

# ST. MAARTEN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

OPERATIONS  
ANNUAL REPORT  
2021



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# About us

*The St. Maarten Chamber of Commerce & Industry (COCI) is a non-profit organization. Its main role is to ensure that all businesses and legal entities on St. Maarten are registered in its Commercial Register. In the pursuit of our objective, the Chamber is a non-racial, non-sectarian, non-political, and gender-friendly organization.*

## HISTORY

The St. Maarten Chamber of Commerce and Industry (COCI) was established on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1979.

Before 1979, the only place where various private sector's points of view could be exchanged was at the Executive Club, which consisted of hotel owners and managers. These meetings, which were held once every month, rotated from one hotel property to another. They provided good opportunities for private sector members to voice their concerns and demonstrate their respective good corporate citizenship. The members either announced their companies and/ or the island, or they introduced new staff members that joined their organization on the island.

The annual event was the honoring of the island's best and brightest high school students during graduation times in mid-June when companies proudly presented valuable gifts to the best graduating scholars to encourage them to further their studies in intuitions of higher learning abroad. These meetings also provided member businesses with the opportunity to invite members of the island's then-Executive Council to clarify objectives purposes, and intentions of new island Resolutions by the island Council of Federal Legislature that affected their operations on St. Maarten.

From the early 1970s, the island's modern hospitality industry provided suitable on-the-job training and supplemented study leave for qualified employees to take courses abroad at reputable institutions during the summer months when operations were not as demanding to gain additional professional instructions.

## THE CHAMBERS ESTABLISHMENT

During 1979 – 1992, the Chamber was led by three prominent business persons, who at one time served as the board's president, i.e. Mr. Charles Vlaun, Mr. Franklin Brison, and Mr. Wilfred de Weever. They were supported by a staff of two persons – Mr. Louis Peters and Ms. Syrma Alberts – with intermitting staff members.

With the development of Philipsburg and the influx of various other services and offshore businesses, there was a growing demand for a Chamber of Commerce and Industry in St. Maarten.

After leaving Island Gem Enterprises N.V. in January 1979, Mr. Louis Peters, with encouragement from the Lt. Governor, Mr. Theodore Maxwell Pandt, solicited the Minister of Economic Affairs of the former Netherlands Antilles, Mr. Mauritz Larmonie, to provide the necessary decree to realize the Dutch Windward Islands with its own Chamber of Commerce and Industry. That solicitation formed the incentive for the minister to issue his ministerial decree to establish the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Dutch Windward Islands on March 12, 1979.

## Mission

To ensure legitimacy of all businesses and legal entities through registration and our regulatory function of maintaining the Trade and Commercial Register of St. Maarten, while promoting economic growth through advocacy and business support.

## Vision

To be that lead entity, propelling St. Maarten to a stronger and more sustainable economy by providing accurate business data, business connectivity, trade opportunities, and commercial facilitation through lobbying, advocacy, and business support.

## Core Values

**Professionalism**: Committed to being professional in all that we do, grounded in the belief in high standard of performance and excellence.

**Productivity**: Committed to constantly improving our work ethic and output for the benefit of our business community and other stakeholders in an efficient manner.

**Independence**: Committed to being independent in our views so that the objective and the transparent representation of the business interest comes first.

**Economic Development**: Promote economic development via the development and growth of the Business Sector of St. Maarten.

**Advocacy**: Provide advocacy for the business community and other entities on matters of National Interest.

## Chamber of Commerce and Industry Engagements

- We issue documentary evidence such as certificates of origin, extracts, legalizations, and other statements.
- A central organization for collecting, analyzing, and disseminating information of a business nature.
- We promote the general interest of the Business Community of St. Maarten and are at the forefront of various issues, which affect the private sector. Therefore, we hold business and educational seminars, and expos in conjunction with our partners in the community.
- We serve as an advocacy group and address the varied concerns of the Business Community through various dialogue and exchanges with government officials and various Non-Government Organizations (NGO's) organizations. We offer solicited and unsolicited advice on matters concerning the country's economic development.
- The Chamber organizes in-house and off-site skills and cognitive training workshops for its clients and non-clients alike. We also carry out consultancy services for clients by offering guidance, information, administrative assistance, and support to the Business Community through our **Business Center**.
- The Chamber promotes Trade and Industry and represent the opinion of the business community on matters affecting Trade and Industry in St. Maarten.

