



**Strategic Achievement Plan for the  
Battle Creek Area  
Chamber of Commerce**

**October 2, 2012**

**JHUDS, LLC.**

## A Note to the Battle Creek Chamber of Commerce Board, Membership, and Staff

I wish to thank all of you for the opportunity to work with you to develop a vision, a mission, and an aggressive plan to enable this Chamber to establish itself as the preeminent voice of the business and employer community in the years to come. I say this with the fundamental sincerity of a person who has worked in the community for over 30 years and has wished for an aggressive chamber partner to take on the public policy aspects of a favorable business climate within our communities in order to foster a community-wide prosperity.

During my last three years as the Chief Executive Officer of Battle Creek Unlimited, I began to search for ways in which organizations can transition from reacting to the turbulence and chaos of rapid change to identifying opportunities and building blocks in the immediate environment and implementing a disciplined, pro-active approach to the conversion of those opportunities for the betterment of the organization.

Every opportunity to make the Battle Creek Chamber a better organization has been identified, analyzed, researched, and placed into this report. The challenge before the governance is to assure that these goals are clearly identified, acted upon, measured, and evaluated. There will be a thousand diversions along the way, but if the Chamber is to get better, it must be totally disciplined toward reaching certain strategic achievements.

After a year on the job, Kara Beer has awakened the organization and made it good. The next step is to become *great*. As the literature shows, going from good to great is the biggest challenge of all. There is no reason why this cannot be done. The journey begins now.

Jim Hettinger, JHUDS, LLC.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Self-Identification.....	5
A Discussion of Vision and an Organizational Mission.....	7
Vision: Greater Battle Creek Area Chamber of Commerce.....	7
Mission.....	7
Current Chamber Programs and the Revenue Issues.....	8
An Analysis of Chamber Capital.....	9
Political Capital.....	9
Economic Capital.....	10
Financial Capital.....	12
Educational Capital.....	13
Cultural Capital.....	14
Human Capital.....	14
Realignment.....	15
Ambassador Club.....	16
Military Affairs.....	17
Chamber Golf Outing.....	17
Reciprocal Business Exchange.....	17
Manufacturers’ Association.....	18
Member Benefits.....	18
Leadership Program.....	18
Chair’s Strike Force.....	19
Issues Forum.....	19
Internship Program.....	19
Local Government Relations.....	19
In-House Operations.....	20
Reorganization for Growth and Prominence.....	20
First Strategic Achievement.....	22
Second Strategic Achievement .....	24
Third Strategic Achievement .....	25
Summary and Findings.....	26
Four Key Goals for 2017.....	27
Summary of Timing and Goal Achievement Chart.....	28
Footnotes and Citations.....	32
Articles.....	33

“When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”

Victor Frankl

## Introduction

The Greater Battle Creek Chamber of Commerce has arrived at an interesting crossroads in its existence. Significant changes have occurred with respect to the appropriate positioning of the Chamber of Commerce in the community.

With a new leader and a new location, the governance of the Chamber of Commerce wisely chose this unique time to set the stage for future growth in the Chamber. The governance accepted a proposal to do strategic achievement planning to chart the future direction.

This point in time is all the more interesting as new literature has surfaced describing the processes of community change as transition, transaction, and transformation. These processes of change apply to the chamber situation.

The process of transition was initiated by the governance of the Chamber of Commerce when they sought a change in executive leadership. The arrival of Kara Beer as the new Executive Director completed the process of transition.

The process of transaction is applicable to the current situation as the Chamber and its new leader are identifying a new path toward a community business leadership entity.

The process of transformation will commence as the work of strategic achievement begins — hopefully, with the adoption of this work.

Many organizations continue to opt for the traditional strategic planning process. The typifying behavior of non-profit organizations toward strategic plans often has such plans getting the shelf in favor of more pressing concerns. Moreover, strategic planning processes assume static positions and static goals. Unfortunately, the world does not work that way anymore. There is too much change.

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Strategic achievement assumes that we are already operating within an environment of accelerated change. It asks us to take full stock of our resources and our will to persevere into the future. That analysis leads us to a definition of the Chamber’s project capacity zones.

The magnitude of the project capacity zone of the Chamber of Commerce enables us to identify up to five achievable projects undertaken by the board, members, allies, collaborators, well-wishers, and staff of that organization. That is where the issue of will comes to the surface. A powerful driver to transform the Chamber into a sustainable and preeminent community business

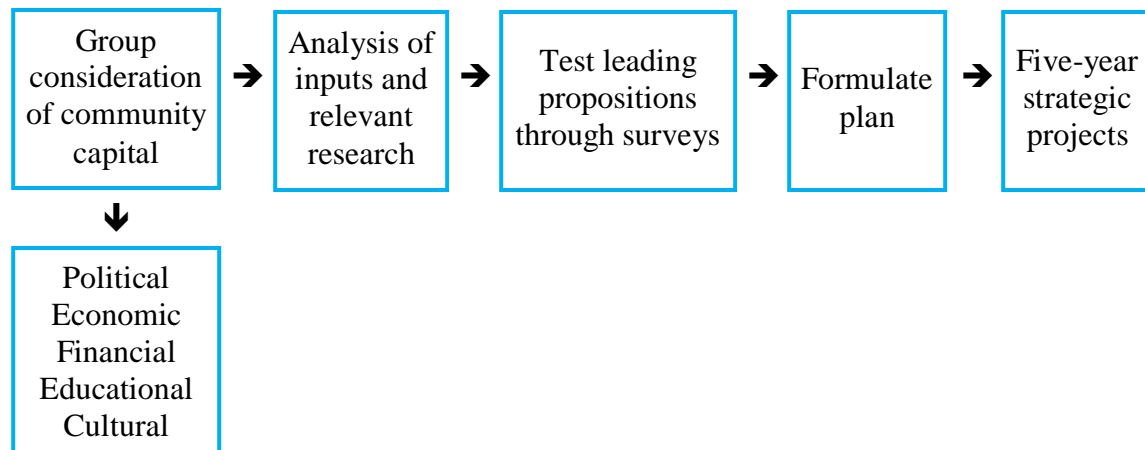
entity will be the will of all those associated with the Chamber to see these projects through to completion in the next five years.

In this way, one can see how a drive and a will to achieve successful outcomes of growth-fostering initiatives draws upon *our* strengths as opposed to external circumstances, which are always important but certainly navigable.

