



# Monterey Bay Aquarium 2025 Sustainability Engagement Survey Results



## Overview

Monterey Bay Aquarium (MBA) conducted a Sustainability Engagement Survey (SES) in August 2025 to gain a better understanding of staff awareness of and involvement in sustainability efforts. A total of 358 full-time employees, 10 part-time employees and 2 fellow/interns completed the survey resulting in a response rate of 64%. The response rate for full-time employees was 63%. MBA distributed its first Sustainability Engagement Survey in September 2023. The baseline survey received a response rate of 43% with the participation of 203 employees. A minimum survey participation rate of 30% is preferred to allow for proper analysis and extrapolation to the remaining employee population.

The survey assesses five dimensions of engagement on a 1-100 scale. The “scores” shown in the table below (Table 1) correspond to the percent of respondents who chose the two responses at the top of the scale (i.e., those who were very aware and moderately aware of efforts, as noted in the table). The overall score is the average of the five dimensions and can be used as a metric to measure progress over time and compare to other organizations that have completed the survey.

## Highlights

**89%** of respondents are aware of MBA 's efforts to promote sustainable commuting (walking, bicycling, transit, carpooling, and clean fuel vehicles)

**96%** of respondents agree that environmental sustainability aligns with MBA's mission and vision



# Dimensions of Sustainability Engagement

Table 1: MBA's Dimensions of Sustainability Engagement (2023-2025)

Dimension	2023 Score	2025 Score
<b>Awareness of Efforts</b> ( <i>very/moderately aware</i> ) at the organization to be more sustainable	<b>38</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Knowledge</b> ( <i>very/moderately knowledgeable</i> ) about ways to be sustainable at work	<b>65</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Behavioral Frequency</b> ( <i>always/most of the time</i> ) self-reported key sustainable behaviors	<b>70</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Perceived Norm</b> ( <i>always/most of the time</i> ) perceptions of how often others engage in key sustainable behaviors	<b>47</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Awareness of Sustainability</b> ( <i>very/moderately familiar</i> ) familiarity with the concept of sustainability	<b>72</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Overall Score</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>65</b>

## Key Findings

### Changes from Baseline

The results of the recent survey can help MBA understand how staff engagement has shifted over time. Between 2023 and 2025, MBA's engagement score increased from 59 to 65. The increase in the overall SES score was driven primarily by a 27-point rise in employees' awareness of organizational efforts to be more sustainable. Employees also reported slight gains in knowledge about how to be sustainable at work and in their familiarity with sustainability concepts. Perceptions of how often others engage in sustainable behaviors (perceived norms) remained relatively flat, while the self-reported frequency with which employees practice key sustainable behaviors declined slightly. These results suggest that while awareness and understanding of sustainability have grown, there is a continued need to strengthen support for employees in translating that awareness into consistent, visible behaviors.

### Waste

Waste reduction was selected by 69% of respondents in 2025 as a key area for MBA to focus its sustainability efforts. Staff noted successes such as eliminating single-use plastics in the café and gift shop, expanding composting and recycling, and offering sustainably sourced products. Opportunities included adding composting to all buildings, improving signage and education, and reducing plastics in shipping and packaging. Some also called for stronger leadership and organization-wide standards. Employees also identified waste

as a top priority in 2023, when 49% of respondents selected it, showing growing momentum for MBA’s efforts in this area.

### Recycling

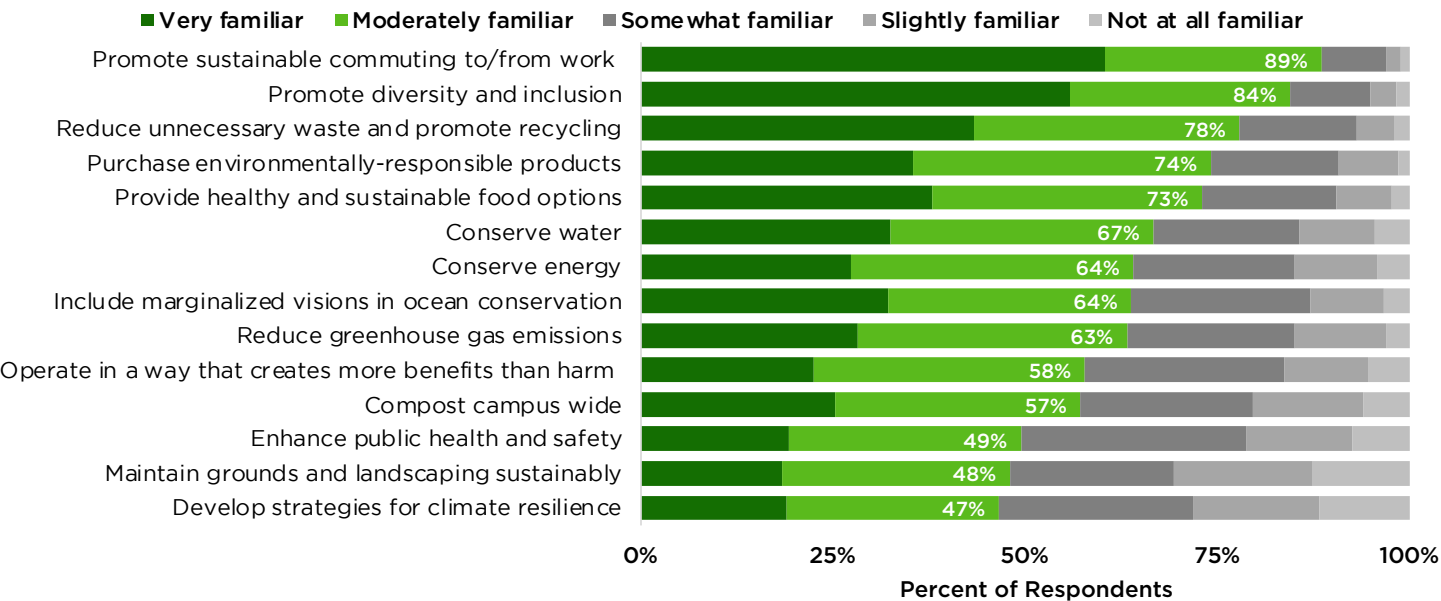
Recycling is a well-established behavior among MBA staff, with 97% of respondents reporting that they place paper, metal, and rigid plastics in the correct bins. Employees noted that having recycling containers in staff areas and the café makes it easier to recycle consistently. Some suggested adding more bins for items like batteries and e-waste, as well as clearer signage to reduce confusion. Recycling is seen as a strong practice at MBA, with room to expand and improve the system.

