



Chautauqua County Chamber of Commerce

Strategic Plan Summary

Approved April 19, 2023

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Background and Methodology

At a time when leaders and managers of public and nonprofit organizations face an increasing number of challenges related to our rapidly changing social environment, the deliberative process of strategic planning is more important than ever. It has been said that “leaders and managers of public and nonprofit organizations must be effective strategists if their organizations are to fulfill their missions, meet their mandates, satisfy their constituents, and create public value in the years ahead” (Bryson, 2011, pp. xi-xii). This point is especially relevant in a day when rapidly evolving technology, unanticipated growth, and increasing levels of complexity contribute to constantly shifting foundations in the public and nonprofit sector. In order to meet the demands of an increasingly complex time, leaders and managers must find ways to be innovative and creative in their approach to planning. At *221b Performance Solutions*, we engage a variety of techniques to ensure that the planning process is thorough, innovative, and responsive to current shifts in the environment. These tools come from the fields of social science, leadership studies, psychology, education, and organizational development. We have found this multifaceted approach to planning to be highly effective with our clients, and are grateful for the opportunity to utilize them in meeting the planning needs of the Chautauqua County Chamber of Commerce.

Based on our research, we perceive the needs of the CCCoC to center around the development of a comprehensive strategic plan that will provide a framework for the focus of the chamber in the foreseeable future. One of the techniques we utilize in the strategic-planning process is the *Creative Problem Solving* process as taught at [Buffalo State College](#) and the [Creative Education Foundation](#). This process delivers innovative and scientifically documented outcomes, along with specific action steps for implementation. We are certified in this approach, and will use it as the underlying technique for the planning process. This, combined with interviews, and other planning tools, will contribute to a comprehensive assessment of the organization while providing valuable insight for future directions and strategies.

Research Methodology

The underlying framework we employ in building a strategic plan is known as the *creative problem solving (CPS)* process. “CPS is a proven method for approaching a problem or a challenge in an imaginative and innovative way. It helps you redefine the challenges and opportunities you face, come up with new, innovative responses and solutions, and then take action” (see “What is CPS” at creativeeducationfoundation.org/what-is-cps/).

The CPS process consists of a number of steps focused on *clarifying* the challenges and opportunities currently facing an organization. These steps employ a number of tools designed to help organizations identify and understand the root of existing challenges. Once clarity of the challenges and opportunities has been achieved, the next step is to *ideate* or brainstorm a variety of potential solutions to the challenges, or approaches to opportunities. Once ideas have been generated, those participating in the process begin to *develop* those ideas into workable solutions. Once ideas have been refined, and solutions have been developed, an *implementation* plan is developed and deployed.

These processes are what make up the underlying foundation of our approach. We work with our clients to bring clarity to their challenges and opportunities. We then work with them to generate a number of ideas and possible solutions/approaches to overcoming those challenges, or meeting those opportunities. After generating a number of possible solutions, we work to develop a plan and a process for implementing that plan. As you review this document, you will notice the elements of the *creative problem solving* process

throughout. It will be clear that this proven method is the foundation underlying the methods we employ to bring forth the recommendations found at the end of the document.

Chamber Mission, Vision and Leadership

Mission

Our mission is to create a business environment in the region where our members can thrive.

Vision

The Chautauqua County Chamber of Commerce is a regional leader that is data driven, flexible and strong, providing services and support that make our organization essential to our members.

Principles

We strive to reduce taxes and regulatory barriers that hamper the viability of our member businesses by driving change through communication and coordination with the local, state and federal government, and regulatory agencies.

We seek to gain regional competitive advantage by having a superior workforce available for our members.

We play a pro-active role in delivering, innovative, high quality, cost competitive health insurance products for our members.

We achieve our mission through the development of services and sharing of information that benefits our members and the geographic area in which they operate.

We work with government and various organizations to define and address the economic and tourism development needs of our small business members with emphasis on helping these businesses increase sales and reduce costs; and through the implementation of the Main Street four point approach of organization, promotion, design and economic restructuring.