The Chamber of Commerce held an afternoon encounter session to foster an idea-generation process and to tease out some answers to questions relevant to how the Chamber could and would grow to a much more recognizable community force. The event occurred on March 7, 2012. Approximately 25 people attended.

Strategic achievement involves idea generation, analysis of community capital, definitions, and the identification and pursuit of achievable goals. Idea generation comes throughout the process and is most certainly welcomed, even needed, as the plan nears a completion stage. Kara Beer will assure that all interested stakeholders can contribute to the process via email, confidential notices — whatever it takes to assemble as much helpful data as possible.

### A Diagram of the Strategic Achievement Process



### Self-Identification

What is the universe of chamber actors, stakeholders, and the like? What is the universe of action that a chamber can realistically take in a community to create positive change for the growth of businesses and employers?

As a business-development organization, the Chamber of Commerce has a vital role in the overall economic development of the community, putting the Chamber in the same boat as several other entities in the community. How do we distinguish the Chamber and its role?

A brief and brutal definition of economic development is simply the attraction of money, the circulation of money in the community as much as possible when it is attracted, and ongoing attempts to stop “leakage” of that money to outside economies.

<b>Economic Development Process</b>	<b>Chamber</b>	<b>Visitor Bureau</b>	<b>BCU</b>
Attraction of Money to the Community		X	X
Circulation of Money in the Community	X	X	X
Diminish Leakage from the Community	X		X

The so-called economic development process does not necessarily preclude the Chamber from attracting money to the community, but a convergence of traditional chamber function — for example, membership services — with updated “B2B” initiatives means the circulation of money within the community is clearly a predominant chamber function. The more successful the Chamber is in fostering the circulation of money within the local economy, it works, perforce, to diminish leakage from local purchasing. Put simply, the maximization of this role can result in the sales slogan, “Make it easy for you to spend money in the community.”

B2B within the Chamber’s circle can turbocharge chamber membership value and strengthen the community’s business climate. Leakage occurs when people work in Battle Creek but live elsewhere or when Battle Creek families take their spending power outside Calhoun County because shopping options may be perceived to be better elsewhere. Leakage costs Calhoun County approximately \$15.6 million per year.

The Chamber, the Visitors Bureau, and BCU all participate in this process and need to work as partners to maximize all aspects.

The larger universe of chamber stakeholders beyond the board, the membership, and the staff includes, but is not limited to:

- Non-chamber members
- Consumers of products and services sold by chamber members (good candidates for chamber membership)
- Municipalities
- Higher Education
- Michigan Works! (Job training and placement)
- Center for Entrepreneurship
- 20/20
- Non-profit Alliance
- Junior Achievement
- Urban League
- Foundations
- Young professionals
- Former chamber members

#### Other Entities:

- Business improvement districts on Dickman Road and Columbia Avenue – *very important to the circulation of money; amenable to coordinated activities*
- Fort Custer Consortium – *very important to local purchasing but could be expanded to become the core of a strong manufacturers' association*
- Casino – *very important to attracting money; an economic actor on its own in the county; Chamber should work toward membership of the casino and, ultimately, the Tribe*
- Department of Defense – *very important to attracting money and circulating it*

Should it be the goal of the Chamber to be the “go-to” entity representing the business and employer community, the following groups are present in the Battle Creek area and may be of relevance to the Chamber’s activities and operations:

- Anti-crime groups
- Elderly groups
- Environmental
- Health advocacy and Fitness groups
- Heritage groups
- Mentoring groups
- Service clubs
- Veterans’ groups

#### A Discussion of Vision and an Organizational Mission

It was observed that the Greater Battle Creek Chamber of Commerce does not have an organizational vision statement. A suggested vision statement has been included for consideration. This is what we want our Chamber to be.

This vision is supported by an energized mission statement. A suggested mission statement is included to articulate and inspire what we do to realize the vision.

#### Vision: Greater Battle Creek Area Chamber of Commerce

***The Greater Battle Creek Area Chamber of Commerce is the premier business association whose influence, solutions, and networks drive economic growth in the Battle Creek area, enabling businesses and people to prosper in an ever-changing economy.***

#### Mission

The current mission statement reads: *The Mission of the Battle Creek Area Chamber of Commerce is to provide member services, business advocacy, and representation to create a positive economic environment.*

A mission statement should be directional, motivational, and measurable. The current mission statement is one of fact — not dynamic, not passionate, and certainly not inspirational.

After some deliberation, the group began to converge on a design process that culminates in the following:

***The Battle Creek Area Chamber of Commerce will provide the best in member services and aggressive business advocacy to create a climate for employer growth and a prosperous community for all.***

A mission statement should be directional, motivational, and measurable. The current mission statement is one of fact — not dynamic, not passionate, and certainly not inspirational.

The statement retains its factual intent, but also emphasizes our aspiration to be the **best** in membership services and the **best** in business advocacy.

Notes on Mission Statement Discussion:

- Should educate general public on economy and business roles in the community
- Should contain value that looks outward
- Should retain/attract members through value-added programs
- Should articulate action and value to the community
- Should show a role where the Chamber is the catalyst or conduit for partnering to strengthen the business climate

### Current Chamber Programs and the Revenue Issues

The group agreed that in order to be sustainable, the Chamber's programming needed an appropriate mixture of revenue programs to offset the costs of non-revenue programs. Non-revenue programs should be directed toward recognition of the Chamber's role and as an attraction for new members.

The participants reviewed existing chamber programs for their continued relevance and usefulness to the Chamber. Programs were discussed within the context of how they serve the Chamber's current mission, how they may relate to a future mission, and the support they provide chamber operations.



<b>Program</b>	<b>Attracts Members</b>	<b>Retains Members</b>	<b>Revenue Producer</b>	<b>Cost to Chamber</b>
Ambassador Club	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Chamber Golf Outing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Revenue producer
Military Affairs Committee	No	Yes	No-but can be	Yes
Eye Opener	Yes	Yes	No-but can be	Can break even
Public Policy/Business Advocacy	Yes	Yes	No-but can be	Yes
Welcome Home to BC	Yes	Yes	Can be	Yes
Membership Services	Yes	Yes	Should be	Yes
Certificate of Origin Services	No	No	No	Minimal

### An Analysis of Chamber Capital

A step in the process of strategic achievement is to look at sectors within the chamber service area and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the capital sector. For the purposes of this discussion, capital is referring to useful community assets or favorable community processes. The participants of the encounter session broke into smaller groups and, for a thirty-minute period, investigated the capital sectors of the area.

