

Chamber of Commerce Executive Handbook

MONTANA ASSOCIATION OF CHAMBER EXECUTIVES



Updated June 2022



Montana Association of Chamber Executives (MACE) Chamber of Commerce Executive Handbook

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FOREWORD

The Montana Association of Chamber Executives welcomes you into the professional world of Chambers. **If you are new to Montana or new to chamber work, this handbook was designed for you.** It is intended to familiarize you with the many chamber and business-related organizations in Montana that work closely with local chambers throughout the state toward mutual goals.

This handbook also aims to provide you with suggestions on how to approach the several major responsibilities of your job and what you as a chamber executive need to know to help continue the work of your Chamber in your community. Hopefully, these suggestions will be useful to those who are new to chamber management and, at the same time, be a beneficial review to experienced chamber executives.

It is characteristic of chamber executives to borrow useful information from others and adapt it to their own use. Just ask any chamber executive and they will share their ideas with you. The preparation of this handbook is no exception to this propensity for borrowing. This handbook represents a great deal of reliance on the writings and ideas of others; hopefully, it is distilled and presented in such a way as to make the contents relevant and useful to the reader.

Finally, this handbook is dedicated, with a great deal of affection, to the men and women of **MACE** (Montana Association of Chamber Executives). Their work, is often times hard, frustrating, and empty of recognition, but does indeed make a difference.

THE CHAMBER

HISTORY OF THE CHAMBER

As long as commerce has existed, traders have banded together for common protection against enemies, to govern the conduct of trade, and later to exert influence on legislation.

The first known use of the term "chamber of commerce" occurred in Marseilles, France, where such an organization was established by the City Council toward the close of the 17th century. From this beginning, chambers of commerce spread to Germany and then throughout Europe.

European chambers have, however, little parallel with the American organization. They frequently operate as quasi-public agencies, with administrative and judicial powers with respect to trade.

The oldest chamber of commerce on the American continent is that of the State of New York, chartered by King George III in 1770. The first local chamber was founded in Charleston, South Carolina in 1773. By 1870 the number of local chambers had increased to 40. The early American chambers, like their European prototypes, were associations of tradesmen, organized for the protection and promotion of commerce. The establishment of the New York State Chamber, for example, was a direct result of the obnoxious Stamp Act passed by Parliament in 1765.

In the United States, early chambers promoted the sale of goods, organized markets, made and enforced rules of trade, protected goods in transit, and even operated their own trading floors. But, their activities were limited to those directly connected with commerce.

The emergence of the chamber as a true community organization came much later, as business men and women began to realize that their own prosperity depended on the development of a prosperous community. A local chamber of commerce is the business, industry, professions, and all civic interest performing tasks that no individual can do alone - rendering a variety of services that benefit all citizens. Today's chamber of commerce, rather than being narrowly focused on one particular industry, issue, cause, or activity, focus on a broad range of activities and support for both businesses and communities.

WHAT IS A CHAMBER?

Chambers' of commerce are business and community associations, generally incorporated as a 501(c) (6) business. Chambers' of commerce are not part of local, state, or federal government, though chambers do often partner with government to accomplish the chamber mission.

Chambers' of commerce are funded by membership dues as well as non-dues items such as events, sponsorships, contracts, and sales of various products and services. The vast majority of chamber memberships are small businesses - businesses with fewer than 20

to 35 employees, on average.

WHAT DO CHAMBERS DO?

Every chamber of commerce is highly individualized in that its objectives and methods of operation must be tailored to meet the needs of the area it serves. At the same time, however, all chambers of commerce have much in common, especially the fact that they are the vehicles through which the businesses and professional people of a community are organized to work together voluntarily to define and solve community problems.

Chambers' of commerce provide opportunities for members to make an impact on critical business and community issues. Together with other talented leaders in business, community, and government, chamber members and professional staff work to make the community a better place to work, live, and play by:

- Building leading businesses
- Building leading communities

What specific programs, products and services do chambers offer? It varies:

- Chambers provide business-building programs for businesses large and small, from trade shows to procurement seminars or other training, to discounts on business-related goods and services.
- Chambers may provide custom research, economic or cluster analysis, or local/regional economic forecasts.
- Chambers may offer one-stop shops for starting a business, getting elected to public office, or even finding a job.
- Chambers fight for pro-business and important community legislation and form public and private alliances.
- Chambers are the primary source for businesses and individuals seeking information on the business climate in a community.
- Some chambers are the primary economic developer in their areas, responsible for marketing their community to recruit new businesses to the area.
- Some chambers are the primary tourism bureau for their area, responsible for marketing their community to tourists as well as attracting conventions and large events.
- Chambers may run large community events, such as restaurant weeks, golf tournaments, and festivals.

But chambers not only address economic issues, they provide leadership in civic and social programming as well. Chambers address community issues health care concerns, education, transportation, workforce quality and availability, housing, and crime with innovative programs, research, coalition-building, and more.

HOW MANY CHAMBERS ARE THERE?

Chambers' of commerce come in all sizes, from a few hundred members to thousands of members; an average chamber has about 1,000 members. The professional staff at chambers may be a part-time executive or even unpaid volunteer, or there may be as many as 150 employees at the largest chambers in the country. There are approximately 7,800 chambers of commerce in the United States. Of those, approximately 4,500 have paid staff members who manage the organization.

ALLIED ORGANIZATIONS



UNITED STATES CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

1615 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20062-2000

Main Number: 202-659-6000; Customer Service: 1-800-638-6582; www.uschamber.com

"To advance human progress through an economic, political and social system based on individual freedom, incentive, initiative, opportunity, and responsibility."

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is the world's largest business federation representing three million businesses of all sizes, sectors, and regions, as well as state and local chambers and industry associations. More than 96% of U.S. Chamber members are small businesses with 100 employees or fewer.

As the voice of business, the Chamber's core purpose is to fight for free enterprise before Congress, the White House, regulatory agencies, the courts, the court of public opinion, and governments around the world.

The U.S. Chamber was formed in April 1912 on the recommendation of President William Howard Taft, who saw the need for "a central organization" to give Congress the benefit of the thinking of the business community on national problems and issues affecting the economy. In its first year, the Chamber's membership totaled 82 local and state chambers of commerce and trade associations.

A December 2008 public opinion survey conducted by Harris Interactive found that Americans rank the U.S. Chamber of Commerce among the top five best-known and respected organizations in Washington. The Chamber consistently leads the pack on lobbying expenditures.

From its headquarters near the White House, the Chamber maintains a professional staff of hundreds of the nation's top policy experts, lobbyists, lawyers, and communicators. Special initiatives covering energy, infrastructure, education and training, and workforce rules help drive the pro-business agenda.

The Chamber is also active in shaping legal policy through its in-house law firm, the National Chamber Litigation Center (NCLC), and through the Institute for Legal Reform (ILR). The Chamber's International Division works in collaboration with 112 American Chambers of Commerce operating in 99 countries to expand global engagement. The Chamber also runs the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), a program of the National Endowment for Democracy.

