

# CHAMBER & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

## 5 Case Studies of Economy-Boosting Collaboration



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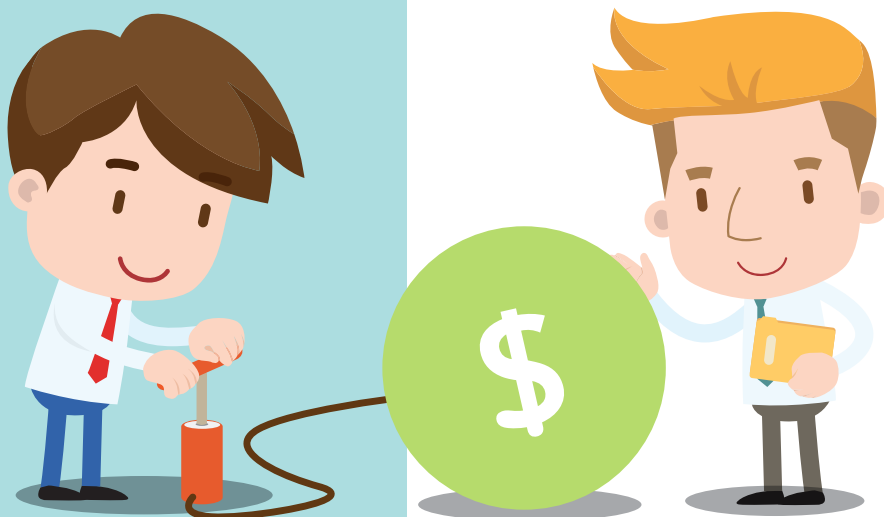
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## Introduction

Regardless of size or location, Chambers of Commerce are tasked with making a positive impact on their communities. Part of this challenge often lies in working to retain established businesses while fostering a future-focused, entrepreneurial atmosphere to attract up-and-coming businesses.

ChamberMaster is pleased to present five enterprising programs established through forward-thinking partnerships between Chambers of Commerce, local organizations, and the businesses they serve. These groups are great examples of how creativity and teamwork can enhance economic prosperity and improve quality of life. We hope you find them inspirational.



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**IDEA:**  
**The Chamber Challenge**

**WEBSITE »**

**VIDEO »**

**CHAMBER:**  
Grandview Area Chamber of  
Commerce

**LOCATION:**  
Columbus, OH

## A Community Rises To A Challenge

"A community is like a ship, everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm."

-Henrik Ibsen

Independent, locally owned businesses are essential to a vital local economy and community character.<sup>1</sup> The Grandview Area Chamber of Commerce recognized that helping locally owned businesses succeed is a win-win-win for those businesses, the area economy, and the community as a whole.

Looking to stay true to their mission of promoting and supporting an environment for development and growth of community, the Chamber issued a challenge. Members were asked to donate time, talent, products, and services to locally owned businesses to help owners who were facing challenges in their day-to-day operations achieve success.

The Chamber Challenge program started by identifying the ideal business with which to launch the initiative. Marijon, owner of the area's iconic French Loaf Bakery, was more than willing to open her mind, doors, business plan, and financials to a group of relative strangers. In return, she would benefit from the expertise offered by local business experts. This project (with zero budget) would serve as a testing ground for the program.



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Here's what happened.

The group sent mystery shoppers to the bakery to assess atmosphere, products, and service. Finances, marketing, and operations were analyzed. Then they developed a coaching and training program, structured finances, redrafted the business plan, and created a fresh marketing approach. Complementing a new website were fresh branding and social media promotions.

Next on the list was atmosphere. In one weekend, community volunteers came together with new furniture, fixtures, landscaping, paint, flooring, and more. After 30 years in the Grandview community, Marijon's French Loaf Bakery was renewed. It is now a warm, inviting location.

Many people and companies stepped up to make this inaugural project a success. With over \$70,000 in donations of products and services, 60+ community volunteers and 31 member businesses joined together to help an independent business thrive.

Kudos to the Grandview Area Chamber for backing locally owned and operated businesses. Independent businesses generate higher local payroll, purchase more local goods and services – and local stores retain a much larger share of their profits within the local economy. Independent businesses are, indeed, the backbone of a community's culture, economy, and character.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> American Independent Business Alliance

<sup>2</sup> staylocal.org





**IDEA:**  
**IHCC Microloan Program**

**WEBSITE »**

**CHAMBER:**  
Idaho Hispanic Chamber of  
Commerce

**LOCATION:**  
Nampa, ID

## All It Takes Is An Opportunity

With a mission to promote and foster new and developing Hispanic-owned businesses through financial and educational resources, the Idaho Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (IHCC) set out to make a difference.

