

— 2025 —

ACCE CHAMBER OF THE YEAR AWARD APPLICATION

—



MICHIGAN
WEST COAST
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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SECTION-

1

Contact Information



MICHIGAN
WEST COAST
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Chamber Information

Chamber Name

Michigan West Coast Chamber of Commerce

Chamber Address

272 E 8th Street
Holland, MI 49423

Person Submitting Entry / Contact Person

Britt Delo

Email: britt@westcoastchamber.org

About the Chamber

The Michigan West Coast Chamber of Commerce is a trailblazing organization that serves 1,220+ member businesses representing 80,000+ employees throughout the greater Holland and Zeeland areas. The West Coast Chamber provides leadership for our thriving community and brings businesses and people together to create tidal waves of positive impact that will last for generations to come.

The Michigan West Coast Chamber of Commerce has earned and maintained 5-Star Accreditation by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. This accreditation is awarded to less than 1% of Chambers nationwide.

Leadership Information

President & CEO

Jodi Owczarski, IOM

Email: jodi@westcoastchamber.org

Vice President of Operations

Colleen Schipsi, IOM

Email: colleen@westcoastchamber.org

Board Chairman

Removed for privacy

Board Chairman's Company

Removed for privacy

Board Chairman's Contact Information

Removed for privacy

Board Size

15

Staff Size

6.75



SECTION

2

Organizational Excellence & Resource Alignment



MICHIGAN
WEST COAST
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

PART 1

1

Does your Chamber comply with annual federal, state, and local income tax filing requirements?

Yes

2

**Is your Chamber audited annually?
If so, in what month?**

Yes - Each November

3

**Is your annual budget approved by your board?
If so, in what month?**

Yes - Each September

4

**Does your Chamber have a strategic plan?
If so, please include a copy.**

Yes

VIEW STRATEGIC PLAN

PART 2

AUDIT MANAGEMENT LETTER

The Chamber's management letter from the most recent financial audit

990 TAX FORMS - 2024

The Chamber's 990 tax forms from 2024

990 TAX FORMS - 2023

The Chamber's 990 tax forms from 2023

990 TAX FORMS - 2022

The Chamber's 990 tax forms from 2022

ANNUAL BUDGET

The Chamber's current annual budget

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

The Chamber's current financial statement

MEMBER RETENTION PLAN

The Chamber's current member retention plan

MEMBER RECRUITMENT PLAN

The Chamber's current member recruitment plan

MARKETING PLAN

The Chamber's current marketing plan

EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

The Chamber's current employee handbook

PART 3: QUESTION 1

How does your most recent strategic plan or business plan align with the biggest challenge(s) your community faces?

One of our core values is, "It's All About You." We don't know exactly what the Chamber of the future will look like, however, we do know that if we continue putting our members first, listening to their needs, and prioritizing the biggest challenges facing our community, then we'll always be viewed as a trusted and valued resource.

All of our goals are developed with a member focus, but we'll specifically call out two of our annual goals that align with our community's biggest challenges: **Talent** and **Advocacy**.

Chamber Career Center: We are a hub for career exploration and growth for students and young professionals.

During a recent "[Listening Tour](#)" our members clearly voiced that talent was a top priority and challenge facing our community. Since then, each quarter has been highly focused on creating solutions around this goal. We're excited to share more later in this application (*please see Synopsis #2 to dive deeper*).

Advocacy in Action: We are leading as a trusted and stable resource during a time of political and social fragmentation.

We're not unique in the fact that our community is facing political and social fragmentation and uncertainty. The need for advocacy is greater now than it has ever been before. We've been intentional to build our expertise in this space, which has helped us gain immense trust from our members. We're recognized as a sane and stable center, where all voices can be expressed and heard. A few notable achievements in this area include:

- President & CEO Jodi Owczarski earned a seat on the US Chamber Committee of 100: [Press Release](#).
- Created a new [Advocacy Resource Page](#).
- Since September 1, 2024, we've delivered 64 Advocacy resources through programs and digital/printed content and brought in experts for the most complex issues: [Program Highlights](#).
- Launched the Lakeshore Chamber Coalition to strengthen our voice: [Crain's Grand Rapids Article](#).

We're uniquely positioned to take on the biggest challenges facing our community and we're confident that our trailblazing mindset and action-oriented, collaborative approach will maximize our impact on the community.



Lakeshore Chamber Coalition: Jodi Owczarski, Michigan West Coast Chamber of Commerce, Mark Allen, The Chamber of Grand Haven, Spring Lake and Ferrysburg, and Rachel Gorman, Muskegon Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce.



What is your strategy to ensure your Chamber has an inclusive culture and your leadership and staff make-up is reflective of the business community you serve?