Through its growing network of grassroots business activists, the Chamber makes a tremendous impact educating voters, turning out the business vote, and advancing legislation on Capitol Hill.

The Chamber hosts more than 2,500 programs, meetings, seminars, and forums with various participants, including Presidents and their Cabinets, members of Congress, and dozens of international leaders. The leadership is equally diverse, with more than 100 corporate and small business leaders from all sectors serving on the board of directors.

Regional offices of the U.S. Chamber have been established in geographical regions to render prompt and efficient member services. The regional office staff counsels chamber of commerce's, associations, and business leaders in all areas of organization activity, program development, and improvement.

Your US Chamber regional office contact for the Northwest Region is: Chris Eyler -
ceyler@uschamber.com
Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming



AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE EXECUTIVES (ACCE)
1-800-424-9245; www.acce.org

The American Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE) is a national association uniquely serving individuals involved in the management of chambers of all sizes. ACCE's mission is to support and develop chamber professionals to lead businesses and their communities. The organizational vision is that ACCE is the organization of choice for chamber professionals.

Chamber executives and professionals hold positions requiring leadership, vision and strong management skills. Devoted to helping chamber executives and their staffs play a significant leadership role in their communities, the American Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE) was established in 1914. Since that time, ACCE has dedicated its resources and energies to enhancing professional growth, career development and management effectiveness of chamber executives and professionals alike. Chamber executives and their staffs can capitalize on a wealth of information, leadership skills development, management techniques and innovative program offerings. ACCE also works diligently to upgrade the economic status and professional standing of those active in the chamber field.

ACCE is the Source, the Place, and the Leader of the Chamber Profession

The Source

ACCE has the solutions for all information and benefits needs. ACCE makes it easy to find the information for chamber executives, their staff and those involved in community leadership...through its community development toolkits and its members-only resource library, containing thousands of references and how-to's. ACCE members also have a source for well-packaged, cost-effective health insurance and retirement plans.

The Place

ACCE is the place for chamber professionals to learn from, and with, each other. Members enjoy many forms of networking through online forums, national and regional events and referrals with ACCE providing the 'place' for those with interest in leading communities.

The Leader

ACCE offers an array of high quality educational and learning opportunities, from practical how to products to visionary leadership and problem solving programs, all to sharpen leadership and management skills. ACCE also plays a leadership role in identifying and analyzing trends, benchmarks and best practices. For more information on the American Chamber of Commerce Executives and all its resources, send questions via email form at <http://www.acce.org/forms/memform.asp> or call 703/998-0072.



MONTANA ASSOCIATION OF CHAMBER EXECUTIVES
MACE Membership– Secretary Treasurer
Caitlin Quisenberry caitlin@bigskychamber.com

“Businesses are the backbone of MT”
Chambers across MT and connector to MACE:
Missoula Area Chamber of Commerce
Kim Latrielle kim@missoulachamber.com 406.544.9722

The Montana Association of Chamber Executives (MACE) is the professional, statewide organization for chamber professionals in Montana. The membership of MACE includes the men and women who work at chambers of commerce in more than 80 communities.

The mission of MACE is to help chamber professionals of all size chambers across Montana to unite, learn and grow professional relationships. Recognizing that all chambers have different needs, cultures, and budgets we strive to create a growing network of chambers to move the business communities of Montana forward through the strong, effective work of the local chambers of commerce.

MACE provides a number of additional membership services. It also sponsors two conferences each year in the spring and fall. Regardless of your chamber size, the MACE meetings will have something for you, your board and your staff. Attending these conferences is an inexpensive way to provide education and team building time that will surely move your chamber forward. It also is a way for Chamber employees to network and learn from other professionals across the state.

MACE is a voluntary organization. Its individual members benefit commensurate with their participation and involvement. Membership dues for MACE are assessed per person.

The statewide database for all Chambers in MT has been created to ensure that all businesses across Montana are connected to business opportunities from the State and supporting organizations relying on business input and support. Update your contact information to ensure you are included for your business community. kim@missoulachamber.com

EDUCATION

INSTITUTE FOR ORGANIZATION MANAGEMENT

The Institute for Organization Management, a program of the U.S. Chamber, has been providing continuing education for chamber of commerce and trade and professional association executives and staff for more than 60 years. The Institute program provides management and leadership training for association, chamber, and nonprofit professionals. The Institute for Organization Management curriculum consists of four one-week sessions. Most participants choose to attend one session per year over a four-year period at a consistent location. Institute, as it is commonly called, is held at six five different universities throughout the country.

Each annual session is five days long and includes 32 hours of regular curriculum, including elective courses. There are two or three voluntary evening sessions during the week. Institute also provides an excellent opportunity for learning from other chamber executives during free time throughout the week. As a chamber executive you can attend progressive levels of the Institute program throughout your professional career. After graduating from the four-year program you can attend the Institute for Advanced Management.

Enrollment for Institute is made with the U.S. Chamber. Information on enrollments, as well as other information about the program, can be found online at <http://www.uschamber.com/institute/default.htm> is contained in the Institute for Organization Management catalog. The catalog is usually distributed in late February or March each year. www.uschamber.com

ACCREDITATION

The accreditation program of the U.S. Chamber is designed for use by local chambers of commerce as a management tool to identify and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of their organization. The accreditation process is voluntary although a chamber of commerce must be in operation for three years before applying.

The accrediting process helps a local chamber define and maintain superior standards of chamber operations. It provides recognition to volunteers and staff members who are meeting basic standards of operation and performance. At the same time, it helps the volunteer leadership understand more about the necessary ingredients required for a successful chamber.

The accreditation designation is not permanent. It must be renewed every five years; re-accreditation is achieved by going through the same self-analysis and evaluation required in the original designation.

Montana chamber executives interested in learning more about this valuable program can write for a set of Accreditation Guidelines, available from the U.S. Chamber.

Every Chamber of Commerce who chooses to go through the accreditation process handles it differently but many Chambers' selects an accreditation Task Force. Then many times the committee will divide into subcommittees, each of which conducts an analysis and evaluation of various segments of the total chamber operation. The accreditation application changes every year but areas of current evaluation include Governance, Finance, Human Resources and Staff, Governmental Affairs, Program Development, Technology, Communications and Marketing, Facilities and Benchmarking. The recommendations from the analysis of these committees are submitted to the chamber's board of directors.

This evaluation report of the accreditation committee is also sent to the U.S. Chamber's accrediting Board. There, a representative of the U.S. Chamber reviews it and an evaluation report is prepared and sent back to the local chamber.

The board of directors of the U.S. Chamber provides final approval, designating the local chamber as accredited.

CHAMBER ORGANIZATION ANQ OPERATION

GOVERNANCE

ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION: A Chamber should be incorporated because:

- Incorporation protects members from personal liability for association obligations and from liability if Chamber officers, directors, or staff violates the law.
- A corporation has an existence of its own, independent of the terms of office or employment of members, directors, or officers.
- Members tend to regard an incorporated organization as more formally structured, more stable and more businesslike than an unincorporated one.
- An incorporated association can sue and be sued in its corporate name; an unincorporated group usually must go into court or be brought into court in the names of all its members.

