

GREATER EASLEY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

STRATEGIC PLAN

2016 - 2018



SEIZE THE FUTURE!

"Providing leadership and resources to strengthen the Easley business community and create a positive business environment and member experience"



Strategic Plan 2016 - 2018

Introduction

- A Chamber of Commerce is an alliance of business owners and representatives who, by virtue of their investment, own the organization. The chamber is governed by the members who elect a board of directors to oversee the organization.
- The general purposes of a chamber of commerce is to advocate for and protect the private enterprise system, advance economic development, advocate for investors' interests as defined by the investors; influence public policy in a way beneficial to investors; and to work with investors and community leaders to create a positive business environment and economic prosperity.
- It is in this environment that this plan was developed.
- This plan sets forth the direction of the Greater Easley Chamber of Commerce for the next several years (2016-2018). The plan outlines a direction with which the Chamber intends to align all of its activities.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Greater Easley Chamber of Commerce provides leadership and resources to strengthen the Easley business community and create a positive business environment and member experience.

VISION STATEMENT

The Greater Easley Chamber of Commerce will be the strongest and most effective voice for our business community.

Value / Guiding Principles

- Member Focused & Experience Driven
- Accessible
- Inclusive
- Partnerships and Regional Collaborations
- Business Advocacy
- Building Community
- Respect & Integrity

Areas of Focus

1. The Voice of Business
2. Business / Entrepreneurial Development
3. Growth & Sustainability
4. Telling Our Story

Goal Statement

The cost of running a business is high, resulting from regulations and mandated requirements. The Greater Easley Chamber of Commerce must become the true voice of business, provide timely information on key issues impacting business, and play an active advocacy role with local, state and federal elected and appointed officials.

OBJECTIVE 1

Create a Public Policy / Governmental Affairs program to develop the agenda, advocate for the passage or defeat of key issues, and to educate and inform members.

ACTION STEPS

- Review key issues at all government levels and recommend policy positions to the Executive Committee and Board of Directors.
- Survey membership annually and communicate the chamber's positions on issues.
- Develop a member "grass roots" effort to assist in passage (or defeat) of critical issues.
- Partner with the Upstate Chamber Coalition, South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, and regional chambers on common issues.
- Provide online links to minutes of Easley City Council, Pickens County Council meetings and School Board meetings for members to review on our website.
- Communicate our legislative agenda.
- Host events to inform local government and the business community of issues impacting business and economic development.

OBJECTIVE 2

Grow and nurture appropriate relationships to position the Chamber to effectively serve as "the voice of business" and be recognized as a regional leader.

OBJECTIVE 3

Participate and be actively involved in the areas of community and economic development.

OBJECTIVE 4

Determine the role of the Easley Chamber of Commerce in providing information and support for local elections

ACTION STEPS

- Partner with the Upstate Chamber Coalition to support a Candidate Academy
- Explore the development of a Political Action Committee (PAC)
- If a PAC is created, identify and endorse qualified candidates for particular local offices who support a pro-business platform.

Business & Entrepreneurial Development

Goal Statement

Business Development should be crucial to the mission of the Greater Easley County Chamber of Commerce. In order to ensure the sustainability of our community, we must effectively recruit, grow, & retain businesses that create quality, good paying jobs for our citizens.

OBJECTIVE 1

Provide the programs, projects, workshops, seminars, and services that meet the needs of our business members.

ACTION STEPS

- Conduct a programming needs assessment to determine our member's training needs.
 - Provide a series of seminars and workshops to meet the developmental needs of small businesses, as well as for larger businesses.
 - Develop partnerships with Clemson University, Southern Wesleyan University, Tri-County Technical College, the Small Business Development Center and others for providing appropriate programs and services to mentor, advise, and support existing and potential business owners.
- Explore new options for better member and employee participation at Chamber seminars, workshops, and business focused events.

OBJECTIVE 2

Develop programs and resources to encourage entrepreneurship.

ACTION STEPS

- Work with the appropriate agencies to develop information and resources to assist entrepreneurs in moving their ideas from daydreams to reality. Examples:
 - One evening per week for 6 – 8 weeks of intensive education.
 - Benchmark other chamber programs that are successful.
 - Partner with City of Easley in promoting the Main Street Challenge contest
- Develop a small business / entrepreneur resource portal to our website,
- Post information and appropriate links on website (i.e. Small Business Support Hotline, SBDC, and SBA), as well as legislative and regulatory concerns of small business.
- Utilize the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce and other appropriate resources

Business & Entrepreneurial Development

OBJECTIVE 3

Work with other appropriate organizations in our region to make it easier to open and operate a business in Easley, Pickens County, and Powdersville.