Inclusivity is one of our Chamber's five areas of focus within our mission. To us, that means:

We envision a vibrant, welcoming, and resilient community where everyone can live, learn, work, and play. At the West Coast Chamber, we have a fundamental belief that every business and individual brings something valuable to the table and has a right to be part of our thriving community.

When you join, you become part of something bigger - a collective of businesses working together to strengthen our community. We encourage business and community leaders, our members, and all residents to engage, connect, and take action toward building a more inclusive economy. Together, we can make our vision a reality, creating a region where everyone has the opportunity to succeed.

Inclusivity means more than these words on a page. It's a mindset and a way of life. We hold our staff, Board, and Ambassadors accountable to all of our core values, one of them being, "Contagious Energy with a Positive Attitude: We create a culture of positivity and belonging". Along with this mindset, below are some of the intentional actions taken to drive this vision of inclusivity forward:

- Obtained sponsor dollars to support women and minority owned businesses: [View Sponsor Report](#).
- Identify a diverse and representative collection of voices to serve as members of our Board and Ambassador team on an annual basis.
- Launched a new [Inclusivity Resource Page](#).
- Host an annual program called *Forward Together: A Forum on Inclusivity*.
- Acquired Holland Young Professionals, a local volunteer-run nonprofit focused on the development and engagement of individuals under 40.
- Created a group called "Hispano Network" to support Hispanic professionals, helped the group gain traction, and empowered them to launch into their own non-profit organization.

An inclusive economy is essential to building a thriving community. As a thought leader and trusted resource, we have a responsibility to ensure every member feels seen, heard, and valued. Everyone deserves a seat at the table, and we are committed to creating an environment where all are welcome and empowered to thrive.

PART 3: QUESTION 3

Trends show a larger percentage of non-dues and non-traditional revenue streams represented in the overall fiscal health of Chambers. Explain how your Chamber is funded and how you are evolving toward this movement.

We've undergone a significant evolution, transitioning from a conventional fair share model to what we now proudly call a hybrid model. This innovative approach places a strong emphasis on identifying opportunities to generate additional revenue through tailored sponsorship plans. We intentionally continue to operate under a fair share entry point because we have found that this makes for the most user-friendly experience for prospective and existing members. We evaluate this model annually to ensure it continues to be the most effective model for our Chamber. As part of this review process, we also increase dues by 3-5% every year.

Our team is intentionally in tune with the trends that show a larger percentage of non-dues and non-traditional revenue streams represented in the overall fiscal health of chambers. In FY24 we were at a 50/50 split between dues and non-dues revenue. We're proud to say that through our efforts to increase sponsorship and non-dues revenue, we expect a 42% dues / 58% non-dues split this year.

Here are a few highlights of the actions being taken:

- Elevated revenue as a key priority in our one-year strategic plan: "We are building revenue streams to support our trailblazing work."
- Secured a substantial grant in support of our workforce development initiatives (*learn more in Synopsis #2*).
 - Actively pursuing additional grant opportunities to further sustain and expand our impact.
- Began utilizing our (c3) Chamber Foundation as a platform for additional funding initiatives.
- Implemented and executed a Liquidity Fund Policy to ensure any excess funds are invested strategically for maximum growth.
 - Transferred funds into a high-interest CD to generate passive revenue.
- Continued to enhance and refine our member journey and sponsorship opportunities to ensure offerings are customizable and aligned with member priorities to drive increased revenue.

Embracing our core value of being "Curious Learners," we will continue to benchmark potential revenue streams, and innovate both new and existing ideas that generate income with impact.



PART 3: QUESTION 4

How does your Chamber exemplify Chamber of the Year?

Chamber of the Year is a prestigious and sought after recognition that honors Chambers who are leading the way in operations, member services, and community leadership. This award directly reflects the core values we live by:

- **It's All About You:** We help our members and community thrive.
- **Contagious Energy with a Positive Attitude:** We create a culture of positivity and belonging.
- **Deliver Remarkable Experiences:** We go above and beyond in all that we do.
- **Curious Learners:** We are eager to explore, discover, share and grow.
- **Be a Trailblazer:** We have an innovative mindset that drives positive impact.

These values guide our mindset, our way of life, and our every action. Pursuing Chamber of the Year is not about chasing a title; it's about affirming and celebrating our deep commitment to excellence and positive impact.

Two years ago, we changed one of our core values from "Think Big, Be Great" to "Be a Trailblazer." Being "great" and thinking "big" was no longer enough. We knew we could do more, and be more, for our members and our community. That change sparked a tangible shift that continues to drive our bold, action-oriented, and future-focused work.

Today, that energy is contagious. It ignites excitement across our whole community. We're creating something that everyone is eager to be a part of.

