

## Chapter 14

# Issues to Policies





# Issues to Policy—Provincial

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## (Practical Steps for Chambers of Commerce)

### Preamble

*We've all witnessed occasions where legislation has been pushed through political channels without receiving proper consideration from groups like the Chambers of Commerce. Our challenge is to identify problems in the early stages so we can ensure maximum input in the drafting of any proposed legislation that might eventually be debated by our elected officials. History has proven that there is limited legislative impact when our best efforts begin at the 11th hour in a time of crisis. The following outline provides a brief overview of how issues are identified and developed into policy.*

### What Is the Issue?

**1. Determine who is behind the issue.** — Whether it is a legislative issue raised by your MLA or a business issue put forward by an individual in your community, your first priority should be to contact the individual behind the initiative to gain greater insight into their concerns. You may find that you have more in common with them than initially thought. If your first response is on the basis of what you have read in the media or obtained through a third party, you are setting yourself up for failure. You need to identify the facts for yourself. This allows you to better assess the potential impact on your members and to make a compelling case for their involvement.

**2. Respect the fact that an opposing party may have a valid point.** — Creating a spirit of understanding and respect for the views of an opposing party is going to be difficult if you adopt the "wait-and-see" approach. If an issue becomes confrontational because you failed to identify the appropriate details early on, you run the risk of trading barbs in the media and at public meetings, both of which ultimately detract attention from the issue and reduce a politician's sense of urgency to act. The time to invest your efforts is before the issue becomes a crisis. Trust and understanding can seldom be cultivated in the heat of battle. In politics, like marketing, the medium is the message. How you conduct yourself with elected officials and bureaucrats will be remembered as much, if not more, than what you had to say. In the life of a Chamber, your success is not defined by your ability to win at every issue — it's defined by your ability to win the respect of those you're trying to influence.

**3. Involve as many as possible in the development of your position.** — The old adage there's strength in numbers is especially true when it comes to making a difference on an issue that affects your community. Politicians recognize the power in numbers — it's what got them elected. In Alberta, the government has introduced a number of new initiatives based on results it has received from public polls. The government will always err on the side of caution if the poll results indicate the electorate isn't prepared to support them in the development of a new policy. The greater the statistical information you collect about how your members feel on an issue, the greater your MLA's interest will be. When it comes to policy-making, politicians think like business people. They are motivated to act only when it becomes clear that it's in their best interests to do so.

## Communicating What You Want Done

**1. Be brief.** — In as few words as possible (one (1) page maximum), summarize your concern and what you want your MLA to do about it. The one page rule of thumb forces you to condense your thoughts into an easy to read document that is much more likely to get your MLA's attention. Avoid lecturing, insulting, or using threatening language. Not only will this affect your credibility with your MLA, it could hurt you on a broader basis if you are asked to appear as a witness before a government standing committee.

**2. Be specific.** — Chambers sometimes have limited impact on the legislative process because their policy recommendations contain language that provides an MLA with an escape route. If your recommendation poses a difficult political challenge that your MLA may not eagerly embrace, it is important to recognize that terminology like "encourage", "create a level playing field", "foster an environment", etc. may hurt your cause. Your recommendations need to provide a clear roadmap of what the government is to do and in what timeframe. Always test your recommendations as though you were the intended recipient and ask yourself whether it is clear and direct enough to cause your MLA to act.

**3. Ensure you check the facts.** — While MLAs have a responsibility to listen to their constituents' concerns, they may distance themselves from your cause if you provide inaccurate or misleading information. If your issue is important and well-argued, your MLA could be your strongest ally to sell the concern to the rest of government caucus. If you fail to provide accurate data to support that issue, you run the risk of embarrassing your MLA as well as him/her pulling away from your cause. Be sure to incorporate the results of relevant studies or polls you've conducted with your Chamber membership. Your MLA is particularly interested in how many of your members share the same concern.

**4. Timing is everything.** — The fact you may not get the answer you are seeking from the government may have everything to do with the issue and its timing. If, for example, your issue requires the use of new money or a reallocation of existing financial resources, you cannot start making your arguments in February when the provincial budget is to be presented. You need to begin working on the issue early in the budget cycle. You will need to consult with politicians and the bureaucracy as there are often differing views on how new initiatives should be developed. Take the time to learn how the government's budget and business planning processes operate. It will save you a lot of extra steps down the road.

