

# THE BIG BOOK *of* CHAMBER IDEAS

10 AWARD-WINNING & REPLICABLE  
IDEAS FOR CHAMBERS OF  
COMMERCE  
**VOL. 5**



2018 CHAMBER  
INNOVATION  
AWARD COMPETITION

# THE BIG BOOK *of* CHAMBER IDEAS

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# INTRODUCTION

The next time you and your chamber staff plan an event or program, you can hit the ground running with these winning program and event ideas from the 5th annual Chamber Innovation Awards Competition.

A record number of over 200 exceptional entries were received from an array of chambers of all sizes from across the U.S. and Canada.

Entries were judged on creativity, industry impact, value to members, and replicability. The winning chamber was awarded the \$1,500 grand prize. Additionally, there were three \$500 prizes awarded to the first-place winner in each of the following categories: Small Chamber, Medium Chamber, and Large Chamber.

The contest was highly competitive and resulted in Honorable Mention recognition, as well as a list of Accolades as an acknowledgement of additional noteworthy programs.

We hope you enjoy paging through these winning ideas and find inspiration that helps your chamber make an impact.



2018 CHAMBER  
INNOVATION  
AWARD COMPETITION

# GRAND PRIZE

**IDEA:**

"Relaunch: Career Reentry For Professional Women"

**CHAMBER:**

Winter Park Chamber of Commerce

**LOCATION:**

Winter Park, FL



WINTER PARK

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

PROGRAM VIDEO

## A CHAMBER'S WIN-WIN

*Helping women relaunch their careers.*

Businesses in Winter Park, Florida were struggling to attract, hire, and retain the right people. Additionally, there were women in the community trying to establish a path to reenter the job market.

Winter Park Chamber President/CEO, Betsy Gardner Eckbert, saw an opportunity and took action. The chamber's response was two-fold: provide a solution to help their members while making a difference for women.

The result? Relaunch: Career Reentry for Professional Women – an innovative program created by the chamber for women who have taken time away from the workforce and now find themselves back in the market for a job.

Based on her own experience, Gardner Eckbert feels that the single greatest step toward career reentry is closing the confidence gap. The chamber's program provides meaningful training to help participants boost their confidence, build their resumes, and foster a network. The eight-month curriculum covers everything from building a personal brand to leveraging LinkedIn. Sessions include The Psychology of Career Reentry, Developing Your Personal Brand, Your Elevator Pitch, and Practicing for the Interview.

More than half of the first class of graduates have gone on to find rewarding jobs, and at least one has switched professions as she'd always wanted to do.

The positive buzz about the program has sent applicant numbers soaring, so the chamber's next scheduled class is significantly larger than the previous class.

Relaunch contributes to the community by helping member businesses build a solid workforce and giving women a path back to the job force. It's a win-win-win for the community, members, and individuals.

*"Through our Relaunch program, we're helping to build a qualified, diverse workforce for the businesses in our community. We're also helping women build their resumes, confidence, and network so they can successfully reclaim their professional careers, which is also very important."*

**Betsy Gardner Eckbert**

PRESIDENT & CEO |  
Winter Park Chamber of Commerce

# FIRST PLACE

## LARGE CHAMBER

**IDEA:**

“Fierce Urgency of Now Festival”

**CHAMBER:**

Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce

**LOCATION:**

Boston, MA

[PROGRAM WEBSITE](#)



**Greater Boston**  
Chamber of Commerce

## A FESTIVAL WITH A PURPOSE

*Energizing Millennials of Color to Unlock a City's Promise.*

In a recent report issued in partnership with The Boston Foundation, the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce found a divergent experience for millennials of color in the region. In addition to revealing that “Black and Latino millennials are most likely to report having incomes insufficient to meet their needs,” the report confirmed the ongoing narrative of Greater Boston as an unwelcoming destination for young professionals of color.

Half of the workforce in Boston is classified as millennials, and nearly half of those millennials are racial minorities. As a result of the report and the current demographic data, the chamber recognized that Boston must improve its image and increase access to opportunities for millennials of color in order to continue to compete globally for exceptional talent.