**Executive Director:**

Jude Houston

**Operations Manager:**

Ruth Patrick

**Business Development Officer:**

Sharilyn Bryson

**Accounts Department:**

Aakeem Ruan

Tian Jones

Natasha Pelgrim

**Customer Service Representative:**

Malaine Dublin-Lake

Xavern Labega

Darius Brown

Lindora Thomas

Donna Jean Baptiste

Esmine Richardson

Kelsee Hodge

Liandro Rombley

# Executive Summary

The purpose of this document is to provide its readers an overview of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry's (COCI) operational performance for the year 2021, which basically includes the activities within the registry of the Chamber. Additionally, insights are provided on the Chambers engagement and support to the businesses and general community on a whole.

During this reporting period, emphasis was placed on and continues to be on the operational efficiency within the Chamber. Hence, several the activities geared towards the improvement of internal processes and procedures were conducted. These measures were done with the main aim of improving the services to the business community by the Chamber.

As it relates to the business registry, compared to the same period of 2020 there have been notably a vast improvement on the overall business registration performance at the Chamber. Some of the highlights include for the year 2021 include:

- First time registrants increased by 20.2 percent; from 643 in 2020 to 2773 in 2021.
- Businesses conducting annual fee payment increased by 31.4 percent; from 3,963 in 2020 to 5,208 entities in 2021.
- Businesses conducting annual payment of previous years increased 347.6 percent; from 718 entities in 2020 to 3,214 entities in 2021.
- Business closures increased 84.3 percent; from 153 in 2020 to 282 businesses in 2021.
- Business inactivation increased 61.8 percent; from 55 in 2020 to 89 in 2021. This inactivation service was halted July of 2021.
- Excerpts request increased 24.9 percent; from 5,960 in 2020 to 7,446 in 2021.

As it relates to Business support and community engagement for the period

- 16 webinars capacity building webinars held, with average 150 registrants and 44 attendees per webinar.
- 12 Schools with a total with a total student population of 418 received presentation from the Chamber on the importance of Entrepreneurship.
- 2 community outreach programs conducted: Simpson Bay and St. Peters with approximately 50 persons in attendance.
- Actively participated in 2 submits – providing information n on the role of COCI and the requirements on conducting business on St. Maarten.

Finally, from a financial perspective, performance of the Chamber for 2021 showed improvement when compared to the previous 2 year.



# Operational Review- 2021

Given the mandate of COCI, its operational activity is measured or monitored by the activities within the trade registry of the Chamber.

Despite the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, there have been a notable increase in the overall activity in the registry of the Chamber for the year 2021 compared to 2020. Even though was considered a slow year due to the lockdown measures implemented to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, the activities of the registry for 2021 even surpassed that of the year 2019. Total engagement or registry activities for the reporting period amounted to 17,559 compared to 11,821 of 2020. Possible reasons for the increase in activities are; i)

Figure 1: Operational Engagements			
Activities	2019	2020	2021
First Registration	941	643	773
Annual Fee	3992	3963	5208
Annual Fee Previous years	632	718	3214
Business Closure	146	153	282
Inactivation	137	55	89
Reactivation			36
Declaration	446	329	547
Excerpts	6045	5960	7446
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,339</b>	<b>11,821</b>	<b>17,559</b>

