

WARREN COUNTY REGIONAL  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



## **Volunteer Handbook**

Published:

## **Introduction**

The Warren County Regional Chamber of Commerce (WCRCC), now in its 4<sup>th</sup> year, continues its long-standing position as the region's voice of business. The Chamber operates like any business – focusing on strategic goals and measuring every aspect of its performance. This orientation document is a resource for leadership, staff, committee and task force chairs and hundreds of volunteers who are dedicated to the successful execution of the Chamber's mission. It is dedicated to the notion that a common understanding of the role and methods of the Chamber, and its components, will lead to a satisfying and productive experience for all who are engaged and committed to helping Warren County become a better place – a world class region! Many thanks for your time, creativity, enthusiasm and support of the Warren County Regional Chamber of Commerce.

## **Structural Overview**

The Warren County Regional Chamber of Commerce is a membership association and is incorporated in the state of New Jersey. Sometimes tax and legal terminology refers to such corporations as “business leagues.” The Chamber's IRS tax designation is under Section 501©(6), which exempts most of the Chamber's revenue from income taxes. Chambers of Commerce are not, however, considered “charitable entities.”

All Chambers of Commerce are independent of one another and are not a part of any governmental body. The WCRCC is a member of both the New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce and the United States Chamber of Commerce, but is completely independent of both.

## **Chamber Mission**

The Warren County Regional Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to the economic development of the business community, through leadership, education and service.

## **Chamber History and Noteworthy Facts**

The roots of the current Warren County Regional Chamber of Commerce stem back many years - to 1979, in fact, when the Hackettstown Chamber of Commerce was first incorporated. In the 1980's, the name was changed to the Hackettstown Area Chamber of Commerce. In 2000, the Warren Hills Chamber of Commerce from the Washington area voted to incorporate with Hackettstown Chamber. Now, a new era has begun with the establishment of the Warren County Regional Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber currently represents members from throughout Warren County as well as from Morris, Sussex and Hunterdon counties.

The Warren County Regional Chamber of Commerce became official in the fall of 2001, but it didn't happen overnight. It took more than a year of discussions and planning by board members of the Hackettstown Area - Warren Hills Chamber of Commerce, a membership vote that was overwhelmingly in favor of the move, and support from the Warren County Freeholders and the New Jersey State Chamber for the Warren County Regional Chamber of Commerce to become a reality.

As the Chamber grows, "councils" will gradually be set up throughout the county. These councils will ensure that communities continue to receive support for the events and issues that are important to them. Washington and Hackettstown currently have councils in place.

## **Membership**

There is one type of Chamber membership:

- Organizational Member – Any firm, corporation, partnership, sole proprietor, association or other organization with a business interest in the Warren County region or its vicinity is eligible to become a member of the Chamber, provided the applicant's objectives are compatible with those of the Chamber.

Each Organizational Member must designate one individual as its member representative (sometimes referred to as a "key contact") from among its employees. This is the only individual authorized to cast the Organizational Member's vote. Organizational Members may designate other employees as additional contacts (quantity based on dues level).

The Board of Directors must approve applications for membership.

Members may cast one vote each in the election of directors. The Board of Directors holds all other authority.

## **Dues**

The membership "investment schedule" is based on company size and type and is determined periodically by the Board of Directors. For more information, contact the President/CEO.

## **Sources and Uses of Funds**

The Chamber's primary revenue sources are:

- Membership investments (dues)
- Sponsorship sales
- Admission/participation fees for events and activities,
- Sales of information products (publications, lists, etc.)

Additionally, the Chamber receives support for several of its initiatives from external funding sources (various foundations and government grants).

The Chamber's single largest expense is payroll and related cost – not surprising since the Chamber is essentially a service organization, and service delivery is usually staff-intensive. Other significant expense categories include:

- Direct costs of events and programs
- Occupancy costs
- Administrative expenses

## **Governance**

The Chamber is managed by a Board of Directors, which is elected by the members for four-year terms. Approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the Board positions are open for election each year. The number of directors is set periodically by the Board of Directors and may be no less than sixteen (16) .

The Executive Committee and the full Board adopt an annual business plan and budget, which they charge the management and staff with executing. The Executive Committee meets monthly to review and discuss topical issues and address management recommendations. The Board of Directors meets every other month.

## **Operations**

Chambers around the country use a variety of operational models. They range from no staff and all volunteers to large professional staffs. The Warren County Regional Chamber of Commerce relies heavily on volunteers for advice, support, expertise and community leadership and has a paid staff that is accountable for most program delivery and execution.

## **Chamber Staff**

Chamber staff is led by the President/Chief Executive Officer who reports to the Board of Directors (via the Chairman of the Board). The staff reports to the President and they manage the activities of the Chamber. Current information on the Chamber staff is maintained on the Chamber web site.

## **Volunteers**

There are many ways to help fulfill the Chamber's mission. Several, including the Chamber Board of Directors, have already been mentioned. Many of the Chamber's programs, initiatives and events benefit from the time, energy, enthusiasm and skill of voluntary advisory committees.

Many volunteers serve on committees. Roles on each committee vary, depending upon the type of committee and its focus.

Business councils and business council cabinets offer another avenue for involvement.

### **Business Councils**

By design, the Chamber has a regional focus. In order to address local issues, the Chamber has developed the business council system. The Chamber operates a business council in each jurisdiction. Currently the Chamber has business councils in Washington and Hackettstown. There are plans to establish councils in Blairstown, Belvidere and Phillipsburg. The councils, which are comprised of member volunteers, serve as the eyes, ears, arms, legs and voice of the Chamber within each locality and also identify emerging regional issues. The councils communicate with one another and with the Chamber Executive Committee and Board of Directors through designated Board members assigned to each represented council.