#### *Political Capital:*

- Among the assets:
  - The Chamber has outstanding relationships with the Lansing delegation. Those local community leaders who were willing to take a stand were judged to be assets.
  - The Chamber's political capital is enhanced by large hospitals and manufacturers with a global reach, all of which provide voices at the state and national levels.
- Among the weaknesses:
  - Participants saw a weakness in political capital in local government, especially, in the development of local talent to serve in important positions, such as city or county commissions and school boards.
  - Participants also believe that pandering or winning popularity contests triumphs over a better vision for the whole community.
  - Concern was raised that fewer and fewer people seem to understand capitalism in the community. A vacation of the role of public advocacy by business and a general lack of forceful engagement within the community have enabled anti-business voices to heavily influence the community discourse on business and employment.
  - At the federal level, Battle Creek is again at a disadvantage as the Third District Congressman is going to be far more beholden to Grand Rapids interests.

*Possible Opportunities in the Political Capital Mix:*

- Redevelop the ideas of political leadership training at the Chamber, as in a Public Service Academy approach. Begin the cultivation of business leaders, especially recent retirees and young professionals, for more participation as businesspeople in local school boards, councils, and commissions.
- Consider the development of a Board Chair “Strike Force” of 10 to 20 business people who could be mobilized via social media and other means to show up at a moment’s notice and be aggressive advocates of chamber and business interests.
- Find more events or programs that showcase both the Lansing and Washington delegations in the greater Battle Creek area.
- Expand the business leader luncheon to ideas and issues seminars or webcasts to more fully inform chamber members of business issues in the political process.
- Recharge and redevelop the Chamber’s Political Action Committee. Kalamazoo has been extremely effective with their community PAC. Although the Kalamazoo process and structure is convoluted, it is still the time for Battle Creek to pull itself together in an enlightened way that promotes the economic good of the community. It is important to note that, at times, it will be necessary to hold one’s nose while promoting the economic good of the community.

*Economic Capital:*

Participants readily identified strengths and weaknesses in local economic capital and the relationship to a reinvigorated Chamber of Commerce.

- Among the assets:
  - BCU
  - Strong corporate citizens
  - A continuing robust manufacturing sector
  - Strong foundations
  - An abundance of space
- Among the weaknesses:
  - A lack of local wealth capable of fueling small start-ups and capable of supporting community causes
    - In Kalamazoo, wealth created by the Upjohn and Stryker Companies was enabled to flow and distribute throughout the community, many times in the form of philanthropic and economic support.
    - In the Battle Creek area, such discretionary wealth as created by the Kellogg Company was largely captured by the Kellogg Foundation, leaving Battle Creek without an important economic change dynamic that appears relevant to community change processes.
  - There was concern that across Calhoun County efforts were not being made toward the development and nurturing of wealth-creating ventures. This may be reflective of the aforementioned lack of a discretionary spending and investment dynamic.
  - Finally, part and parcel of the economic weaknesses of the area is the seeming inability to be positive and to positively promote the area. With the neighbors

that the Battle Creek area has, we cannot afford this climate of negativity to overrule serious efforts at promoting prosperity within the community.

The Downtown Transformation Plan has won awards and has dazzled economic development people across the country with impressive measurements in the first three years. The effort has done this in spite of significant criticism from the usual suspects and without the badly needed supportive input of the businesspeople that pay taxes in the community.

*Possible Opportunities in the Economic Capital Sector:*

- Identify and organize new community wealth sources. It is believed that the Chamber and others have not cast a wide enough net to attract new wealth creators in the community.
- Establish the Military Affairs Committee as a social asset to build relationships between the military and chamber members. Create a second committee to utilize Battle Creek's unique federal mechanisms to foster more local purchasing, thereby attracting and circulating more money in the local economy. Battle Creek's unique assets eliminate the need to depend on a PTAC that has not shown the slightest interest in Battle Creek, anyway. Insofar as the Defense Logistics Agency has several important purchasing functions located in Battle Creek, the Chamber could bypass these procurement programs and go straight to the purchasing source. Federal Center purchasing people have long bemoaned the disproportionate lack of suppliers in the Battle Creek area. A similar typology could be developed with facilities in Fort Custer. From such a typology, the Chamber could also develop bid partnerships between members for all levels of procurement.
- Create a manufacturers' association. The equivalent of such an entity exists very loosely in Fort Custer. If the Chamber could form such an association, it may be able to assume bundled purchasing options such as fuel, office supplies, etc. Moreover, the association could work toward the forging of a more common, business-oriented agenda with non-manufacturing chamber members.
- Strengthen the Chamber's small business development processes, as it is known that entrepreneurs and small businesses move through some fairly uniform challenges, such as management, technical, and financial matters.
- Battle Creek's negative self-image has been a long-time instrument of self-destruction, especially in perceptions vis-à-vis the Kalamazoo/Portage/Gull Lake areas. For way too long, the good people of the Battle Creek community have surrendered the mood agenda to the ne'er-do-wells, the chronic complainers, the rustbelt lovers, the community organizers, and the grandstanding politicians. The Chamber should consider a more formal partnership with the Battle Creek/Calhoun Visitors Bureau and BCU to bombard the social media and other landscapes in the area with positive messaging. The organizations should consider an updated community brand, marketing campaign, and advertising dollars. We are not the only ones to read what is posted about the Battle Creek area. Others considering the very important life questions of where they will work

Federal Center purchasing people have long bemoaned the disproportionate lack of suppliers in the Battle Creek area.

and live almost always choose an upbeat community over one that seems satisfied with decline, deterioration, and incessant bickering.

- Create a Local Government Relations Effort. Many small businesses are complaining that local government is not responsive to their needs. In some cases, they argue that local government is hostile. In a few rare cases, businesses totally avoid any contact with the taxing units they support. The thrust of a chamber-sponsored local government relations effort would be a nonpartisan approach to seek a better understanding and efficient working relationship between local governments and the small business community.<sup>1</sup>
- In order to promote local growth, local governments must develop processes that do not thwart growth or give rise to bad public and business perceptions. “Make it easy to spend money in our community.”

