

# **LOCAL CHAMBER BEST PRACTICES**

**Report  
2004 AGM**



**The Manitoba Chambers  
of Commerce**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: .....	p. 3
ADMINISTRATION: .....	p. 4
MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:	
A) Membership Drives: .....	p. 5
B) Networking: .....	p. 6
C) Reporting To Members: .....	p. 7
D) Ascertaining What Members Want: .....	p. 7
FUNDRAISING: .....	p. 7
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: .....	p. 9
LOBBYING:.....	p. 12

## 1) INTRODUCTION:

If there is an essence to Manitoba's chamber movement, it is the idea of 'strength in numbers'. Whether it is businesses gathering together to make a community stronger, or communities gathering to make our province stronger, the idea is the same, our challenges are similar and we can meet them more effectively by sharing ideas and working together. It is in this spirit that the MCC developed the 'Local Chamber Best Practices'.

We would like to thank the Local Chambers of Manitoba that answered our survey and provided many of the ideas contained herein.

A number of other provincial chambers and chamber organizations also issue some form of Best Practices. To this end, the Canadian Chamber Executives of Canada (CCEC) is currently gathering a comprehensive Best Idea Directory that should be available for purchase in the near future. The Directory will cover topics such as:

**Administration:** Financial Operations, Internal Operations, Staff Policy, Staffing, Other

**Governance:** Board Role, Committees, Strategic Plans, Other

**Marketing and Communications:** Brochures, Events, Membership Campaign, Publications, Surveys, Website, Community and Youth, Other

**Member Communications:** Member Recognition, Member Retention, Member Roster, Membership Fees, Membership Surveys, Newsletters and Publications, Other

**Member Services:** Discount Programs, Event Administration, Networking Programs, Professional Development, Tradeshow, Other Events, Other

**Policy Development:** Member Notification, Other

**Sponsorship and Fundraising:** Fundraising, Sponsorship

**Volunteers:** Ambassadors, Other

The MCC will advise Manitoba's local chambers once the Directory is completed. In the interim, the CCEC has kindly agreed to allow us to include a sampling of its entries in this edition of the Local Chamber Best Practices. For ease of reference, at the end of each idea we have listed the Chamber that it came from. If the idea emanated from the

CCEC Directory we included a '\*' beside it.

### **How To Use This Publication:**

Despite its title, there is no guarantee that the ideas contained in here will help your chamber. They are simply 'food for thought'.

There is always a challenge in providing information to local chambers in that different chambers will have different levels of experience/understanding relating to certain issues. Some chambers will consider many of the ideas in here as 'old hat', while others will see them as revelations. There still may be a value to you if you come across an idea that you are already trying. You may wish to call the chambers that are also doing those activities to see if there are ways that you can improve upon your efforts. Alternatively, you may wish to call to see if there is any advice that you can give them.

If you do come up with any new ideas, or if you did not participate in this year's edition, please feel free to send in your information. You may do so by contacting the MCC office (email: [doverall@mbchamber.mb.ca](mailto:doverall@mbchamber.mb.ca) or fax: (204) 948-0110) or by participating in the new 'Chamber Chat' feature on the MCC website: [www.mbchamber.mb.ca](http://www.mbchamber.mb.ca).)

### **2) ADMINISTRATION:**

**Idea:** My recommendation is that each Chamber of Commerce update, refine, polish and adopt its mission statement and/or mandate and have this statement professionally transposed onto a plaque of reasonable dimensions in legible lettering (to be read from a distance of 3 to 10 feet) and mounted/displayed in an appropriate position in the reception area of your Chamber. The idea being that any individual coming to the Chamber sees this mission statement first and foremost when they arrive in the chamber front door.

The message should clearly in one or two sentences define the purpose of that Chamber of Commerce. Remember, a picture is worth a thousand words and if displayed properly will capture every eye. (Brandon, circa 1991)\*

**Idea:** We are always looking at other Chambers to see what is working for them (Flin Flon)

**Idea:** Canada Post has some excellent products designed to save us money, but all too often we are not aware of them and not taking advantage of them. We recently found out about a product called addressed admail. This allows you to mail your monthly mailings at a greatly reduced cost. You must get in touch with Canada Post who will register you for this program and give you a contract number and a logo which you must put on your envelopes. If you have 400 or more envelopes that all contain the same information and are going to the same postal code prefix, you are eligible to save postage costs. You have to get your envelopes printed with the Canada Post addressed admail logo in the upper right corner.