We are incredibly proud of what we have accomplished together, and we would be deeply honored to bring home this recognition for our team, our members, and our entire community. No matter what, we'll continue trailblazing forward, because it's who we are at our core. We believe our ripples of influence can create tidal waves of positive impact in our community and beyond.



The Chamber Ambassador team at their end of the year party.

SECTION

3

Program Synopses

PROGRAM 1

Statewide Community Impact Day



PROGRAM 1

Program/Initiative Name

Statewide Community Impact Day

Impact Area Addressed

Community/Social Impact: The Chamber provides unique opportunities for individuals and businesses to make a difference by connecting them to important community issues.

Program/Initiative Summary

Community Impact Day is a powerful initiative connecting businesses, nonprofits, and communities through an afternoon of service and celebration. What began as a small part of our Leadership Class has become one of our fastest-growing programs and this year, we launched **Statewide Community Impact Day**. In partnership with Chambers and communities across Michigan, we're amplifying our collective impact by volunteering on the same day, at the same time, in the same blue shirts. This effort builds vital connections, boosts visibility for local causes, fuels civic pride, and drives non-dues revenue. We're offering the leadership, tools, and funding to help other Chambers bring this impactful program to life in their own communities. We're inviting everyone to join us in building something bigger, an effort that sparks meaningful change and unites people across Michigan and beyond.



Horizon Initiatives: Belonging & Gathering, Population Shift, Catalytic Leadership, and Engaging the Public Sector

KEY OUTCOMES

- A successful and growing annual Community Impact Day program shines a spotlight on nonprofit and community needs and connects eager volunteers with meaningful, curated service opportunities across Michigan and beyond.
- Collaboration and connection fuel civic pride and a sense of belonging which lays the foundation for thriving, engaged communities in every city that embraces the Community Impact Day program.
- Businesses and individuals feel more connected to their community through Community Impact Day, positioning Chambers as a trusted and valuable resource; therefore, attracting new members, driving further engagement, and generating non-dues revenue.
- The West Coast Chamber is providing resources, tools, and guidance through a proven and repeatable process that makes it seamless for other Chambers and communities to successfully implement Community Impact Day throughout Michigan, and eventually, the nation.

PROGRAM 1

Needs Identification

Target Audience	Need	Tie to Mission
Local Nonprofit Organizations and Municipalities	Support: Nonprofit organizations and municipalities are in need of additional capacity to complete essential projects and are seeking opportunities for increased visibility for their causes.	Business Building Community Impact Inclusivity Leadership & Talent Development
Business Professionals and Community Members At Large	Community Building: Individuals and groups are craving the opportunity to connect and build community, but in a busy world with competing priorities, it can be difficult to navigate ways to give back. We create a simple point of entry through Community Impact Day.	Business Building Community Impact Inclusivity Leadership & Talent Development
Employers	Engaged Workforce: Businesses are looking for meaningful ways to connect their employees with the community. When employees feel proud of where they live—and see their employer investing in that connection—they're more likely to stay, engage, and grow within the organization.	Business Building Leadership & Talent Development
Chamber Leaders from Across Michigan	Expand Impact: With participation of Chambers across Michigan, we'll have the unique opportunity to unify communities, create positive impact, and build connections throughout the entire state...and eventually beyond.	Business Building Community Impact

Community Impact Day was created to serve as a clear, accessible entry point for leaders to engage more deeply with their communities. The idea took root in our West Coast Leadership Program, where graduating cohorts often expressed a desire to make a difference, but lacked a tangible next step. To bridge that gap, we introduced hands-on service opportunities with local nonprofits during graduation. The impact was immediate: participants felt more connected and inspired, and interest quickly grew among alumni, Chamber members, and the broader community.

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PROGRAM 1

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After several successful years of Community Impact Day, we shared our program model at the 2023 ACCE Conference, where it received an overwhelmingly positive response. We were honored, and a little amazed, to see other communities begin replicating the program, even matching our t-shirt design. Inspired by the national interest, we partnered with the Michigan Association of Chamber Professionals (MACP) to launch the first-ever Statewide Community Impact Day. This exciting first step lays the foundation for expanding the movement nationwide, creating a powerful ripple effect of connection, service, and community impact.

*Exhibits:*POINTS OF LIGHT
REPORTAMERICORPS
RESOURCEINDEPENDENT SECTOR
REPORT2024 COMMUNITY IMPACT DAY
REPORT

“The West Coast Chamber has a reputation for being a trailblazing, action-oriented, and community-focused organization. Its success with Community Impact Day caught the attention of MACP to partner on a statewide initiative. Thanks to the West Coast Chamber’s leadership and generosity, Chambers across Michigan are uniting businesses to drive visible, meaningful change in their communities in ways that were not seen before. Its impact will change the state forever—for good.”