The chamber's City Awake [www.cityawake.org](http://www.cityawake.org) initiative was designed to empower, engage and celebrate the next generation of Greater Boston leaders. As part of its CityAwake programming, the chamber launched The Fierce Urgency of Now Festival (FUN), a six-day, city-wide festival designed to highlight the experiences and challenges of, and possibilities for, millennials of color in Boston.

In addition to its core mission, the program served to gather information from this target demographic about their experiences living and working in the region. The Fierce Urgency of Now Festival (FUN)

provides the chamber with the information in order to advocate for policies and initiatives that help young professionals.

The Fierce Urgency of Now Festival (FUN) is the first-of-its-kind program, with the ultimate goal of creating a community where all feel welcome and all can succeed. With amazing support from their membership, the chamber organized more than 40 unique events hosted by a variety of organizations.

Knowing that Greater Boston's success will continue to depend on its ability to attract and retain diverse, young talent, the chamber is dedicated to making Greater Boston the best place for young professionals to start and grow careers and businesses.

*“Boston's workforce today is younger and more diverse than ever before, and while the region is thriving thanks to this incredible young talent, we know that millennials of color are experiencing a completely different city. The FUNinBOS festival is about bringing those challenges to the forefront, creating dialogue, and embracing real opportunities for connection and change.”*

**James E. Rooney**

PRESIDENT & CEO |

Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce

# FIRST PLACE

## MEDIUM CHAMBER

**IDEA:**

“The Whistler Experience”

**CHAMBER:**

Whistler Chamber of Commerce

**LOCATION:**

Whistler, BC

# Whistler<sup>®</sup> Chamber™

[PROGRAM WEBSITE](#)

## THE TIDE RISES ALL BOATS

### *The Whistler Experience.*

The Whistler Chamber of Commerce partnered with the University of Victoria (UVic) to build a service leadership program that provides local organizations with the resources necessary to deliver world-class service.

The result? The Whistler Experience – a suite of programs powered by UVic’s Gustavson School of Business. The programs leverage learning partnerships that help organizations provide powerful customer experiences.

Developed by Dr. Mark Colgate, an award-winning Professor of Service Excellence, The Whistler Experience approach focuses on the 3Rs: be Reliable, be Responsive, and build Relationships.

Customer experience is critical to the success of the entire Whistler resort. The Whistler Experience approach offers a methodology that can be consistently taught at every business – large and small – and in any sector. By leveraging the large scale of the resort, the chamber is able to make the training affordable – especially for small businesses.

Through the Whistler Experience, the chamber is able to offer a growing framework of programs and resources which strengthen individual business models to sustain excellence and add to the bottom line. In addition to its training courses, the program

offers tools, such as an Implementation Guide, a Secret Shopper Program, and a Recruitment & Retention Toolkit.

Since its inception, hundreds of organizations have implemented the core content and 20,000 people (approximately 50% of the annual workforce) have attended the training.

Secret Shopper reports and resort-wide guest satisfaction indicate the program’s positive impact on the guest experience. Recent statistics show that over 85% of visitors were satisfied in all 3Rs.

*“The Whistler Chamber of Commerce has been instrumental in engaging businesses to further improve the resort’s excellent customer service. This commitment is a cornerstone to Whistler’s overall guest experience and therefore to the continuing economic success of the resort community as a whole.”*

**Nancy Wilhelm-Morden**

MAYOR | Resort Municipality of Whistler

# FIRST PLACE

## SMALL CHAMBER

**IDEA:**

#SmartAndWise "Did You Know?" Campaign

**CHAMBER:**

The Berrien County Chamber of Commerce and Dev. Authority

**LOCATION:**

Nashville, GA



[PROGRAM WEBSITE](#)

## WATCHA WANNA DO TODAY?

*It's lights, camera, action for these member businesses.*

Beginning a job as a chamber director is tough. Filling the shoes of a leader who had been in the position for ten years can be daunting. As the new director of the Berrien County Chamber of Commerce and Development Authority, Lisa Smart knew she needed to hit the ground running and make a name for herself.

