

Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce

Overview

Founded in 1890 by Colonel Eli Lilly and a group of Indianapolis business leaders, the Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce is a not-for-profit organization with 3,400 members, a staff of 32 and a budget of \$3.5 million. Its affiliate organizations and programs bring about change in specific areas of economic development. The main activities are public policy initiatives, issues identification and management, economic and business information, a group health insurance program, networking events and acting as a liaison with other community organizations.

The Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce tries to create a climate for business growth. The Chamber has traditionally taken an indirect approach to regional issues, by focusing on changing policy through the Legislature to create the right business climate for Central Indiana. The Chamber has played a lead or supporting role on downtown school issues, transportation and regional sewer and storm water issues. The Chamber adopted a new agenda for 2004-2007, however, that maps out a more ambitious and broader regional strategy.

Regional Priorities

In the last three years the Chamber has focused on city school infrastructure planning, research for a nine-county transportation plan and the division of the region's sewer system from its storm water runoff.

One of the Chamber's most ambitious efforts has been its downtown school initiative in 2001-2002, which included a Facilities Plan Task Force to improve the infrastructure of the City of Indianapolis' school system. After extensive study and discussion, the Task Force offered solutions that would generate \$90 million per year in revenue or cost savings to Indianapolis' public schools. The Chamber raised money to staff the task force and hired consultants to offer alternatives. The Chamber also helped devise a marketing program to promote the downtown school initiative, and its President, John S. Myrland, is a strong advocate for it.

ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOT

Type of Organization

Primarily led by companies or employers

Unit of Membership

Company/organization

Number of Members

2003: 3,400

1998: 2,900

Membership by Company Size

Small Companies: 81%

Mid-sized Companies: 14%

Large Companies: 5%

Dues Determined by

Number of employees, typically; dues are negotiated for Board members and largest member companies

Annual Dues Paid by

Largest Member Companies: \$75,000

Smallest Member Companies: \$450

Annual Operating Budget

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

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

Staff Members (FTE)

2003: 32

1998: 35

Board Members

2003: 90

Regional Priorities

Downtown Schools, Transportation, Sewer and Storm Water

In 2003 the Chamber updated its agenda for the next three years with a more regional focus. Economic expansion is one of the Chamber's chief regional priorities. The Chamber has worked closely with the IndyPartnership, the region's economic development arm, to consolidate functions and coordinate efforts. The new agenda also identifies life sciences as a priority, urging Central Indiana to provide incentives to grow the industry. A third regional priority is regional planning and transportation. The Chamber is urging regional municipalities to cooperate on capital improvement planning and environmental compliance and on the creation of a regional transportation authority. Finally, the Chamber's new agenda maintains its commitment to core city development and education and regional workforce development issues.

Structure and Operations

The Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce grew in membership by 500 companies from 1998 to 2003. Today's membership stands at 3,400, of which 81 percent are small businesses. Membership is at its highest point in 15 years.

The Chamber's 90-member Board of Directors includes five councils. "An advantage of the council structure," says incoming Chairman David Griffiths, "is that it provides a structure for participation among members." "It also enables the Chamber to prioritize its needs in a systematic way," he said.

The Chamber expects its operating budget to stay roughly the same in the next three years. As a way to boost revenues, the Chamber is looking at affinity programs and products to sell to encourage members to use the Chamber as a branding or marketing arm for their companies.