### **Committee Roles**

Only one committee has direct authority vested by the Board of Directors – the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors. All other committees serve in an advisory capacity to Chamber leadership and staff regarding the planning and execution of various Chamber programs, initiatives and events. Committee chairpersons lead committee meetings and appoint sub-committees. Committee members may provide input on financial issues associated with their activity and may even generate revenue (by selling sponsorships and the like). Committees are not, however, “responsible” for the budget.

Committees often recommend venues, formats, duration, speakers, themes, topics, menus, etc. for events – or strategies, objectives, milestones, and methods for programs and initiatives. Committees must operate within established budgets – with an eye toward improving upon budgeted margins. Committee participants also provide needed manpower to execute events and support in promoting them.

### **Committee Composition**

The Board of Directors, the Executive Committee or the President of the Chamber may create advisory committees, appoint persons to serve on them and recommend appointment of chairpersons of such committees from among the members thereof. Committee chairs must be approved and invited to serve by the Executive Committee. Representatives of member companies in good standing who are interested in becoming involved on a committee should express interest to Chamber staff. We encourage interested individuals to provide background information on their past Chamber involvement and experience and any expertise of special skills they can offer, along with the factors motivating their interest. A few committees, such as business council cabinets, are self-perpetuating, but the Executive Committee or President determines most committee assignments. With few exceptions, assignments are for one year,

renewable depending upon needs and circumstances. Committee chairs can only renew chairmanship for three years. In recommending committee appointments, the organization strives to optimize several variables:

- Create opportunities for as many interested individuals as possible
- Invigorate committees with fresh perspectives and new ideas,
- Capitalize upon the wealth of talent and energy among the membership,
- Ensure continuity of purpose and quality of programming,
- Keep committees manageable and engaged, and
- Develop select Chamber volunteer leaders to take on roles of increasing responsibility.

While there are no absolutes, the Chamber tries to size committees and task forces based on the scope and breadth of work to be accomplished. All else being equal, working groups of 6-10 people are generally the most productive. A wide variety of committee sizes can be found in the Chamber.

### **Program/Activity/Event-Specific Orientation Materials**

The Chamber is developing specific “Operating Guidelines” for all of its programs, including Business Councils, LEADERSHIP WARREN and the Economic Development Council.

### **WCRCC Events**

The Chamber executes a wide variety of events and activities throughout the year. They range from large, complex and expensive events like the Spring Festival to smaller affairs like Business Over Breakfast. Events serve three primary purposes in satisfying the overall mission of the Chamber:

- They provide an avenue for fulfilling one or more of our many objectives such as advocacy, networking, recognition, economic development and information sharing.
- Some of them generate (admission/participation) revenue. The revenue generated by any single event covers or in most cases, defrays the cost of executing the event. On occasion, revenue exceeds cost, and when this happens the “profit” helps to cover overhead and indirect costs and enhances the Chamber’s ability to execute other programs.
- They provide a venue for sponsorship sales. Sponsorships do two things, they generate revenue for the Chamber and they provide opportunities for member companies to market and promote themselves and their products to various target audiences, all while demonstrating support of the Chamber’s mission.

## **Planning & Budgeting**

Periodically, the Chamber surveys its members and other constituents relative to priorities, successes, quality of service and the like. The Board, the Executive Committee and the management team continually evaluate the same parameters. The Chamber President proposes an annual business plan corresponding budget to the Executive Committee and ultimately, to the Board of Directors. The end result of this process directs the resources and efforts of Chamber volunteers and staff for the year. The Chamber's fiscal year starts on January first and ends on December thirty-first.

The Chamber budget is quite thorough and details revenue and expenses for the year, including specific budgets for each program, initiative and event. Preparation of the budget entails many hours of painstaking analysis and discussion, and many difficult decisions regarding sources and use of funds. In the end, the budget represents the best effort of the staff and leadership to optimize the many trade-offs to achieve the Chamber's mission with the resources available. Once approved, the Board holds management and staff accountable for compliance and execution.

Each activity is budgeted individually. However, only direct and indirect revenue and direct expenses are budgeted within each activity. Indirect expenses – such as staff costs, occupancy costs, and costs for in-house support, including event planning, marketing, finance/accounting, photocopying, internet technology, human resources, etc. are not included (or allocated) in individual activity budgets. There are a number of reasons why the budgeting is done this way, but one of the most important reasons is that staff and volunteers should be charged with executing activities to focus on items that are truly within their control.

It is important to remember that each activity – while important – is one square in the larger quilt of the Chamber's total mission. Many years of experience and considerable thought goes into the composition of the "quilt." Budget input from committee members is welcome but we ask that committee members understand:

1. The budget for the current year was generally established months earlier and is not likely to be very flexible – therefore, budget input will most likely be considered for the subsequent budget year, and
2. Of necessity, budgetary trade-off decisions are made by individuals focused on the big picture – the total mission of the Chamber. This is accomplished via the process outlined above.

## Questions & Contacts

Thank you again for being an active member of the Warren County Regional Chamber of Commerce. Your time and assistance in developing and implementing great programs and service to our members is something we do not take lightly. It is our hope that the information provided here will make your time well spent and enriching.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask the staff member assigned to your committee or to any of the following staff:

- Robert Goltz – President & CEO (908) 835-9200
  - [bgoltz@warrencountychamber.org](mailto:bgoltz@warrencountychamber.org)

Current contact information for all Chamber staff members is available on the Chamber web site at <http://www.warrencountychamber.org>. The main Chamber phone number is (908) 835-9200.

t: chamberdocuments/boardandstaff/volunteernj