Costs should not increase for your envelopes if you have a year's supply printed at once (in fact it was less expensive for us to get a year's worth of envelopes printed than to purchase them a month at a time). For us, the added benefit was having our logo added to our large envelopes. Prior to implementing this program, we stamped our return address in the top left corner, now it is printed there with our logo. (Fredericton)\*

**Idea:** We invested in software and are now training on it to truly track our members' activities. (Brandon)

### **3) MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:**

#### **A) Membership Drives:**

**Idea:** Members receive a 10% discount if they pay their membership within 60 days of receiving our invoice. (Flin Flon)

**Idea:** It's hard to find an efficient way to generate new leads for members (there is no city business tax listing!). (A number of chambers mentioned this challenge)

**Idea:** We provide members with a preferential rate for booths at our Trade Show. (St. Rose)

**Idea:** We are preparing a customized membership package. (Altona)

**Idea:** We provide 50% off for first time members. (Flin Flon)

**Idea:** Non-members are invited to events. It has led to four new members. (Headingley)

**Idea:** A chamber 'ambassador' visits new businesses as they open. (Brandon)

**Idea:** Our chamber is planning on sending the Minutes of our monthly general meeting to non-members. (Plum Coulee).

### **B) Networking :**

**Idea:** We hold a New Members Night (a wine and cheese event) (Flin Flon)

**Idea:** We changed our meetings from the evening to the noon hour, and that has proved popular. (Oakville)

**Idea:** 'Business Profile' - each month one business is asked to speak to the membership about their business. We are making a 'scrapbook' of the talks. (Morris)

**Idea:** We held a Roundtable that focused on the Retail Sector. (Altona)

**Idea:** We've reinstated our 'Welcome Evening', which is jointly hosted by the Town and RM. (Rossum)

**Idea:** Each year our members are besieged with invites to numerous Christmas parties. So we decided to combine them into one big party. We began the event for business owners to take their staff to. It has been so successful it has been expanded to include the whole community and beyond. (Riverton)

**Idea:** We recently held our first Annual Awards luncheon. (Minnedosa)

**Idea:** 'Business After 5' - approximately once a month businesses showcase their operations and get to know other business people in the community. (Brandon)

**Idea:** We will be offering a 'Manitoba Best Training' event to our members to improve skills regarding tourism and customer service. (The Pas)

**Idea:** Tried a Small Business Week kick-off evening, which had a small amount of success. (Portage)

**Idea:** We volunteer to help other organizations (e.g. Manpower) to enhance the chambers' visibility in the community. (Flin Flon)

**Idea:** We hold a members golf tournament. (Minnedosa)

**Idea:** We hold weekly general membership meetings. (Minnedosa)

### **C) Reporting To Members:**

**Idea:** We are launching a website which features an interactive map and individual business profiles of our members. (Altona)

**Ideas:** We issue a one-page report of activities at the end of the year. (MacGregor)

**Ideas:** We fax our Minutes to all our members. (Oakville)

**Idea:** Our newsletter is a joint effort with our local CDC, REC Commission and Village Council. (Riverton)

### **D) Ascertaining What Members Want:**

**Idea:** Many chambers find this to be a challenge.

## **4) FUNDRAISING:**

**Idea:** We hold a Radio Auction, with articles donated by businesses. (Flin Flon)

**Idea:** The Town has implemented a special business levy to support our Chamber. (Plum Coulee)

**Idea:** We have a 'Cash Calendar' that we sell in the fall for the next year. There is a weekly draw for \$20, two draws for \$100 and a final draw at Christmas for \$500. Each year features a new local theme in the pictures. It has been very successful. (Oakville)

**Idea:** We have developed a master Sponsorship Registry to ensure that:

- 1) organizations that wish to sponsor an event could be identified and approached;
- 2) organizations were not being approached on successive occasions by different departments, volunteers, staff and Board members representing the Chamber; and
- 3) sponsorship could be maximized and no potential sponsorship revenue would be over-looked

(Calgary)\*

**Idea:** We sell ads in seasonal flyers (Easter, Christmas, special community events etc). (St. Rose)

**Idea:** We have a Christmas Raffle, which is open to members only. (Rossum)

**Idea:** The Chamber sponsored the Bailey Bros Circus coming into town. (Altona)

**Idea:** At the end of 1997, the Executive and Board approved our first-ever five year plan. The financial portion of this plan included reducing our reliance on government funding. As of April, 1998, we no longer receive municipal funding, and are in a better financial position than we have been in the past two years.

In order to implement the move, we had to raise our dues, and did so a flat \$30.00 across the board. We built into our budget a loss of 10% of membership dues, and to date have lost about 4% as a result of the increase.