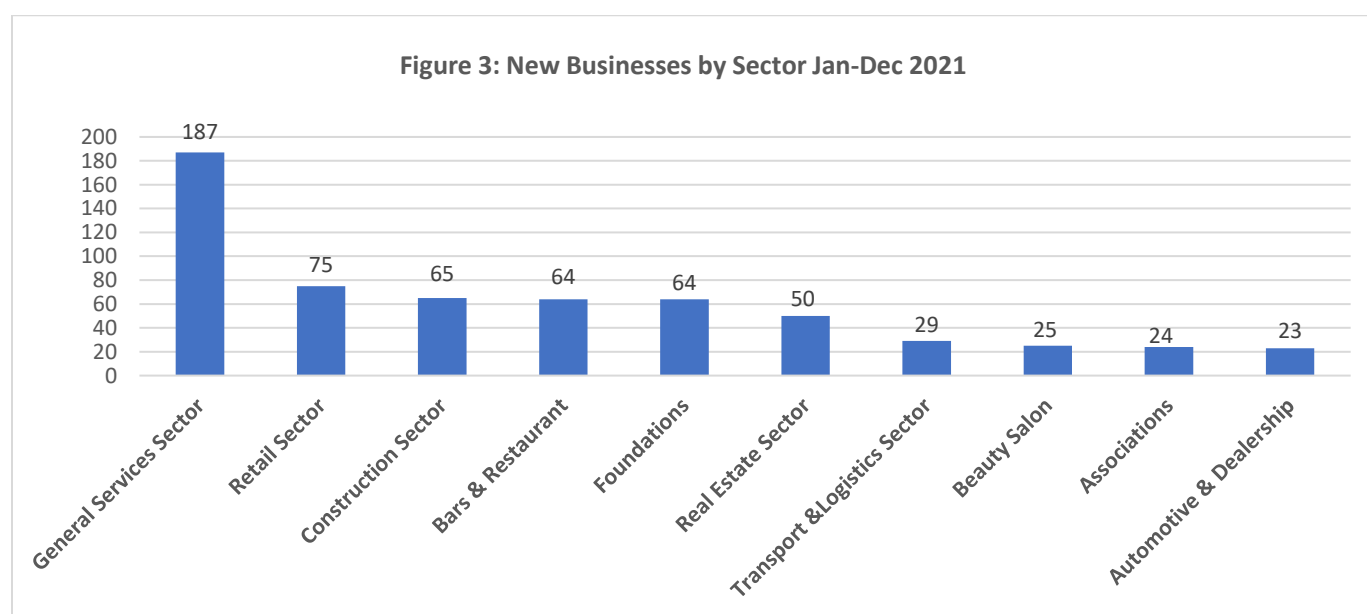
Increased economic activities during 2021 compared to 2020, that have stimulated positive movement in various sectors of the economy, ii) The Chamber of Commerce compliance campaign , whereby businesses were reminded of their obligation to the Chamber, iii) COCI's commencement of the deregistering of businesses in default; iv) continued salary support initiative provided by the Government to the business sector during 2021, to which an updated business excerpt or proof of registration from the Chamber is a requirement; and v) the Enterprise Support Project under the NRPB, which provides financing to both new and existing businesses. It was reported by the NRPB, that an estimated 100 businesses received financial assistance to the sum of over 7 million dollars.

## New Business Registration

For the reporting period, the Chamber recorded a total of 773 new business registrants compared to 643 the same period in 2020. This illustrates a 20.2% percent increase in new registration of business and entities, which signifies there was 130 more businesses registered when compared to the year 2020. Among the various types of businesses and entities as newly registered for the period, Sole Proprietors were the most predominant with 290 entities, followed by Private Liability entities with 277, Limited Liability entities with 92, Foundations with 81 and Associations with 33. This is illustrated in figure2.

Figure 2: New Businesses by Type				
	2019	2020	2021	% diff.
Associations	26	15	33	120.0
Foundations	79	72	81	12.5
Limited Liability Companies	83	55	92	67.3
Private Limited Liability	369	244	277	13.5
Sole Proprietors	384	257	290	12.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>941</b>	<b>643</b>	<b>773</b>	<b>20.2</b>