Smart understood that local businesses were feeling the impact of big chain stores in surrounding communities. She partnered with their Main Street Director, Jill Wise, to brainstorm for an affordable way to support local merchants. The goal? To remind the community what their town offers with a "Yes, you can get that here" focus.

The duo decided to launch an online video series. The concept: Each video spotlights a member business which provides a product or service relevant to the time of year. For example, the summer episodes focus on pool companies, A/C service providers, etc.

The process is not only simple but a lot of fun. A member business requests to be featured and in return, they offer a prize (usually around \$50-150). The videos include shots of the business as well as casual, humorous banter between Smart and Wise.

Through the interaction, they share details about the business using their catchphrase, "Did you know?" Both the catchphrase and the hashtag, #SmartAndWise (a take on their last names), have caught on.

They conclude the episodes by highlighting the prize giveaway. To enter, the viewer must "like" the Facebook pages of the chamber and the sponsoring member, and also share the post.

Each episode is around 3-4 minutes and is produced using inexpensive equipment and basic editing software. The result? The community loves the videos, and the chamber is flooded with requests from members requesting to take part in the program. Their first video had over 8500 views and 80 new "likes" for both the chamber's and member's Facebook pages.

The program has created greater awareness about the community and provided fantastic exposure for the chamber and its member businesses. And, Community feedback included comments such as, "I didn't know that business offered that." And "We were headed out of town to buy that exact thing because I didn't know our town had that."

#SmartAndWise has completed nine videos to date and have plans for eight more in the coming season.

# HONORABLE MENTION

## LARGE CHAMBER

**IDEA:**

"South Central Kentucky Learning About Unique and New Careers Here (SCK LAUNCH) Experience"

**CHAMBER:**

Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce

**LOCATION:**

Bowling Green, KY



**Bowling Green Area**  
Chamber of Commerce

[PROGRAM WEBSITE](#)

[PROGRAM VIDEO](#)

## **BUILDING THE PIPELINE TO ECONOMIC GROWTH**

### *A Chamber's Commitment to Developing a Skilled Workforce.*

The Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce is committed to stimulating economic development in south-central Kentucky.

The results from a regional labor market survey showed that demand for talent will more than triple over the next ten years. Additionally, the majority of employer-respondents expressed concern about maintaining a skilled and motivated workforce and cited limited access to skilled workers as a major barrier to expansion.

The chamber initiated the SCK LAUNCH Experience (South Central Kentucky Learning About Unique and New Careers Here Experience") to provide career-related, hands-on activities to help area students recognize the link between educational pathways and career opportunities. The program introduces 8th-grade students to the regional business sectors that are projected to have high job growth and strong demand. Through the program, students are exposed to a variety of career opportunities, as well as the educational requirements of each.

Students are introduced to local business sectors as part of the SCK LAUNCH Experience classroom curriculum. They then attend a hands-on career expo, where they are given the opportunity to actively

participate in interactive exhibits such as operating a virtual reality welder, performing simulated medical procedures, and learning how large construction equipment works.

The program is designed to allow for scalability and portability. Since its inception, the number of SCK LAUNCH Experience student participants has increased from 1,725 to 3,300.

The program provides important knowledge and resources to participants while building the pipeline for robust, economic activity. The result? Development of local talent so desperately needed for businesses to grow.

*"We believe providing an opportunity for middle school students to experience the world of work helps them chart an intentional path for future career success."*

**Meredith Rozanski**

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce, Inc.



# HONORABLE MENTION

## LARGE CHAMBER

**IDEA:**

“Business Success Platform”

**CHAMBER:**

Greater Lafayette Commerce

**LOCATION:**

Lafayette, IN

[PROGRAM WEBSITE](#)

Greater  
**Lafayette  
Commerce**



## WHEN BUSINESSES ARE SUCCESSFUL, SO ARE COMMUNITIES

*Developing leadership skills among business owners is only the beginning.*

The Greater Lafayette Commerce has a mission: to advance economic and community prosperity for a superior quality of life. With that in mind, the Business Success Platform was developed as part of the organization’s strategic plan to position the chamber as a supportive partner to small businesses by providing just-in-time information and professional development opportunities.

