



Horizon Initiative: Chambers 2025

Eight Influences Shaping the Next Decade for Chambers of Commerce

Workbook Questions

June 2015

Return on Investment

In the “Nature of Belonging and Gathering” and “Resource Alignment” chapters of the Chambers 2025 report, we talk about members expecting demonstrated ROI for their investments, especially those “above the rate card,” such as campaign support, sponsorships and elite memberships.

- How do your mission-supporting investors measure their return? (Have you asked them?)
- How have their ROI expectations changed over the years?
- How will your reporting change to meet new demands?
- What measures or progress reporting could you develop to articulate your advocacy efforts on behalf of businesses, the economy and community?

Feedback Loops

The “Communications and Technology” chapter opens with a quote from the U.S. Air Force stressing the importance of “robust feedback loops” with both “traditional constituencies” and “other stakeholders.” Clearly, keeping your ear to the ground and being out-and-about are insufficient.

- Other than an annual member survey, how could you better collect and analyze feedback from members?
- How could you be more deliberate about using the feedback you receive to improve the organization and enhance the member experience?
- Since the community at large is one of your “publics,” how could you better gather useable feedback from influential members of the community on a regular basis?

Volunteer Participation

The “Nature of Belonging and Gathering” chapter notes that participation in many traditional clubs has waned while newer groups like kickball leagues are thriving. It states, “For instance, direct involvement in traditional chamber committee meetings declined during the last decade, but young professional groups blossomed.”

- How will your “traditional committees” adapt over next decade to be more aligned with a new generation of members?
- How could you better evaluate programs and meetings to determine which are working best and why?
- What processes and protocols could you put in place to constantly refresh the chamber’s engagement opportunities? i.e. kill off dying committees and councils to make room/time for others?

Message Customization

The “Nature of Belonging and Gathering” chapter states, “It will become untenable to communicate in broad, generic messaging ... there will be an expectation of individualized communication.” It won’t work to assume that *a member is a member* and communicate with your lists en masse.

- How do you currently customize messages for different market segments?
- What software, process and personnel adjustments will you need to make in order to go beyond segmentation and toward personalization?
- How can you better use your existing technology tools to establish more personal relationships with members?

Transparency

The closing paragraph of the “Communications and Technology” chapter mentions members’ and stakeholders’ “capacity to evaluate metrics,” and “growing concern for accountability.” Expectations for transparency have grown over the last five years and every organization can expect greater scrutiny in the years to come. (Think FIFA or presidential campaigns.) Assume that a fresh, outside pair of eyes will be looking at your financial reporting, governance practices and management procedures in 2017. . .

- What processes should you map to ensure that anyone, inside or outside, can understand them?
- If you’re not strictly following your by-laws, must you amend them or change your practices? How?
- How must you structure compensation practices, board records and the other management areas most likely to face scrutiny in a more transparent world?
- Who on your staff and/or board can keep up to date on best practice sources for compliance and non-profit management, such as Board Source, Bob Harris and ASAE, as well as ACCE’s “HERO”?

Member Service

“Chamber staff professionals spend an inordinate amount of time dealing, one at a time, with the challenges and problems of individual companies.” (Resource Alignment chapter). Given the get-it-when-I-need-it learning model of wired generations, such demands are growing. If all of your members asked for this kind of service on a regular basis, you would be overwhelmed – time is valuable.

- How could you measure and report the percentage of time spent by you and your team addressing member (and often non-member) issues one-on-one in order to increase perception of the value?
- Which of these services might be monetized (pay-for-advice/consulting, subscription, etc)?
- How could you better align staff to ensure that questions are handled at the appropriate level – and only handled once?
- What methods could your chamber establish to better handle the FAQs that constitute the bulk of member inquiries?

Going Global

The “Global Impacts” chapter suggests getting “closer to the companies in your region with overseas connections or owners” as a strategy to expand your international connections and support for members

- What steps could you take to better quantify and understand the international connections among your larger-active members?
- What countries seem to be most connected (as suppliers, customers or investors) to your member businesses?
- Who are the “fixers” or partners your members use to connect in other countries? How can you connect with those well-placed experts?
- What questions can you include in your routine member visits to ensure that you know whether companies already trade internationally, or whether they want to?

Investor vs. Member

The “Resource Alignment” chapter says that chambers must tie fundraising (money beyond the membership rate card) to their missions – “economic opportunity, quality of life and other higher purposes.” Some members want something *from* the chamber and some want to get something *done through* the chamber.

- How could you better evaluate and track the motivations of your members?
- In the future, will you distinguish sponsorship revenues as “mission supporting” or “direct investor benefit?”
- Economic development campaign contributions are usually made in support of the mission, but what ROI will be expected over the duration of the campaign?
- Given the relatively low turnout rate for most chamber programs, a \$400 dues payment may very well be an investment in your mission, even if the member is small. How could you better recognize the commitment to community and organization success such members are making, and set the stage for expanding “crowd source” funding for your mission?

The Leadership Thing

The anticipated evolution/revolution regarding organization and community leadership will involve both staff and volunteer components. The chapter discusses the primary difference between leadership of the past and of the future in terms of “catalytic” leaders – those who don’t just help their constituents deal with change, but who cause change to occur. For most senior staffs and officers of chambers, this approach will be somewhat foreign, but necessary.

- How will your officer nominations process change to address this need for change-agent, rather than caretaker leadership?
- What preliminary steps are necessary for CEO to take before breaking things that don’t seem broken?
- In dealing with the most important (rather than most urgent) issues and changes in your org or business community, persistence is the only way to affect change. What steps can you put in place to maintain and sustain priorities across multiple years, rather than changing direction with each annual work plan?
- Given the resistance to institutional hierarchies among future generations, how can you be more intentional and deliberate about building networked leadership across a broader group of leaders in allied entities?
- Government affairs work and advocacy are constants for most chambers, but how can you get beyond specific issues in order to nurture shared views of the future between public and private sectors, which can lead to aligned leadership down the road?

Abundance

Nearly every chamber in the country promotes its “quality of life” and its people. You can itemize things people like about working and living in the vicinity, but an inventory of the resources and assets that *can’t be wasted* is a different ballgame. The way resources are positioned and articulated also affects their value, e.g. Florida and Arizona promote their warmth and sunshine while some other states consider hot weather a burden. Chambers must deal with reality when it comes to scarcity and problems, but making the most of (and increasing) abundance can radically impact a region’s economy.

- How can you break the traditional model for evaluating your regional strengths,?
- Not all resources are natural – abundance of government-related jobs, transportation infrastructure, viable downtowns, top quartile rated education institutions are all examples. How can you itemize abundant man-made resources and identify the 3 that you need to work on to build bragging rights?
- What perceived scarcities in your region can be repositioned to highlight a related abundance? – e.g. shortage of developable greenfield space creates “natural” drive for walkable living of a dense new urbanist community.
- Since people and talent are the new inventory for economic development and investment decisions, what aspects of your workforce and talent pool are abundant, but largely unidentified, misunderstood, or exported?