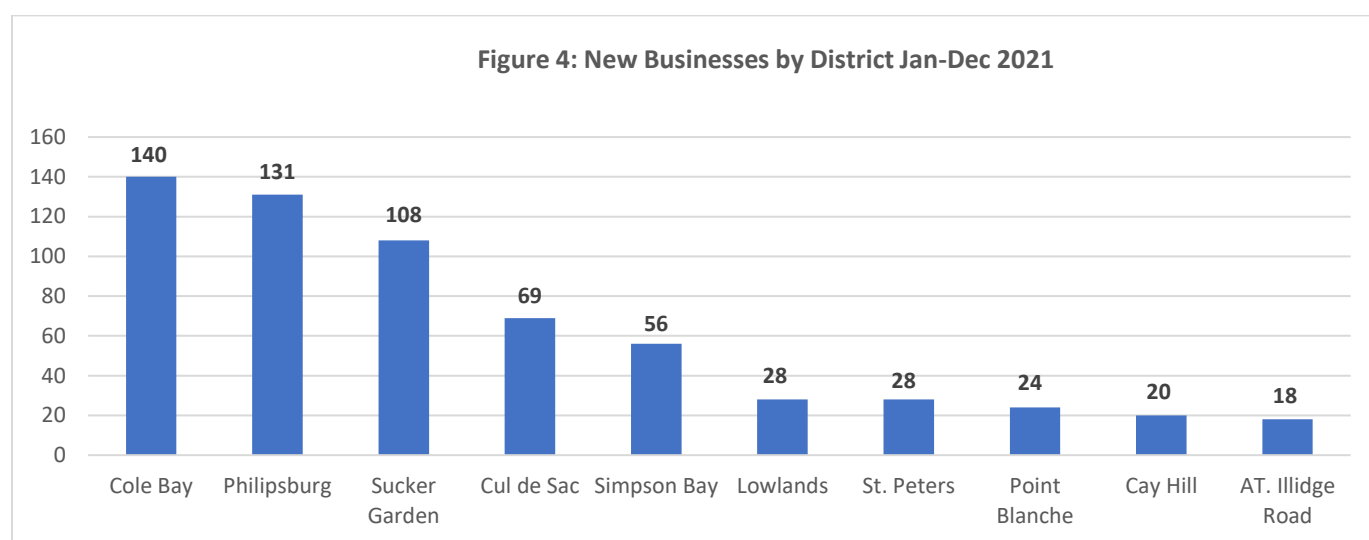
## New Business per Sector



Analysis was conducted on the top 10 sectors for which the new businesses established during the reporting period are involved. As illustrated in figure 3, the most predominant of sectors were the general service (administrative and consultancy services) sector 187 new businesses.

This was followed by the retail sector with 75 new businesses, for which the retail of clothing, footwear, jewelry and accessories, food and other consumables, electronics and other household items are registered. Construction sector followed with 65 businesses, followed by bars and restaurants and foundations with 64 businesses each. This was followed by the real estate sector with 50 businesses, transport sector with 29 businesses and beauty salons with 25 businesses. The latter being associations and automotive sector with 24 and 23 businesses respectively.

## New Business per Location



As it relates to the district for which these new businesses have been established, the 10 predominant districts are illustrated in figure 4. The most predominant districts of the 10 are, Cole Bay, Philipsburg and Sucker Garden with 140, 131 and 108 businesses respectively. This was followed by Cul de Sac with 69 businesses and Simpson Bay with 56 businesses. Lowlands and St. Peters had 28 new businesses each, followed by Point Blanche with 24, Cay Hill with 20 and AT. Illidge Road with 18 new businesses.

## Annual Fees

Figure 5: Business Activity Totals Jan-Dec 2020/2021					
Activity	2019	2020	2021	# Diff	% diff 2020/2021
Annual Fee	3992	3963	5208	1245	31.4
Annual Fee Previous years	632	718	3214	2496	347.6
Business Closure	146	153	282	129	84.3
Inactivation	137	55	89	34	61.8
Excerpts	6015	5960	7446	1486	24.9

For the reporting period, there has been an increase in the number of entities fulfilling their obligation of paying their annual fees. There were 5,208 business engagements in 2021 compared 3,963 in 2020. This signifies that there was an increase of 31.4 percent or there were 1,245 more entities paying their fees when compared to the same period of 2020. This is illustrated in figure 5.