## Results by Dimension

### Awareness of Efforts

Overall score: 65

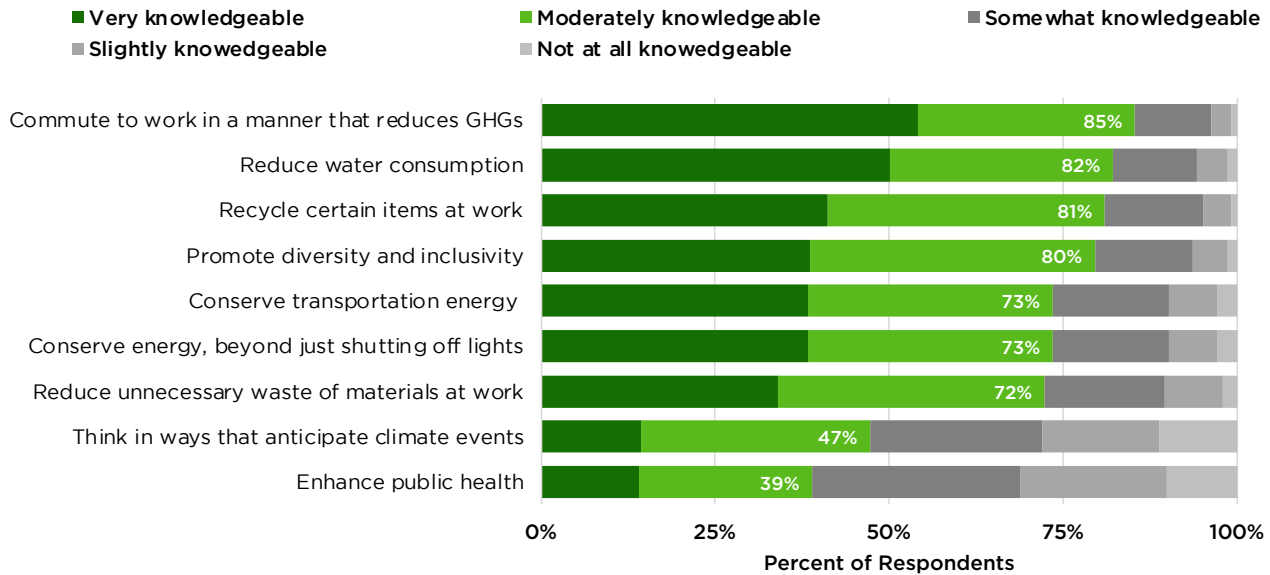
Awareness of organizational efforts to...



