

## **Chambers of Commerce - Overview**

At the heart of the local economy and the backbone of the nation's economy, you'll find a chamber of commerce.

Celebrating and promoting the diversity and uniqueness of their communities, chambers of commerce form the fabric of America.

### **What is a Chamber?**

Chambers of commerce are a non-profit business and community association, 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. Many Chambers work closely with City Municipalities.

Chambers of commerce are funded by membership dues as well as non-dues items such as events, sponsorships, and sales of various products and services.

The vast majority of chamber membership rolls are small businesses - businesses with fewer than 25 employees, on average.

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 do Chambers Do?**

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 business 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.

A strong dynamic business community benefits the entire community. Chambers directly involve themselves in the community to create the environment where people want to live and work.