ACTION STEPS

- Identify the steps to establishing a business and post clear steps online to expedite the process for potential business owners.

OBJECTIVE 4

Determine workforce issues in which the chamber can provide meaningful awareness and education for our members.

ACTION STEPS

- Promote the workforce development programs currently available in Pickens County and the Upstate.
- If identified, offer workshops on topics of key workforce concerns.
- Partner with the Business-Education Alliance to support career focus sessions for K-12 students
- Collaborate with schools to connect career tech students with specific industries / businesses.
- Actively partner with the Business-Education Alliance to develop and strengthen programs that connect businesses with public and private schools. The program will:
 - o Develop a marketing plan to encourage internships, co-op programs and shadowing program experience.
 - o Create a Speaker's Bureau to facilitate businesspeople speaking to students on skills / attitude needed to be successful in the workplace.
 - o Create a dialogue with administrators and teachers to discuss critical issues. Establish forums for meaningful, productive communication.
 - o Develop programming to assist students in the area of "soft skills" necessary in the workplace.
 - o Support the continued development of the Pickens County Education Foundation.
- Explore best practices from other chambers offered as suggestions for consideration by the Easley Chamber of Commerce:
- Educate members about internship programs with area colleges.
- Support the Anderson-Oconee-Pickens Career Showcase

Goal Statement

The Chamber cannot achieve the strategic objectives in this plan without the combined financial investment of its business members. With this fact in mind, we must reach our **full potential** in terms of membership growth and financial resources by providing programs, projects, services, and events that are important to the member experience. We will create a belief among the business community that investing in the Greater Easley Chamber of Commerce is a sound business decision. This will be done by creating a correlation between business success and involvement in the Chamber.

OBJECTIVE 1

Grow the membership to over 600 by December 2018.

ACTION STEPS

- Continue to develop member benefits that maximize current member retention.
- Study current market penetration by geographic area and business sector and develop strategies to obtain new members that reflect the great diversity of the greater Easley area.
- Monitor progress to ensure maximum membership growth.

OBJECTIVE 2

Revise our investment structure to a tiered investment model that encourages members to bundle products and services that are tailored according to their business needs.

ACTION STEPS

- Research, review and select an investment model that meets the above objective.

OBJECTIVE 3

Retain our members at a minimum of 85%.

ACTION STEPS

- Enhance member follow-up by developing a detailed plan.
- Maximize the Ambassadors' role to the fullest extent possible.
- Research, review and implement additional membership best practices for chambers of our size.

OBJECTIVE 4

Provide value-added benefits for members.

ACTION STEPS

- Increase and enhance networking opportunities. Offer ribbon cutting, groundbreaking, and other celebration events that recognize our members and their accomplishments.
- Provide regular membership meeting opportunities through programs with topics of interest and engaging speakers.
- Communicate to members on a regular basis.
- Maintain and enhance our media presence to include mobile app and other social media.

OBJECTIVE 5

Research the feasibility of additional Area Councils to better serve members located in communities outside of Easley.

Telling Our Story

Goal Statement

Communication is the key to telling our story. We will develop a meaningful plan in order to enhance our current communication strategies.

OBJECTIVE 1

Develop a communication plan to provide visibility and benefit for our members through opportunities and marketing.

ACTION STEPS

- Evaluate and enhance the content and format of membership communication tools.
 - Develop a marketing committee made up of marketing, public relations, and communication professionals. (i.e. Clemson University School of Business)
 - Maintain and market a meaningful website.
 - Ensure membership information is updated and accurate
 - Create a marketing effort to drive members and public to the website
 - Drive business to membership
 - Provide diverse vehicles for communication
 - Communication to the membership through technology (i.e. Social Media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, text /emails)
 - Ensure members choose how they prefer to receive communications. (i.e. options provided)
 - Educate our members on programs and services available and promote the benefits and value of your investment. (i.e. thank-you notes, follow-up letters, flyers)
 - Utilize new technologies to expand reach and develop consistent content and messaging.
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OBJECTIVE 2

Develop a positive relationship with local and regional media.