**5. Be relevant.** — An issue must be relevant if it is to ever get the government's attention. A new approach to infrastructure funding would certainly be perceived as relevant, whereas a recommendation that the government provide subsidies and loan guarantees to professional hockey clubs would not. You don't want to take on issues that you know the government has no interest in addressing unless you have the overwhelming support of your members to do so. Politicians only get behind the issues that complement their own political platform or which may have an overwhelming impact on all Albertans.

## **Bringing Issues to the Alberta Chambers of Commerce**

**1. A provincial voice strengthens your position.** — If your issue is provincial or federal in nature, having the support of the Alberta federation of 127 Chambers adds significant credibility to your position. It is the Alberta Chambers' ability to systematically communicate with Chambers in every geographical corner of the province that causes both government and opposition MLAs to listen to what the Chambers are saying. Before presenting your issue as a proposed resolution to the Alberta Chambers, take time to consult fellow Chambers for their views. Others may have different ideas of how to address your issue. Having the insight and support of a cross-section of Chambers will not only help you develop a stronger position, it will strengthen the odds of your resolution being adopted as policy at the Alberta Chambers' AGM.

**2. Attendance at the Alberta Chambers of Commerce AGM is important.** — It is important that you are on hand to speak to your resolution at the AGM. As the resolution's sponsor, you have the first opportunity to speak to the merits of your position. If you don't have a good read of how delegates plan to vote on your resolution, this might be your only chance to convince them to support you. You should be prepared with supporting research, letters of endorsement, media coverage, etc. if questions arise. That said, it is important to recognize that the majority of delegates have pre-determined how they will vote on resolutions. Many Chambers review the resolutions with their boards and develop precise voting strategies. As convincing as you might be during the policy session,

delegates may be unwilling or unable to change their voting strategies at the last minute. You won't help your case if you force these individuals to abstain from voting. Don't underestimate the importance of promoting your resolution to fellow Chambers weeks in advance of the policy session.

**3. Following the AGM, get involved in the Alberta Chambers' communication strategies.**

— It is rare that the government will act unilaterally on the recommendations of any group without first conducting an extensive review of its own. This means the work of the Alberta Chambers is usually just starting when it receives the initial government response to its recommendations. If the response was unsatisfactory, a number of communication strategies may be employed through the year to both educate and sway the opinion of government MLAs in favor of the Alberta Chambers' recommendations. Your Chamber's support of these strategies could be the difference between government acting on or ignoring these recommendations. As trivial as the completion of another short survey, form letter or petition might seem, politicians recognize the power of these instruments, especially when well over 100 communities simultaneously engage in the process.

**4. Commit to being an ongoing information provider.** — The Alberta Chambers of Commerce is committed to regularly updating the membership on the status of all approved policies that have been sent to government for response. While the Alberta Chambers does its best to understand and work through the labyrinth of legislative issues that impact members' policies, we rely heavily on the expertise of our member Chambers to do this. The individual who drafted your Chamber's resolution is an invaluable asset to the ongoing advocacy process. Make sure if your resolution becomes adopted as Alberta Chambers' policy that you follow that issue through with the Alberta Chambers of Commerce until government has provided a satisfactory response. Your expertise and insight on the issue is needed on an ongoing basis.

To the extent that your Chamber is involved on numerous policy issues, you may want to consider joining the Alberta Chambers' policy committee following the AGM in May. The policy committee joins the expertise of Chambers from across the province for networking and policy development purposes.



# Call for Policy Submissions

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(An annual process)

This is your invitation to participate in the Alberta Chambers policy development process prior to and during the Chambers' Annual General Meeting in Alberta each May.

One of the reasons the Alberta Chambers has realized such success influencing public policy is due to its commitment to finding constructive solutions to business issues that can be supported by a majority of MLAs. Obtaining that support reflects the work completed by Chambers at the local level and their ability to develop those issues into provincial and nationally focused policies.

