

Policy Development Process

The Leduc Regional Chamber of Commerce is “In business for business” and we strive to be regarded and respected as the proactive business voice and leader of our region. One of the top priorities of the Chamber is to advocate for our businesses to support economic growth in order for our members to thrive.

Advocacy is defined as: one that pleads the cause of another, one that defends or maintains a cause or proposal or one that supports or promotes the interests of another. This works and is effective if the Chamber knows and understands the needs and wants (interests, cause or proposals) of its members. It is also very important for the Chamber to comprehend the strategic vision and actions of their local municipalities.

Advocacy is really a process of identifying problems and finding ways to solve those problems. As a grassroots organization, your Chamber of Commerce can be presented with members’ issues that need to be addressed in a timely manner. The following process is intended as a step-by-step guide to stimulate discussion about local, provincial and national issues and develop ways to find satisfactory solutions to them. It’s a systematic way to develop an advocacy strategy.

This seven-step strategy process is a means by which our Chamber of Commerce can translate a member issue or concern into a constructive campaign for change.

Issues must:

- Be of significance to the Chamber’s membership;
- Be timely, reasonable, understandable and relevant; and
- Be specific, complete and actionable, (can be impacted by the actions and initiatives of the Chamber, its partners or the Provincial or Federal governments).

Advocacy & Lobbying:

Lobbying is a subset of advocacy that aims to influence specific legislation. Advocacy covers a much broader range of activities that may or may not include lobbying.

Policy:

Policy refers to the positions that define business problems and propose solutions. These policies are approved by the Chamber Board and remain Chamber policy until amended or revoked by the Chamber Board of Directors. The policy positions of the Chamber are available to the public. Advocacy policy is distinctly separate from chamber operational policies regarding the operation of the chamber (harassment policies, privacy policies etc.).

Consultation:

Consultation refers to seeking input (i.e., advice, reactions, clarifications, etc.) during the policy development process. The amount of consultation will vary based on the policy and time available.

The Seven - Step Strategy/Policy Development Process

1. *Define the current situation.*

What is the issue and clearly state the current situation that is perceived as a challenge.

2. Analyse the current situation

What are the challenges that have led to the issue?

Positive elements to the issue?

Who can help resolve?

Who else shares the same difficulties?

What has already been done to resolve the issue?

Written material and additional resources

The issues are constantly assessed for their relevance to the business interest. If a clear connection cannot be made to the business community, the issue is not addressed further. The issue may be monitored or referred to other organizations but the Chamber will not pursue policy development.

In the event an issue does affect business, initial research is conducted. The complexity of the issue is estimated and a review of existing policy in the Chamber and partner organizations is conducted.

3. Define what must change

Clarify the challenge to be sure that the root causes of the issue are addressed. Why must it be changed?

The information gathered in Steps Two and Three are reviewed and the following criteria are used to determine if further policy work should be conducted and resources committed to significant policy research. The criteria include considerations such as:

- fit with Chamber priorities;
- fit with existing Chamber policy;
- fit with business principles;
- scope of businesses affected;
- evaluation as to partner activity;
- is the Chamber the best organization to take on this issue?
- complexity of the issue;
- what resources are required to research a policy solution?
- the likelihood of success.

4. Generate possible solutions

It is important to bring solutions — not problems.

Solutions must be attainable and capable of being assessed, measured or evaluated.

5. Choose a solution

Fully consider whom your solution affects and what the reaction might be.

The solutions are assessed and collateral effects of each solution considered. The approved Chamber policy will be focused on the best solution for the business community.

6. Act on the solution

Once the policy is approved, the Chamber advocates that policy on behalf of the membership. The process of advocacy will depend on the specifics of a policy and will relate to:

- who the decision making authority is (i.e. is it submitted to the Alberta Chamber of Commerce);
- who the affected stakeholders are;
- the publicity value of the policy; and
- partners in support of our position.

These factors are considered and the policy included in Chamber communication activities. These activities include but are not limited to:

- meetings with stakeholders and decision makers;
- media releases;
- news articles;
- letter writing;
- public / member information sessions;
- political candidate forums; and,
- media appearances.

7. Close the loop

Evaluate if the desired result was achieved. If so, celebrate and communicate your success, and if not, restart the process.

The effectiveness of the advocacy efforts is assessed and the policy tactics changes to suit the political and business environment. Once the policy is created and the initial communication process is conducted the situation is evaluated. In particular the response from the decision- making authority is considered as compared to the scope of businesses affected. The Chamber can only actively advocate on a handful of issues at any one time so only a very few undergo active advocacy. The circumstances regarding the policy are monitored and if circumstances change, active advocacy may be reinitiated. A policy will continue to be part of the Chamber's policy portfolio until success is achieved or the Board of Directors rescinds the policy.

In order for the Chamber to meet the needs of its members in a dynamic global economy the process must be capable of adapting quickly to changing circumstances. The time period involved in many of these steps can be reduced to a very short turnaround: in some cases it can be measured in days. The process of advocacy and active lobbying allow policies to be lobbied in relation to one another and policies that have not recently been active to move very quickly if circumstances change.



The policy development and advocacy process is designed to identify issues of concern to the business community and allow for informed review and decision making by the Chamber Policy Chair, Policy Committee or the Board of Directors. Once the Board has decided to adopt a particular policy the chamber staff advocates for changes to be made.