The five year vision statement is:

*The Maple Ridge Chamber of Commerce is a financially self-sufficient influential organization for business in Maple Ridge.*

Lobbying has become much easier with no financial ties. (Maple Ridge)\*

**Idea:** Our annual Trade Show is a good fundraiser. (The Pas)

**Idea:** Our Trade Show is very successful. (St. Rose)

**Idea:** We are looking at selling additional roster listings for those companies with several locations. (Brandon)

**Idea:** We charge a fee for a link to our website. (Riverton)

## **5) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:**

**Idea:** Many chambers held a local barbeque in support of the beef industry.

**Idea:** We have worked hand in hand with the Greentsone CFDC and the City on such things as highway signs and the Peacepark. (Flin Flon)

**Idea:** We help sponsor and distribute the 'Echoes & Legends' magazine produced by the Central Plains Tourism Network. (MacGregor)

**Idea:** For immigrants our initial contact with families comes through the 'Winkler Welcomes You' visit and school placement assistance. We receive requests for many forms of settlement assistance, including interpretation assistance at clinic, lab, dentist, & specialist appointments (usually in Winnipeg), job applications & interviews. We provide information & assistance in the areas of income tax, Manitoba Medical Insurance, credentials assessment, Adult ESL classes, housing issues & filling out all kinds of forms. We work closely with the Public Health department assisting with interpretation for home visits (baby, other health issues), bringing children's immunization records, the school immunization program, & other public health programs. (Winkler)

**Idea:** Rather than building things from the ground up, we focus on partnerships. For example, we help to sponsor a Citizen of the Year Award, a student to Ottawa, an annual garage sale, rodeo. Fair Day etc, etc. (MacGregor)

**Idea:** We are attempting to arrive at short and long-term plans for the area, seeking input from local organizations, the Mayor and council, and the Economic Development Office. (Flin Flon)

**Idea:** Three years ago we amalgamated the chamber of commerce, the Winkler Economic Development Corporation and the Community Development Corporation into one office, and that has worked very well. (Winkler)

**Idea:** We are establishing a transmitter to broadcast events in our area. (Morris)

**Idea:** We tried a Community Roundtable but it wasn't that successful. (Oakville)

**Idea:** Our annual Plum Fest is going into its third year. (Plum Coulee).

**Idea:** We became a member of the Triple R Futures Development Corporation, sharing the cost with the Town. (Plum Coulee)

**Idea:** The RM of Headingley received a donation of antiques and oil artifacts dating back to the early 1900's. The value of the collection is estimated at over \$1 million. In conjunction with our RM we initiated a committee to work on fundraising to house this collection in a museum. To date we have raised \$360,000 of the \$510,000 needed through government grants and private donations. This project expects to have a very positive impact on the community in terms of the economy, the environment, education and tourism. (Headingley)

**Idea:** We are working on an Economic Development Strategic Action Plan Committee to help give focus and long-term vision to the City's economic development plan. (Brandon)

**Idea:** 'Minnedosa Money' can be purchased at the local Credit Union on par. The money must be spent locally. (Minnedosa)

**Idea:** We have an annual scholarship initiative. (Headingley)

**Idea:** We produced an attractive Headingley relocation package which includes a history and overview of the community, tax information, infrastructure, by-laws, community services, clubs and organizations, school information, library, fire department, RCMP, recreation and employment opportunities. It lists all business in the community and also lists all chamber members. Members are welcome to insert pamphlets advertising their business. (Headingley)

**Idea:** In partnership with Economic Development we held an 'Entrepreneurship Evening'. We featured speakers from the Chamber, Economic Development, Triple R, and the business community. As well, pamphlets and other information were available. The target was people who were thinking of starting a business or were running a home-based business, but were looking at making the move to a mall or Altona's incubator mall. The event was very successful. (Altona)

**Idea:** We have a Christmas Loan program through the Credit Union. The loan is six months interest free and merchants participate through advertising and promotion. (Minnedosa)

**Idea:** In conjunction with our town we have developed incentives for residential and commercial property within our town:

The Town provides:

- a) Land: any town-owned lot can be purchased for \$1.00 where any home or business construction will start within two years from the date of purchase;
- b) Water Credit: for the first two years, each new homeowner moving into the Town will receive an annual credit of \$400 towards water bill charges;
- c) Other incentives:
  - i) free family skating passes at the Rossum Memorial Arena for two years;
  - ii) two free adult curling memberships at the Rossum Agri-Rec Centre for two years;
  - iii) one free adult golf membership at the Rossum Golf & Country club for two years;
  - iv) waiver of the quarterly garbage collection fee for two years.