Articles of Incorporation generally provide information such as: Corporation Name, people organizing, stock or nonstock, existence, for profit or non profit, registered office and registered agent.

MISSION STATEMENT: An organizations mission statement often contains the following:

- Purpose and aim of the organization
- The organization's primary stakeholders: clients, stockholders, etc.
- Responsibilities of the organization toward these stakeholders
- Products and services offered

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE: A Chamber, or any other enterprise, must have an organization structure. The primary authority of the chamber rests with the membership. The membership elects a board of directors and also vests in the board the authority to set policy for the organization. The board of directors elects a Chairperson of the Board as well as other officers. In a chamber with no paid staff, the Chairperson of the Board and other officers of the chamber may direct the work of the committees. The Board of Directors are the governing body of a Chamber and all its councils, committees, task forces, affiliated or subsidiary organization, employees and properties. Recommendations for policy considerations by the board of directors may come from any of the committees, the president or other officers, any board members, or any member of the chamber.

The formal organization chart is important because it helps the chamber manager, staff as well as all volunteers, understand their role and position as the chamber moves to accomplish its goals and objectives.

BYLAWS: Bylaws are rules for the internal organizing and governing of an association. In Montana, nonprofits are required to maintain current bylaws. Bylaws help organizations to establish a management of rules that provide consistency and continuity of operations as well as help to define relationships between the association and its members among the members themselves. It also helps to minimize the likelihood of confusion and disagreement on association structure and operation. Bylaws should be reviewed and adopted by the Board as well as the Chamber's Legal Counsel.

A Chamber's bylaws often contains the: Purpose, Definition of Membership, Who Qualifies, Dissolution, Definition and Make-up of the Board of Directors, Committees, Meetings and Review.

VOLUNTEERS: One purpose of a chamber of commerce is to provide a vehicle in the community through which business and professional people can volunteer their time to accomplish worthwhile things. The participation of these volunteers and others in the chamber program is the responsibility of the chamber executive and staff.

The duties of the officers, directors, and, in some cases, the committee chairs are usually spelled out in the chamber's bylaws. It is important that these key volunteers understand that their duties and responsibilities are delineated in the bylaws.

Volunteers like objectives, tasks, and deadlines. They especially like them if they come by the direction of other volunteers. It is not enough for the membership committee chair to say to all the members "Take these prospect cards and go call on them." They won't do it. Rather, the committee members, and the chair need to understand that the objective of the membership committee is \$6,000 in dues income, that each committee member needs to call on six prospects each month in order to sell two prospects to achieve the objective. The same kind of participation can be obtained from all other volunteers if they understand the objective, the task, and the deadline.

There is a rule to maximizing volunteer participation. It goes something like this, "Do not ask someone to do something without first giving them an opportunity to say no." Once they have been asked and said yes, then you as the chamber executive or another volunteer has every right to politely push and persuade until the job is accomplished, on time.

As in the business world, some volunteer jobs are more glamorous than others. You cannot have one group of volunteers always having lunch with the governor while another group is always cleaning up behind the horses in a parade. Volunteer jobs are not all alike. Some are more interesting, some require different talents, and some have greater notoriety than others. Your chair or president needs to vary the assignments of volunteers so that everybody gets a share of the limelight from time to time.

COMMITTEES: Committees are the lifeblood of any chamber. They enable the chamber to multiply its efforts and effectiveness. In fact, the extensive use and effectiveness of committees is one of the distinguishing characteristics of a local chamber. Few, if any, other organizations in your community can marshal the resources and talents inherent in a committee as effectively and consistently as your chamber can.

Chambers have committees for almost every kind of work that we do. Standing committees are organized and meet regularly to deal with a particular area of the chamber's program. Many chambers have standing committees for: agribusiness, education/workforce development, governmental affairs/public policy, membership, and many other facets of the chamber's program.

Increasingly, chambers are moving toward the use of the ad hoc committee, often called the task force. A task force is a group of people brought together to resolve a specific

issue or put on a particular program. When the effort is completed, the task force is disbanded. The use of the task force implies that the work of the group will be of short duration. Though this is not always the case; some chambers may organize a task force to work on a particular problem that might take two or three years to bring to fruition. The task force is brought together for the purpose of dealing with a single problem; in most cases the work is accomplished in a period of six months or less.

Many chamber volunteers, as well as chamber executives, heartily endorse the task force concept. Business people tend to be objective-oriented people. They seem to enjoy being brought together to resolve a problem or issue and, when it is resolved, moving on to something else.

The size of the committee varies according to the task. Many chambers have committees with as few as three to five people; others have committees with as many as forty or fifty people. The committee should be large enough to accomplish its work yet small enough so that its members will be involved and needed.

Chamber executives need to remind themselves, often, that a committee is a living, breathing example of the group decision-making process. Working with a committee requires a fine honing of interpersonal skills and an understanding of small group dynamics. Remember, chamber committee members are volunteers and they help pay your salary.

One thing to remember about committee meetings: If there isn't a reason for the committee to meet, don't meet. There are all kinds of books and pamphlets about how to plan and organize committee meetings. Preparing agendas, sending out notices, taking minutes, making arrangements, preparing the chair, summarizing the committee's work, seating arrangements, encouraging participation, taking action, starting on time - nearly all of these can be handled by using polite, good common sense. Two further admonitions: Be prepared, and assume nothing.

OVERVIEW OF BOARD ORIENTATIONS: Many chambers of commerce have adopted the practice of holding orientation sessions for their Board of Directors and committee chairs. The purpose of an orientation session is to tell the leaders of your Chamber what is expected of them, what can be expected of the chamber organization, and to give them some background information about the chamber, its committees they are residing over, and its function.

The orientations are normally done by the Chamber President/CEO and/or the Chairman of the Board. Nearly every individual performs better and is more comfortable if he or she has a clear understanding of what is expected. That is the purpose of the orientation. It is a sound investment in organizational public relations and it pays big dividends in the productivity of the chamber's volunteer force.

A Board of Directors orientation is a great arena to educate your Board members on the following:

- *Strategic Plan*
- *Board Job Descriptions*
- *Bylaws*
- *Organizational Structure & Staff Responsibilities*
- *Committees Roles & Responsibilities*
- *Governmental Affairs Policy*
- *How they will be evaluated*
- *Meeting Requirements*
- *History of the Organization*

Overview of Committee Chair Orientations: Nearly every individual performs better and is more comfortable he or she has a clear understanding of what is expected. That is the purpose of the orientation.