Make it easy to spend  
money in our community.

#### *Financial Capital:*

Financial capital refers to money flows within the community and whether or not, there is a business and community benefit.

- Among the assets:
  - BCU Investment Fund
  - Local financing vehicles, including SBA instruments, are available locally.
  - A strong presence of Credit Unions has helped local financing.
- Among the weaknesses:
  - The lack of an organized angel investment group (although a purely Battle Creek scale would not support such a group)
  - The perception that money is available in the community, but there are no organized connections

#### *Possible Opportunities in the Financial Sector:*

- Maintain an inventory of all possible sources for private, local, state, and federal financing for publication to the chamber membership.
- Work with Investment Fund to assist more small businesses.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a highly desired activity, and it has been recommended by the National League of Cities, which outlined several important roles for city hall:

*“To support entrepreneurs and small businesses, local leaders should first look to the tools within their own wheel house—leadership, communications, regulations.*

*“Strong local elected leaders are needed to prioritize issues and to outwardly demonstrate that entrepreneurs and small businesses are important to a community.*

*“Communication between the entrepreneurial and small business community and the municipal government is needed to improve processes and better respond to needs.*

*“Unclear regulations with confusing steps are especially burdensome on new and small business. Successful review and improvement of permitting and regulatory functions hinges on communications with internal and external stakeholders and committed political leadership.*

*“Local leaders need to provide an accessible way for business to interface with regulations and permitting.”*

*Educational Capital:*

It is a good sign that some of the liveliest conversation took place in an analysis of educational capital within the area.

- Among the assets:
  - A world-class community college
  - The Math Science Center
  - The College of Aviation at Western Michigan University
  - The non-traditional Miller College, the area's only four-year institution of higher learning
  - The participants also listed updated physical plants, Legacy Scholars, and a degree of collaboration between schools.
- Among the weaknesses:
  - The worry that there is far too much capacity and a declining enrollment
  - Low student achievement scores, a higher-than-average dropout rate, and insufficient collaboration are of great concern to the future fabric of the community.
  - Furthermore, some of the educator-participants expressed concern that curricula were outdated.
  - The lack of a Montessori or some other signature form of educational institution also fuels a negative self-image vis-à-vis competitors in Portage, Gull Lake, and Kalamazoo.

Not mentioned in the discussion but of important historical relevance to the Chamber's analysis are three important facts: Battle Creek was the FIRST to mainstream handicapped people to the educational process (Ann J. Kellogg); the FIRST to utilize outdoor education (Clear Lake Camp); and the FIRST to provide a systematic approach to convenience learning (RMTC).

*Possible Opportunities in the Educational Sector:*

- Better promotion of area K-12 educational institutions through a more collaborative messaging with other education-sensitive groups in the area, such as BCU, Michigan Works!, and the Battle Creek real estate community
- Seek to improve Legacy Scholars—expand to a four-year program with the last two years being a forgivable loan for returning to Battle Creek.
- Work with BCU to create and operate the very best array of internship possibilities in the state.
- Support or, if need be, take the lead for a back-office consolidation of Battle Creek's school districts to free up money for curriculum upgrades, new education and training initiatives, etc.
- Support and lead business efforts to the creation and repositioning of the Battle Creek Area Math Science Center as a significant and visible community asset for talent creation and development.

*Cultural Capital:*

We define cultural capital as the community's inventory of arts, events, and occasions that mark the community's character in the pursuit of creative outlets in performing arts, literature, and music.

- Among the assets:
  - Participants believe there is an abundance of no-cost and low-cost opportunities to become involved with the arts in one form or another.
  - New actors such as WomenWhoCare.org and *What a Do Theatre* have formed and have added significantly to the cause of community arts.
- Among the weaknesses:
  - Many arts and historic organizations are below the business radar and are struggling in a bad economy.
  - There are perceptions of waning numbers of participants in arts organizations and low levels of support due to a bad economy.

*Possible Opportunities in the Cultural Sector:*

- Connect business with art; connect art with business.
- Coupon and package deals between arts events and chamber members
- Special festivals, perhaps structured like a fair, where each business or artist provides their own fun-oriented products and services in an interactive format
  - Local actors, art students, and interns would be of immense relevance with these special festivals.

*Human Capital:*

- Among the assets:
  - The area has been robust with vehicles to keep people trained and skilled.
  - Skilled trades opportunities, apprenticeships, KCC, and Michigan Works! all work together to deliver value to the human capital sector.
- Among the weaknesses:
  - There continues to be a mismatch between the perceived large pool of willing applicants and employers who say they cannot find new, good workers.
  - In general, the area has been slow to embrace the idea that better education and educational outcomes lead to higher compensation levels and increased community vitality.

*Possible Opportunities in the Human Capital Sector:*

- Assume leadership and responsibility for the developing internship program tied to food safety and emerging Battle Creek area technologies.
  - Research is now showing better retention rates of talented young people where they have had robust internship possibilities.
- Place more forceful business representatives on the Michigan Works! board. Most businesses fail to appreciate the impact they could have on shaping the area's labor force.
  - We are hearing about job fairs where jobseekers turn up totally unprepared — poorly dressed or without resumes — turning off employers who graciously provide the time to participate in such events.

- Upgrade internal staff infrastructure through a rational work allocation aligned with strategic achievement projects.

## Realignment

Strategic Achievement has, as the completed result, a list of projects to be achieved. If those projects are completed, there is progression toward the realization of the vision of what the Greater Battle Creek Area Chamber of Commerce aspires to be. Through a hard look at capital within the community, we are more aware of what is needed and how we must progress.

As programs and initiatives are identified, alignments with the mission of the Chamber must be assured.

The first of two tasks is to assure the existence of an enabling infrastructure to support chamber staff and programs. The Chamber is financially sustained through dues, fees, service contracts, events revenue, and donations. Given the interest in growing the chamber membership base, every source of revenue (except dues) could be increased to grow the Chamber's revenue stream. Moreover, some internal functions of the organization can be performed offsite to allow overhead expenses to be diverted to programs.

The optimal goal is to maximize all arrangements to provide the Chamber with as much revenue as possible without driving the costs of chamber affiliation, in any form, beyond the means of the area business community. Perceptions of value must be conveyed constantly in chamber communications regarding these programs and initiatives.