The effort began with a survey, which concluded that as area businesses began to grow, many small business owners struggled with the transition from the role of founder to that of CEO. From that discovery came the decision to develop a series of programs to provide solutions to common challenges faced by business owners.

The Platform has four goals: 1) It must provide information quickly. 2) It must facilitate meaningful relationships that contribute to business owners’ support networks. 3) It must assist in the development of improved decision-making algorithms among participants. 4) It should further the leadership skills of business people, leading to participation in community efforts.

In order to accomplish these goals, nine programs were developed covering everything from decision-making skills to technology trends as well as navigating threats to exploiting opportunities.

Knowing that successful small businesses are vital to developing and maintaining vibrant communities, Greater Lafayette invests in preserving community culture and history. Additionally, member businesses often have higher economic multipliers because much of the revenue they generate remains in the area.

The result? The Business Success Platform is contributing to quality of life by fostering an environment which emboldens the creative class, supports entrepreneurship, and develops leaders with strong ties to the community. As a bonus, there is increased motivation to preserve the culture and history of the area.

*“We developed our Business Success Platform in response to our members’ need to help build their skills. The suite of nine programs are designed to help cultivate business owners, solve specific business problems, and are tailored to their stage of business. We know that great business owners have the opportunity to become great civic leaders, and we are partnering with members to create our community’s next, great leaders.”*

**Scott Walker**

PRESIDENT AND CEO

Greater Lafayette Commerce

# HONORABLE MENTION

## MEDIUM CHAMBER

**IDEA:**

“Chico Retail Watch”

**CHAMBER:**

Chico Chamber of Commerce

**LOCATION:**

Chico, CA

[PROGRAM WEBSITE](#)



## SENDING A MESSAGE TO SHOPLIFTERS

### *The Year of Accountability.*

The Chico Chamber of Commerce and the local police department deemed 2018 “The Year of Accountability.” Together they launched the Chico Retail Watch program to empower area retailers to fight shoplifting, and as a way to respond to new laws that increased the threshold for felony charges.

Local retailers had been reporting annual losses upwards of \$250,000 individually due to shoplifting. However, some retailers were reluctant to report due to a lack of (real or perceived) police response.

In support of a community suffering from brazen shoplifting, the chamber initiated the Chico Retail Watch education and awareness program which partners local police and area businesses. Representatives from law enforcement and retail businesses conduct monthly meetings to discuss theft prevention, reporting, and prosecution procedures, as well as state and local regulations, and best practices for identifying and reducing shoplifting. Meetings are open to retail owners, managers, employees, and loss prevention officers.

The program has allowed retailers to come together and help one another through the sharing of experiences and ideas. There has been a shift in corporate policies from “hands-off” to “hands-on” practices and electing to prosecute shoplifters.

The program launched in February 2018, and by July, local law enforcement reported a 209% increase in shoplifting calls, a 23% uptick in arrests, and a 57% increase in prosecutions. Retail Watch encourages merchants to prevent, report, and prosecute -- and it's working!

*“Shoplifting is a continual problem in Chico and a weakened accountability for shoplifters had left retailers hesitant to report and law enforcement reluctant to respond. The Chico Retail Watch program has strengthened the relationship between retailers and the police department. As a result, businesses are voluntarily sharpening their loss prevention policies, and there is increased police response. Promoting these successes has improved the community’s sense of accountability and sends a message that Chico is not a place to shoplift.”*

**Katie Simmons**

PRESIDENT & CEO | Chico Chamber of Commerce

# HONORABLE MENTION

## MEDIUM CHAMBER

**IDEA:**

“MicroLoan Program”

**CHAMBER:**

North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce

**LOCATION:**

Fitchburg, MA

North Central  
MASSACHUSETTS

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

[PROGRAM WEBSITE](#)

## HELPING LOCAL BUSINESSES THRIVE

*A Lending Program for Local Businesses Makes a Big Impact.*

The North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce recognizes that small businesses and entrepreneurs are the backbone of the local economy.