Bob Thomas | Chief Operating Officer, Michigan Chamber of Commerce

”

PROGRAM 1

Program Objectives

Goal #1: Launch Statewide Community Impact Day**Target Audience:** Chamber Leaders from Across Michigan // **Need:** Expand Impact

Expand the reach and impact of Community Impact Day by providing leadership, tools, and support to empower communities across Michigan to successfully implement the program.

Objective: Create and execute a plan to recruit, train, and support Chambers in the implementation of Community Impact Day.

Objective: Engage at least 5 additional Chambers in Michigan in the first year to launch Community Impact Day in their communities in order to refine the toolkit for future expansion.

Goal #2: Engage, Empower, and Grow Impact**Target Audiences:** Local Nonprofit Organizations & Municipalities, Business Professionals & Community Members At Large, Employers // **Needs:** Support, Community Building, Engaged Workforce

Lead a remarkable Community Impact Day locally while offering guidance and support to participating Chambers across Michigan - driving meaningful impact for businesses, nonprofits, municipalities, individuals, and Chambers alike.

Objective: # of Nonprofit/Municipality Locations in 2025

100 Nonprofit/Municipality Locations for West Coast Chamber's local program

25 Nonprofit/Municipality Locations from additional Chambers in Michigan

Total Nonprofit/Municipality Locations: 125

Objective: # of Volunteers Participating in 2025

1,650 Volunteers for West Coast Chamber's local program

375 Volunteers from additional Chambers in Michigan

Total Volunteers: 2,025

Objective: Revenue in 2025

\$50,000 Revenue for West Coast Chamber's local program

\$2,500 Revenue for additional Chambers in Michigan

Total Non-Dues Revenue: \$52,500

COMMUNITY IMPACT DAY PROJECT PLAN



PROGRAM 1

Methodology

Goal #1: Launch Statewide Community Impact Day

Actions Taken

- Partnered with the Michigan Association of Chamber Professionals (MACP) to expand the reach and impact of the first-ever Statewide Community Impact Day.
- Presented at the MACP Conference in October 2024 to showcase our success and invite Chambers across Michigan to join the movement.
- Created grant opportunities in partnership with MACP to remove barriers to participation.
- Followed up with attendees to answer questions and encourage involvement.
- Hosted a virtual information session to build momentum and provide deeper insights.
- Led monthly check-ins to offer support, share best practices, and guide local rollouts.
- Coordinated all t-shirt orders to create a unified statewide presence.
- Created a resource guide available through [The West Coast Way Resource Document Library](#).



PROGRAM 1

Goal #2: Engage, Empower, and Grow Impact
Actions Taken

Generating impact of this magnitude does not happen by accident and requires strategic mapping and execution. Here's how we make the magic happen:

- We've created a proven, repeatable process with templates and tracking systems to ensure a consistent and remarkable experience year after year.
- West Coast Leadership graduates, our Board Members, Ambassador Team, and Leadership Alumni each host a nonprofit site and recruit at least 10 volunteers, generating around 550 volunteers.
- We implement a robust marketing plan to engage corporate partners, Chamber members, and the broader community. Everyone is welcome!
- We work closely with members, nonprofits, churches, schools, municipalities, and senior facilities to assess needs and generate project ideas.
- We provide high-quality, well-designed t-shirts at no charge to promote lasting visibility and keep the momentum alive year-round. We love seeing our blue shirts around town!
- Inclusivity and positive energy are priorities.
 - We invite often-overlooked groups, such as seniors, students, and people with disabilities, to broaden participation.
 - Our team identifies creative opportunities, including "take-home projects," to make volunteering more accessible and impactful.
 - We focus on making it easy and welcoming for anyone to participate.



COMMUNITY IMPACT DAY BUDGET

PROGRAM 1

Communications

A thoughtfully designed marketing plan was created and implemented to increase awareness, engagement, and participation. Outlined on the following page, you will see the various media channels used to share major points or calls to action.