Perceptions of value must be conveyed constantly in chamber communications regarding these programs and initiatives.

The second and far more absorbing way to look at value-added chamber programming is to list aligned current programs and those suggested by the participants. For purposes of review, evaluation, and potential deployment, the programs or initiatives are grouped below in accordance with the mission statement.

Program / Initiative	Revenue Producer	Serves Mission	Suggested Changes and Enhancements to the Chamber
Ambassador Club	No	Yes	Explore a “contribution” to the program when used to open a new business; seek business sponsorships; consider linking to “Welcome to Battle Creek”
Military Affairs	Potentially	Yes	Create a pure economic entity to explore a commercial relationship with the Federal Center to add value to chamber members
Chamber Golf Outing	Yes	Yes	Expanding to two events per year, consider a challenge or competitive component in the latter event
Reciprocal Business Exchange	Potentially	Yes	Set up technology to allow and enhance purchasing among chamber members
Manufacturers’ Association	Potentially	Yes	Begin the work of organizing an association to lure the Fort Custer Consortium and expand the service area
Member Benefits	Yes	Yes	Study health care exchanges as possible small business inducement; try to work a deal with BC/BS
Leadership Program	Yes	Yes	Re-tool program; upgrade value proposition; prepare public/private leaders
Internship Program	Yes	Yes	BCU and BCPS must be prepared to convey work to the Chamber
Local Government Relations	No	Yes	“Make it easy to spend money in our community”; Local Government issues

The first thing to observe is that all of these programs and initiatives are aligned with the chamber mission. Not all the programs produce revenues, but others have to prove results that lead to future revenues. For each of these programs, we will examine value and program enhancements.

*Ambassador Club:*

- Values:
  - Raises the chamber profile throughout the community
  - Represents the Chamber at auspicious occasions
  - Operates in a no-cost / low-cost zone
  - Participants are reported as being very supportive.
- Program Enhancements:
  - Is it possible to generate revenue from the Ambassadors’ presence? Is it bad manners to ask for a contribution back to the Chamber? What about business sponsorships?
  - Can this program be married to the “Welcome to Battle Creek” initiative where the Ambassadors could also serve as advocates for living and working in the greater Battle Creek area?



*Military Affairs:*

- Value:
  - Ties the community to the Department of Defense employer establishment
  - Fosters good relations with the military
    - Communities with military installations in the south and the west United States have a long history of always working to foster better relationships with the military. It is common practice these days for communities to lobby heavily for even the slightest improvements at their respective bases. It is virtually legendary how “Doc” Stewart and his Committee of 100 kept Clovis, New Mexico, in the good graces of the military for almost 30 years.
    - In fact, Battle Creek, with its own bases, is not unfamiliar with this practice. In times of certain cutbacks in the Department of Defense, the Chamber is the logical vehicle to turn up the heat in the community’s long-running relationship with the Department of Defense.
- Program Enhancements:
  - Create a second group to more effectively bring contracting opportunities to chamber members through a special relationship with the Federal Center. The PTACs have demonstrated NO interest in the Battle Creek area, so nobody’s feathers will be ruffled if the Chamber steps up.
  - Consider a lobbying effort on behalf of the area’s military installations.

*Chamber Golf Outing:*

- Value:
  - Produces revenue for the Chamber
  - Provides a great atmosphere for member mixing and member recruiting
- Program Enhancements:
  - The Chamber is in the process of adding a second event but should consider making the second event competitive. The Chamber should issue golf challenges for revenue raising, i.e.:
    - Chamber golf outing vs. Organized Labor
    - Chamber golf outing vs. city employees
    - Chamber golf outing vs. Foundation employees

*Reciprocal Business Exchange:*

- Value:
  - Circulates money locally to locally owned businesses
  - Would add considerable value to chamber membership
- Program Enhancements:
  - See Member Benefits section below.

*Manufacturers' Association:*

- Value:
  - Co-opts membership of manufacturers into Chamber
  - Implies a strong revenue stream for chamber leadership and administration, if they can prove their value to the community's manufacturing establishment
    - In particular, chamber value must be proven to the manufacturers at Fort Custer Industrial Park.
- Program Enhancements:
  - The Chamber should closely look at this program as a means of generating revenue and as a means of helping the Chamber meet its mission challenges.
    - The Chamber could approach the Fort Custer Consortium as a base for the manufacturer's association.

*Member Benefits:*

- Value:
  - Chamber is more easily able to attract and retain members if the value proposition in member services is undisputable.
- Possible Enhancements:
  - Review the chamber membership benefit package.
    - Can the Chamber continue to provide health care options or will small businesses go to the exchanges due to debut in 2013?
    - Is there something the Chamber can do with Blue Cross/Blue Shield to occupy a pivotal position in local business costs and health care?
  - Be aware of the other programs and initiatives that can load the value proposition in favor of the Chamber, and also provide the Chamber with revenue streams from favorable economic activity and administrative fees.
  - Step up business advocacy through some of the measures, such as the Chair's "Strike Force."
  - Make a very committed effort to bring as much value as possible through B2B reciprocals, such as an exchange for purchasing among chamber members.

*Leadership Program:*

- Value:
  - Cultivates community and chamber leaders
  - Can be a source of membership work
  - There is an opportunity to shape and attract young leadership in a community that badly needs it. As the leadership curriculum is being revised, consider a public service academy approach.
- Possible Enhancements:
  - The program should be re-tooled toward a broader private/public approach (business to community).
  - Prepare young leaders for more meaningful participation as local elected leaders, school board members, hospital trustees, etc.

There is an opportunity to shape and attract young leadership in a community that badly needs it.

*Chair's Strike Force:*

- Value:
  - Sides with chamber members and businesses in town by providing support and input
- Possible Enhancements:
  - Program must be created. It is envisioned that 10 to 20 business people could volunteer to support other chamber members and the business side of community issues. The “Strike Force” could operate as a social media mechanism by alerting all members as to times, places, and issues to be considered. Make good use of the social media strategies that have worked in society, but not always to the most noble of ends. The “Strike Force” can be a strong component of Member Services.