Realizing that funding was sometimes hard to come by, the IHCC put their heads together and created a unique MicroLoan program to help members pay for startup costs such as equipment, inventory, and advertising.

Loans of between \$1,000 and \$2,500 are designated to those who need additional support or do not qualify for traditional loans. The IHCC also helps with the application and provides guidance on adhering to loan terms and navigating the path for traditional small business loans in the future.

But it doesn't stop there. Loan recipients also learn skills and insights, and they are provided with tools and resources necessary to start and grow successful businesses. This is done through a curriculum such as FastTrack® and required training with a SCORE® or SBDC consultant.

Funds are either distributed in increments over a set period of time or paid directly to



**IDAHO HISPANIC**  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



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vendors on behalf of the applicant. Larger loan amounts are available for exceptional applicants and those with collateral.

Since its inception, the MicroLoan program has proven to be very valuable. For members with poor credit, an ITIN (individual taxpayer identification number) instead of a social security number, or no collateral, traditional loans have not been an option. Victor Nava of Andy's Raspados y Helados in Nampa, Idaho sums it up best – "Having a resource like this is truly a blessing. We knew we could make it if given the opportunity."

To date, IHCC has awarded more than \$38,000 and its members inject the funds back into the local economy. Through this program, the Chamber has been able to impact not just individuals, but entire families.

According to the IHCC Board of Directors, "IHCC is delighted to help these families who are truly grateful to receive guidance and support. We trust our members and take the risk of lending them funds because we understand and have seen the impact it has on them, our cities, and the Hispanic community!"



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**IDEA:**

**Onward Yankton**

**WEBSITE »**

**VIDEO »**

**CHAMBER:**

**Yankton Area Chamber of Commerce**

**LOCATION:**

**Yankton, SD**

## When A Community Takes Charge, Good Things Happen

**The Yankton Area Chamber of Commerce and its partners were looking for a big idea.** Recognizing that smaller cities and towns in rural states and communities are fighting for relevance and vitality, they knew something had to be done. They considered the situation critical; they needed to fight not only for their area's growth, but for its survival.

So the Chamber and their partners decided to start the process of **creating Yankton's own future.** The result? Onward Yankton.

The program was designed to encourage community collaboration; Yanktonians would be given the opportunity to weigh in on the direction they should go as a community.

There was extensive planning, followed by weeks of hype and buildup for the official launch. Alongside local civic and business leaders, Carmen Schramm, Executive Chamber Director, explained to the crowd that it was time for the city to find a new vision. It was emphasized that like other rural cities of its size and despite its man-made and natural amenities —**Yankton was struggling to retain or attract young families.**



***Yankton!***  
**WHAT A  
DISCOVERY**  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



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"When you look at the reasons why people move to a community, we had a number of things," said Schramm. "We had lifestyle and education, but we still needed to fill in some gaps. We didn't really know what people thought was missing."

The committee asked the community to share their ideas to **help Yankton become the kind of town where young people want to stay; a town everybody wants to live in.** It was stressed that the big idea could be about anything. The only criteria was that it be big enough and bold enough to change the face of Yankton in the years to come, yet feasible - something that could realistically be implemented by a city of 15,000 people.

"We thought Yankton was long overdue for something big," Schramm said. "So we started a 100-day search for Yankton's next Big Idea."

The prize for the winning idea? \$10,000. Plus, five finalists would receive Yankton Bucks.

Entries were submitted on the Onward Yankton website. After 100 days and nearly 500 entries, the ideas were narrowed to six finalists, from which the Big Idea will soon be chosen by the steering committee.

The result so far? For the first time in years, people are taking part in the conversation about what they want to see happen in their community. Among the big ideas, there are a lot of smaller ideas that Chamber members are already working to implement.

Yankton District 18 Senator Bernie Hunhoff summed it up with a simple yet powerful statement, "Let's create a vision and make an impact 100 years from now. Communities like Yankton provide a great value, not only to South Dakota, but to the nation."