Vehicle Used	Major Points / Call to Action	Target Audience	Execution
Email	Call for Volunteer Projects	Local Nonprofit Organizations and Municipalities	eNews Sample Personal Emails Sent from Chamber Staff
	Call for Volunteers	Business Professionals, Community Members at Large, Employers	eNews Sample Personal Emails Sent from Chamber Staff
	Invitation for Additional Michigan Chambers to Participate	Chamber Leaders from Across Michigan	MACP Email Personal Emails Sent from Chamber Staff
Direct Ask	Let Us Help Your Organization Complete Projects	Local Nonprofit Organizations and Municipalities	In-Person Asks
	Join Us As a Volunteer to Make a Positive Impact	Business Professionals and Community Members at Large	
	Engage and Empower Your Employees	Employers	
	Join the Movement and Make a Positive Impact	Chamber Leaders from Across Michigan	
Local Media	Celebrate the Collective Strength of Our Community	Local Media Sources with the Goal of Broad Community Outreach	Press Release Article

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PROGRAM 1

(continued from page 19)

Print Publication	Join Us in 2025	Chamber Members	The West Coast Way Magazine Article
Social Media: Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram	Give Back to Your Community Celebrate the Collective Strength of Our Community Visibility for Nonprofits and Municipalities	Entire Community	2025 Community Impact Day Campaign Sample Post
Website	Sign Up to Be a Volunteer or Sponsor Sign Up to Join The Movement - Make An Impact - Statewide!	Entire Community Chamber Leaders Across Michigan	2025 Program Page 2025 Statewide Program Page

COMMUNITY IMPACT DAY MARKETING PLAN



PROGRAM 1

Evaluation

Goal #1: Launch Statewide Community Impact Day
Impact/Outcome

We believe in working smarter, not harder. So we've refined, tested, and packaged our core processes, templates, and proven strategies to make it easy for any Chamber to jump in and launch Community Impact Day in their own community.

COMMUNITY IMPACT DAY IMPLEMENTATION

In the first year, we're thrilled to share that we launched Statewide Community Impact Day with **6 Chambers** throughout Michigan (*Goal of 5*). And we're just getting started...

A big thank you to the early adopters who helped us prove out the process and launch of this powerful program across the state of Michigan.



“

The West Coast Chamber has curated the Community Impact Day partnership into a seamless, purpose-driven experience! Their team has meticulously planned every detail, delivering a clear, organized partnership that maximizes value and ensures all participating Chambers understand their role and that their members will gain meaningful impact and exceptional return on their efforts in their respective communities.

”

Rachel Gorman | President & CEO, Muskegon Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce

PROGRAM 1

Goal #2: Engage, Empower, and Grow Impact
Impact/Outcome

Community Impact Day has grown exponentially since its inception. What started as a ripple of influence is turning into a tidal wave of positive impact locally and across Michigan. The results are incredible.

235
Locations

(Goal of 125)

124 West Coast Chamber +
111 Additional Chambers

3,733
Volunteers

(Goal of 2,025)

2,124 West Coast Chamber +
1,609 Additional Chambers

\$106,750
Non-Dues Revenue

(Goal of \$52,500)

\$64,750 West Coast Chamber +
\$42,000 Additional Chambers



Imagine this...

If every Chamber that participated invited just *one* other Chamber every year for the next 5 years, the impact would be truly remarkable.

 7,321 Locations

 166,188 Volunteers

 \$6,027,559 Non-Dues Revenue

Saving Communities

\$18,326,193

in Labor Costs

*based on the national value of a volunteer hour

PROGRAM 1



We know we are stronger together, and that when we create a vision bigger than ourselves, remarkable things happen. The momentum behind Community Impact Day is already making a profound difference across our community and throughout Michigan. Nonprofits and municipalities are gaining greater visibility, forming lasting relationships, and receiving help with projects that might otherwise go unfinished. Employers are strengthening team culture and boosting employee morale and retention by encouraging their teams to get involved. Individuals are rolling up their sleeves to make a real, tangible difference, with many continuing to serve through ongoing volunteer and board opportunities. As more people feel connected and invested in their communities, a true sense of belonging grows. Connections are formed, relationships are built, and the spirit of “Trailblazing Forward Together” comes to life.

We're thrilled about the success of the first ever Statewide Community Impact Day and can't wait to continue trailblazing forward with even greater impact across the nation in the years to come. We invite you to trailblaze with us!

SECTION

3

Program Synopsis

PROGRAM 2

Chamber Career Center



MICHIGAN
WEST COAST
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

*Congressman Bill Huizenga (center) poses
with students at a Chamber program.*

PROGRAM 2

Program/Initiative Name

Chamber Career Center

Impact Area Addressed

Building a Better Equipped Workforce: We are engaged in education attainment and/or workforce development initiatives in our region.

Program/Initiative Summary

We've been called to bridge the gap between education and business—and we're all in. We've launched the **Chamber Career Center**, which represents a book of work *and* a physical space that empowers students and young adults to discover their unique aptitudes, align with career opportunities, and connect with local employers, bringing learning to life outside the traditional classroom. How is this different than other workforce development initiatives? Our work is informed and driven by a game-changing tool called YouScience. With a bold, collaborative approach and a focus on action, we're reimagining what's possible. Here's a look at what we're building together.