As part of their mission to create jobs and improve the economy, the chamber conducted research to understand the financing challenges facing new and growing businesses. Their research showed that young firms rely extensively on external debt, obtaining about 75% of their capital from banks. They also learned that business loans under \$100,000 were increasingly harder to come by.

The Great Recession was particularly difficult, as area businesses with less than \$1 million in revenue endured a 34% decline in loans. Realizing there was a need for alternative lending sources, the chamber strategically aligned their efforts to increase capital funding and expand their existing, outdated lending program.

Through their economic development arm, the chamber began offering various loan programs to provide capital for businesses that are not able to obtain traditional financing through banks or credit unions.

The Express Loan is intended to provide businesses with microloans of up to \$5,000 within a week and help them avoid using credit cards or other high-interest funding channels.

The Second Chance Loan Program is specifically focused on businesses that have been turned down by banks. Because they can take greater risk than banks, the chamber offers loans of up to \$150,000, providing an entrepreneur with financing they thought was not possible.

Since its launch, the program has granted nearly \$6.3 million in loans to help grow the economy in North Central Massachusetts. These funds have helped create 25 new businesses, enabled five business expansions, and ensured nine existing businesses remained open. 46% of their clients were from under-represented or under-served groups.

The chamber takes great pride in playing a role in helping businesses thrive. Their microloan program has helped to establish a food market in a community that lacked access to a grocery store, a farm stand in a rural community, an immigrant-owned food truck business, two bakeries in distressed communities, a micro-brewery in a mid-sized urban center, and numerous other small businesses in low income and underserved communities.

*“Our microloan program goes a long way to help support local small businesses and the economic growth of North Central Massachusetts.”*

**Roy M. Nascimento, CCE, IOM**

PRESIDENT AND CEO |

North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce

# HONORABLE MENTION

## SMALL CHAMBER

**IDEA:**

"Ridgway Through A Student's Eyes"

**CHAMBER:**

Ridgway-Elk County Chamber of Commerce

**LOCATION:**

Ridgway, PA



## Ridgway-Elk County Chamber of Commerce

## GOOD IDEAS DON'T HAVE TO BE COMPLICATED

*A little creativity can go a long way toward community involvement.*

Sometimes, the simplest idea can become something big. Just ask the Ridgway-Elk County Chamber of Commerce. They turned a simple idea into a way to engage with area students and generate visitor traffic to their Welcome Center.

The chamber partnered with local, school-oriented youth day camps to launch a new program called "Ridgway Through a Student's Eyes." Student campers were given disposable cameras and sent on a scavenger hunt to capture Ridgway as they saw it.

Through two different camps, thirty students went on a mission to capture images with varied assignments. The first set of students were free to take photos of their choosing, while the second set of campers were given a list of 22 items to photograph - plus 5 "free" pictures.

The assigned list included such things as an object with the name Ridgway (or Elk County) on it, something red, a photo with the Mayor, etc. The community was thrilled with the opportunity to take part in the program. They welcomed the students, offering them snacks and drinks - one member even provided lunch, allowing the kids to pick their pizza toppings!

The cameras were sent away for development, and pictures were put on display at the chamber's Welcome Center. The students were invited to stop in to see their work and were given a disc with their photos. The clever display brought attention to the chamber, creating an awareness of its location while driving visitor traffic.

*"A small town has to be viewed through the eyes of its youth. By seeing what they see, we can recognize the locations that appeal to them, their impression of the town, and what they are looking for going forward. In essence, what the town is, what it has happening, and where it needs to be headed!"*

**Beth Shuttleworth**

RIDGWAY MAIN STREET MANGER

Ridgway-Elk County Chamber of Commerce Youth  
Development Member

# HONORABLE MENTION

## SMALL CHAMBER

**IDEA:**

“Chamber Challenge”

**CHAMBER:**

Oldham Chamber and Economic Development

**LOCATION:**

La Grange, KY

[PROGRAM WEBSITE](#)

**oldham chamber**   
& economic development  
*connect. grow. succeed.*

## TURNING A CHALLENGE INTO A MORE PRODUCTIVE WORKFORCE

*A little creativity can go a long way toward community involvement.*

A business is only as successful as its employees. While there's certainly no shortage of workplace incentive programs, they tend to come at a high cost to employers.

