

Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce

Overview

The Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce is the region's major business-led organization. It covers a seven-county metropolitan area and has a core membership base of small companies. Eighty-five percent of its 2,700 members are small businesses.

The Chamber's mission is to promote economic vitality and quality of life in the region. The Chamber's newly formed affiliate, the Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation (EDC), is an initiative to coordinate regional economic development efforts. It focuses on marketing and recruiting new business as well as coordinating a new program to increase retention of existing business. Formerly a program of the Chamber, the EDC became an affiliate in 2004. The Chamber is its largest investor, contributing \$1 million annually. The President and Chief Executive of the Chamber, Joseph Blake, is also the President of the EDC.

In addition to a strong emphasis on economic development, the Chamber focuses its regional efforts on transportation and water quality.

Regional Priorities

One of the Chamber's largest areas of investment and interest in 2004 is regional economic development. In early 2004, the Metro Denver Network began operating as the Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation. The EDC is the region's expanded marketing, recruitment, and retention initiative. The separation from the Chamber was made in response to criticism by economic development agencies, believing that the Metro Denver Network had lost its focus and influence as a program within the Chamber. Leaders expect the transition to increase the group's profile, in addition to help raise more money. The EDC launched a \$12.5 million fundraising campaign in March 2004.

One of the EDC's priorities is corporate recruitment, which combines a national marketing campaign with a state-of-the-art prospect management system. A staff of six makes up a central processing

ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOT

Type of Organization

Exclusively led by companies or employers

Unit of Membership

Company/organization

Number of Members

2003: 2,700
1998: 3,000

Membership by Company Size

Small Companies: 85%
Mid-sized Companies: 12%
Large Companies: 3%

Dues Determined by

Flat dues or fees; some dues are also determined by the number of company employees.

Annual Dues Paid by

Largest Member Companies: \$1,200
Smallest Member Companies: \$400

Annual Operating Budget

2003: \$2 million to less than \$5 million
1998: \$2 million to less than \$5 million

Staff Members (FTE)

2003: 50
1998: 58

Board Members

2003: 55

Regional Priorities

Economic Development,
Transportation, Water Quality

unit that electronically coordinates the activities of its 58 public, private, and economic development partners within the seven-county metro area. Under the system, when a local partner is contacted by a prospect, the information goes into a central database. Each EDC partner can access the database, view exactly where the prospect is looking, and determine its current needs. If the prospect is interested in the region, one can access more information about the company. Proposals are then established and developed online.

DON'T LET THEM SLIP AWAY: METRO DENVER SPOTLIGHTS RETENTION

The Metro Denver EDC has launched a new business retention initiative that analyzes the risk of closure or relocation of existing companies in the region. The effort uses volunteers from its 58 partner agencies to survey existing businesses. The volunteers ask questions such as: What are the company's growth needs? What kind of assistance is needed? They enter the results into a database which then spits out trends analysis, customized company profiles regarding site visits and assistance requests and growth prospects.

Such programs are used elsewhere, but what's different about the EDC effort is its use of new web-based retention software that takes data analysis one step further by analyzing the risk of closure or relocation.

More than 1,000 companies have been surveyed in the first few months of the EDC's effort.

The process is governed by a set of principles and an agreed-on code of ethics. These two documents underline the contract among users to sell the region first and the individual communities second. Transparency and a culture of cooperation are key to the system's success, says Tom Clark, Executive Vice President of the EDC.

The retention effort, using new web-based software, will survey and identify critical issues facing existing businesses in the region. (See "Don't Let Them Slip Away" on this page.)

In addition to economic development, the Chamber focuses much of its regional efforts on infrastructure issues. Transportation and water quality are two key areas. Chamber President and CEO Joseph Blake calls these areas the "bread and butter work" of the chamber.

In 2000 and 2002, the Chamber released a series of white papers on the region's transportation crisis. The first white paper identified the expansion needs and funding shortfalls of the region's transportation system. The second paper outlined alternative funding options for regional and statewide transit. Shortly after the release of the second white paper, the Chamber led the broad-based Transportation Coalition to assert the coalition and business community's position with the Governor and General

Assembly. With the Chamber's support, the Colorado General Assembly funded and reauthorized the statewide transportation program in 2002.

The Chamber has also organized an internal water task force to increase the business community's understanding of the state's growing water needs and concerns. In 2002, a scarcity of water was exacerbated by one of the state's driest years. Regional leaders are calling it a crisis.

In 2003, the Chamber worked with a coalition of municipal, business and citizen interests to develop the "Colorado 64 Water Principles." The Principles set out guidelines for balancing the needs of water rights owners with practices to reduce negative impacts on the water supply. The Principles were approved by representatives of Colorado's 64 counties. The Chamber also boosted public dialogue on water issues with a white paper in 2003 called, "Water: What It Means to Business."

Structure and Operations

The Metro Denver Chamber has 2,700 members, down from 3,000 in 1998. Chamber leaders blame the decline on the economic downturn. About 83 percent of Chamber members are small companies, most coming from the healthcare, financial, real estate, manufacturing and utility sectors. The Chamber is led by a 55-member Board of Directors.

The Chamber's budget is in the range of \$2 million to \$5 million and leaders expect it to stay about the same over the next two years. Revenue from member dues makes up 85 percent of the budget, ranging from \$400 for small companies to \$1,200 for large companies annually. Chamber leaders hope to balance their revenue mix with more revenue coming from non-traditional sources, such as sponsorships and publications.

The Chamber has six committees, including transportation, education, and public affairs. It convenes a task force for short-term issues that need the Chamber's attention. The Chamber formed a "transition 2003 task force" to aid the Denver municipal elections and the change to a new mayor. A water task force was established as well to address the region's water crisis after a drought in 2002. The Chamber organized a city-to-city leader exchange program, whose most recent trip was to Seattle, in addition to leadership development programs under the Denver Metro Chamber Foundation.