## Knowledge

Overall score: 69

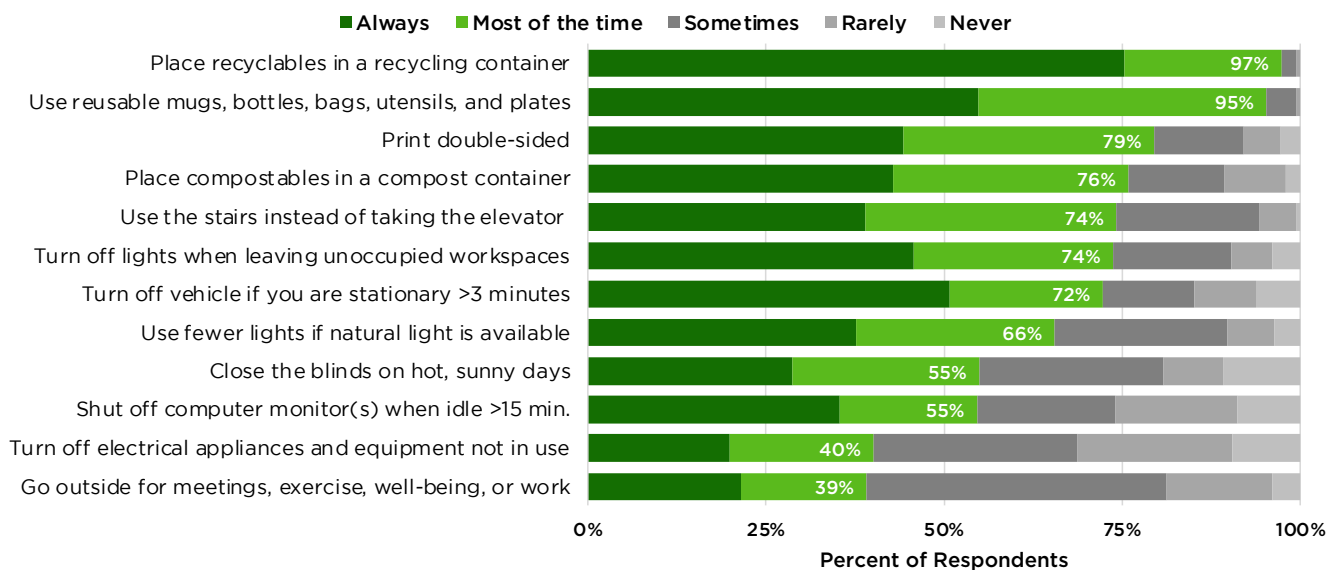
Knowledge of ways to personally... at work



## Behavioral Frequency (Self-Reported)

Overall score: 69

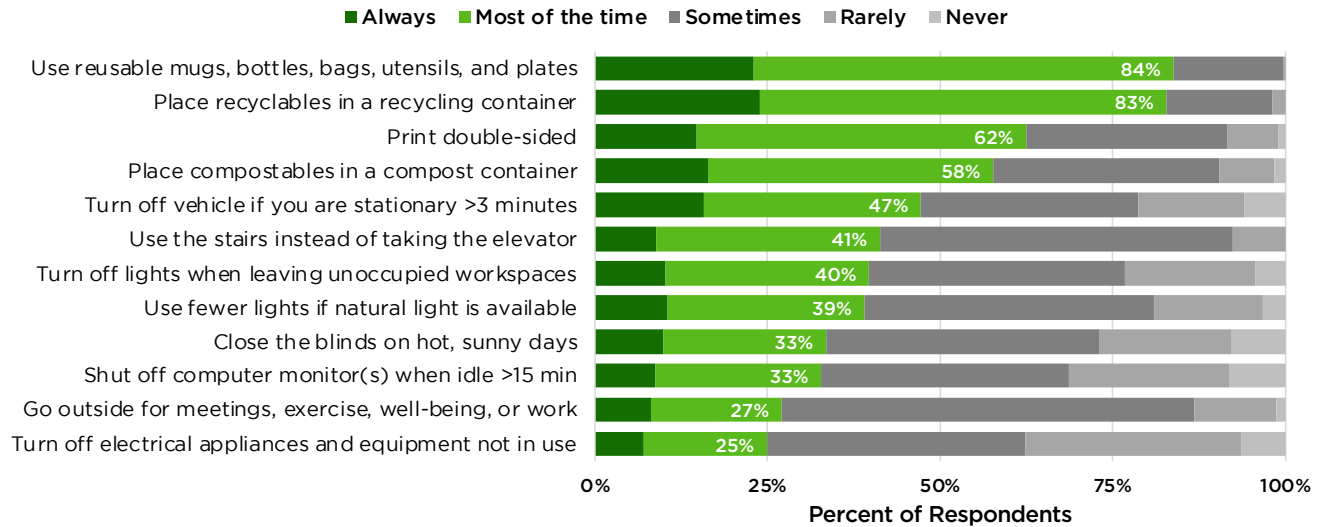
How often do you do the following at work?



## Perceived Norm (Behavioral Frequency of Peers)

Overall score: 48

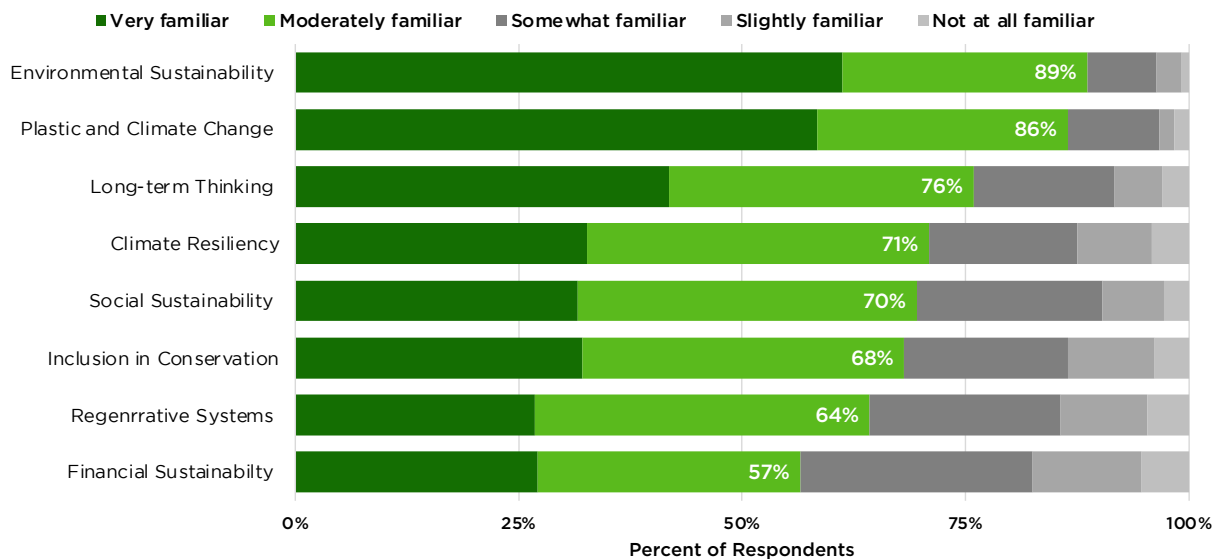
How often do others do the following at work?