The committee chairs and committee members of the Chamber are striving to implement your program of work and the Chamber's strategic plan and they are a very important piece to the workings of the Chamber. Committee orientations may be done by you the Chamber Executive, Chairman of the Board and/or Committee Chair with discussion revolving around the importance of the committee's work in meeting the Chamber's goals and mission, the expectations of the committee, review of the objectives and how their policies will be decided by the Board of Directors. Also details can be given about their meetings including meeting notices, times etc... There should also be ample time for questions and discussion by the individual committee members.

A Committee Chair Orientation is a great time to educate your Volunteers leading each of your committee's on:

- *Bylaws*
- *Roles, Responsibilities and Procedures in the Organizations Structure*
- *Staff Responsibilities in relation to the committee*
- *Meeting requirements*
- *Budget requirements*

BOARD RETREATS/STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSIONS: The leadership of every organization needs an appropriate amount of time to think about the organization, its purposes, and to set strategy for the future endeavors of the organization. Many Chambers meet this need for an organizations "think time" by planning a retreat. This is a time for the gathering of key chamber leaders for an uninterrupted period to do in-depth thinking about the chamber. The method or format of the retreat is less important than the concept for the retreat itself.

There are many variations on this theme. Some retreats are half-a-day or day-long events, others involve an overnight stay. Some retreats focus simply on creating a strategic plan for the organization and building a Program of Work for the year, within the plan while others tackle nagging problems that have been bothering the chamber of the community for some time. In some instances, the participants at a retreat will break into smaller groups for discussion on a variety of issues. In other cases, all of the participants engage in all of the discussions that take place.

Some chambers, in planning a retreat, use an outside speaker or facilitator. This helps to set the stage for the discussion and also enables this outside facilitator to summarize thinking without concern for the personalities that might be involved in the discussion of issues.

A retreat can be an invigorating process. The leadership, having taken the time to think about how to articulate their feelings on certain community issues, returns with greater enthusiasm for the chamber and a stronger commitment to work for the chamber in attaining its goals.

BOARD POLICIES - THE POLICY MANUAL (*Personnel & Administrative, Public Policy*)

A policy is nothing more than an expression of a position of the chamber. This expression, or policy, serves as a guide to suggest courses of action that the chamber will take on issues and matters. The policy declaration states as fairly as possible the majority view of the chamber of commerce members as determined by the chamber's leadership. Policies generally fall into the following categories: Personnel and administrative, federal, state and local issues and matters.

Personnel policies would include issues such as equal employment opportunity, probationary periods, hours of work, vacation, and other employee benefits. Administrative policies might cover subjects like personal political participation, personal use of chamber equipment, and required approval for publicity or news releases.

Public Policies can be related to policies on federal, state, and local issues and can be many and widely diverse. They would include the chamber's positions on legislative and regulatory state and national issues as well as any positions on transportation, education, business development, downtown development, tourism and convention, agriculture, and virtually anything else that the chamber is involved in.

A good rule of thumb can be: If it's important enough for the chamber to be involved in, it is important enough for the chamber's leadership to develop a policy position.

Any member may submit a proposed statement of policy or recommended issue for the Chamber to become involved in to the chamber board of directors as well as many proposed policy recommendations come from the various chamber committees, board members, and occasionally, the chamber staff. Following its adoption, a board policy statement should be publicized to the chamber membership, and where appropriate, to others in the community.

If you and your chamber are new to each other, dig up the policy manual and read it. You will have a better understanding of the knowledge and action that preceded your coming. It's the same thing if you've been around your chamber for a while. If the policy manual is no place to be found, the solution is easy: Start one! Get someone going through the minutes of the board meetings, and every time the board made a decision that looks important enter it into the policy manual. When the policy manual has been completed, share it with the board of directors.

All adopted policies shall from time to time be reviewed and revised as necessary. This also means that you should have a process for getting rid of outdated policies.

HUMAN RESOURCES AND STAFF

OVERVIEW: THE CHAMBER EXECUTIVE

The chamber executive is the chief executive officer of the chamber. If you are new to chamber management this section has been designed to help you. We encourage you, as a new executive, to schedule a visit with a counterpart in a neighboring community or attend a MACE meeting to start building your network of executives that can help with your transition into your new position. Another great resource is to attend the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Institute for Organizational Management. If you're an experienced chamber executive, hopefully this section will be a helpful refresher for you.

As the chief executive officer of the organization, you will have scores of responsibilities. Some of your duties may include:

- Official representative of the Chamber's position on any issue that the Chamber has or takes.
- Chief adviser to the board of directors, the executive committee, and the other committees of the chamber.
- Management of the Chamber's Budget
- Building Effective Community Partnerships
- Community Cheerleader
- Membership Visits
- Staff Management
- Assist the Board with Envisioning, Implementing and Monitoring of Strategic Plans
- Conducting official correspondence
- Preserving all books, documents, and communications
- Maintaining accurate records of the proceedings of the chamber, the board of directors, and all committees.
- Any duties as may be incident to your office, subject to the direction of the board of directors.

You will create an impression on all of the people that you encounter during your first several months. It is an important period for you because many times the first impression, good or bad, will be a lasting one. The best advice is to remember that these are business and professional people that you are dealing with; you will probably make the strongest impression on those that you deal with in a business-like, professional manner. Regardless of your experience, here are some things to keep in mind:

- **The board sets the policy, not the chamber executive.**
- **Do your homework-** As a Chamber executive you will be involved in many different aspects of your community and you will not know it all. By doing your homework, asking the right questions and building your network of resources you will be able to share information that is needed for your Chamber Board to make educated and informed decisions when it is needed.
- **Become Involved-** You'll meet lots of people - members of the board of directors, officers, chamber committee chairs and committee members,

members of the chamber, other community leaders which the chamber does business with, and members of the chamber staff. Each of the individuals in these groups will all have a role to play in your destiny.

- **Be Accessible-** You are the face of your business community and sometimes the first stop for businesses, agencies and individuals looking to do business or work with your community. Be available and always willing to help as you are making the first impression on your community.
- **Take advantage of all of the assistance, information and advice** that the volunteers are willing to give during those first crucial months as you learn about the community and the chamber.
- **When in doubt, ask.** And ask lots of questions of lots of different people involved with the Chamber.
- **Listen carefully.** There is nothing more important than listening because you are working for your volunteers and community.
- **Never stop learning about the community and the chamber.** Read and research all you can. Great Chamber information can be found at www.acce.com and www.uschamber.com.
- **Don't change things too quickly.** Remember the Chamber was there before you started. Research, ask and listen to why things were set-up a certain way or why certain policies, procedures, committee's were set in the first place. The past can assist you in realizing why the organization is where it is at today as where as help lead the organization to where its needs to go in the future.
- **Assume nothing.**

PLEASE NOTE: ALL members of the chamber are important. They may not be involved now, but they may have been at some earlier date. They also may get involved in the future, depending upon their relationship with you as the new chamber executive or if the Chamber plays a role in a specific issue important to their business or to the community. Also not all influential business people in the community are involved in the chamber. There are other civic leaders in your town who probably have frequent or occasional contact with the chamber. This list may include the city and elected officials, the superintendent of schools, the United Way director, and other leaders of important community organizations. This is where building community partnerships can be key when working with these people who may not be a part of your organization. Just like you, all of these people have agenda's and ideas for what makes your community a better place to live but the key is to work together.