With that, the Oldham County Chamber laid down a challenge by asking a question: How can we help member businesses create a healthier, happier, and more productive workforce? And just like that, the Chamber Challenge initiative was born.

Through this program, member businesses offer employees quarterly month-long challenges that focus on topics such as financial literacy, health and wellness, lifelong learning, and community connection. The challenges are conducted using a curriculum created through a collaborative effort with sponsor businesses. For example, a recent Health and Wellness Challenge spotlighted the monthly sponsor alongside information on healthy cooking classes available through the County Extension Office.

At the beginning of the month, participants receive a free Chamber Challenge promotional item to promote the chamber, program, and sponsor, along with a packet of educational materials. Each packet includes a points tracker and provisions from various member businesses that align to that month's theme.

To keep interest high, a weekly Challenge newsletter showcases educational articles, tutorials or videos, and links to ways to put new skills into action. At the end of the month, participants turn in their points trackers to receive prizes for their efforts.

So far over 200 chamber member employees have participated in the program to build stronger workplaces through low-cost team building opportunities. Members see the effort as a value-added service while the chamber has another way to increase member engagement.

*“Programs like Chamber Challenge show that we are committed to innovative, unique ways to serve our members. By creating offerings that reach beyond traditional attendees, we are able to prove value above and beyond what is expected. Through actively engaging in this program, members benefit, employees benefit, and our community benefits – Chamber Challenge is a win, win, win.”*

**Mae Marks**

VICE PRESIDENT OF CHAMBER SERVICES  
Oldham Chamber & Economic Development

# JUDGES' ACCOLADES

Hometown Heroes Program  
Colonial Heights Chamber of  
Commerce  
Colonial Heights, VA

Monday Update Videos  
South Shore Chamber of Commerce  
Ruskin, FL

Business Connect Banquet  
Swift Current & District Chamber of  
Commerce  
Swift Current, SK

SPLASH  
Roseville Area Chamber of  
Commerce  
Roseville, CA

Women in Leadership Lectures  
Series  
Greater Vancouver Chamber of  
Commerce  
Vancouver, WA

Success for Teens  
Miramar-Pembroke Pines Regional  
Chamber of Commerce  
Pembroke Pines, FL

Vision2020  
Lodi Chamber of Commerce  
Lodi, CA

Carpool Karaoke: Chamber Edition  
Western St. Charles Chamber of  
Commerce  
Wentzville, MO

Start By Believing  
Westminster Chamber of Commerce  
Westminster, CO

On behalf of the chamber community at large, ChamberMaster would like to extend a sincere thank you to this year's panel of judges! Without their expertise and support, the competition would not be possible.

- **Frank Kenny,**  
Membership Pro and Industry Leader
- **Jamee Jolly, President**  
President/CEO  
Plano Chamber of Commerce ACCE 2018  
Chamber of the Year
- **Chris Romer,**  
President & CEO  
Vail Valley Partnership, ACCE 2016  
Chamber of the Year
- **John Cook,**  
Senior Vice President of Marketing  
GrowthZone, providers of ChamberMaster

# CONCLUSION

Chambers of commerce exist to support and grow business in the communities they serve and are essential to economic growth. Gone are the days when a business would join just because they were new to the area and needed to make connections. It's crucial to stand out and go the extra mile to engage members. At ChamberMaster, it's our hope that this book gives you a few ideas along with the courage to try something new in your chamber.

## CHAMBERMASTER SOFTWARE

ChamberMaster helps organizations grow and retain membership, engage and inform members and prospects, and streamline tedious tasks. The cloud-based system is powerful, easy to use, and designed to manage all the day-to-day operations of your organization. Guaranteed.

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