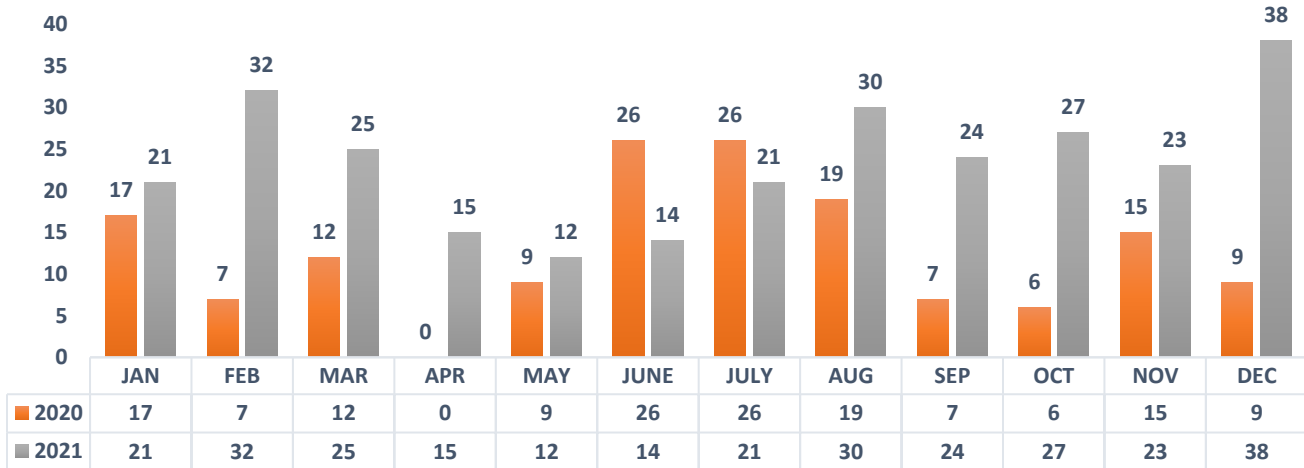
## Annual Fees Previous Years

For the reporting period, there have been a significant increase in the number of legal entities engaging the Chamber to have their outstanding fees of the previous years regulated. As noted in table 5 above, 3,214 entities engaged the Chamber in the year 2021 compared to 718 in the same period of 2020. This signifies an increase of 2,496 more businesses during the period or an increase of 347.6 percent compared to 2020.

## Business Closures

As noted in figure 5, there was a total of 282 business closures for year 2021 compared to 153 during 2020. This represents an increase of 84.3 percent or 129 more closed businesses. In figure 6, it is noted that practically every calendar month of 2021 has shown huge increase in business closure except in June and July, when compared to the calendar months for 2020.

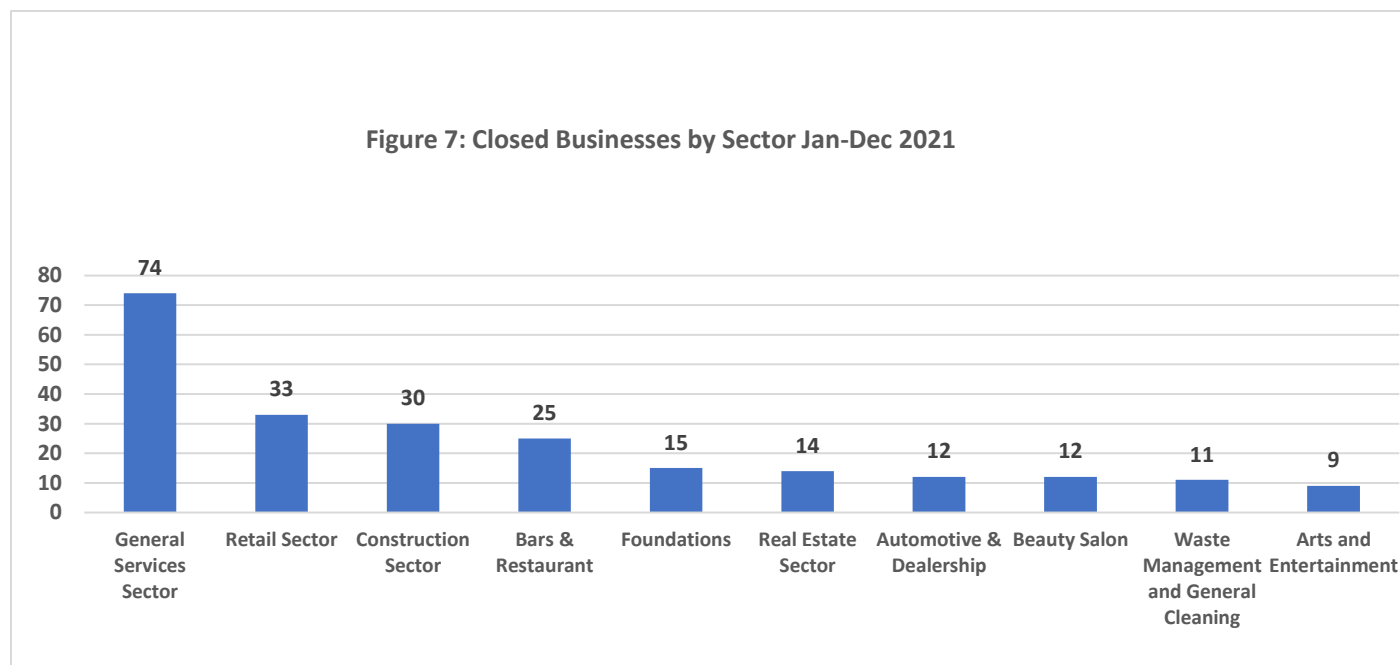
Figure 6: Business Closure 2020/2021



Apart from the negative the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the business community, other reasons for the increase in business closure include: the compliance campaign launched by the Chamber in which some businesses that were inactive and had outstanding fees opted to close. Other reasons are that some businesses closed as Sole Proprietors and converted into BVs and NVs, while others indicated to the Chamber that the taxing policies have hindered their business success.

