

Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce

Overview

The Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce (GACC) is a private, nonprofit membership-driven organization comprised of almost 2,400 business enterprises, civic organizations, and education institutions. GACC's mission is to provide leadership that will help create regional economic prosperity and success for its members in Central Texas. The Chamber tries to support economic prosperity in the region by generating business opportunities, creating an environment for sustained prosperity, leading economic development efforts and providing an environment for networking.

GACC has gone through some major changes recently — last year it hired a new President and CEO and is in the process of rebuilding the organization.

Regional Priorities

The Greater Austin region's economy has been affected by the recent recession in many ways. There has been substantial job loss of high paying technology jobs throughout the region, especially in the semiconductor industry. This is worrisome for business leaders because the steep decline in high-wage, high-skill jobs translates into a decline in sales and other taxes, which puts services in jeopardy. Recently, the harsh economic reality of Austin's economy has forced city leaders to prioritize and streamline the city budget.

Because GACC is concerned about the effects that massive job loss will have on the economic prosperity of the region, it has focused on developing strategies that aim to build up the regional economy. For example, GACC completed a five-year, five-county plan last year that provided a "roadmap for recovery" to rejuvenate the Austin economy and create jobs. The goal of the plan is to create 72,000 new jobs in five years along with a \$2.9 billion aggregate increase in payroll. The plan will cost an estimated \$11 million, much of it in private donations.

GACC is also interested in playing a larger role in setting the local agenda. GACC is now focused on removing impediments

ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOT

Type of Organization

Exclusively business-led

Unit of Membership

Company/organization

Number of Members

2003: 2,350

1998: 1,900

Membership by Company Size

Small Companies: 90%

Mid-sized Companies: 8%

Large Companies: 2%

Dues Determined by

Number of company employees

Annual Dues Paid by

Largest Member Companies: \$14,000

Smallest Member Companies: \$425

Annual Operating Budget

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

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

Staff Members (FTE)

2003: 23

1998: 36

Board Members

2003: 36

Regional Priorities

Job Creation; Creating Business

Opportunities for Members;

Sustainable Economic Development

OPPORTUNITY AUSTIN

In 2003, the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce undertook a new initiative designed to create jobs, diversify the economy, attract new businesses to the area and retain and grow existing businesses. The effort, called “Opportunity Austin,” first began with an economic development analysis study conducted by Market Street Services of Atlanta. The study included an evaluation of the region’s economic structure, strengths and core industries. It also analyzed the region’s competitiveness in the global economy. The results of the analysis have been used to provide GACC with a five-year strategy for sustainable economic prosperity.

For more information, see www.austinchamber.com.

to business growth. For instance, the average time for business permitting is 222 days. GACC feels this process takes too long and is working with trade associations and the local Hispanic chamber to encourage the city of Austin to speed up this process. In addition to getting the business community more engaged in city issues, GACC is also trying to increase voter turnout for local elections to avoid a situation from the 1990s, when voter turnout was extremely low.

Structure and Operations

GACC has a professional and administrative staff of 23. It is governed by a Board of Directors and funded by annual membership dues. The organization’s program of work is carried out by volunteers from member companies as well as its professional staff. Each year, hundreds of GACC volunteers work on a variety of committees and programs to help the GACC shape public policy issues and accomplish goals that advance the economic vitality of the community.