



## **The Chamber, Gadsden/Etowah County 2015-2019 Strategic Plan**

### Overview of the Process

The Chamber, Gadsden/Etowah County is a nonprofit membership organization representing more than 760 businesses. The Chamber acts as the voice for businesses in the county and is driven by a vision to be the catalyst organization that ensures Etowah County is a vibrant place to do business, work and live. The Chamber's mission is to be a catalyst for economic growth in Etowah County by serving member businesses through advocacy, education, and community partnerships.

This strategic plan provides an overall framework for action during a five year span (January 2015 – December 2019) with the intent to supply flexibility through more detailed tactics within each annual program of work. Progress is measured and reported quarterly.

The initial plan was developed over a 12-month period in 2012 using the following guiding principles:

- **Clarity:** the plan should be designed so that it delivers accountability while being easy to understand, access and report outcomes
- **Inclusivity:** It is important to ensure that a variety of voices are heard in the process, including those of leadership, staff, members, volunteers and community partners.
- **Relevancy:** The plan should reflect Chamber vision, mission and values as well as the desired direction of the leadership.

The plan's development process included the following steps:

Information Gathering  
(February – April 2012)



Determination of Common Themes and Areas of Focus  
(May – July 2012)



Draft Development  
(August – October 2012)



Review of Draft Plan  
(October - November 2012)



Plan Approval  
(December 2012)



Membership Survey for SWOT Analysis  
(July 2015)



2015-2019 Redlined Strategic Plan Proposed  
(October 2015)



2015-2019 Updated Plan Approval  
(estimated December 2015)

The information gathering process encompassed the opinions of 100 people surveyed through an online survey. Other relevant data including past surveys, historical information, benchmarks and best practices was also examined.

Three common themes resulted from the analysis. Stakeholders believed the Chamber should:

- Build on current momentum, while increasing focus and accountability, thereby increasing The Chamber's effectiveness in the business community
- Remember that small business is important, and advocate accordingly in local and state public affairs
- Work to build collaboration and cooperation between all forms of local government, education and public service to benefit the business climate.

Across various stakeholder groups there was a feeling of strong positive momentum at The Chamber. The Chamber was reminded to be inclusive on a variety of levels and to better document the collaborative role the organization plays. It was also emphasized that the general membership needs clear and continual communication about programs and services available to them through their membership. Creating a more diverse environment was also a clearly stated priority.

As a result of the information and analysis, five areas of focus were developed which ultimately became these five goals:

- **Education:** Create and/or support personal development opportunities at the elementary, high school, college and professional levels in an effort to develop and retain a well-trained, career-driven workforce.
- **Workforce Development:** Assess skills needed to satisfy workforce demand and work to attract and retain talent by improving collaboration between public and private sectors and determining the barriers to accessing training and gaining employment.
- **Economic Prosperity:** Ensure that the county's business climate is competitive for existing and future companies by maximizing existing partnerships to fully complement innovation and proactive planning, supporting small business in efforts to launch and succeed, and utilizing targeted marketing to support county prosperity.
- **Community Stewardship:** Work to make residents and businesses strong advocates for existing quality of life benefits and future prospects by working to prove quality of life amenities and initiatives, engaging in pro-business public affairs initiatives and developing and implementing recognition programs for member retention and growth.
- **Leadership:** Organize the business community to serve as a powerful, proactive voice for a unified, progressive vision through board development, committee participation and active plan champions.

In 2015, the President and Chair Elect reviewed and redlined the plan to update for new activities, activities that have been eliminated since inception and to incorporate survey data collected from a membership survey designed to collect strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats from the

perspective of the general membership. The following pages highlight each of the six goals, measures of success and general strategies for the Chamber's operating focus from January 2015 through December 2019. More detailed plans of action will be presented annually in the organization's program of work.

Progress on this strategic plan, as directed by the program of work, is reported quarterly. Each year's 4<sup>th</sup> quarter report will also summarize the year and review the successes against annual measure and goals.

# **EDUCATION**

Create and/or support personal development opportunities at the elementary, high school, college and professional levels in an effort to develop and retain a well-trained, career-driven workforce.

## **GENERAL STRATEGIES**

- Professional-Level Development
  - Leadership Etowah
- High School-Level Development
  - Student Council Leadership
  - Support BEST program
  - Career Exploration Program
- Elementary School-Level Development
  - Support Invention Convention through city enrichment program
- Middle School-Level Development
  - Occupation Orientation
  - Worlds of Work – partnership with Region 5 Workforce Development counties
- College-Level Development
  - Student Association Memberships
- Partnership/collaboration with Jr. Achievement and United Way of Etowah county to enhance mentorship programs

## **REPORTING**

- Number of courses completed during quarter for each program
- Number of participants per each program
- A short, written report on progress of annual priorities, delivered through the President's Activity Report at regular board meetings.
- Develop a scorecard that indicates hours, number of people, and number of classes per program

## **ANNUAL OUTCOME MEASURES**

- Full implementation of each program
- Participant engagement and satisfaction
  - Student participation
  - Sponsor participation
  - Speaker participation

# **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Assess skills needed to satisfy workforce demand and work to attract and retain talent by improving collaboration between public and private sectors and determining the barriers to accessing training and gaining employment.