It should be noted however, that there was a possible cushioning of the business closures for the reporting period due to the available financing possibilities through Qredits, the Government salary support to businesses and the Enterprise Support Project by the NRPB.

## Closed Businesses per Sector



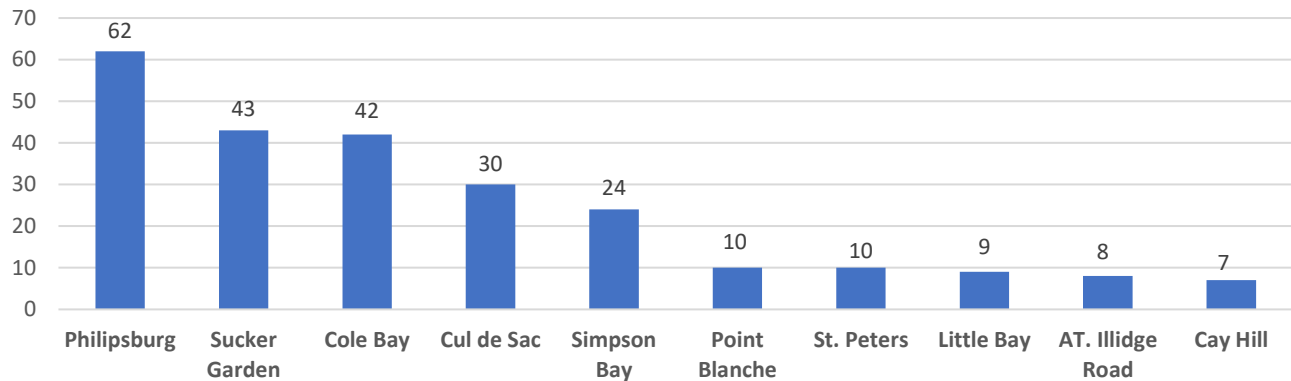
The predominant sectors for which the closed businesses and entities for 2021 represented were, the general service sector with 74 businesses, Retail sector 33 businesses, Construction sector with 30 businesses, Bars and Restaurants with 25 and foundations with 15 businesses.

This was followed by Real estate sector with 14, automotive sector and beauty salons with 12 each. The latter were general cleaning and arts and entertainment businesses with 11 and 9 businesses respectively. This is illustrated in figure 7.

## Closed Businesses per District

As it relates to the district for which the closed businesses occurred during 2021, the 10 predominant districts are illustrated in figure 8. The most predominant districts of the top 10 are Philipsburg, Sucker Garden and Cole Bay with 62, 43 and 42 closed businesses respectively. This was followed by Cul de Sac with 30, Simpson Bay with 24, Pointe Blanche and St. Peters with 10 closed businesses each, Little Bay with 9, while AT. Illidge and Cay Hill followed with 8 and 7 closed businesses respectively.

Figure 8: Closed Businesses by District Jan- Dec 2021



## Inactivation and Excerpts

For the reporting period, there was a total of 89 business inactivation compared to 55 over the same period in 2020. However, it should be noted that the figure for 2021 only represent the first half of the year 2021, since the Chamber took a decision to stop the registration of inactive businesses. A business can only be registered as open or closed unless they are in the liquidation process.

Excerpts request for the period amounted to 7,446 requests compared to 5,960 in 2020. This signifies there were 1,486 more request or an increase of 24.9 percent. This increase in excerpts, again is believed to be triggered by the Chambers Compliance campaign and also it being a requirement to receive assistance by through Qredits, NRPB and the government.

## Business Support Initiatives

For 2021, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry embarked on a number of initiatives geared towards supporting the business community and stimulating the entrepreneurial culture among our youths and communities. These initiatives took the form of online webinar series 2021, engagement with the various secondary schools and community outreach sessions.

### *Webinar Series 2021*

During the year 2021, COCI hosted sixteen (16) webinars. These webinars were done with the collaboration of several entities and professional individuals whose core services involved the business community. Webinars were offered free of charge to the participants since COCI took into consideration the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on businesses and the need for the knowledge among the business community geared towards capacity building. All webinars were recorded and posted on COCI's website.

As a synopsis, considering that management used a benchmark of at least 30 participants per webinar it can be deemed a success since such was surpassed. On average 44 individuals participated in the monthly webinars, while registration averaged 150 person. Furthermore, since the videos have been posted on our social media platforms, it should be noted that there has been a considerable increase in traffic or engagement particularly to the webinars on the social media platform.