OVERVIEW: THE CHAMBER STAFF

Unless you work for a very small chamber where you are expected to do everything, you as the chamber executive will have staff to assist you in striving to meet the Chamber's mission. You, as the Chamber Executive, have the responsibility to hire and direct the chamber staff. It is your job to direct their efforts so that the chamber functions effectively and efficiently day-to-day. Your staff will look to you for guidance and direction about what they should do to accomplish their portion of the chamber's mission. You need to rely on them for background information and for their current impressions and judgments about the activities, programs, and issues which your chamber is directed to accomplish. Not everyone subscribes to it, but many successful chamber executives have developed a team approach in working with the

chamber staff.

Delegation is a key approach to developing a team approach in your organization. Delegation is also and a lot of times needed due to the diverse items the Chamber works on at one time as well as the numerous duties these projects can entail. By delegating projects, events, sales of membership to a staff member you also can hold them accountable. Remember, though, you as the chamber executive still have the responsibility for everything that goes on in your organization. You are accountable to the board of directors. The chamber executive delegates authority to the staff members and then they are accountable to the chamber executive.

JOB DESCRIPTIONS: Every member of the chamber staff, including the chamber executive, should have a job description. A job description is a statement of the job position, the overall responsibilities of the job as it relates to other jobs within the chamber, the detailed duties of the job, the accountability of this employee (who the employee reports to), and a statement on how the results of the job will be measured. Job Descriptions should be reviewed periodically and revised whenever necessary.

NEW EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION PROGRAM: New employee orientation effectively integrates the new employee into your organization and assists with retention, motivation, job satisfaction, and quickly enabling each individual to become contributing members of the work team. An effective orientation will:

- Foster an understanding of your Chamber's culture, values, and structure
- Help the new employee make a successful adjustment to the new job
- Help the new employee understand her role and how she fits into the total organization
- Help the new employee achieve objectives and shorten the learning curve
- Help the new employee develop a positive working relationship by building a foundation of knowledge about your Chamber's mission, objectives, policies, organization structure, and functions.

EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS: Employee Appraisals are important to do at least annually because this allows you the means to hold your staff accountable and gives you a time and a place to review employee's performance. Every employee should have a job description; if you're going to hold people accountable, you don't want them saying to you, "Nobody ever told me I was supposed to do that."

OVERVIEW: PERSONNEL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Every chamber should have a personnel policies and procedure manual. The personnel policies and procedures manual describe the way things are (policies) and the way we do things (office procedures) for the benefit of new employees. Every employee should have a copy of the office policies and procedures manual for their own reference while employed by the chamber. And, of course, the manual should be periodically reviewed and updated. Each employee should sign a form acknowledging their receipt and accepting the policies at the chamber.

Items that can be covered include:

- hours of work
- sick leave

- employment records
- accidents on the job,
- probationary period, salary and overtime regulations
- compensatory time off, paid holidays
- Insurance, retirement benefits
- Workers Comp and unemployment compensation
- Office procedures on financial procedures and control, reimbursement of expenses, use of the telephone, incoming and outgoing mail, and employee suggestions.
- Employee benefits
- Administrative policies-affiliation with organizations, budget control, committee management, staff meetings, political participation, publicity etc...
- Appendix including sample pre-printed forms, letters, committee meeting notices and minutes.

FINANCE AND MEMBERSHIP

The success of every chamber of commerce is measured by a membership that supports its Program of Work with volunteer efforts and with ample funds. The skills of business leaders in financing the operations of their firms can be readily applied to developing a sound financial plan for a chamber. In order to do this, your chamber volunteers want a clear picture of the basic chamber organization and operation. This section attempts to give you some helpful suggestions on how to approach this most important responsibility of your job.

WHAT DOES A CHAMBER OF COMMERCE HAVE TO SELL?

What is the product of a chamber? The product of a chamber is unique, quite unlike any product or service of any private firm or other organization or agency. The basic product of the chamber is an organized effort to promote, stimulate, increase and improve business to build a better community.

Under this broad banner, the chamber product, or what the chamber has to sell, is all of the various projects and activities that make up the chamber's current Program of Work which is striving to accomplish the goals of a Chamber's long-term strategic plan. What the chamber has to sell this year may be different from what it had to sell last year. And, the salable ingredients in your chamber's program may vary somewhat from what chambers in other communities have to sell.

The important concept, however, for developing a sound financial plan for a chamber is that a chamber's principal product is its program of organized activity. The appealing part of that concept is its current nature or its future prospects. You, or your volunteers, will not sell many chamber memberships on the basis of civic responsibility. You also will not sell many chamber memberships on the basis of what the chamber has done in the past. **WHY BUSINESSES JOIN is because of what the chamber is doing today or what the chamber is trying to do for tomorrow.**

WHAT ARE THE CHAMBER'S COSTS OF PRODUCTION?

The basic costs of production for a chamber can be related to the principal product - its program of organized activities. The more expansive the program is, of course, the greater the cost will be. The converse is equally true; a chamber of commerce with a modest budget must tailor its program activities accordingly.

The major costs of production for a chamber of commerce are the administrative costs. These include: staff salaries and benefits, office space, utilities, insurance including liability and directors and officer insurance, supplies, technology, postage etc... These administrative costs - the day-to-day cost of the operating of the chamber - make up the majority of expenditures most chambers incur during its operating year. Other possible costs might include direct program expenditures, a reserve fund for equipment replacement or building repair, an operating reserve fund, and a provision for contingencies.

THE CHAMBER BUDGET

The product that the chamber has to sell is its program of organized activity as defined in the Program of Work. The production costs for the chamber will be its administrative costs, and possibly some fund cost for the replacement of capital expenditures. These two issues are melded together to develop a chamber budget.

The budget for the chamber, as for any organization, is a management tool. The budget is a guide or a control factor with a close relationship to other management functions, especially planning and coordination. The budget estimates the probable income for the organization over the course of the year and allocates the anticipated funds for the organization to administrative and program expenses as they are projected to occur.

The preparation of the budget is an administrative function. In many chambers it is usually assigned to a committee; Ways and Means, Budget and Finance committee, or some other title. Many Chamber Boards also install a Treasurer, who is a Board liaison to work with staff to assist in monitoring the budget, monthly financials and to ensure financial policies are being met. The Treasurer and Finance committee should also play a role in creating the Chamber's financial policies. The chamber executive needs to be intimately involved in the preparation of the budget. Remember, after the committee has approved a draft budget and after it has been adopted by the Board of Directors, then it will be your responsibility for its supervision and control. You need to work very closely with the budget committee to be certain that their estimates of income and their allocation of expenditures are reasonable and accurate.

The starting point for the development of a budget is past experience. The income of the prior year is a basis from which estimates can be made for the upcoming year. The expenditures for the coming year can also be related to the experience of the past year.