## Awareness of Sustainability

Overall score: 73

Awareness of the following sustainability concepts



## Focus Areas

Top areas that respondents believe MBA should focus its efforts on:

<b>WASTE:</b> reducing waste, increasing recycling, and purchasing environmentally-responsible products	69%
<b>ENERGY:</b> conserving energy, making buildings more energy efficient, and generating energy on site from renewable sources (e.g. wind or solar)	62%
<b>CLIMATE RESILIENCE:</b> assessing the risks posed by climate change to MBA, understand climate change's impacts on life and infrastructure such as the increased risk of mosquito-borne diseases, extreme weather events, and flooding and develop a plan to address the risks identified	47%

## Mission Alignment & Importance

**Mission Alignment:** How strongly respondents agree or disagree that sustainability concepts align with the MBA's mission.

**Importance:** How important respondents feel it is for MBA to take active steps toward the various aspects of sustainability.

Shown below are the results for both Mission Alignment and Importance for each of the four sustainability concepts, as well as the average of the four that is used as an overall response (Table 2).

Table 2: MBA's Mission Alignment & Importance (2023-2025)

Concept	Mission		Importance	
	2023	2025	2023	2025
Environmental Sustainability	96%	96%	98%	98%
Community leadership in sustainability	90%	89%	97%	97%
Operating in a way that produces more benefits than harm	86%	87%	95%	95%
Social Sustainability	85%	86%	95%	95%
Resiliency to the effects of climate change	80%	83%	83%	87%
Fiscal Sustainability	69%	78%	93%	95%
Include historically excluded voices and visions of marginalized identities in ocean conservation	n/a	n/a	95%	93%
<b>Overall Average</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>94%</b>

## Reason

Respondents were presented with a list of 12 options (along with the opportunity to select other and specify) and asked to select the top three reasons why they personally believe it is important for Monterey Bay Aquarium to actively pursue sustainability. The most commonly selected responses are displayed below.

<b>ENVIRONMENT</b> - Because it lessens Monterey Bay Aquarium's environmental impact, conserves resources, and reduces greenhouse gas emissions	<b>79%</b>
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<b>MISSION</b> - Because it aligns with and supports Monterey Bay Aquarium's mission	<b>69%</b>
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<b>RESPONSIBILITY</b> - Because it's the right thing to do	<b>66%</b>
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## Mode Split

Transportation constitutes approximately 28% of U.S. emissions, in large part due to commuting.<sup>1</sup> Driving alone in a vehicle is the most emissions-intensive commute mode. It is also the most common. Commuting via means other than driving alone in a personal vehicle is known as 'active commuting'. Active commuting includes biking, walking, carpooling, and using public transit and other forms of sustainable transportation and working from home. When employees commute using an active mode of transportation, it not only helps MBA reduce its emissions but also contributes to employee wellness.

The percent of employee trips to and from work that are made using an active commute mode is known as a 'mode split'. MBA's current mode split is 54%. This means that 46% of employee commuting trips are made alone in a personal vehicle, and the remaining 54% are completed via a low-emissions commute mode. MBA's historical (2023) and current (2025) breakdown of employee commute trips by mode is shown in the table below (Table3).

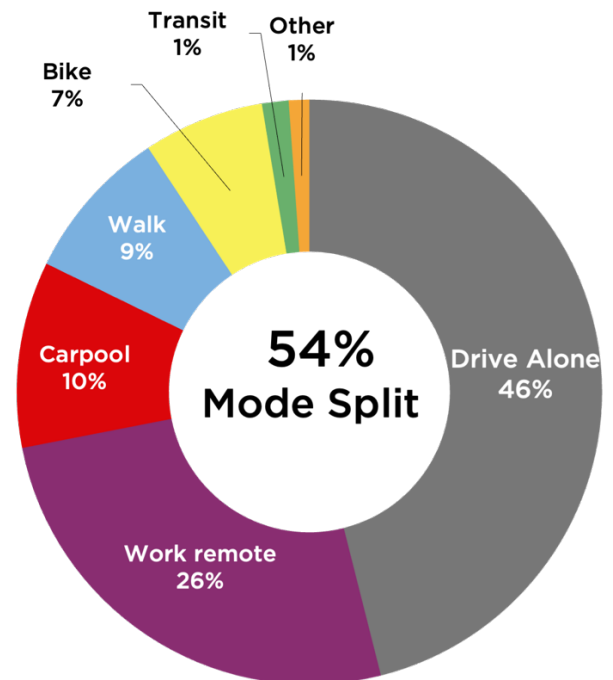


Figure 1: MBA's employee commute mode split, 2025

<sup>1</sup> U.S Environmental Protection Agency. (2025, April 25). Car pollution from transportation. U.S. EPA