**IDEA:**

**Shot in the Arm for Housing**

**WEBSITE »**

**CHAMBER:**

North Platte Area Chamber and Development

**LOCATION:**

North Platte, NE

## A Much Needed Shot In The Arm

Despite a growing local economy, employers in North Platte, Nebraska faced a big obstacle. There were numerous jobs not being filled despite their best hiring efforts. The problem? The housing crisis that began in 2008 coupled with the expanding local economy resulted in **a serious lack of residential new construction, thus limiting the available work force.**

Although there had been substantial construction in the area, its focus had been on commercial development and residential remodeling. The housing “bust” resulted in the failure of some local homebuilders, while others exited the industry. Those who remained had limited access to capital.

During this time, it was noticed that area hotel operators reported high occupancy rates, but not from visitors. Their beds were filled by employees who didn’t have housing.

**Recognizing the significant impact of the situation, the North Platte Area Chamber and Development Corporation took action.** A joint venture using funding from the city and the Chamber resulted in a **new program called Shot in the Arm for Housing.**



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"The program combined our funds and the city's quality growth funds to grant up to \$8,000 per new home," said Dan Mauk, Chamber President.

Through the program, Chamber funds were leveraged with local public funds, private funds, and matching grants to offer cash incentives to home builders to construct duplexes and single-family homes. Applicant builders were required to be Chamber members and all homes had to meet program guidelines. A resource guide was produced and given to builders, promoting member subcontractors, decorators, and landscapers. In addition, those members received notification when a builder was approved to participate.

"The hope was to give the industry the push it needed to get things rolling to address the housing shortage," added Mauk.

**The estimated economic impact of this effort on the area is over \$8 million.**

Most importantly, the Chamber proved itself to be responsive to the needs of its membership, big and small.



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**IDEA:**  
**EI<sup>2</sup> Business Plan Competition**

**WEBSITE »**

**CHAMBER:**  
Christian County Chamber of  
Commerce

**LOCATION:**  
Hopkinsville, KY

## Sometimes All It Takes Is A Good Idea

**The Christian County Chamber of Commerce and its members recognized the contributions new businesses make to the local economy.**

So in 2012, the EI<sup>2</sup> Business Plan Competition was born. Its purpose was to provide economic development opportunities to future business owners in the Christian County, Kentucky area.

The Chamber joined forces with other organizations in an effort to **stimulate entrepreneurial activity and greater awareness of resources for business startups in the region.**

Entrepreneurs were encouraged to submit a business plan and verbal pitch for evaluation. Submissions were judged on concept quality, marketability, strength of financial model, and sustainability over the long term. Any business or innovative concept not already in operation was eligible.

As part of the competition, **entrants were required to attend a business plan/pitch workshop.** The first session of the workshop covered specifics on what should be included in a business plan. The second session focused on how to pitch an idea to potential investors.

Additionally, **a draft of the plan and pitch were submitted to a business**





**resource organization for review and feedback.** Organizations included the Small Business Development Center, the Kentucky Innovation Network, and Minority Economic Development Initiative.

Submissions were initially evaluated by a panel of judges who then narrowed the field to a handful of finalists. The finalists were then invited to pitch their business ideas to the panel in person. **Finalists were presented and the winner announced at the Annual Chamber Dinner.**

The Grand Prize Winner was awarded \$10,000 in cash and business services to help start their business. Second Place received \$400 cash plus business services, and Third Place received \$100 cash plus business services.

**The program has assisted in the launch of several new businesses.** All past winners of the competition are still in operation today and are developing new products and services to meet community needs.

The EI<sup>2</sup> Business Plan Competition is still going strong and being embraced by the community as a key incentive to help startups succeed.



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### Want more *inspiration?*

See the five winning ideas from this year's Chamber Innovation Award Competition.

**Download Chambers of Inspiration, Vol. 2 »**  
and read about winning programs, strategies,  
and event ideas from some of the most  
innovative member-based organizations  
in North America.

## Conclusion

Breathing new life and energy into a local economy can be daunting; however as these five Chambers have shown, all it takes is an idea and a little motivation to transform a vision into reality.

These noteworthy programs, focused on cultivating economic development and community growth, were submitted through the 2015 Chamber Innovation Award Competition.

Here at ChamberMaster, we're committed to helping organizations achieve their goals. Through eBooks, guides, articles, and courses taught by industry pros, we provide tools and information for improvement and growth.

## About ChamberMaster

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