Each of the committees that might have program expenses in the coming year should get a budget request to the budget committee or the chamber executive so that these can be included in the budget preparation. Add to that the administrative and operating changes

that you can foresee. These might include: an additional staff person; staff salary increases; Social Security increases; increases in fixed charges like rent, utilities, taxes and insurance; increase in operating expenses like postage, telephone, supplies, and other variables.

It is sometimes difficult for volunteers to understand a budget with high administrative costs and minuscule program costs. After all, the program of the organization is the reason for its existence. The fact is the cost of doing business includes the implementation of the program. You may have budgeted only a few hundred dollars for direct program expenses for the retail merchants. But, it is your skilled management ability, supported by an administrative machine that can deliver, that will be the real contribution to the retail merchants in the coming year. Of course, the largest percentage of the budget will be spent for administration and operation; those are the tools, along with some dedicated volunteers, that we need in order to implement the chamber program.

Monitoring the Financials & Budget

Normally, the Chamber Executive will be reviewing monthly financial statements along with the assigned Finance committee and Treasurer. The Board of Directors should review and approve each of the Chamber's financial statements along with its annual budget. Per the U.S. Chamber of Commerce accreditation process, a Chamber's accounting and reporting systems should be maintained electronically.

MEMBERSHIP

WHO CAN BE EXPECTED TO SUPPORT THE CHAMBER?

Every business organization or professional individual that can afford to do so should be a member of the chamber of commerce. You may never attain that, but don't settle for any less.

The chamber of commerce is the premier organization in the community working in an organized effort to advance community growth and development. Every business enterprise has a stake in the progress of the community. As the community grows, they grow.

The fact is that the success of many chamber activities depends upon widespread support of the business community. A broad base of business participation enhances the chamber's ability to accomplish its program in the community; it is also essential to the financing of the chamber.

HOW MUCH DOES EACH MEMBER PAY?

The chamber organization, like any other business, must have a fair price for what the

chamber has to sell. Clearly, not all chamber members will pay the same amount. This suggests that chamber membership will probably have some basic dues rate - low enough to attract the support of small businesses with a limited income but with a desire to participate.

Beyond this basic dues rate, the chamber will undoubtedly need to establish some guidelines, or dues structure, for larger, more prosperous firms who can and should pay more than the basic dues rate. The objective of a good membership financing plan is to encourage each business firm in the community to invest proportionately in the chamber in order to absorb its fair and equitable share of chamber costs.

There are almost as many methods of establishing a dues schedule or formula as there are chambers of commerce. Each chamber seems to tailor a dues schedule slightly in order to reflect the individual characteristics of its membership. The three methods of establishing dues formula that are discussed below are not intended to be all-inclusive but have been widely used.

Tiered Membership: Tiered membership is a fairly new way to sell Chamber memberships. A tiered system allows businesses to choose what level of membership they want to invest in. Many times this is structured by establishing a base level membership. For example for "\$350.00" a business would receive various benefits provided at this level such as participation in events, a ribbon cutting, listings in the membership directory etc... As businesses move up the tier level (or the more dollars they invest) so do the benefits provided with the membership. Normally chambers establish 5-8 tier levels for businesses to join at.

Business Classification: With this system the chamber membership can be divided into classifications depending on the nature of the business: financial, professional, utilities, retailers, wholesalers, automotive, real estate, insurance, manufacturers etc... There are seventeen suggested business classifications, although some chambers use a modified classifying system that includes eight classifications. A separate dues schedule is usually created for each of these classifications.

With each classification the schedule may be different. For example, for manufacturers their dues may be based on number of employees, the schedule for retailers on gross volume of sales, financial institutions might be determined by deposits etc... The dues schedule assures that, for example, a restaurant with 20 employees is paying dues that are fair and equitable compared to its competitor with 30 employees and with all other restaurants.

Average Membership: A third method of financing is selling an average membership. This assumes that the chamber has a minimum or basic dues rate. It also assumes that the chamber has a dues schedule for at least the larger classifications of membership. Average dues are calculated by dividing the aggregate membership dues by the number of chamber members firms. For example, the minimum dues may be \$100; the average dues may be \$175. The first objective is to get all of the people who pay minimum dues up to the average. The second objective is to sell those people who pay the average on the idea that they really are an above average firm and therefore could and should pay more. As soon as anybody pays more, you have increased the average and the process

starts all over again next year.

Some chambers also sell the average on the basis of membership classification. For example, the average chamber membership may be \$175; the average chamber membership for manufacturers may be \$400. An entire new vista has just opened. Now, you go through each business classification and upgrade them individually compared with the firms that are similar to theirs. If done properly, the process of selling the average is a time-consuming process but it does raise adequate amounts of money for those chambers that have the staff and volunteers in order to do it.

WHAT IS THE BEST METHOD OF SELLING THE PRODUCT?

Dedicated Membership Director or Volunteer: Every chamber needs a well-organized plan to sell its product. Several larger chambers in Montana have one or more full time staff that call on prospects and direct the other facets of the chamber's membership operation. Other chambers might have a retired businessman who sells chamber memberships on a commission basis.

Membership Committee: A membership committee is a group of volunteers who have the time and a willingness and talent to sell. They call on prospective members, delinquent accounts, and can work on problems of retention. They also have the added value of serving as a liaison between the chamber membership and the chamber board of directors. They can be an excellent source for feedback about the concerns of the general membership.

A membership committee usually meets once or twice a month to report on their calls for the previous period, to select new prospects to call on, to discuss strategies for targeted groups of prospects, and to be brought up to date on the progress of the chamber's program. The latter is important because that is principally what the membership committee has to sell. An up-to-date knowledge about the activities of the chamber is the best sales kit for a member of a membership committee. The membership committee should receive regular reports at its meetings from committee chairs, officers, and the chamber executive on the progress of the chamber.

Volunteers in the membership committee should be given clear objectives, expressed in understandable terms to assist them in achieving their goal. If they understand that their objective is to get 60 new members this year, then the chair and each committee member can break that objective down to determine how many calls each member should make each month, how many sales will have to be made, and so on in order to achieve it.

The chair and the membership committee members need both a desire to help build the chamber membership as well as the time to work on the membership committee. There are many members of the chamber who make daily contacts with other business people in connection with their work. These people are ideal membership committee workers. Selling chamber membership is hard work. Not everybody says yes. Some people say no, unpleasantly. The chair has to be able to inspire the other committee members to maintain a high level of enthusiasm for the job.

Membership Drives: The format of membership drive varies considerably. Some are half-day affairs, some all day, some a week or more. Some chambers conduct a membership drive by using telephone volunteers to call and screen prospects with a follow-up to close the sale by a member of the membership committee. The importance of the membership drive in addition to the new memberships that are obtained during the drive is that it provides a source of qualified prospects that can be followed up by the Chamber's own Membership Director or volunteers of the Membership Committee during the year.

