

# Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce

## Overview

The Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce is the region's leading business organization. Its main focus is economic growth and development — attracting and retaining good companies and good jobs. The Chamber is a traditional membership-based group, and about 75 percent of its 3,000 members are small companies. The larger members include Cardinal Health, Nationwide, The Limited, American Electric Power and the headquarters of Battelle, the world's largest private research institution. The Chamber has 38 Board members and 48 full-time staff members.

The Chamber has worked with the newly established Columbus Partnership on some issues. The Partnership tends to focus on overall strategy, while the Chamber focuses on operations. Some say the Chamber has not been as visible as it could be.

The Chamber's main regional priorities are cluster-based economic development, workforce development, and issues of regional infrastructure.

## Regional Priorities

The Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce has four strategic priorities: marketing the region as a desirable place to live and work; workforce development to ensure the labor supply satisfies employers; entrepreneurship to cultivate an environment friendly to emerging enterprises; and infrastructure to sustain economic growth and quality of life.

Beyond these four overall strategies, the Chamber has focused on building three industry clusters — life sciences, advanced logistics and creative services. In 2003 the Greater Columbus Chamber and the City of Columbus joined with The Ohio State University to establish a core leadership group of business and community leaders. The leaders researched the region's assets and developed work plans to promote life sciences, advanced logistics, and creative services industries in the region. The three industries were chosen because they have high-skill, high-paying and high-demand jobs. Each industry work plan identifies a single organization to keep the leadership

## ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOT

### Type of Organization

Primarily led by companies or employers

### Unit of Membership

Company/organization

### Number of Members

2003: 3,000

1998: 4,500

### Membership by Company Size

Small Companies: 75%

Mid-sized Companies: 15%

Large Companies: 10%

### Dues Determined by

Number of company employees

### Annual Dues Paid by

Largest Member Companies: \$50,000

Smallest Member Companies: \$400

### Annual Operating Budget

2003: \$5 million or more

1998: \$5 million or more

### Staff Members (FTE)

2003: 43

1998: 45

### Board Members

2003: 38

### Regional Priorities

Cluster-Based Economic Development, Workforce Development, Infrastructure

group focused and on task. The creative services work plan, for example, establishes a Greater Columbus creative services consortium with a full-time Director. The core leadership group is supplying each project team with resources to complete the plans. The core leadership team has charged the Greater Columbus Chamber's four strategic initiative committees — marketing, workforce development, infrastructure and entrepreneurship — to support each project team.

The Chamber has been active in trying to keep open the Defense Supply Center Columbus, a procurement agency and coordinator of military supplies that provides 6,500 jobs but is threatened by closure. (See "Chamber of Commerce Heads Effort to Save Military Supply Center" below.)

#### CHAMBER OF COMMERCE HEADS EFFORT TO SAVE MILITARY SUPPLY CENTER

**The Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce has taken a leading role in trying to keep open a military supply facility that provides 6,500 Columbus-area jobs. The Defense Supply Center Columbus, a procurement agency and coordinator of military supplies, is threatened by a wave of military base shutdowns proposed by the Defense Department. The Defense Department seeks to cut the military's domestic real estate by 25 percent, and decisions on which bases will be closed are expected in 2005. The Greater Columbus Chamber has set up a steering committee to rally the business community behind the base-saving effort, and submitted a grant request to the State of Ohio for \$500,000 to evaluate the Center's competition and devise a lobbying effort to save it.**

The Chamber has fairly advanced efforts geared to workforce development. The Chamber's Workforce Leadership Council is a group of executives from business, presidents of community organizations and leaders of educational institutions that oversee the Chamber's many efforts in workforce development. The Council is organized into six industry areas and two areas of workforce services — basic workplace skills and adult training.

One of the Chamber's highest profile efforts in workforce development is the career academies. The career academies help high school students prepare for careers in Greater Columbus. In the fall of 2000, the Chamber implemented the career academy program in partnership with the Columbus Public Schools and Columbus State Community College. The career academies are learning communities within high schools designed to promote a college-preparatory curriculum and a career-focused education. The career curriculum includes tracks in architecture and engineering, business, health sciences, information technology, engineering and manufacturing, and logistics. Five Columbus Public Schools participate. The Chamber has contributed nearly \$2 million to the Career Academies program over the last three years.

### **Structure and Operations**

The Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce's membership has fallen in recent years, from about 4,500 in 1998 to about 3,000 today. Seventy-five percent of the Chamber's members are small companies, paying a wide range of annual dues. Its annual operating budget has remained at over \$5 million in recent years.

The 38-member Board participates through committees attached to one of the Chamber's specific initiatives (marketing, workforce development, entrepreneurship, etc.).

Typically, one Board member is involved with a project and reports back to the rest of the Board about its progress. The Chamber has 43 full-time staff members, down slightly from five years ago.