

FACT CHECK:

WHAT PEOPLE GET WRONG ABOUT CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

Most people have heard of their local chamber of commerce, but far fewer could tell you what it does. Only 44 percent say they know their chamber, while 70 percent want to know more. That gap gets filled with guesses and misconceptions that only weaken the public image of local chambers. Let's take a closer look at those myths and set the record straight.

YOU MAY HAVE HEARD:

"THE CHAMBER? THAT IS BASICALLY PART OF CITY HALL."

A CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IS A PRIVATE, NONPROFIT BUSINESS ASSOCIATION, BUILT AND GOVERNED BY LOCAL EMPLOYERS.

Chambers work with city, county and state governments on shared priorities, which is why people mix the two up. Chambers are typically organized as 501(c)(6) nonprofits, with boards of directors drawn from local business leaders. The chamber answers to its members, not a mayor.

"MY TAXES PAY FOR IT."

CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE ARE FUNDED BY MEMBER DUES, EVENT REVENUE, SPONSORSHIPS AND GRANTS.

Some chambers hold a public contract for a specific service like tourism promotion or economic development, disclosed and paid for delivered work. Neither makes a chamber a taxpayer-funded agency.

"THE CHAMBER IS A POLITICAL ORGANIZATION."

CHAMBERS ADVOCATE FOR ECONOMIC PROSPERITY, A PRO-GROWTH POLICY ENVIRONMENT AND COMPETITIVE WORKFORCE. THAT IS THE JOB.

What the advocacy does not follow is a party. A chamber will push hard on permitting timelines, housing availability or child care capacity, because those issues impact employers. Some chambers engage in political activity, promoting pro-growth ballot initiatives or supporting candidates. Those endorsements go to candidates from both parties. Business friendly policy is not owned by one political party. The road, the school and the labor market do not change with the election.

"JOINING DOES NOT MOVE THE NEEDLE. NOBODY NOTICES."

THEY NOTICE. NEARLY HALF OF U.S. ADULTS SAY KNOWING A BUSINESS BELONGS TO THE CHAMBER WOULD MAKE THEM VIEW IT MORE FAVORABLY.

They are also more likely to buy from it and recommend it. Among adults who already know their chamber, those percentages are even higher. The problem is most people don't know which businesses are members. Only 40 percent of adults can name which local businesses belong. Window decals, websites, receipts, social bios.

YOU MAY HAVE HEARD:

"IT IS A CLUB FOR THE BIG COMPANIES."

CHAMBERS REPRESENT EMPLOYERS OF ALL SIZES AND CAN BE ESPECIALLY HELPFUL TO SMALL BUSINESS LEADERS WHO HAVE THE FEWEST HOURS TO SPARE.

A five-person shop may not have a dedicated HR department, business development staffer or lobbyist to sit through a zoning hearing. That is the gap a chamber fills. Among business owners, 65 percent say their chamber advocates for policies in their interest and 62 percent say it supports their growth. And the benefits of the work impact the entire community, not just the member businesses. When a chamber expands child care or clears a permitting backlog, non-members get the same shorter wait.

"CHAMBERS ARE A BOOMER THING. NOBODY YOUNG BOTHERS."

BABY BOOMERS AND OLDER ADULTS REPORT THE LEAST FAMILIARITY WITH THEIR LOCAL CHAMBER.

Not the most. Millennials are the most likely to say they know their chamber and can explain what it does. Millennials and Gen Z are also most likely to see chamber involvement as evidence that a company is reputable and follows good practices.

"ALL A CHAMBER DOES IS RIBBON CUTTINGS, BREAKFASTS, AND BUSINESS CARDS."

THE RIBBON CUTTINGS AND EVENTS ARE THE PART THAT GETS PHOTOGRAPHED, BUT THE WORK BEHIND THEM IS CONNECTING AND GROWING LOCAL BUSINESSES.

Very few local organizations can bring employers, elected officials and community leaders to the same table and expect all of them to show up. Chambers can. That's what makes it possible to take on problems no single entity can solve alone. These examples show the impact of that work better than any response could.

CHAMBERS IN ACTION

SEE THE REAL WORK OF CHAMBERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY...

- OneSpartanburg, Inc. set out to add 100 child care seats in Spartanburg County. Through \$200,000 in micro grants, it created 197, faster and cheaper than building a new facility.
- The Bend Chamber commissioned polling, won zoning changes and launched a revolving loan fund for workforce housing.
- The Florida Chamber Health Council built a Mental Wellness Institute off its own behavioral health research.
- The Grand Rapids Chamber and its foundation helped house 100 chronically homeless neighbors in 100 days, for less than \$500 per person.