*Issues Forum:*

- Value:
  - Identifies the Chamber with pressing business and political issues where education is needed
  - Helps amplify the chamber profile as the leading business advocate in the community
- Possible Enhancements:
  - Certain kinds of issues programs should be fit to charge admission. With the plethora of regulations coming down the pike, there are constant challenges to businesses to adhere and otherwise conform.
  - Utilize the Business Leaders Luncheon as the jump-off point for the creation of a bigger and more active program.
  - This is a strong candidate for revenue generation.

*Internship Program:*

- Value:
  - Links business with motivated and talented Battle Creek students
  - Nurtures young talent and can serve as a great retention-of-talent mechanism
- Possible Enhancements:
  - Program is in formative stage but should fit the chamber mission perfectly and can generate program revenue.

*Local Government Relations:*

- Value:
  - Create a forum between local governments and small business to clarify leadership, communications, and regulations and to facilitate knowledge, understanding, and effective use of local processes.
  - Inform local government as to the needs of a robust small-business ecosystem that provides employment and tax base.
  - Work to provide more online relationships between local government and small businesses.

- Convince local government and all its employees that growth is a good thing and that they should do all they can to support reasonable growth.
- Chamber members and small businesses can easily identify structural barriers to their growth and can assist in the formulation of entrepreneur-friendly policies and programs.<sup>2</sup>
- Make it easy for people to spend money in our community.
- Make Battle Creek the easiest town in America in which to start a business.
- Possible Enhancements:
  - Need to be developed

Convince local government and all its employees that growth is a good thing and that they should do all they can to support reasonable growth.

#### *In-House Operations:*

Consider outsourcing functions where the money can be better utilized, strengthening existing programs, and launching new initiatives.

#### Reorganization for Growth and Prominence

In order to stay aligned with the chamber mission, future initiatives are listed in order according to their relevance to the mission statement.

#### *Membership Services:*

The Chamber's value proposition to all businesses, but small business in particular, must be increased to such a level as to draw new members and to force existing members to think long and hard before they drop membership in the Chamber. In effect, the Greater Battle Creek Area Chamber of Commerce will grow stronger and more influential if it can develop internal membership services that are second to none.

There are at least three areas that are ripe for action. Moreover, much of the change can be initiated through the appropriate software and computer applications. Additional efficiencies and gains can be made through better staff selection and training of specific staff for specific competencies.

#### *Strategic Achievement Process:*

The Strategic Achievement Process for the Chamber is illustrated below. Projects have been identified based upon needs of the Chamber, the membership, potential members, employers throughout the community, and community issues. It should not be a surprise to see that of the sectors of community capital explored by the committee, the opportunities focus on economic

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<sup>2</sup> The National League of Cities notes, "Understanding small business development stages is important for local government because it allows them to better understand the challenges facing entrepreneurs and provide policies to support them."

capital. And that takes us back to circulating and retaining money in the local economy, clearly raising the need for high-value membership services.



The diagram speaks to the essentials on which the Chamber's Strategic Achievement approach must be based.

Even though staff will implement the projects, a crucial part of staff efficacy will be the support received from constituents; in particular, chamber governance must stay committed to achievement of these projects. It is recommended that the three main areas for accomplishment in the near future be a part of the board-meeting agendas. Board directors and chamber members must stay committed to project outcomes.

As the Chamber elects a new chair each year, it is crucial that this process and these achievements become part of the Chamber's DNA through 2017.

The governance and staff will need to work together to put together a plan of annual outcomes leading to the successful completion of all projects adopted by the Chamber of Commerce. Measurements can be included to show progress. Some obvious measurements would include retaining members, attracting new members, feedback on issues forums, revenue increases, and continuous involvement of the governance and members through surveys and meetings.

## Strengths in Community Capital, Commitment to Outcomes, and Strategic Achievement Projects

<p><i>Chamber Personnel:</i> Sales skills; membership and clients services protocols; computer expertise; communications, including social media skills; marketing capability</p>
<p><i>Constituents:</i> Chamber members; potential chamber members; other employers; business associations; business improvement districts; political representation; local governments</p>
<p><i>Expertise:</i> Where to find BC information; leadership training and skills; client services; organizational capabilities; financial; knowledge of business issues and health care</p>
<p><i>Economic Capital:</i> Sponsorship of fund raisers; membership dues; contract reimbursements; grant writing; aggregated purchasing power; contributions</p>
<p><i>Networks:</i> Private institutions; public institutions; associations; multipliers; business improvement districts; business associations; individuals</p>

### *First Strategic Achievement:*

The first strategic achievement to be accomplished within a two- to three-year period:

- Re-tool Membership
  - Services need to include a stronger commercial component, including the favoring of local purchasing among chamber members, and the positioning of chamber members to sell to the outside.
  - Strengthen the Military Affairs Committee, but create a second group to interface directly with Federal Center procurement people.
  - In the process of devising a typology for local sales activity, a similar typology can be adapted for more general use.
  - Contemplate an administrative fee to be collected for a value-added service.
    - Needs:
      - Two committed board members to oversee the effort and use their influence to help the staff
      - Approximately 20 staff hours per week until the system is operational
      - The cost of start-up is estimated at \$20,000 for the first year.
- Add Manufacturers' Association
  - The core of such an organization currently exists in Fort Custer. The chamber objective ought to be to gain administrative responsibility for the Consortium with the ultimate goal of having a very robust B2B effort constantly in motion at the Chamber of Commerce.

- The Chamber Executive Director should immediately gain familiarity with the manufacturing community by attending all BCU retention calls when appropriate.<sup>3</sup>
  - Needs:
    - One committed board member, preferably a manufacturer, to serve as the bridge and the advocate for chamber staff to assume administrative responsibility for the Fort Custer Consortium, growing the numbers to include all dues paying manufacturing members of the Chamber
    - Initially, staff time is estimated at 8 hours per week.
    - The cost of start-up and integration is estimated at \$5000.
- Health Care
  - Health care is a huge issue and one with which the Chamber has had experience.
  - It is known in 2013 that insurance exchanges will be coming online to offer small businesses and individuals the “opportunity to shop” for appropriately sized programs and rates.
  - Insofar as an inducement to join the Chamber is affordable health care for smaller businesses, the Chamber needs to jump ahead of the curve and be deployed so as to be able to protect its position with respect to exchanges.
  - There is no indication that the health care mess will be sorted out anytime soon, but pieces are being put in place over the next two years that will radically alter the system. Does this mean an alliance with Blue Cross/Blue Shield to continue coverage for members, existing and new? Or does the Chamber develop expertise in the exchanges to buy the best rates for their members? There is ample help available to the Chamber through two large hospitals, the Chamber’s existing relationship with BC/BS, and the expertise housed at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.
    - Needs:
      - Definition of approach amidst health care reform: either the Chamber becomes the center of attention when it comes to businesses and health care, or the Chamber leverages its current partnerships, say, with BC/BS, to achieve the same outcomes. This is probably a role for the President of the Chamber to directly oversee until a plan is made and the system is up and running.