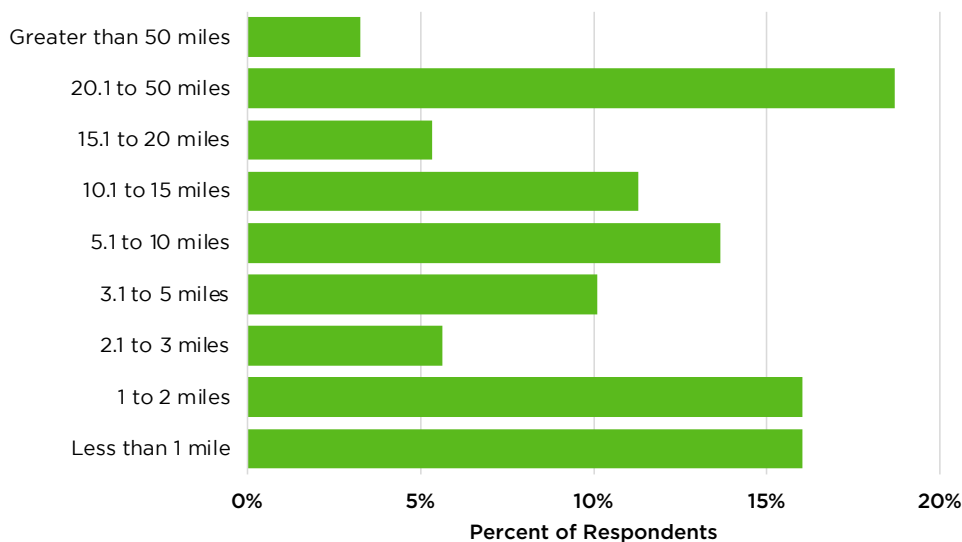


Mode split at MBA remains higher than drive-alone commuting, but it has declined from 60% in 2023 to 54% in 2025. This shift reflects local factors such as the rising cost of living and more employees moving farther from campus, which makes driving alone more practical for some. Remote work also decreased from 30% to 26%, with opportunities identified to expand remote and hybrid schedules. Flexible work supports both sustainability goals and work-life balance by reducing commute trips.

*Table 3: MBA's Employee commute trends by mode (2023-2025)*

Mode		2023	2025
	Drive Alone	40%	46%
	Work remote	30%	26%
	Carpool	7%	10%
	Walk	10%	8%
	Bike	10%	7%
	Transit	1%	1%
	Other	2%	1%
Mode Split		60%	54%

The graph below (Figure 2) shows the various distances that employees commute to work (one-way) on a typical day. The majority of respondents' commute distance is 20 miles or more. Eleven employees indicated that they travel more than 50 miles to work each day, while 54 reported commuting less than one mile each way.



*Figure 2: MBA's one-way employee commute distances, 2025*

## Electric Vehicles (EV)

Employees were asked what type of vehicle they typically drive to work. The majority of respondents (59%) reported using a gasoline or diesel-powered vehicle. A smaller percentage indicated driving a hybrid vehicle (14%) or an electric vehicle (9%). Another 17% shared that they do not drive a personal vehicle to work.

## EV Purchase Consideration

The survey also explored employee interest in purchasing an electric vehicle (EV). When asked whether they were considering purchasing an EV, 5% said they were planning to do so within the next year, 35% indicated they were considering it in the next two to three years, and 60% reported they were not considering purchasing an EV at this time. One respondent noted the value of “increased EV chargers at ARCC, HH and 160,” reflecting how expanded and convenient charging stations could make EV ownership more practical and appealing for staff.

# Strengths and Successes

## Key Themes

The survey asked participants for specific sustainability strengths and recent successes with explanations, if possible. Of the 334 respondents, 128 left comments. The table below shows the results of these responses (Table 4).

- 1. Waste Reduction.** 203 responses (60%) highlighted progress in reducing single-use plastics, improving recycling and sorting, expanding composting, and increasing employee awareness through signage and engagement. Staff noted that waste audits and clear messaging have strengthened the aquarium's efforts to minimize waste.
- 2. Ocean Conservation and Inclusion.** 195 responses (58%) highlighted the Aquarium's leadership in marine conservation through research, education, and public engagement. Staff emphasized the impact of Seafood Watch, tuna conservation progress, and visibility at the plastics treaty negotiations. Respondents also noted the value of DEIA initiatives, bilingual exhibits, and inclusive outreach that broaden conservation's reach.
- 3. Sustainability Sourced Goods.** 162 responses (49%) highlighted progress in reducing plastic packaging and offering more eco-friendly, sustainably sourced products in the café and gift shops. Staff noted the shift to reusable and recycled materials, bulk purchasing to minimize waste, and SSA's role in sourcing sustainable food and retail items. Respondents viewed these efforts as strong examples of leadership in sustainable operations.