In the months leading to the resolutions deadline, we encourage you to talk with your membership about the issues that affect business activity in your community. Find out if there are common concerns that are provincial or national in nature and could be presented as a policy issue to the Alberta Chambers. *If you are short on staff resources or lack the research expertise to fully develop your own views, consider working together with other Chambers.*

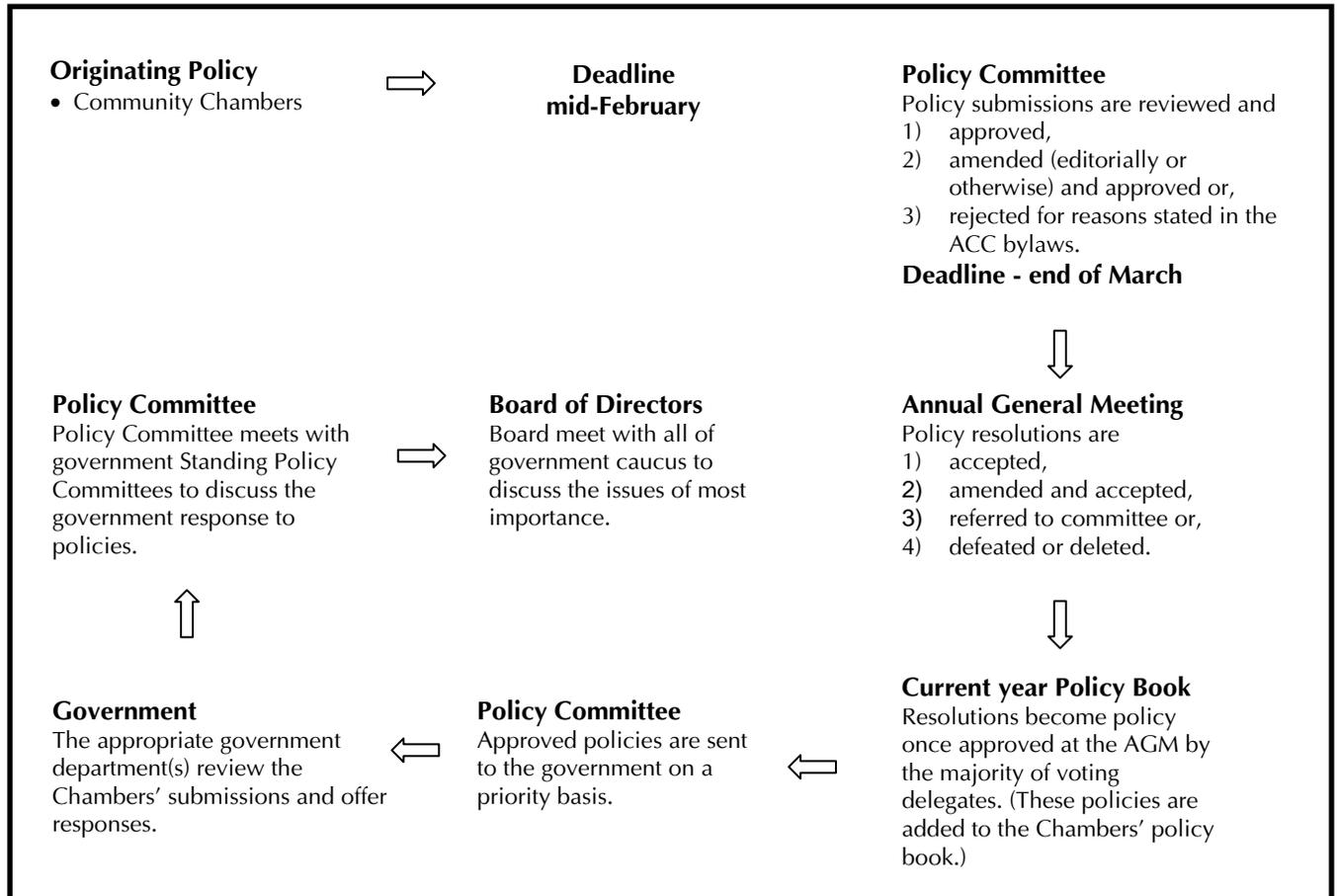
The Alberta Chambers has discussion forums on its website located at [www.abchamber.ca](http://www.abchamber.ca) should representatives in your Chamber wish to begin a dialogue with other Chamber on any given policy issue.

In order to get more information on how you can participate in policy development, contact Terri Kemball 780-425-4180, ext. 6 or toll free in Alberta at 1-800-272-8854.