Chautauqua County Chamber of Commerce
Strategic Planning Proposal

Focus Group Sessions

Pre-planning interviews, or focus groups, were an important part of this process. A series of sessions were conducted with members of the Chautauqua County Chamber of Commerce team with groups representing various facets of the organization. The purpose of these focus groups was to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences, and reactions to the Chamber and provide insight into the specific needs to be addressed in the strategic plan.

Focus Groups Conducted:

- Group Session with CCCOC Full-time Employees and Committee Coordinators ● Individual Sessions with CCCOC Committee Chairs:
 - Rick Klisiewicz, Hanover Chair
 - Ellen Luczkowiak, Dunkirk Chair
 - Larry Fiorella, Fredonia Chair
 - Fred Johnson, Westfield-Barcelona Chair
 - Sorena Gilkinson, Mayville-Chautauqua Chair
 - Vicki McGraw, Jamestown Chair
- Group Session with CCCOC Board Members

Focus Group Questions:

- What are the goals you'd like to accomplish?
- What challenges are you facing?
- What would you like to do differently?
- Imagine yourself (or your positions) one year from today. What goals, dreams, or visions would you like to accomplish or begin in the next year?
- What would that be?
- What are your thoughts about the current state of the CCCoC?
- How does your role support the Mission and Vision of the Chamber?
- What are your thoughts and feelings about the Chamber's Mission, Vision, and Principles?

Focus Group Key Themes at a Glance

- **Culture/Chamber identity**
 - Overcoming the past structures – community chambers and MAST
 - Mixed preferences on how far the Chamber goes when it comes to legislation/advocacy ○ Small vs. big business; advocacy
- **Business processes**
 - Balancing workload
 - Budgeting
 - Finances
- **Strategic Plan**
 - Revise mission, vision, and values

- **Communication**

- Develop communication mechanisms internally
- Training for members and others out in the field, away from the main office

- **Branding**

- **Providing information and educating value to members**

- Communicating to current and prospective members what the services are and how they will benefit them

Focus Group Details

- There is confusion in the structure of the committees and naming
- There is a large need to clarify the financial structure
- Strategic plan needs to be revised now that we are not formally connected with MAST
- The current Chamber brand is not being used consistently and is confusing for business members
- We are in a good spot with coordinators in every location
- Helping members see value in their membership is a challenge
- Small staff feels very constrained with the workload they have
- Some said the current focus should be:
 - Communications
 - We need a strong communication plan
 - Marketing
 - Increasing members
 - Strengthen relationships and connections with current members
- Advocacy came up in some of the conversations
- A focus on small business came up several times. Should this be a core strategy of the Chamber?
- A strategic goal could be to recruit more volunteers

Retreat Overview

The focus of the retreat was to bring together as many key members of the CCCoC organization to build upon the information gathered through the focus group process. Following a brief introduction to the key elements of the *CPS* process, we engaged in an in-depth review of the feedback provided in each of the focus group sessions. The purpose of this review was to get everyone on the same page going into the four stages of *CPS*. Following the introduction, participants were split into two groups and were guided through a systematic process of clarifying the challenges and opportunities. This stage was followed by an ideation process where innovative ideas and solutions were generated, then developed. At the end of the retreat, we generated a list of key recommendations that will be included at the end of this document. Below is a summary of the information provided during the retreat.

Strategic Directions

- **Facilitate collaborative relationships between businesses to promote economic activity for our county.**
Goals:
 - Create networking events for B2B opportunities
 - Encourage collaboration to promote B2B growth
 - Utilize inclusivity to overcome bias
 - Provide better tools to help businesses promote themselves
- **Unify and streamline the CCOC through utilization of a consistent brand structure**
Goals:
 - Redevelop the chamber logos, voice, and marketing materials to create a more unified and consistent brand
 - Support the development and education of the chamber brand to board members, staff, and volunteers
- **Clarify who we (the Chamber) are and what we do.**
Goals:
 - Review in depth, revisit, and potentially revise the Chamber mission
 - Develop and integrate messaging that is targeted to the value of the businesses
 - Develop a communication plan and strategy that effectively communicates who we are and what we do – a communication blitz
- **Lead the way and excel at boosterism and serve as the spokespeople for business.**
Goals:
 - Empower partners and others to communicate our value
 - Engage political leaders in promoting the value of business
 - Proliferate messaging regarding the value of business