

Detroit Regional Chamber

Overview

The Detroit Regional Chamber is the largest chamber of commerce in the U.S. It currently has over 20,000 members, nearly twice as many as five years ago. Ninety-eight percent of those members are small businesses. The Chamber has 89 full-time staff members and 70 Board members.

The Chamber serves its company members by providing traditional member services, by lobbying in Lansing and Washington, D.C., and by attracting people and businesses to the region through its business development arm, the Detroit Regional Economic Partnership.

The Chamber has several public policy priorities, including transportation, economic development, worker training, environmental regulations, tax issues and healthcare.

Regional Priorities

The Detroit Regional Chamber has supported efforts to improve regional public transit for 30 years. Its latest effort was to promote legislation to create the Detroit Area Regional Transportation Authority, with the goal of providing coordinated and efficient public transit service in Southeast Michigan. The Authority, known as DARTA, was approved by Michigan Governor Jennifer M. Granholm in May 2003.

The Chamber's business development arm is the Detroit Regional Economic Partnership, which works to attract people, dollars and jobs to the region. For example, the Partnership might help a company open a manufacturing facility or establish a sales office within the region. Eighty percent of the Partnership's funding comes from the private sector and 20 percent from the public sector. The economic development budget is roughly \$2.5 million per year. Besides business development, the Partnership also works to improve the region's image. One way it has done that is by promoting Detroit internationally as a place for high-tech innovation.

ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOT

Type of Organization

Primarily business-led

Unit of Membership

Company/organization

Number of Members

2003: 20,622

1998: 11,611

Membership by Company Size

Small Companies: 98%.

Mid-sized Companies: 1.5%

Large Companies: 0.5%

Dues Determined by

Flat fees and number of company employees

Annual Dues Paid by

Largest Member Companies: \$9,000

Smallest Member Companies: \$80

Annual Operating Budget

2003: \$5 million or more

1998: \$5 million or more

Staff Members (FTE)

2003: 89

1998: 85

Board Members

2003: 70

Regional Priorities

Transportation, Economic Development, Worker Training, Environmental Regulations, Tax Issues, Healthcare

In the area of worker training, the Chamber is investigating linking industry groups with community colleges and technical training programs. In general, the Chamber serves as a clearinghouse for entry-level and technical workforce needs. The Chamber links employees to technical training and other programs and helps employers find entry-level and technically trained employees through its affiliated program, www.clickoncareers.com.

On the issue of healthcare, the Chamber has lobbied for changes in the Michigan state insurance market to keep prices low. On the federal level, it has lobbied against proposed legislation that would create Association Health Plans, which it says would raise insurance costs for employers and boost the number of uninsured.

The Detroit Regional Chamber lobbies on behalf of businesses on state and federal legislation that could affect them. It has a registered lobbyist working on federal and state policy issues. The Chamber raises and spends approximately \$100,000 per year through its political action committee in support of pro-business candidate on both sides of the aisle.

PROMOTING THE REGION'S "CREATIVE CLASS"

A new strategy, known as "CreateDetroit," is being touted in the Detroit region. The strategy was created by the Detroit Regional Chamber and several partners to promote the region as a destination for creative and entrepreneurial workers. CreateDetroit expands upon the theories of Richard Florida, author of the book "The Rise of the Creative Class," and responds to Governor Jennifer Granholm's Cool Cities challenge to Michigan mayors. On March 3 and 4, 2004, the Chamber and others sponsored a Regional Transformation Process, a process used by Florida and his team to report about and set priorities to build on the creative economy in Detroit. More than 2,000 people participated in the two-day event at downtown venues Orchestra Hall and The Max.

For more information, see www.createdetroit.com

Structure and Operations

The Detroit Regional Chamber's membership has risen sharply in the last decade. In 1995, the Chamber counted 10,000 members. Today it has over 20,000 and is the largest chamber of commerce in the U.S. Most of that growth in membership has come from smaller companies, which now make up 98 percent of membership.

Membership dues vary widely, from \$80 to the smallest member companies to several thousand dollars for the largest members. The Chamber's annual operating budget is at least \$5 million. The Chamber has 70 Board members and 89 full-time staff members.