ACTION STEPS

- Maintain regular communication with appropriate members of the media.
 - Enhance the appearance and content of our media advisories and news releases.
 - Connect with local radio and print media to ensure the chamber voice is heard.
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OBJECTIVE 3

Develop an image campaign for the Easley Chamber of Commerce

ACTION STEPS

- Partner with the City of Easley, and local economic development organizations to initiate a community branding effort and awareness campaign.
- Develop “Did You Know?” type campaign to demonstrate the positive aspects of the Chamber and community.
 - Incorporate facts into a marketing campaign targeting the general public.
 - Highlight the role the Easley Chamber of Commerce has played in creating positive community change.
- Develop a “Why the Easley Chamber campaign?” to demonstrate the benefits for joining the chamber. (i.e. Board member testimonials, Chamber member testimonials)
- Develop talking points for all members of a “Why the Easley Chamber?” (i.e. economic development, networking, advocacy)

Plan Summary

Peter Drucker was quoted as having said, “The best way to predict the future... is to create it”. The Board of Directors of the Greater Easley Chamber of Commerce, through the planning process, has taken a critical step in creating a future that will improve the business climate for the area and enhance the long term viability of the organization.

Planning is a management tool, and this plan will be used for one purpose only - to help the Greater Easley Chamber of Commerce do the best possible job for its’ members, the health of the community, and for the viability of community economic development. The plan will allow the Chamber to remain a truly meaningful, relevant organization to its investors and to the community in general.

The plan will allow the Chamber to focus its energy and resources to ensure that committees and task forces are working toward the same goals. The planning process has given the Board of Directors the opportunity to assess and adjust the strategic direction of the Chamber to meet the challenges of a changing environment. We are living in an era of exponential change, and the 2016 – 2018 strategic plan allows the focus of the organization to remain on the key issues and programs for the foreseeable future.

Businesses compete in a far different environment today than existed just a few years ago. And, it is an environment where the only constant is change. The Greater Easley Chamber of Commerce must adapt to the environment in which our member businesses reside. That environment is characterized by these elements among others:

- **Time Challenge:** There is a time famine. The Chamber must create relevant programs and meeting structures that are relevant and worth an investment of time.
- **Generational Values:** There are multiple generations in the work place. We must meet their unique needs and be willing to be uncomfortable on behalf of the future of the chamber. We must engage these professionals in the life and work of the chamber.
- **Technology:** The Chamber should lead the introduction of technology where we can.
- **Return on Investment:** How can we help our members work less stressfully, more productively and more profitably? We must be able to demonstrate the substantial return on investment that we provide to our members and community.

The Easley Chamber of Commerce is an established organization that has strived over the past years to meet the needs of the membership, as well as other stakeholders, partners and constituencies. There are a number of current programs that will continue to be important going forward. The strategic planning process uncovered several additional areas of importance, along with some new objectives and action steps for existing priorities.

Business Development and Growth should be the cornerstone of the Greater Easley Chamber of Commerce. Participants in the planning process were emphatic in their desire for the Chamber to do the best job possible in this critical area. The Chamber must work to ensure that efforts are in place to assist small businesses and to encourage entrepreneurial initiatives and development.

Plan Summary

Staff professional growth & development is important to executing the strategic plan. We encourage the board of directors to appropriately budget, annually, for each staff member to be able to continue their professional development. The Institute for Organization Management, American Chamber of Commerce Executives, Carolinas Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, and our local colleges provide excellent resources for continuing education.

Four strategic areas of focus have been identified during the planning process as critical to the future vitality and viability of the Greater Easley Chamber of Commerce and the business community it serves. The strategic areas of focus and the objectives identified will set forth the direction of the Chamber for the next few years (2016 - 2018). The Areas of Focus are:

The Voice of Business/Public Policy
Business / Entrepreneurial Development
Organizational Growth & Sustainability
Telling Our Story

Well thought-out staff responsibilities should be developed to best implement and execute the plan. Committees and Task Forces must be created that will need the volunteer resources that only the board, investors, and partners of the Chamber can provide. Strategic Partnerships and Alliances will be sought with other chambers and organizations that are headed in the same direction as the Greater Easley Chamber of Commerce. The Board of Directors is committed to the four areas of focus and will be actively involved in their implementation.