KEY OUTCOMES

- The Chamber has an inclusive, holistic approach to workforce development.
- Career exploration is powered by YouScience, linking aptitudes to education and job opportunities.
- Local, hands-on learning opportunities are available for all high school students, post-secondary individuals, and young professionals.
- A commitment to bridge gaps and create opportunities for underrepresented groups exists across our work.
- Strong and collaborative community partnerships are driving the program's success.
- The West Coast Chamber is driving both individual success and regional economic growth through workforce readiness.

Horizon Initiatives: Catalytic Leadership, Communications & Technology, Population Shift, Belonging & Gathering, and Resource & Alignment.



Alternative high school students at a small business panel hosted at the Chamber.

PROGRAM 2

Needs Identification

Target Audience	Need	Tie to Mission
Employers	Workforce Development: Engaged and qualified talent is one of the greatest challenges facing employers.	Business Building
Students	Career Exploration: In a world with seemingly endless career pathways to consider and very few opportunities to explore those options in a real-life setting, students are craving connectivity and hands-on learning through meaningful and interesting experiences.	Community Impact Inclusivity Leadership & Talent Development
Young Adults	Ongoing Support: Young people may often find themselves unsure of where to turn for additional career exploration after graduation - whether they went to college, began working right out of high school, dropped out of school, or are looking to make a change, the Chamber meets every individual wherever they are in their journey and invites them to learn, grow, and explore pathways that are uniquely aligned with their skill set.	Community Impact Inclusivity Leadership & Talent Development
Business Professionals	Mentors: Career seeking individuals need experienced professionals from a diverse range of backgrounds to share their insights to help guide and provide an example of what is possible.	Business Building Community Impact Inclusivity Leadership & Talent Development

PROGRAM 2

We believe in the power of data—it guides everything we do. While we didn't know it at the time, our journey toward the **Chamber Career Center** started with a [Listening Tour](#) in FY23. Talent emerged as the #1 challenge facing our business community. Around that same time, our CEO, Jodi, was approached by community leader Travis Williams, who shared a bold vision for bridging business and education.

As a connector and catalyst, the West Coast Chamber was a natural fit to lead the charge. We jumped in, benchmarking with members, other Chambers, educators, and students to explore what was possible.

During that discovery phase, Jodi learned about an innovative tool called [YouScience](#). After meeting with their team, it quickly became clear—this was more than a resource. It was a game-changer. With our trailblazing mindset and the right partners in place, we saw a new path forward to create stronger connections and experiential learning opportunities for students and young adults.



“The West Coast Chamber sits at the heart of the business community and has a reputation for excellence. With a proven ability to move quickly and strategically, the Chamber was the ideal partner to lead the next phase of reimagining education—fostering business connections and expanding real-world learning opportunities.”

Travis Williams | CEO, ODC Network

Exhibits:[2024 YOUSCIENCE REPORT](#)[YOUSCIENCE FACT SHEET](#)[MLIVE ARTICLE](#)

Alternative high school students enjoy lunch with local business professionals at the Chamber.

PROGRAM 2

Program Objectives

Goal #1: Connect Students and Individuals to YouScience Platform**Target Audiences:** Students, Young Adults // **Needs:** Career Exploration, Ongoing Support

Leverage partnerships with local educators and community organizations to connect students and individuals to career exploration through the YouScience platform.

Objective: Invite 100 individuals to complete the YouScience assessment within the first year.

Goal #2: Increase Business Engagement in Workforce Development**Target Audiences:** Employers, Business Professionals // **Needs:** Workforce Development, Mentors

Position the Chamber as the connector between education and business, creating awareness and encouraging participation in our work to support current and future talent needs.

Objective: Grow awareness of our work through a dedicated Chamber Career Center webpage and marketing campaign to clearly communicate our role and invite business participation.

Objective: Recruit a minimum of 30 employers to create YouScience employer profiles.

Objective: Receive a commitment from 15 local employers and business professionals willing to actively participate in the development of students and young professionals beyond the YouScience platform.

Goal #3: Empower Future Talent Through Experiential Learning**Target Audiences:** Employers, Students, Young Adults, Business Professionals, Educators // **Needs:** Workforce Development, Career Exploration, Ongoing Support, Mentors, Connection

Utilize insights from YouScience data to develop meaningful, real-world learning experiences that connect students and young adults with career exploration that aligns with their unique aptitudes and interests.

Objective: Design, coordinate, or facilitate at least 15 unique experiential learning opportunities (such as job shadows, workplace tours, classroom visits, and mentorship experiences) for individuals or groups, with the goal of engaging a minimum of 75 students within the first year.

Objective: Develop the framework for the next phase of experiential learning, strategically targeting student groups from across our community based on their YouScience aptitude clusters.