Table 4: MBA's Strengths and Successes, 2025

Code	#	%
Waste Reduction	203	61%
Ocean Conservation and Inclusion	195	58%
Sustainably Sourced Goods	162	49%
Waste Diversion	156	47%
Electric Vehicles	119	36%
Community Engagement	112	34%
Water Conservation	111	33%
Employee Engagement	107	32%
Energy Conservation/Efficiency	106	32%
Leadership	99	30%
Social Justice	60	18%
Staff Moral	48	14%
Renewable Energy	48	14%
Other	3	1%

“We need compost bins in breakroom/kitchen areas!”

2023 Opportunity

“Compost bin added to 3rd floor office area.”

2025 Success

“...we made a good start on waste but there is still a lot of confusion on all the bins and what goes where”

2023 Opportunity

“There has been much more clear communication about where certain items can be recycled on site”

2025 Success

## Sample Responses

- “The Monterey Bay Aquarium plays a vital role in ocean conservation by combining research, education, and public engagement... For example, its Seafood Watch program empowers consumers and businesses to make sustainable seafood choices that protect ocean ecosystems.”
- “Campus Management – electric truck fleet recently launched; researching into additional electric charging options. Gift shop / sales – reducing items in plastic packaging, selling sustainably sourced materials.”
- “Our engagement with the public through social media on the plastics treaty, inclusion of the plastics treaty in a recent all staff... Diversity and inclusion initiatives like bilingual meeting and bilingual exhibits.”
- “The Aquarium has thrived as a beacon for ocean conservation around the world and serves as a model for zero waste, reducing carbon footprint, eliminating single use plastics, etc.”

# Opportunities

## Key Themes

In addition to asking survey participants about strengths, the survey also provided an opportunity for respondents to suggest ways in which MBA could be more sustainable. Of the 307 respondents, 143 left comments. The table below shows the results of these responses (Table 5).

Table 5: MBA's Opportunities, 2025

- 1. Waste Reduction.** 130 responses (42%) highlighted the Aquarium's progress in eliminating single-use plastics across cafés, gift shops, and operations. Staff pointed to expanded recycling and composting opportunities, clearer signage and education, and increased availability of reusable or biodegradable alternatives. Respondents also noted the need to improve guest recycling practices and expand composting beyond the café to all buildings.
- 2. Employee Engagement.** 123 responses (40%) identified opportunities to expand how staff connect with sustainability. Suggestions included offering more interactive trainings, streamlining communication about initiatives, and increasing cross-department collaboration. Respondents also saw potential in strengthening inclusive staff programs, creating additional engagement events, and providing clearer updates on goals and progress to keep momentum high.
- 3. Community Engagement.** 118 responses (38%) identified opportunities to expand outreach and inclusion. Respondents suggested building on programs like *Museums for All* and community free days, while strengthening connections with underrepresented groups and tribal communities. Staff also noted the value of more visible engagement in global initiatives, broader bilingual offerings, and clearer communication of the Aquarium's role in local and international conservation efforts.

Code	#	%
Waste Reduction	130	42%
Employee Engagement	123	40%
Community Engagement	118	38%
Renewable Energy	117	38%
Waste Diversion	106	35%
Energy Conservation/Efficiency	100	33%
Sustainably Sourced Goods	98	32%
Ocean Conservation and Inclusion	98	32%
Leadership	91	30%
Staff Moral	90	29%
Water Conservation	85	28%
Social Justice	82	27%
Electric Vehicles	78	25%
Other	18	6%

