

{ CHAMBERS }

OF

INSPIRATION

IDEA BOOK VOL. 2



5 Award-Winning
Chamber Ideas
That *Challenge*
the Status Quo



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Introduction

Whether national, regional, or local, Chambers of Commerce face similar opportunities and challenges. They all need creative ideas for events and programs that have a positive impact on the community while adding value to their organizations.

The Chamber Innovation Award Competition is about celebrating and showcasing enterprising Chambers of Commerce. Now in its second year, the competition is designed to encourage innovation and recognize ideas that challenge the status quo.



This year, numerous remarkable submissions were received from an array of organizations of all sizes from across the U.S. and Canada. With a record number of entries, the contest was extremely competitive and was expanded to include 2nd and 3rd places.

Volume 2 of Chambers of Inspiration showcases the successes of inventive and forward-thinking organizations. Kudos to the 1st place winner, Greater Fort Wayne Metro Chamber Alliance, for their noteworthy program. They are featured alongside four other organizations that submitted programs or events that help breathe new life and energy into their communities.

Before sitting down to plan your next event or program, take some time to review these successful ideas to find something that helps your Chamber challenge the status quo.





THE WINNING IDEA!



IDEA:

"The Greater Fort Wayne Fellows Program"

CHAMBER:

Greater Fort Wayne Metro Chamber Alliance

LOCATION:

Fort Wayne, IN

[Event Website »](#) [Event Video »](#)



**GREATER
FORT WAYNE INC**

METRO CHAMBER ALLIANCE

TAKING INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL

Like many Chambers of Commerce, The Greater Fort Wayne Metro Chamber Alliance wanted to attract top talent to their region. An area rich in secondary education institutions, they recognized their local colleges and universities as an integral part of the talent pipeline for their business community.

While nearly every Chamber is focused on short-term internships, Greater Fort Wayne Inc. took it a step further to provide a yearlong experience that included a summer internship.

The GFW Fellows program was built to fulfill the talent needs of businesses as well as the life and work experience sought by students. Acknowledging that this generation has a focus on quality of life and making an impact for the greater good, they took an innovative approach to attracting, developing, and retaining talent.

As a yearlong program that attaches college students to Fort Wayne, the GFW Fellows program connects high-potential students with Chamber member businesses with a regular need for new talent. Internships



"It's this combined and concentrated focus on talent retention that will mean true success for the Greater Fort Wayne area into the future."

Justin Clupper

Program Director of Leadership
Development & Community Engagement



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are project-based (instead of being based on coffee runs and filing!), allowing students to leave their mark on the company. Each Fellow has both a supervisor and mentor ready to support them and keep them moving forward.

In addition to their internships, Fellows interview area nonprofit leaders and self-select summer service projects that will have a substantial impact on the nonprofit and the community at large. As summer winds down, they transition into the fall with a focus on preparation for life after college through tools like personal financial literacy.

The GFW Fellows program is only accessible to Chamber members. Several members have joined the Chamber just so they can participate in this program. It is one of the strongest retention tools in the state, and people want to be a part of it.

IDEA:
"N-Squared Innovation Corridor Initiative"

CHAMBER:
Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce

LOCATION:
Newton, MA

[Event Website »](#) [Event Video »](#)



{ KICK UP YOUR HEELS FOR A WIN-WIN-WIN }

Despite the region's growing economy, the Newton-Needham Chamber was experiencing declining membership. Searching for a solution, they partnered with the Massachusetts Office of Economic Development to look for a way to bring new businesses to the area. Research showed that 40% of their local workforce was employed by the innovation economy sector, but that those businesses were not members of the Chamber.

The Chamber created a strategic plan, and then it launched a program to attract new businesses from the booming sector while also reinforcing their value to existing member companies. Two underutilized office parks were designated the "N-Squared Innovation Corridor" as a destination for innovation economy businesses.

The "N-Squared Innovation Corridor" program included listening tours for the planners to understand the dynamics of this new industry segment in order to cater to their specific needs. Monthly meet-ups were

"Working with the town of Needham, we advocated for tax incentives that led to the decision by TripAdvisor, the world's largest on-line travel site, to build its world headquarters here. Working with the Israeli Consulate, we sponsored an event attended by 50 Israeli-rooted CEOs designed to introduce them to the N2 Corridor as a good destination for their companies. Six such companies now operate small offices in our market."

Greg Reibman

Chamber President, Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce



held to create networking opportunities. And tax incentives were implemented to attract larger companies such as TripAdvisor to locate in the region.

This effort has helped the Newton-Needham Chamber become relevant in the ever-changing Massachusetts economy and has spurred an increase of 98 new members. The Boston Business Journal has even named it the fastest growing Chamber of Commerce in the state.

In addition to an expanded membership base, the average age of attendees at Chamber events has gone down by at least ten years due to targeting new, innovative start-ups and tech companies.

IDEA:

"Business Immigrant Mentorship Program / HIVE Incubator"

CHAMBER:

Fredericton Chamber of Commerce

LOCATION:

New Brunswick, Canada

[Event Website »](#) [Event Video »](#)



ROLLING OUT THE WELCOME MAT FOR NEWCOMERS

Facing a stagnant provincial economy and a declining population, the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce was quick to spot an opportunity to act. With immigrant newcomers struggling to understand the Canadian business culture, the maze of new regulations, and the local markets, the Chamber had an idea to pilot a new and innovative program to help ease and accelerate their transition to being participating members of the business community.