HOW DO YOU KEEP THE MEMBER?

A good membership retention program for the chamber should be established to assist the Chamber in keeping its members. All too often, chambers tend to take membership retention too lightly. Certainly, some membership attrition will occur in any chamber. Firms go out of business, the ownership changes, or the member may even get mad at the chamber's position on an issue and cancel.

A good membership retention program has four important steps.

1. **Orientation:** Each new member in the chamber should be given a proper orientation. Each new member of the chamber should be invited at least once, preferably twice, to a meeting at the chamber in order to understand what was purchased. This orientation would include meeting the officers and staff of the chamber, a discussion of the chamber's program, and perhaps literature that describes chamber services and how the chamber operates.
2. **Encourage Participation:** The second important retention step is to encourage each member to become active on a committee of their choice. Experience shows that the rate of membership loss is very low among active committee members. They understand what the chamber is and what it is doing.
3. **Open Lines of Communication:** The third retention device, for the member who does not have time to serve on committees, is a good communications program for the chamber. This includes external communication about the chamber - newspapers, radio, and television - as well as internal communications, the membership newsletter, correspondence, and special communications.
4. **Collection of Dues:** Finally, good membership retention also depends upon a proper system of regular billing of accounts. Most chambers send a statement of dues one month before the account is due. As soon as the membership account becomes overdue, a letter or note might accompany the billing. Then, this may be followed up with a telephone or personal call to delinquent accounts. Whatever the procedure, the chamber should conduct its billing and re-billing of delinquent accounts in a systematic, business-like way.

OTHER INCOME

Other income is just that; it is all of the creative ways that a chamber can raise money beyond the method of simply increasing dues. It is predicated upon the very simple assumption that the business people who benefit most or have the greatest interest in a chamber activity or program should pay.

The chamber may generate other income from ticket sales by charging a surcharge to events or meetings that the chamber sponsors, advertising sales in a community book or a newsletter, or the sale of maps, brochures, and directories. Many chambers have a number of affiliated organizations like an economic development corporation or a retail promotion organization. Sometimes, these organizations and others pay a monthly or annual administrative fee as their contribution to the general overhead expenses of the chamber.

New or special programs of the chamber often present an opportunity for other sources of income. For example, an economic education program or a special legislative effort may require funding that was not anticipated when the budget was developed. Frequently, a group of the chamber's membership will make a special contribution for such a new program.

An area not to be overlooked in talking about other income is donated services. Many chambers find a willingness, particularly among their larger members, to donate facilities or services to work on some aspect of the chamber program. This allows the chamber to use its resources for other things.

The above examples are not intended to be all-inclusive as other income sources for the chamber. The executive needs to be constantly alert for additional sources of revenue. Clearly, the trend is toward a smaller percentage in total income from dues, greater reliance on other sources of income.

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

OVERVIEW GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS: Your Chamber should be involved in Governmental Affairs on some level in your community. This is because Public policy affects your members. Elected officials need to hear from you as the voice of business. Your members can't accomplish alone what they can together and if you don't someone else will!

It is important to note that every Chamber is different when it comes to their Governmental Affairs involvement. Some take more of an educational role; while others tend to take more formal positions as well as forming a Political Action Committee to help endorse candidates. Whatever role your Chamber leadership decides that your Chamber should play, it is important to have an organized governmental affairs component to your Chamber.

DEVELOPING A LEGISLATIVE OR PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA: Whether you assemble a group of Board members or already have a governmental affairs committee in place for developing a public policy agenda, it is important to construct an agenda that can help guide your Chamber when local, state and federal issues arise. If your chamber does not have a legislative committee in place to construct a policy agenda: A few thoughts:

1. Select people who want to serve but won't bring their own agendas.
2. Get business people from your membership as they will be a good resource for sections of the policy that their businesses are involved in. Avoid elected officials,

- government employees, consultants.
3. Establish procedures for setting and approving policies.

When your group of volunteers is in place- Have them decide what issues really matter. This also may be done by doing a quick survey of your Chamber membership. By constructing an all-purpose agenda your Chamber can take a broad position statement such as: "The Anywhere Chamber of Commerce believes that adequate and affordable health care is important to all citizens" and then develop priorities that are important to your Chamber, city, or region under this broad heading and add priority items as issues arise facing businesses in your community. A Priority Example would be: We encourage: More options to choose from so that coverage best meets individual needs and circumstances.

Resources for Creating a Governmental Affairs Committee- In Montana, Renee Sinclair, with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce is a contact to help your Chamber with any Governmental Affairs related issues or to help with trainings for your chamber to develop what is needed in the governmental affairs arena.

Your regional office contact for the Northwest Region is: Chris Eyer
ceyer@uschamber.com Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming

Communicating and Sharing Your Public Policy- It is important to communicate to your membership and elected officials the Chamber's legislative agenda and your Chamber's priority issues.

Business Days at the Capitol- Every January in Montana there is a unique time to do this with your state officials at Business Days at the Capitol. This is a great time to host your city's officials at this event as well as communicate to them the important issues facing the business community. Contact the Montana Chamber to learn more about this annual event.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Program of Work (Strategic Plan/Business Plan)

Perhaps the single most important document that your chamber produces each year is its Program of Work (Strategic Plan/Business Plan). In simple terms, it is the statement of goals and objectives that your Chamber intends to accomplish over a given time period. Moreover, the Program of Work assigns the responsibility for individual tasks within the chambers volunteer efforts, i.e., which committees are responsible for which endeavors. *(Incidentally, the term, Program of Work, is generally used and recognized only by those in chamber management or occasionally in some other form of organization management. It is not readily understood by most of our volunteers. Therefore, the final product of a Program of Work generally has some other title such as, "Blueprint for Action," "Action for Tomorrow," or some other equally catchy title that gives the document stature and recognition by the chamber volunteers)*

Developing the Program of Work

Developing a Program of Work should involve the broadest possible cross-section and participation of chamber officers, directors, committee chairs, committee members, the general membership and, perhaps, representatives from the community at large. The reason for this broad participation is because the more people who identify with the chamber's program, the greater the likelihood of their investment of money and time into the Chamber to see their goals accomplished. Thus, the process of writing a Program of Work becomes a major instrument in its implementation.

The Program of Work is an important document for every chamber member. It says what we as an organization intend to accomplish, who will accomplish it, and when we can expect it to be completed. Publicizing this process generates the membership manpower and volunteer time in order to get the job done. Setting an objective oriented Program of Work maximizes the effectiveness of the chamber's volunteer power. It also demonstrates to the membership and the Directors and officers that the chamber is indeed accomplishing things in the community.

The Chamber's Board of Directors and officers are the key group in determining community needs and the development of a chamber program to meet those needs. They have the final responsibility for distilling and prioritizing a myriad of suggestions into a final document - one that is workable, manageable, representative of the community it serves, and one that can be implemented with the resources of the chamber.