Deadline for policy submissions is — **mid-February**



# Policy Process & Guidelines



## Policy Guidelines

### Scope

In order to be considered, policies must be:

- Specific, complete, and relevant;
- Reasonable and attainable;
- Capable of being measured, assessed, or evaluated; and,
- Of provincial, national, or international importance.

## Basic content requirement

- Policy title, preamble, background and recommendations that accurately reflect the issue under consideration.
- Factual account of the concern, issue or problem.
- Explain the context of the policy: Why is it an issue? How long has it been an issue? Who does it affect? Why is the Alberta Chambers the organization to bring this concern to?
- What are the arguments that would support a change to existing government policy? (e.g. Loss of new investment, loss of jobs, etc.)
- Identify the stakeholders affected by the issue. What have they said? What have they done?
- Reference relevant research materials that support your arguments (conjecture is not an acceptable approach in policy development).
- Address any opposing points of view by other stakeholders when developing policy recommendations. (e.g. If another organization has a sound, economic or scientific viewpoint that differs from the viewpoints being proposed in your policy, state that position and then defend your position with reasoned policy options.)
- What is the specific course of action to be tendered to government? (e.g. Is the request clear? Is it clear who is expected to act on it and in what timeframe? Does it communicate what next steps should occur should the government fail to provide the desired response?)

## Who may participate?

A member Chamber eligible to submit policy resolutions may submit no more than three proposed policy resolutions on its own (including late resolutions) to each AGM. If a Chamber submits more than three resolutions, it must identify a policy co-sponsor (s) at the time the policy(s) is/are brought to the Alberta Chambers attention. Resolutions may, however, be submitted by proxy in the name of another member Chamber eligible to submit policy resolutions, with the consent of that member Chamber.

## Time for submission

Policies intended for consideration at an AGM **MUST** be submitted to the policy committee not less than 90 days prior to the AGM. Policies approved by the policy committee for consideration at the AGM will be distributed to members not less than 45 days prior to that meeting.

## Late resolutions

Late resolutions will only be considered for debate at the AGM if:

- a) They are of an urgent or crucial nature in the opinion of AGM voting delegates;

- b) They otherwise satisfy the criteria applicable to proposed policy in the opinion of the AGM voting delegates;
- c) They are received with sufficient copies for distribution to each member attending the AGM; and,
- d) The members attending the AGM agree to consider the resolution by a two-thirds majority.

### **Circulation of approved policy**

Following the AGM, the Policy Committee will:

- a) Distribute to members all approved policies and policies editorially amended; and,
- b) Present approved policies to the government on a priority basis for response.

(Board of Directors meeting – April 16, 2007)

# Policy Resolution Worksheet

## TITLE:

Compose a title that describes the issue. A review of the index in ACC's policy book should provide the reader with a summary of the issues important to our members.

## PREAMBLE:

- Describe the problem requiring government action. Explain the impact it has on business. If possible, support your statements with statistics and note the sources from which they are derived.
- Contain sufficient background to ensure delegates can fully debate the issue at the AGM.
- Write in continuous text with paragraphs.
- Identify whether the issue falls under the purview of the provincial or federal government, or both.
- Although a local issue may have prompted your resolution, broaden its scope of the policy to ensure it has provincial applications.
- Discussing an issue with Chambers with similar concerns may provide more background and recommendations. A policy resolution can gain strength when a number of Chambers choose to co-sponsor it.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

State the level(s) of government the recommendations are for, what action is desired, and, if applicable, a timeline.

Recommendations begin in one of the three following ways:

- **The Alberta Chambers of Commerce recommends the Government of Alberta:**
- **The Alberta Chambers of Commerce recommends the Government of Canada:**
- **The Alberta Chambers of Commerce recommends the Government of Alberta and the Government of Canada:**

As recommendations direct the government to take an action, they should begin with a verb, such as, *develop, implement, establish, initiate, assist, provide, introduce, improve, explore, commit . . .*

Recommendations should reflect points raised in the preamble.

Number the recommendations.



# Issues to Policies—Municipal

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## (Practical Steps for Chambers of Commerce)

### Preamble

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### What Is the Issue?