Objective: Collect feedback and gauge interest from students and young adults who have completed the YouScience assessment to inform and shape the launch of our Free Student Chamber Membership.



Alternative high school students visit the Chamber.

PROGRAM 2

Goal #4: Align Resources to Sustain and Grow Impact

Target Audiences: Employers, Students, Young Adults, Business Professionals, Educators // **Needs:** Workforce Development, Career Exploration, Ongoing Support, Mentors, Connection

Secure new funding sources to support the expansion and long-term sustainability of the Chamber Career Center, including offsetting additional staffing needs and resourcing the tools that will drive this work forward.

Objective: Identify and secure at least \$53,000 in new funding through grants, sponsorships, and strategic partnerships within the first year.

Objective: Finalize plans for the physical build-out of the Chamber Career Center: a dynamic community hub for workforce development, career exploration, ongoing support, mentorship, and meaningful connections.

CHAMBER CAREER CENTER STRATEGIC PLAN

Methodology

Goal #1: Connect Students and Individuals to YouScience Platform**Actions Taken**

Eliminated barriers to participation by fully covering the cost of all assessments.

Launched targeted beta trials with select student groups to test the platform and gather valuable feedback.

Incentivized participation by offering job shadow opportunities aligned with each student's YouScience results.

Expanded outreach and engagement by building relationships with key partners, including:

- High school guidance counselors
- Careerline Tech Center staff
- Nonprofit organizations serving underrepresented populations
- Local colleges and universities
- West Michigan Works!

Established ongoing collaboration with the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District (OAISD) through monthly partnership calls to increase student access to the assessment.

Integrated YouScience into classroom learning by participating in a Project-Based Learning session, where students explored a guiding question centered on YouScience and the Chamber Career Center. Every student completed the assessment as part of the project.

Increased accessibility by making the assessment readily available through the Chamber's website.

PROGRAM 2



Local high students learn about what the Chamber is.



A high school student meets with a local business professional for a job shadow.

Goal #2: Increase Business Engagement in Workforce Development

Actions Taken

Developed and launched a strategic marketing plan to guide messaging and storytelling around the Chamber's role as a connector between business and education, with the goal of increasing awareness, engagement, and participation. *(See Communications section for more.)*

Designed a member experience journey to establish a consistent, repeatable process that fosters long-term engagement and partnership.

Conducted personalized outreach through targeted emails and one-on-one meetings with members to share the vision and invite participation.

Created branded one-page resources that provide clear instructions and highlight the impact of the Chamber Career Center using relevant data and success stories.

Launched a dedicated Career Center webpage to serve as a central hub for information, engagement, and access to resources.

Goal #3: Empower Future Talent Through Experiential Learning

Actions Taken

Developed clear, repeatable user journeys with built-in feedback loops to ensure consistently high-quality experiences for students, employers, and educators, laying the groundwork for long-term scalability.

Launched the Education Connections Board, a dynamic platform where educators can post experiential learning requests and business professionals can easily engage. The Chamber also leverages internal data to facilitate strategic matches. *(Note: Posts may be limited during summer break and are removed once fulfilled.)*

Facilitated job shadow experiences for all interested students who completed the YouScience assessment during initial pilot phases.

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PROGRAM 2

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Integrated students into Chamber programming to help them build social capital and gain real-world insight into the local business community.

Hosted experiential learning opportunities at the Chamber to model engagement and provide behind-the-scenes exposure to Chamber operations.

Collaborated with educators and business professionals to create and support a variety of experiential learning opportunities across industries.

Analyzed data from multiple sources including YouScience results, surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one conversations to inform the framework for the next phase of experiential learning.

Goal #4: Align Resources to Sustain and Grow Impact**Actions Taken**

Engaged key education partners, Chamber members, and community organizations to share the vision of the Chamber Career Center and invite their support and collaboration.

Researched grant opportunities and identified one highly aligned funding source, which the Chamber applied for as a strong strategic fit.

Developed tailored sponsorship opportunities designed to align with member interests while providing essential support for the Career Center's mission and growth.

Cast a collaborative vision for the physical Career Center space within the new Chamber building, gathered stakeholder feedback, and partnered with construction teams to bring the concept to life.

CHAMBER CAREER CENTER BUDGET



Local high school students participate in project-based learning focused on the Chamber and YouScience.

PROGRAM 2

Communications

A carefully crafted marketing plan was designed and executed to effectively communicate our role as a convener between the education and business sectors. The goals were to ignite excitement and promote engagement from each of our target audiences.