## Sample Responses

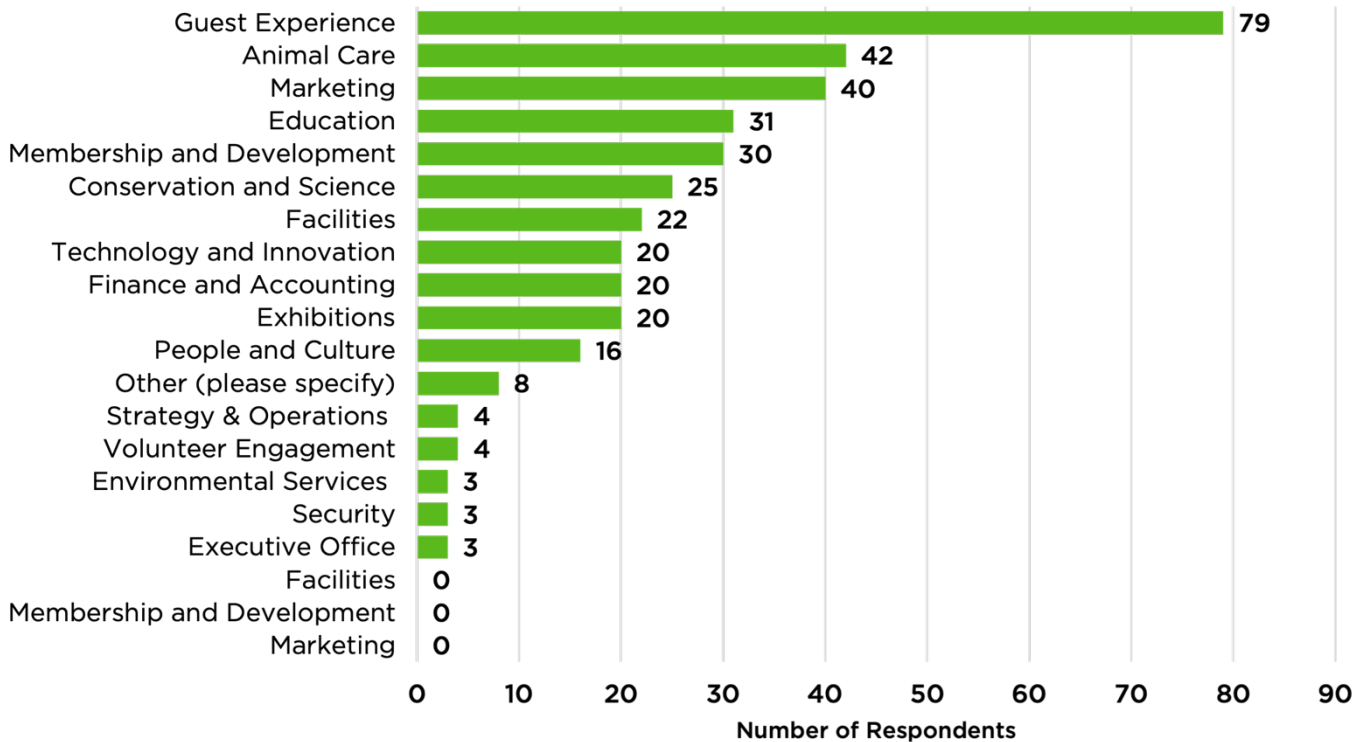
- "Eliminating plastic in gift store packaging and single use plates, glasses, silverware."
- "Allowing native tribes to engage with the aquarium in an equitable way is a major positive."
- "Regular updates at all-staff meetings are an important way to engage staff and keep them updated. The annual recycling drives at the office were a good way of focusing folks on what can be recycled and keeping things out of landfill (...).
- "Community free days in September; Museums for All program; informative and inclusive staff meetings that include topics on diverse groups; creating sustainably sourced products for the gift shop and swag; Affinity groups (...)."



# Demographics

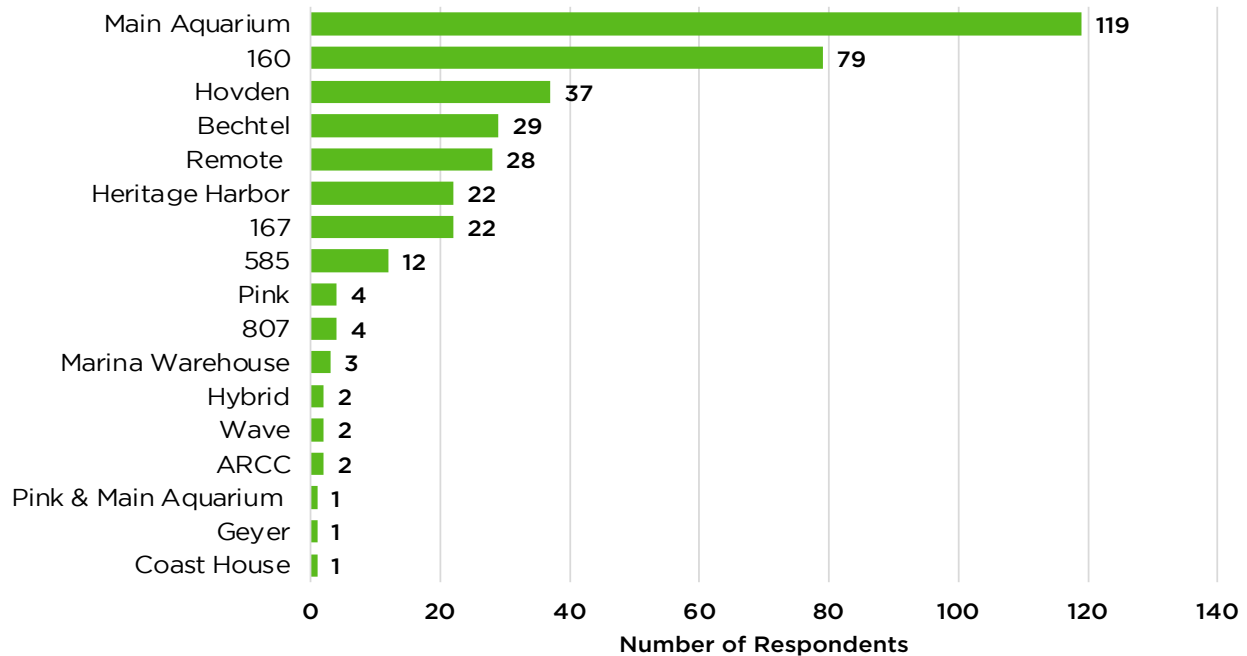
## Department

Please select your department at MBA.