The six-month Business Immigrant Mentorship (BIM) Program has evolved to offer newcomers comprehensive, classroom-style training on Canadian business principles, start-up advice, legal requirements, business etiquette, and other topics. The program features volunteer business professionals who serve as mentors to offer training, guidance, support, and expansion of network opportunities to immigrant mentees.

"We have shown ourselves to be "open for business" as a community that is open to newcomers. We are committed to inclusion and focused on retention; we promote prosperity through business to drive the economy and encourage population growth. We do whatever we can to offer quality programming to enhance their lives and experience in Canada. After all, they chose us, so we must support them."

Janet Moser

Director, the HIVE, Business Immigrant Mentorship Program, Intercultural Business Incubator

The Chamber further provides a jumpstart to Fredericton's newcomer entrepreneurs by offering mentees



and their mentors access to Chamber events, which include training and networking opportunities outside of the program.

After running the BIM program for several years, the Fredericton Chamber added another complementary component to their efforts in the form of an innovative program called HIVE - a business incubator that houses 12 business developers who are fast-tracked with full-time support in high-growth potential business start-ups. Depending on their level of readiness, participants can enter the HIVE program directly or as graduates of the BIM program.

HIVE participants receive complimentary Chamber memberships as a thank you for investing in their city. Amongst other highlights, there are weekly meetings for participants which introduce the group to local business professionals, key politicians, and other stakeholders. Meetings are informal roundtable discussions to get acquainted and share culture, business questions, and opportunities. The incubator fosters accelerated business development and removes our clients from the silo of working on their own with no network to leverage.

The Fredericton Chamber was the first in Canada to offer this kind of support to newcomers. Since its inception, other municipalities in New Brunswick and other provinces in Canada have developed sister programs.



IDEA:
"School Supplies for Teachers Party "

CHAMBER:
Berthoud Area Chamber of Commerce

LOCATION:
Berthoud, CO

[Event Website »](#)



{ INVESTING IN EDUCATION PAYS DIVIDENDS }

The Berthoud Area Chamber of Commerce wanted to support the teachers that educate the area's future business leaders. In partnership with the local library and area schools, the Chamber planned a very special Business After Hours. The library hosted the event and the schools provided lists of items needed by their teaching staff. The Chamber reached out to members who then worked to gather the supplies and monetary donations.

The Chamber invited teachers, who were able to "shop" for free for everything from disinfectant wipes to science lab supplies. Also at the event, attendees were able to experience firsthand what's available to students in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) and Arts programs. People were encouraged to honor teachers by sharing a story on camera about a favorite teacher from their past. The videos were then shared on social media.

The evening culminated in a drawing where every teacher who RSVP'd had a chance to win a \$100 bill to use for classroom needs. The generosity of Chamber members resulted in 6 winners! The publicity allowed the Chamber to showcase goodwill in the community beyond business and tourism.

"We have a great education system here in Berthoud and we want to support it. This event allowed us to show non-members what a Chamber of Commerce does. It was a great way to show goodwill and impact our community."

Deanne Mulvihill

Executive Director, Berthoud Area
Chamber of Commerce



IDEA:

"The Readily Achievable Barrier Removal Plan "

CHAMBER:

Marshall Area Chamber of Commerce

LOCATION:

Marshall, MN

[Event Website »](#)



BREAKING NEW GROUND FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Since 1967, Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall, Minnesota has made disability accessibility a priority on its campus. Because of this progressive approach, both the school and the city of Marshall have a larger population of people in wheelchairs compared to cities of similar size.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires public accommodations (businesses and non-profit organizations) to provide goods and services to people with disabilities on an equal basis with the rest of the public. With a belief that only new construction and alterations need to be accessible while older facilities are "grandfathered," a number of accessibility-based ADA lawsuits were filed against local businesses.

The Marshall Area Chamber of Commerce went to work and devised a plan to help member businesses meet ADA requirements and improve the city's overall accessibility. The Chamber worked with the City of Marshall, Southwest Center for Independent Living (SWCIL), and the State of Minnesota to implement the plan.

The first step was to draft an information packet for Readily Achievable Barrier Removal Plans. The

"We anticipate continuing the program until all businesses have been reached. It's a benefit to our members and allows our community to provide a welcoming atmosphere for clientele with disabilities in the Marshall Area to shop, stay, and play."

Karen VanKeulen

Events/Partnership Coordinator



Chamber then worked with individual businesses to develop their own plan of action with the focus on four key areas: parking, accessibility, shopability, and awareness.

When needed, the Chamber provided matching grant assistance for improvements. Each business was also supplied with marketing materials such as table tents and window decals to communicate their participation in the program.

Rather than simply sending out information and hoping a business would take the initiative, the Chamber simplified the process by providing support for their members. In only four months, the Chamber made significant progress and assisted close to 50 businesses. This progress can be seen in both the physical building alterations and increased knowledge of how to best serve clientele with disabilities.

Interested in starting a Readily Achievable Barrier Removal Plan for your Chamber?

Information and easy-to-follow checklists are available through the [Americans With Disabilities Act National Network](#)



Conclusion

The 2015 selection panel brought a wealth of industry expertise to the competition. Judges included Chamber pro Frank Kenny, Jason Stambaugh of StartupLocal.biz, John Cook of ChamberMaster, and Cathi Hight, President of Hight Performance Group, Inc.

All entries were judged on creativity, community impact, and value to Chamber. The 2015 Chamber Innovator of the Year was awarded the \$1500 grand prize by ChamberMaster. The second place winner received \$500 and the third place winner received \$250. The competition was powered by StartUpLocal.biz.

The ChamberMaster team hopes that Chambers of Inspiration gives you a few ideas and the confidence to hit the ground running for your next Chamber program.

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