The Chamber will provide each new family moving into the Town and purchasing a home, constructing a home, establishing a new business or purchasing an existing business with the following:

- a) For each residential property, a grant equivalent to the property tax bill to a maximum of \$1,500 per year for the first two years;
- b) For each business start a grant equivalent to the property tax bill to a maximum of \$2,500 per year for the first two years.

(Rossum)

**Idea:** Economic development agencies and the chamber meet every two months to exchange ideas, talk about projects etc. We also touch base with each other to coordinate responses to media inquiries. (St. Boniface)

**Idea:** We leave economic development to our CDC Board. (Virden)

**Idea:** We introduced a 'Christmas Buck' program and, encouraged members to give them out as cash bonuses. (Altona)

## **6) LOBBYING:**

**Idea:** A Town Council representative attends all our executive meetings - to share information from town meetings and bring ideas, concerns from our meetings to Town Council. (Plum Coulee)

**Idea:** I continually notice that the section "Lobbying" each year coming out of the Best Ideas catalogue has never received the attention it deserves. I believe this is the single most important category that will lead to higher retention and increased membership. But for some reason it's not being done at local levels other than on provincial and federal issues. Why then are chambers set up on all 3 levels? What is happening in your municipality that needs your attention and support?

I believe if each Board sets aside time to review the city of town by-laws affecting business they'll never have to worry about retention. Every monthly bulletin should briefly discuss new or existing by-laws in your city which the Board believes deserves attention. Ask for a response, then sit back! Not only will the Board have something to really sink its teeth into, watch how the media brings exposure to your chamber.

There are several issues which are common to all cities with which you can start: portable sign placement, parking issues, building codes and inspections. Once a year have a meeting with town or city council to voice the concerns of business. Have your members send, in writing, complaints about issues they face. If you get enough on one issue then that's what you should work on. (Windsor)\*

**Idea:** We lobby through of local MLA. (Plum Coulee).

**Idea:** We came up with a new committee called the Business Issues Response Team. This committee is structured with a panel that is made up of two co-chairs, along with the Chamber President and two other panel Members (also including the Chamber General Manager). Their role is to seek and respond to business issues, communicate regularly to evaluate issues as they arise, and determine whether a response from the team is required.

Volunteers were obtained from the membership to serve on teams in various categories such as: Economic Development, Real Estate, Human Resource Issues, Knowledge Industry, Public Finances etc. Those who volunteered were informed that they may be called on through the year if an issue arose in their area that the Panel felt should be responded to. In the case that the Panel chose not to pursue an issue, the member that proposed action was forwarded a letter explaining why the Chamber would not be working on their issue.

When the Panel found an issue that required a response, they prepared a one page form identifying the issue, contact persons, background etc. Then they called a meeting of the team in that area to discuss the issue. The team would then work on the issue and determine a route of action to take. Their recommendations would be reported on a one page standard form and would identify who is responsible to complete the actions and establish time frames.

In most cases, the actions were carried out by team members. Possible actions included written response, position paper, letter to appropriate persons, Press Releases, inclusion in briefs to various levels of government, surveys, recommendations etc. The team working on the issue would, while working on the issue, be identified as a Task Force rather than a sub-committee of the Business Issues Response Team. The Task Force would basically "spin off" from the initial group and work independently from the Business Issues Response Team - this would allow the Panel to have many task forces running at one time. Currently, we have one Task Force working from this Panel – the Franchising Task Force.

Sample invitation to participate:

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE PART OF  
A NEW CHAMBER OF COMMERCE TASK FORCE?

This new committee will meet on an as needed basis to respond to issues that are of concern to the expansion and growth of business in our community. Its role, after identifying issues, will be to respond to them in a fashion that will be most effective in accomplishing the aims of our members, the business community. These responses will help form the basis of the Chambers public policies in the future.

As a volunteer on this committee you the members will be called upon to provide input on issues that fall under specific areas of interest or expertise. Through this we always try

to draw on the members who can best provide the experience and background to properly assess and respond to important business issues.

If you have an interest in helping us shape public policy and having a say in important business issues, please fill out the form below and forward it by mail or fax to the chamber office:

Name:  
Company:  
Address:  
Phone:

I have an interest or expertise in issues relating to the following areas *(Please check boxes that apply)*:

Public Finances  
Human Resource Issues  
City/Provincial Economic Development  
Labour & Industrial Relations  
Transportation  
Business Financing/Venture Capital  
Knowledge Based Industry  
Environmental  
Natural Resources  
Real Estate & Development  
Downtown-City Centre  
Regionalization/Amalgamation  
Education  
Other (Specify)

(Fredericton)\*