## **GENERAL STRATEGIES**

- Intern database – work with area colleges and universities to partner available interns at member facilities matching skillsets to needs.
- Industrial Skills and Needs Summit – annual roundtable forum with industry and education leaders to determine the skillsets needed for workforce demands and advocate for program development.
- Active participation in Region 5 Workforce Development Council
- Etowah HR Professional Partnership

## **REPORTING**

- A short, written report on progress of annual priorities, delivered through the President's Activity Report at regular board meetings.

## **ANNUAL OUTCOME MEASURES**

- Internship success stories , possibly leading to gainful employment
- Employment opportunities fulfilled with local workforce
- New program development to meet area needs
- Increased knowledge and regional collaboration through participation in Region 5 Workforce Development Council

## **ECONOMIC PROSPERITY**

Ensure that the county's business climate is competitive for existing and future companies by maximizing existing partnerships to fully complement innovation and proactive planning, supporting small business in efforts to launch and succeed, and utilizing targeted marketing to support county prosperity.

### **GENERAL STRATEGIES**

- Social media marketing through various outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Constant Contact and others.
- Small business support through training opportunities, Ambassador Club program, implementation of business expos/retail shows, continued support through ribbon cuttings and grand opening celebrations and annual opportunities for business disaster planning.
- Local and regional networking opportunities that allow for growth of small business
- Targeted print and electronic marketing opportunities that showcase small businesses and their products.
- Support Industrial Development Authority in efforts to attract and retain manufacturing and industrial facilities.
- Utilize business and individual mentoring programs.
  - Operation HOPE partnership to develop entrepreneurs in disadvantaged populations.
  - Utilize partnership with Jacksonville State University's Small Business Development Center to provide specific one-on-one mentoring, as well as public programs and workshops
- Business Incubation Research – develop partnerships and complete a feasibility study on business incubation opportunities within the county and advocate for development where feasible.

### **REPORTING**

- A short, written report on progress of annual priorities, delivered through the President's Activity Report at regular board meetings.

### **ANNUAL OUTCOME MEASURES**

- Measured growth in new small businesses.
- Measured retention of existing small businesses.
- Measured growth and sustainability of participation in networking and training opportunities.
- Development of workshops and programs delivered by JSU's SBDC and Operation HOPE.

## **COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP**

Work to make residents and businesses strong advocates for existing quality of life benefits and future prospects by working to improve area amenities and initiatives, engaging in pro-business public affairs initiatives and developing and implementing recognition programs for member retention and growth.

### **GENERAL STRATEGIES**

- Advocacy on pressing issues that negatively impact the business community (i.e. expansion of Interstate 759, future of Federal Building, etc.)
- Strategic philanthropy through employee representation on area boards and participation in area fundraisers and activities.
- Programs and activities that promote female leadership in business.
- Public affairs initiatives such as education on amendments, forums and roundtables with elected officials, legislative breakfasts, etc.
- Participate in/create awards and recognition programs, both locally and statewide, that recognize excellence in business leadership, longevity and dedication to the economic community.
- Work to enhance the image and goodwill of The Chamber throughout municipalities and unincorporated areas.

### **REPORTING**

- A short, written report on progress of annual priorities, delivered through the President's Activity Report at regular board meetings.

### **ANNUAL OUTCOME MEASURES**

- Greater accessibility and participation from local delegation
- Greater statewide and local recognition of businesses, organizations and companies from Etowah County



## **LEADERSHIP**

Organize the business community to serve as a powerful, proactive voice for a unified, progressive vision through board development, committee participation and active plan champions.

### GENERAL STRATEGIES

- Continue to build a strong, diverse and active board of directors
- Strategic development of division vice presidents that oversee active committees consisting of board members and members-at-large.
- Identification of specific program plan champions that are voluntarily responsible for the oversight and success of initiatives.
- Municipal collaboration with mayors
  - Consider a partnership with local non-profit for a Mayors' Prayer Breakfast or hosting one Mayor's Association Meeting per year at the Chamber.

### QUARTERLY REPORTING

- A short, written report on progress of annual priorities, delivered through the President's Activity Report at regular board meetings.

### ANNUAL OUTCOME MEASURES

- Increased diversity on board of directors
- Restated bylaws identifying standing committees, terms and position responsibilities.
- Program committee chairs and plan champions that engage and activate membership.