The webinars held were scheduled as illustrated below:

2021	No.	Date	Institution/ Dept.	Topic	Name(s)
Feb	1	02/02/2021	The Chamber	Know Your Chamber	Jude Houston
Feb	2	04/02/2021	Mingo Civil Law Notary Office	Notary	Marlène Mingo
Feb	3	09/02/2021	Dept. Economic Licenses (TEATT)	Business Licenses	Julia Solognier, Jacqueline Peterson & Justine Webster
Feb	4	11/02/2021	Dept. Tax Administration (Finance)	Business Taxes	Sharon Washington-Philips
Feb	5	16/02/2021	The St. Maarten Bankers Association	Business Banking	Derek Downes
Feb	6	18/02/2021	SZV Health Insurance	SZV Employer Rights and Obligations	Parveen Boertje
Feb	7	25/02/2021	The Chamber	Know Your Chamber	Jude Houston



2021	No.	Date	Institution/ Dept.	Topic	Name(s)
Mar	8	25/03/2021	Principle Account & Consulting Services B.V.	Financial Planning for Businesses	Ahmed Bell
Apr	9	29/04/2021	HBN Law & Tax	Improving Your Tax Position by Quincy Lont	Quincy Lont
May	10	27/05/2021	Qredits	Business Planning for Business Loans	Edsel Gumbs
Jun	11	03/06/2021	Met Office & Fire Dept. Disaster Planning	Hurricane Awareness and Disaster Planning	Joseph Isaac and Paul Martens
Jun	12	24/06/2021	A&A accounting, Business Support and Training Center	Financial Management (How To Manage Your Finances)	Ann Marlin-Evans
Jul	13	22/07/2021	NAGICO Insurances	Understanding Your Policy Offering and the Claims Process	Bhardwaj Raghubir, Hannah Hypolite & Alberto Philips
Aug	14	05/08/2021	Novodiem	Blockchain Opportunities (Cryptocurrency)	Paul Helmich
Aug	15	26/08/2021	Litemoon	Branding and Marketing Done Right	Nicholas Warmé
Sep	16	30/09/2021	Central Bank Sint Maarten and Curacao	Developments in the Payment Landscape in Sint Maarten	Raquel Lo Fo Wong and Glensher Maduro
Nov	17	25/09/2021	Ministry of Public Health Social Development and Labor, dept. Labor Affairs and Social Services	Business Services For You	Natasha Richardson & Shirley Priest

### *Fostering of Entrepreneurship - Schools Engagement*

As a form of fulfilling our corporate social responsibility and in effort to promote entrepreneurial culture among our youth, COCI embarked on a series of presentation to the various Secondary, Vocational, and Higher Learning Educational Institutions. The presentation prepared by COCI is primarily geared towards educating of the importance of entrepreneurship and stimulating its interest among of youth population. In, total **twelve** (12) schools and 418 students were engaged during the year's presentation. There were instances where repeat sessions were facilitated given the number of students and demand.

Presentations were conducted via virtual means given the Covid-19 guidelines and in some instance in person. Students learnt about the Chamber and its role, the different types of businesses, steps to starting your own business, the role and importance of small business and was given inspirational and innovative stories of successful entrepreneurs locally and regionally. This event will likely continue into 2022, given its importance towards ensuring a sustainable and resilient business community.

## Community Outreach and Engagements

### *Presentation to Parliament*

During the first quarter of the year, COCI accepted the invitation of the Parliament of Sint Maarten to present its plan and initiatives. Presentation was made by the President- Ms Jennifer Cathy, with support from the Executive Director and other members of the board. The opportunity was also taken to present the parliament with a copy of the 2020 Annual Report

### *Community Engagement*

As form of engaging business enthusiast and the general public, during the reporting period COCI also took part in community outreach initiatives with other stakeholders, namely, Qredits and the NRBP. During these sessions' further elaboration of the Chamber's operation and services were explained. Furthermore, insight as to the procedure to open and close businesses were provided and the available assistance from the Chamber to the business community. Two sessions were conducted during the period. This event had to be scaled back due the established Covid -19 protocols on mas gatherings.

### *“Doing Business in St. Maarten” Summit Participation*

During the year, the Chamber was invited and participated in the “Doing Business in St. Maarten- Online Summit”. Through the Director, presentation was made to international participants on the business opportunities and the role of the Chamber within by the business environment of St. Maarten.