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<sup>3</sup> Geneva Analytics recognized the importance of manufacturing as a way to boost membership: “Both perceived and real value is the basis of membership development and retention. Utilizing plant/site visits, coordinating them with local elected officials is a key method of establishing an understanding of the local business mix as well as establishing a basis for membership development and retention. These visits offer opportunity to put a company’s best foot forward as well as being able to observe if there are issues that need resolution or threaten the company’s viability.”

- Golf Outing Objectives
  - Use new or second chamber golf outing as a competitive challenge to some other organized group in the community, such as the city employees, organized labor, casino employees, etc.
  - At all times, the golf outing should be utilized for three purposes: a) member retention; b) member attraction; and c) raising revenue for chamber operations.
  - The two competing parties would have to agree as to the use of proceeds, but there is nothing wrong with the Chamber using a competitive approach to generate operating revenues.
    - Needs:
      - Staff analysis of increased time, costs, and revenue projections

*Second Strategic Achievement:*

The second strategic achievement will be accomplished within a three-year period:

The Chamber competency of business advocacy will be strengthened by enhancing the business and employer perspective throughout the Battle Creek area. This will include, but not be limited to:

- Business inputs on public policy matters
- Assisting our members by advocating the benefits of living and working in the greater Battle Creek area (gas prices are on the Chamber's side)
- Running educational/informational seminars
- Informing members and non-members of business-sensitive issues<sup>4</sup>

Business advocacy can be strengthened in many ways. In the coming months, changes will be taking place at a furious rate and the Chamber can best assist its members by making sure they have the latest information and recommendations about how to comply. The NLRB and the EPA, each singlehandedly promise many challenges for the job creation community in the immediate future. There is ample expertise available in West Michigan to stage informative and income-generating issues forums or webinars.

The Chamber needs to develop a "Strike Force" of 10 to 20 volunteers who can be mobilized by social media and other outlets to appear at a time and place to advocate for chamber and business interests in the community. Internal processes will necessitate talking points preparations for "Strike Force" members. "Strike Force" will need to be disciplined and guided by chamber leadership, specifically the Board Chair and CEO. This needs to be targeted and precise. The Chamber does not want to emulate JONAH or other groups who are down railing with inadequate information about an issue, and their leaders have no idea what is going on. Business advocacy is enhanced by the reformulation of the chamber leadership program, which is in progress. It is recommended that the Chamber take a much harder look at the

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<sup>4</sup> Geneva Analytics noted the importance of information to chambers and their members: "Businesses' consumption and utilization of data reflecting economic conditions is very high. Chambers should consider maintaining access to such data..."



business/community relationship within its leadership programs, as there is a paucity of business input in public policy matters.

It is recommended that the Chamber take a much harder look at the business/community relationship within its leadership programs, as there is a paucity of business input in public policy matters.

- Staging of six to eight issues forums throughout the year through expansion of the “Business Leaders” Luncheon
  - These forums need to be timely and they need an admission fee.
  - The forums must be restricted to businesses’ issues and direct impacts on chamber members.
- Create a business advocacy unit known as the Chair’s Strike Force.
- Re-tool and redevelop chamber leadership program, implementing a Public Leadership Academy approach.
- Create a Local Government Relations committee to demand prompt and consistent public services and to foster an investment-friendly community.
  - Local government officials, because they are dependent upon a robust private sector, must work with businesses to make it as easy as possible to spend money in the community.
- Re-charge the Political Action Committee to strengthen business and community influence.
  - Needs:
    - Appropriate Chamber Committee to work out details
    - One staff person to strengthen leadership programming

### *Third Strategic Achievement:*

The third strategic achievement resides within special interests of the Chamber and the employer community. A special interest of the Chamber is an area where business has a very strong interest in the outcomes of the public sector, such as educational attainment levels. Knowing that other groups are actively involved — albeit none are a pure business entity — in education change, the Chamber can watch and can help but does not need to lead these efforts as it does the previous two strategic achievement accomplishments.

- Assist in and improve Legacy Scholars in what best serves the needs of students and businesses — talent retention and attraction notwithstanding.
  - Ideas include making the first two years of tuition free and the second two years in the form of a forgivable loan should the student decide to return to work and live in Battle Creek.
- Internship programs are currently being constructed with chamber input.
  - Given the proximity of the Chamber to the employer community, the Chamber should seek to operate and administer the program for a fee.
- The Chamber can be a proponent of educational efficiencies in the Battle Creek area.

- Is a backroom co-mingling of duplicative school functions a good way to put more money in teachers and classrooms?
- Chamber support for a specialty school is also a valuable contribution. Many competing communities have specialty schools (e.g., Montessori) that they market heavily to attract talent and residents.
  - Can the Chamber, as part of its positive messaging, do something globally to promote the Math Science Center? This needs to become the community's signature educational asset.
    - Needs:
      - The priority and significance of these projects needs to be parsed by chamber staff and board to see where their effort should go.

### Summary and Findings

The time is certainly right for the Battle Creek Area Chamber of Commerce to undertake this initiative. With new leadership and strong reason to believe the Chamber is going to claim its rightful community leadership position, the analysis has considered and submitted ideas for an organizational vision as well as an energized mission statement.

Moreover, the analysis has considered community capital strengths and weaknesses within the context of the Chamber. The Chamber was judged to now have adequate resources and direction to undertake a transformation that will lead to the fulfillment of the mission statement and the vision statement.

The analysis has given the Chamber up to seven attainable strategic achievements. Successful implementation of these projects in pursuit of the mission will make the Chamber the community force that many want and need it to be.

It is now up to the governance of the Chamber to identify the targets and set the direction toward achievement. The targets have not been prioritized, but all will make a positive impact on the status of the Chamber.