Input for a Program of Work can be received in various ways including:

- Board of Directors often times use their leadership retreats as a major element in developing their Program of Work.
- Committees in one of their final meetings each year should offer general suggestions about the activities of the committee in the coming year as well as for the chamber program as a whole.
- Membership Surveys can be developed and sent to all chamber members asking for their suggestions about what the chamber ought to be doing in the months and years ahead.
- Many chambers plan and organize a series of membership group meetings to discuss the past accomplishments of the chamber and seek membership suggestions on new chamber directions.
- Personal visits by the Chamber President or Chairman of the Board to a handful of community leaders who do not normally participate in chamber activities. The suggestions and insight of these individuals are vital for consideration in developing the chamber program.

Implementing the Program of Work

After the board of directors creates and adopts the Program of Work, the leadership - officers, directors and staff - need to organize the available resources of the chamber toward its implementation.

Staff assignments need to be made in order to provide continuity and accountability for specific areas of the Program of Work.

Volunteers need to be recruited, orientated, and assigned to work on specific committees or task forces relating to the chamber's Program of Work.

The chamber directors, and the chamber executive, need to analyze the chamber's finances; then they need to decide the cost of the chamber's program, budget for those projects in order of their importance, and, when necessary, set a strategy for raising additional moneys in order to complete the program.

Each committee and task force of the chamber should establish a timetable for their objectives. The objectives should be realistic. This simple process - setting a specific objective for each committee and a timetable for their completion - is one of the keys to effective committee management. It allows the board of directors to know when each project is expected to be completed so they can correlate the work of one committee with all of the other committees in the chamber. It also provides the chamber executive or staff person with a clear indication of the progress of each committee.

Informing the Members and the Public of Results

As the process of implementing the chamber's program moves throughout the year, it is important to keep the membership informed. In fact, all of the constituencies who had a hand in writing the program should be kept informed of its progress.

The committees and committee chairs need to be reminded of the objectives that they have accomplished throughout the year.

The board of directors should receive monthly reports on the status and accomplishments of all committees. This is especially important when the board may have to make a policy decision on the activities of a committee at some future meeting.

The general membership of the chamber needs to be kept informed of the chamber's progress on the program. Usually this is done through the chamber newsletter; or sometimes a special membership bulletin.

Some chamber accomplishments, events, and activities are significant enough that they are reported to the general public in the various news media. When this occurs, the chamber should issue a news release on the event or accomplishment so that all media have fair opportunity to publicize the chamber story, a news release also assures maximum exposure.

Many chambers and chamber executives inadequately report on the progress of the chamber program feeling this may be tooting their own horn. It is important to recognize the Program of Work as the single most important sales tool that the chamber has. Its development, implementation, and publicizing of results are the measures to the membership of the work and value of the chamber. Moreover, acceptance by the chamber in the community at large depends upon the ability of the chamber to accomplish its goals.

All too frequently, chambers of commerce set a program that is far in excess of the monetary and volunteer resources of the chamber to accomplish in a given time period.

Your chamber organization cannot be all things to all people and it cannot accomplish everything at once. A chamber of commerce Program of Work should be realistic. Setting too many unattainable objectives is demoralizing to the volunteer effort. Remember, when you have your annual meeting, it is better for your president to say that we set six objective last year and accomplished seven rather than saying we set fifteen objectives last year a accomplished only seven.

COMMUNICATIONS

Many chamber executives under estimate the importance of communicating the chamber's message to not only its membership but also to the community. It is important because what the chamber communicates to its members and the community is the information used to measure the real and perceived value of the chamber organization. It is vitally important to reach each of the audiences that are important to the chamber and tell them of your progress and accomplishments.

A chamber should identify target audiences within its membership and have a clear and strategic plan to communicate with them. A Chamber should use diverse forms of media to promote the Chamber, its services and events and should be maintaining an open line of communication with its members. A Chamber should use a variety of methods to communicate with its members.

Many Chambers are developing a communications and marketing plan that lays out clear measurable goals for the staff to implement.

METHODS

THE CHAMBER NEWSLETTER/E-COMMUNICATIONS:

Newsletters have a variety of purposes within the Chamber. It is used to inform members of chamber events and policies as well as to keep other people in the community informed about chamber events and policies. The chamber newsletter also promotes programs among chamber membership, provides information that might be helpful to members in conducting their business, recognizes volunteer workers and member firms, alerts members to new physical, social, or governmental developments, and occasionally solicits member opinions, registrations, or other input.

Chamber newsletters come in all different formats, sizes, and qualities. Many Chambers are moving to an electronic newsletter. An electronic newsletter has many benefits including, cost of production, timeliness and frequency of sending communications as well as targeting the membership as a whole or different segments.

Though members can feel overwhelmed with receiving electronic communication, many members will still acknowledge that they now prefer to receive communications electronically so they can forward it to their home, view in off time or send it on to other staff.

An affordable communication tool that many chambers have been using to create electronic newsletters is Constant Contact – www.constantcontact.com.

Many chambers use specialty communications to convey different messages to different segments of the chamber membership. Some chambers have legislative bulletins that keep members informed of state or national legislative issues. Some chambers send a special retail promotion newsletter. Other chambers may communicate with manufacturers on issues that are of concern to them.

Sometimes a special membership bulletin is prepared and sent to the entire membership to report on an event or accomplishment whose urgency or significance demands that you not wait for the next issue of the newsletter.

WEBSITE:

A Chamber should have a website to not only promote its community, its own mission, goals and committees but also to link people to its chamber members and their services. It is up to each Chamber on how to develop its website, what to promote on its site as well as site management but it is important for a Chamber to establish one. Examples of Chamber websites include: <http://www.helenachamber.com/>, www.missoulachamber.com, <http://www.destinationyellowstone.com/>, <http://www.ennischamber.com/>

THE PRESS RELEASE

One purpose of the press release is for the chamber to tell the general public of noteworthy progress or accomplishments by the chamber. You can also use the release to inform the general public and the chamber membership of chamber events or activities as they occur throughout the year. For example, many chamber members might not respond initially to an invitation from the Chamber to attend a meeting. However, if the upcoming meeting is reported on the radio, in the newspaper, and on television, the message is reinforced and the likelihood of the member attending is increased.

There are lots of examples about how to write a news release. Remember the five W's - who, what, when where and why - and how! That is the essence of the news release. Like all communications, the news release should be attention getting, have a purpose, be easily understood, and be concise. You'll know you've done a good job in writing a news release when it is printed verbatim.

MEETINGS

In mapping your strategies for communicating the chamber's message, don't overlook the opportunity to communicate with many of the chamber's members at each of the various meetings held by the chamber during the year. Chamber members who attend committee meetings or general membership meetings are first of all an interested audience. Secondly, you have their attention. You can instantly measure feedback - if the message is being received and what the response is - and tailor your message accordingly. At every chamber meeting, and chamber executives go to lots of them, there is the opportunity to communicate both formally and informally with a broad cross-section of the chamber membership. It is your opportunity to sell the chamber of commerce message.