**1. Determine who is behind the issue.** — Whether it is a legislative issue raised by your City/Town Council or a business issue put forward by an individual in your community, your first priority should be to contact the individual behind the initiative to gain greater insight into their concerns. You may find that you have more in common with them than initially thought. If your first response is on the basis of what you have read in the media or obtained through a third party, you are setting yourself up for failure. **You need to identify the facts for yourself.** This allows you to better assess the potential impact on your members and to make a compelling case for their involvement.

**2. Respect the fact that an opposing party may have a valid point.** — Creating a spirit of understanding and respect for the views of an opposing party is going to be difficult if you adopt the “wait-and-see” approach. If an issue becomes confrontational because you failed to identify the appropriate details early on, you run the risk of trading barbs in the media and at public meetings, both of which ultimately detract attention from the issue and reduce your Council's sense of urgency to act. The time to invest your efforts is before the issue becomes a crisis. Trust and understanding can seldom be cultivated in the heat of battle. In politics, like marketing, the medium is the message. How you conduct yourself with elected officials and bureaucrats will be remembered as much, if not more, than what you had to say. In the life of a Chamber, your success is not defined by your ability to win at every issue — it's defined by your ability to win the respect of those you're trying to influence.

**3. Involve as many as possible in the development of your position.** — The old adage "there's strength in numbers" is especially true when it comes to making a difference on an issue that affects your community. Politicians recognize the power in numbers — it's what got them elected. The greater the statistical information you collect about how your members feel on an issue, the greater your Council's interest will be. When it comes to policy-making, politicians think like business people. They are motivated to act only when it becomes clear that it's in their best interests to do so.

## Communicating What You Want Done

**1. Be brief.** — In as few words as possible (one (1) page maximum), summarize your concern and what you want your Town/City Council to do. The one-page rule of thumb forces you to condense your thoughts into an easy to read document that is much more likely to get your Council's attention. Avoid lecturing, insulting, or using threatening language. Not only will this affect your credibility, it could hurt you on a broader basis if you are asked to make a presentation to your Council. **Never present an issue without presenting a solution.**

**2. Be specific.** — Chambers sometimes have limited impact on the legislative process because their policy recommendations contain language that provides Council with an escape route. If your recommendation poses a difficult political challenge that your Council may not eagerly embrace, it is important to recognize that terminology like "encourage", "create a level playing field", "foster an environment", etc. may hurt your cause. Your recommendations need to provide a clear roadmap of what the town/city is to do, and in what timeframe. Always test your recommendations as though you were the intended recipient and ask yourself whether it is clear and direct enough to cause your Council to act.

**3. Ensure you check the facts.** — While Councils have a responsibility to listen to their constituents' concerns, they may distance themselves from your cause if you provide inaccurate or misleading information. If your issue is important and well-argued, your Council could be your strongest ally. Be sure to incorporate the results of relevant studies or polls you've conducted with your Chamber membership. Your Council is particularly interested in how many of your members share the same concern.

**4. Timing is everything.** — The fact you may not get the answer you are seeking from Council may have everything to do with the issue and its timing. If, for example, your issue requires the use of new money or a reallocation of existing financial resources, you cannot start making your arguments in February if their budget has been passed. You need to begin working on the issue early in the budget cycle. You will need to consult with

Council and town/city management as there is often differing views on how new initiatives should be developed. Take the time to learn how the town/city's budget and business planning processes operate. It will save you lots of extra steps down the road.

**5. Be relevant.** — An issue must be relevant if it is to ever get Council's attention. A new approach to infrastructure funding would certainly be perceived as relevant, where a recommendation that the Council provide subsidies and loan guarantees to hockey clubs would not. You don't want to take on issues that you know Council has no interest in addressing, unless you have the overwhelming support of your members to do so. Politicians only get behind the issues that complement their own political platform or which may have an overwhelming impact on all residents.

# Responding to Emerging Issues

<p><b>What is an Emerging Issue?</b>          An emerging issue is any issue not addressed by way of policy and which has the potential to stop, limit or inhibit business activity in Canada if not addressed by the ACC in a timely manner on behalf of all member audiences.</p>	<p><b>Acceptable Timeframe for Determining How to Address an Emerging Issue?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media-driven issue: (1-4 hours)</li> <li>• All other circumstances: (Within 24 hours)</li> </ul>
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