



The Seattle Metropolitan Area

The Region

The Greater Seattle area is a leading center for advanced technology in computer software, bioinformatics, genomics, telemedicine, electronics, medical equipment, and environmental engineering. Microsoft, the world's leading personal computer software company, is one of 2,500 software development firms in the state. Biotechnology and medical technology generate \$2 billion annually in the state's economy. By the year 2005, these industries are projected to employ 26,000 people, account for more than \$2 billion in R&D expenditures and generate revenues of approximately \$5 billion annually in the state's economy. Other major industries include wood products, transportation equipment, food products, fish processing, and apparel design.

Additionally, the Defense Department is one of the largest employers in the Puget Sound region. Major facilities include Fort Lewis Army Base, the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, Bangor Naval Submarine Base, McChord Air Force Base, and Naval Station Everett. Seattle has been ranked as one of the best U.S. cities in which to locate a business according to several recent surveys. Key factors are Seattle's skilled workforce, manufacturing capability, education and research, quality transportation and infrastructure, access to international and domestic markets, and government accessibility. Other important factors are cultural diversity, an international perspective and quality of life.

Regional Business-Led Organizations

In the Greater Seattle area, there are two main business-led civic organizations — the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce and The Regional Partnership (TRP). The Greater Seattle Chamber is the traditional membership-based business organization and is the largest chamber of commerce in Western Washington with nearly 2,500 members. The Seattle Chamber is focused on enhancing and fostering regional cooperation, especially across jurisdictional boundaries. The Seattle Chamber hopes that by fostering regional thinking and coordination, business and civic leaders in the region will be better able to address critical challenges facing the region.

TRP is a coalition of community leaders and organizations from King, Pierce and Snohomish counties. TRP's agenda is focused on supporting key industries in the region — health, computer science, airplane and advanced manufacturing. TRP is also focused on protecting and enhancing the ports and regional transportation system. The organization has also launched efforts to support higher education, workforce training and the continued operation and/or potential expansion of military bases in the region.

The Regional Business-Civic Landscape

Business leaders throughout the Puget Sound region recognized that in order for the business and civic communities to cooperate with each other more efficiently and effectively, a new mechanism to foster regional collaboration needed to be instituted that could cut across multi-jurisdictional lines. Accordingly, at the annual 2002 Regional Leadership Conference, leaders from all sectors decided that it was time to create an entity that could bring diverse leaders and ideas to the table in order to foster solutions to solve critical regional problems. This resulted in the creation of The Regional Partnership. TRP has no full-time staff and maintains a fairly modest budget. However, TRP is seen by many business leaders as an authoritative and powerful instrument in the region. One of the reasons for this is TRP's membership, which includes four chambers and three economic development councils as well as cities throughout the region that act as partners.

Despite TRP's rise in prominence and influence, the Greater Seattle Chamber still considers itself the primary convener, business advocate and community partner in the region. More importantly, the Greater Seattle Chamber is not looking to be moved aside as the convener and catalyst in the region, but instead would like TRP to play a complimentary role to the Chamber's efforts. The Greater Seattle Chamber strives to be the force that brings everyone who is involved in solving regional issues together. According to Steve Leahy, President and CEO of the Greater Seattle Chamber, "[Our] Board is the tool through which the organization has been able to influence our connectedness and depth across the four-county area."

Business Leadership

Business leaders in the Seattle area say that there is a high level of civic engagement by business leaders today. However, this level of engagement is probably less than it was ten years ago for a couple of reasons. First, business leaders say local businesses have been affected by the change in the corporate structure. Businesses have become more international and no longer identify like they did in the past with a particular region or city. This has reduced the amount of time spent by business leaders on regional civic issues. The second factor contributing to a lower level of civic engagement is the region's expansion. According to some leaders, the population is much more dispersed now, which makes it difficult for business and civic leaders to focus on regional issues because they cut across so many political jurisdictions.

Although business leaders' attention given to regional civic issues has declined over the years, the business community's influence has not. According to business leaders in the Seattle region, this level of influence is high. The major reason for this, according to Steve Leahy from the Greater Seattle Chamber, is that the weak economy in the Seattle area has led to high credibility ratings for the Chamber and the business community in polls. Polls indicate that there is a level of support for the business community by residents. According to Leahy, "The interpretation is that people were speaking their economic insecurity and saying that we hope business people know their way out of this mess — we're more inclined to follow their lead since we don't know what else to do. There's no single individual who has this kind of authority."