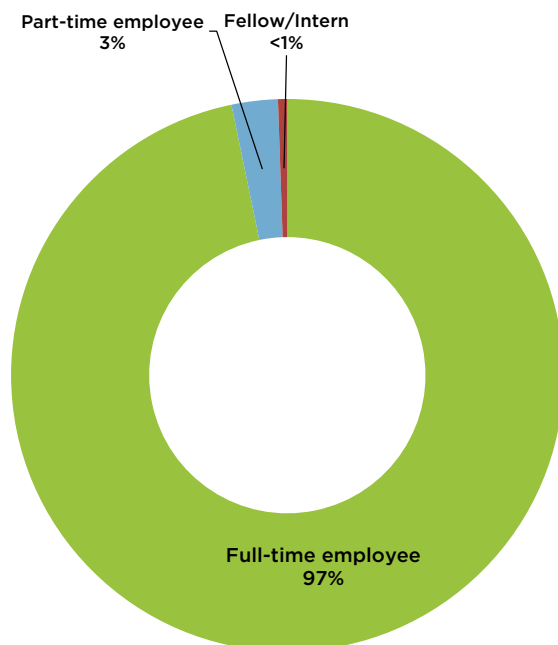
## Building

In which building do you spend most of your time at MBA?



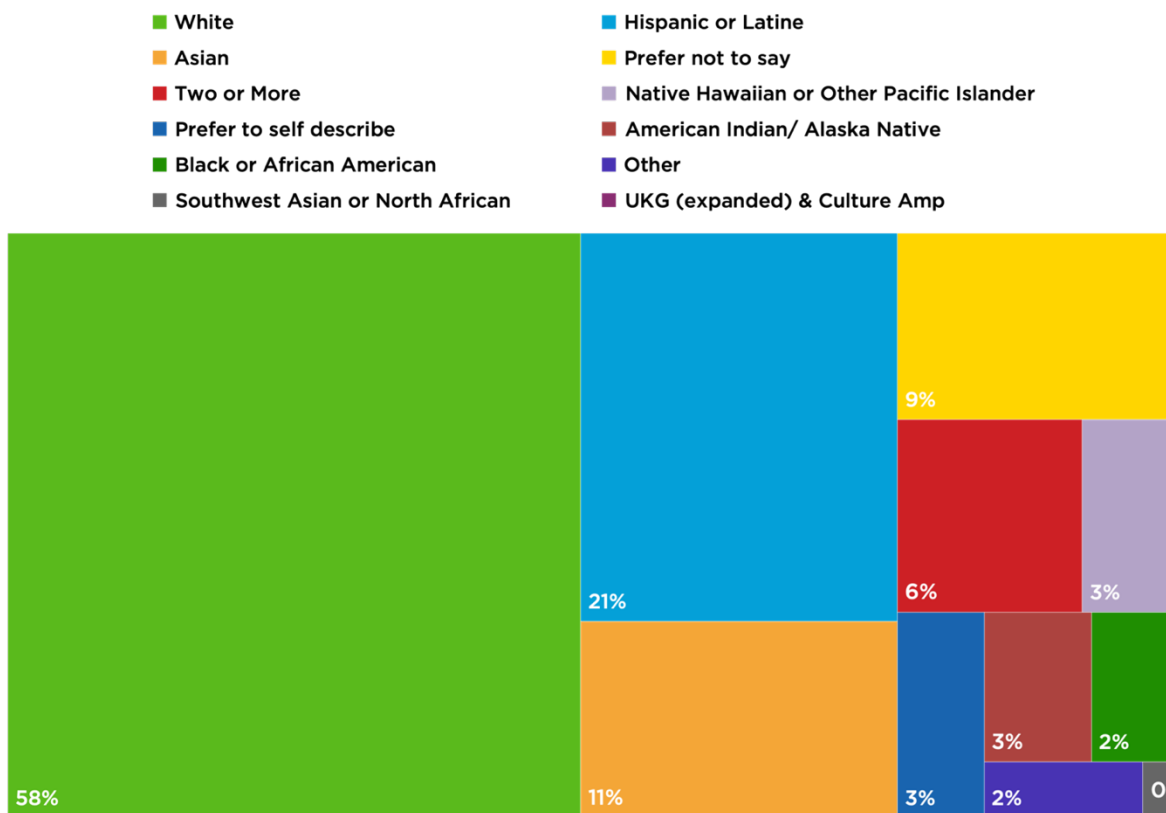
## Role

Please select the option below that best describes your role at MBA.



## Race and Ethnicity

Which of these categories best describes you? Select all that apply



## Sustainability by Demographic Group (2023-2025)

Dimensions	2023			2025		
	POC*	White	Overall	POC*	White	Overall
<b>Awareness of Efforts</b> (very/moderately aware) at the organization to be more	<b>48%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>65%</b>
<b>Knowledge (very/moderately knowledgeable)</b> about ways to be sustainable at	<b>66%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>69%</b>
<b>Behavioral Frequency (always/most of the time)</b> self-reported key sustainable	<b>70%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>69%</b>
<b>Perceived Norm (always/most of the time)</b> perceptions of how often others	<b>48%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>48%</b>
<b>Awareness of Sustainability</b> (very/moderately familiar) familiarity with the concept of	<b>70%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>73%</b>
<b>Overall Score</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>65%</b>