Vehicle Used	Major Points / Call to Action	Target Audience	Execution
Chamber Weekly Email	Learn About Our Role and Work Create a YouScience Profile Join the Education Connections Platform Participate in Our Workforce Development Initiatives	Employers, Business Professionals	eNews Samples
Email Communication through User Experience Journeys	Instructions and Next Steps Follow-ups and Thank You's Requests for Feedback	Employers, Business Professionals, Students, Young Adults	Job Shadow Journey YouScience Journeys
One Page Marketing Documents	Instructions Showcase Results	Employers, Business Professionals, Students, Young Adults, Educators	YouScience Employer Profile Instructions YouScience Assessment Instructions Career Center Results

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PROGRAM 2

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Direct Asks	Invite to Take YouScience Take Advantage of Additional Career Exploration Learn About our Role and Work Create a YouScience Profile Join the Education Connections Platform Participate in our Workforce Development Initiatives	Students, Young Adults. Employers, Business Professionals	Individual Emails and In-person Meetings
Website	Learn About our Role and Work Learn About and Engage with YouScience Join the Education Connections Platform Participate in our Workforce Development Initiatives Sponsor	Employers, Business Professionals, Students, Young Adults, Educators, Community Members	Launched a Career Center Webpage

CHAMBER CAREER CENTER MARKETING PLAN

PROGRAM 2

Evaluation

Goal #1: Connect Students and Individuals to YouScience Platform
Impact/Outcome

We had a goal of engaging 100 students in the first year. We are thrilled by the progress we've made in the first 7 months.

1,020

Users Are Active in
YouScience

389

Assessments Have
Been Completed

24

Unique Groups Are
Represented

“

I feel like a big weight has been lifted. After taking the assessment, I realized I was on the wrong career path. YouScience confirmed what I had been feeling, and it helped me decide to pursue a different career.

”

Mia Riemersma | Local College Student



Local high school students attend Chamber programming on a regular basis.



PROGRAM 2

Goal #2: Increase Business Engagement in Workforce Development
Impact/Outcome**Website Launch**

Launched website page at westcoastchamber.org/chamber-career-center on February 26.

**eNews Open Rates**

48% Open Rate

42% Open Rate

31% Open Rate

**Employer Profiles**

50 local employers have created YouScience profiles. *(Goal of 30)*

**Employer and Professional Commitment**

61 local employers and business professionals have committed to actively engaging in our work. *(Goal of 15)*



“

We love welcoming high school students for **job shadows**. Our work supports businesses in ways many students haven't seen before, and that early exposure can be a powerful influence as they explore future paths.

”

Leanne Schaeffer | Partner, Boileau & Co.



Leanne and students at a job shadow.

PROGRAM 2

Goal #3: Empower Talent Through Experiential Learning
Impact/Outcome

- Since January, we've created, hosted, or facilitated **34 unique experiential learning opportunities** (*Goal of 15*) for **283 students** (*Goal of 75*).
- After collecting feedback from students and young adults, we've received overwhelming interest in a **Free Student Chamber Membership**. We're confident that this will begin their lifelong journey as a Chamber member much sooner. Our future decision makers now know and trust the Chamber.
- Leveraging data from the YouScience platform, along with insights gathered from surveys, focus groups, and community conversations, we've developed a structure for the **Chamber Career Center's programs and services**.

CHAMBER CAREER CENTER FRAMEWORK



Local high school students participate in project-based learning focused on the Chamber and YouScience.



Alternative high school students enjoy lunch with local business professionals at the Chamber.

PROGRAM 2

**Goal #4: Align Resources to Sustain and Grow Impact
Impact/Outcome**

We set a goal of securing \$53,000 in new funding. In just 7 months, we've blown that goal out of the water.

Total Funding: \$707,500

\$ 400,000 - Now for the Next Grant
\$ 200,000 - Furniture Donation
\$ 72,000 - ODC Network - Reimagining Education Fund
\$ 30,000 - Chamber Foundation
\$ 5,500 - Customized Career Center Sponsorships



Local high school students presented the results of their project-based learning to the Chamber.

“

Job shadowing gave me a real look at the day-to-day of a career I'm interested in and helped me imagine what it would actually feel like to do this long term. My biggest takeaway was how important it is to choose a career that keeps you fulfilled and wanting to come back every day. I'd love to do more experiences like this!

”

Jenna Smith | Local High School Student

PROGRAM 2

We never thought we'd outgrow our current building. We love our space and it's iconic in our community but the rapid growth of our impact in workforce development made it clear: it was time to reimagine how and where we work. That vision is now becoming a reality, with construction underway on our new space, which will include the new home of the Chamber Career Center.



Together, we have the opportunity to trailblaze into the future—creating a generational impact that shapes the lives of students, strengthens the future workforce for our businesses, and ensures the long-term vitality of the Chamber. And the best part? We *get* to do this work.