## Meetings & Other Engagements

1. Small Business Academy – A number of meetings was attended towards the set up and the fruition of this initiative, with the NRPB, Qredits and USM. The objective was primarily to provide individuals seeking to become entrepreneurs (business owners) with in-depth business education and in-person assistance. Individuals would undergo a 10-week course learning about entrepreneurship, complete case studies, hear from real-life entrepreneur guest lectures, be educated, and assisted on business plan creation and what is needed to open and run a business on St. Maarten. At the end of the course, their businesses would be able to apply for a Qredits loan for its launch.
2. Survey Collaborations- CBCS – Numerous meetings held with CBCS in planning for this survey which will be conducted during the first quarter of 2022. The purpose of The Central Bank of Curaçao and Sint Maarten (CBCS) is seeking to conduct a research study on the effects of administrative burdens on business performance and economic growth. Through this collaboration, it is envisioned that impeding factors of business growth and development would be captured and solutions can be proposed and advocated for by COCI to the government.
3. St. Maarten Small Business Needs Survey – Numerous meetings were held, and support provided to the NRPB on this survey by COCI. The focus of this survey was assessing the challenges & needs of businesses on Sint Maarten in view of future training.

### *Internal Operational Procedures 2021*

1. Official COCI invoicing and receipts from accounting system was established in quarter one. Only in the event of new registration, other receipts are provided. This is since new businesses have to be approved and inputted in system. Once this process is complete, official documents are issued.
2. For efficiency and quality control, the operation floor was redesigned hence giving customers to the Chamber individual or one and one service and reduced wait time.
3. Resolution presented and approved to stop the activity of “inactivation”. It was determined that an entity can either be open or close. This activity was stopped in July of 2021. Press release was published to inform the public.
4. Deregistration campaign started in all earnest with the publishing of the first list of business in default with COCI after months of sensitizing the public. During the period 543 businesses were published in the proposed listing. 14 were removed, hence 529 businesses were dissolved. This activity will continue into 2022.

5. In collaboration with the Board of Directors, decision was taken to consolidate all Sole Proprietors activities given set criteria.
6. New Website was developed and launched. This new website was developed with the aim of having better navigation, user friendliness and being more informative on COCI's product and services.

# Outlook 2022

For 2022 focus will continue to be on two areas of priority. These are the operational efficiency of the Chamber and increasing business support and engagement. The purpose of the Chamber's focus on operational efficiency is to ensure that the direct services rendered to the public and the disseminated information from the Chamber is at the optimal level. To ensure this level of efficiency the Chamber will embark on several internal initiatives. These initiatives will include:

1. Capacity building and training of staff.
2. Enhancement of communication and engagement with the public.
3. Improving business data gathering, analysis and dissemination of the same.
4. Continued of regulatory function through compliance for financial stability.
5. Review and reform activities where necessary for optimal efficiency and the integrity of the Chamber.
6. Development and implantation of revenue generating initiatives of the Chamber.
7. Foster and build stakeholder relations
8. Increased business and community engagement.

As it relates to business support and engagement, COCI is highly cognizant of the fact that it is very rare that a healthy economy exists without a healthy business community. With this notion and mindset, it is the intention of COCI to not only focus on the registration of businesses but to put more emphasis towards their growth and development. This emphasis will be in the form of a number of initiatives that will include but are not limited to:

1. Facilitating Business to Business match making, through collaboration with stakeholders. The Chamber will collaborate with its regional and international stakeholders to promote business interest and match making possibilities. This will ensure more opportunities for the local business community and improve business sustainability.
2. Continue fostering an entrepreneurial culture among the youth within our educational institutions. During 2022, it is the intention of COCI to harness an entrepreneurial spirit and culture among the youth population. This will be achieved by targeting the age group between of 14-18, giving them an understanding of the importance of Entrepreneurialism and how it can be gravitated to even at their age level. COCI also sees this initiative as an opportunity to foster future economic growth and stability.
3. Provide business Support via our Business Center. With the reopening of this center, COCI will be able to add institutional value to the business community. This implies that new and existing businesses will

now have an entity that they can rely on for business tutorials and support. This measure further cements COCI's intent to ensure the growth and development of our businesses.

4. Continue stakeholders' collaboration and networking. COCI will be very proactive in bringing to the awareness of the business community all the relevant information that it may need for the prosperity of its businesses. This will be done through collaboration with key regional and international stakeholders and networking with key focus on:
  - a. *New markets*
  - b. *Products and services*
  - c. *Trends*
  - d. *Workshops and other pertinent information*
5. Continued Advocacy on behalf of businesses for their continued growth and development.