The targets are such that they can and should be tracked for progress. The governance of the Chamber should consider a tracking process to be part of board meeting agendas so that staff can articulate progress and where the board can help. It needs to be noted that without board member involvement, these recommendations could well go the way of too many strategic plans and strategic studies of organizations in the Battle Creek area.

But the essentials appear to be in place — the opportunity is certainly present, and the will to progress is also present.

## **The Four Key Goals of the Battle Creek Area Chamber of Commerce for 2017**

The Battle Creek Area Chamber of Commerce shall educate the general public on the economy and business roles in the greater community.

The Battle Creek Area Chamber of Commerce shall fight for public policy and private partnerships that are conducive to employer growth and community development.

The Battle Creek Area Chamber of Commerce shall retain and attract members through value-added programming.

The Battle Creek Area Chamber of Commerce shall act as a catalyst or conduit for partnering and strengthening the business climates in the communities we serve.

### Summary of Timing and Goal Achievement

**Date of Commencement:**

Goal	Objective Year 1	Objective Year 2	Objective Year 3	Objective Year 4	Objective Year 5	Completion-ROI	Evaluation	Improvements
	<p>Educational series (luncheon, seminars, or webcasts) to focus on general business issues in the political process (local, state, and federal levels).  <b>*Business Leader Luncheons and Party Politics</b> (<i>Political Capital</i>)</p>	<p>To facilitate and implement a Public Service Academy to encourage more participation of business people in local elected positions such as school boards, councils, and commissions. (<i>Political Capital</i>)</p>						
	<p>Establish programming that showcases both the Lansing and Washington delegations in the greater Battle Creek area. <b>*Party Politics – October 11, 2012</b> (<i>Political Capital</i>)</p>	<p>Establish a Chamber of Commerce Board Chair “Strike Force” community to be aggressive advocates of chamber and business interests. (<i>Political Capital</i>)</p>						
	<p>Collaborate and develop a relocation package for Battle Creek that will serve as a marketing piece for employers as well as a community messaging piece. (<i>Economic Capital</i>)</p>	<p>Create a Manufacturers’ Association. (<i>Economic Capital</i>)</p>						

Goal	Objective Year 1	Objective Year 2	Objective Year 3	Objective Year 4	Objective Year 5	Completion-ROI	Evaluation	Improvements
	Create a committee and facilitate a “Buy Battle Creek” campaign that fosters more local purchasing, thereby attracting and circulating more money in the local economy. * <b>Member 2 Member Discount Program...</b> launching in September 2012 <i>(Economic Capital)</i>	Establish value-added programming that strengthens the Chamber’s small business development process that focuses on management, technical, and financial matters. <i>(Economic Capital)</i>						
	Establish and connect chamber members with local military opportunities. <i>(Economic Capital)</i>	Maintain an inventory of all possible sources for private, local, state, and federal financing for chamber members. <i>(Financial Capital)</i>						
	Collaborate and facilitate internship opportunities for the greater community. <i>(Educational Capital)</i> a. Chambers: Summer Intern Reception event (1 <sup>st</sup> week of June 2013) – to welcome and connect all of the Battle Creek interns in a social environment. b. Chambers: What’s GREAT about Battle Creek? Panel of interns sharing their summer experience outside the workplace with employers (end of July 2013)	Collaborate with the Legacy Scholars program officials to expand to a four-year program with the last two years being a forgivable loan for returning to Battle Creek. <i>(Educational Capital)</i>						

Goal	Objective Year 1	Objective Year 2	Objective Year 3	Objective Year 4	Objective Year 5	Completion-ROI	Evaluation	Improvements
	<p>Design and facilitate events that connect education and business in the community. <i>(Educational Capital)</i></p> <p>a. Collaborate and participate in the Sophomore Future Track (Spring 2013) – matching sophomore students from the local schools to local businesses for a day in the life.</p> <p>b. Chambers: Educators in the Workplace event (early August 2013) – immerse educators in the day-to-day operations of local businesses for one day.</p>	<p>Support and lead business efforts in the repositioning of the Battle Creek Area Math Science Center as a significant and visible community asset for talent creation and development. <i>(Educational Capital)</i></p>						
	<p>Upgrade internal staff infrastructure through a rational work allocation alignment with strategic achievement projects.</p>	<p>Collaborate with other local leaders to promote a strong community message around our area’s K-12 educational institutions. <i>(Educational Capital)</i></p>						
		<p>Create and facilitate special festivals where businesses and artists participate in interactive formats. <i>(Cultural Capital)</i></p>						

Goal	Objective Year 1	Objective Year 2	Objective Year 3	Objective Year 4	Objective Year 5	Completion-ROI	Evaluation	Improvements
		Create package and coupon deals between art events and chamber members. <i>(Cultural Capital)</i>						
		Connect business with art and art with business. <i>(Cultural Capital)</i>						
		Assume leadership of and responsibility for the developing internship program tied to food safety and emerging Battle Creek Area technologies. <i>(Human Capital)</i>						
		Collaborate with Michigan Works! on workforce development opportunities and recruitment of an ideal board of directors from the business field. <i>(Human Capital)</i>						

### Footnotes

1. Center for Research and Innovation, National League of Cities, “Supporting Entrepreneurs and Small Business: A Tool Kit for Local Leaders,” Washington, D.C., 2012.
2. Op. cit.
3. Geneva Analytics, “Chambers of Commerce: Their Roles and Areas of Opportunity,” New York, N.Y., 2011.
4. Op. cit.

### Other Sources

1. Schapiro Group, “The Real Value of Joining a Chamber”. Atlanta, 2011.
2. Isenberg, Daniel J., “How to Start an Entrepreneurial Revolution”, Harvard Business Review, September 2010.
3. George Washington Institute of Public Policy, The Brookings Institution, "Corporate Citizenship and Urban Problem Solving: The Changing Civic Role of Business Leaders in American Cities, Washington DC, 2006.
4. Piskorski, Mikotaj Jan, "Social Strategies That Work", Harvard Business Review, November, 2011.



This final section contains representative support articles drawn from our research. The first three articles deal with chamber operations, discussing growing chambers, non-dues revenue prospects, etc.

The fourth and fifth articles and summaries deal with the all-important imperative of business getting more involved in a community and educating others as to the need and conditions for business and employer growth.

A final article discusses ways in which social media can be used to strengthen the Chamber's messaging to the membership, board members, non-members, and the community-at-large.