

Building Clean Cities Partnerships Through Local Chambers of Commerce

Clean Cities is aiming to reduce petroleum use by 2.5 billion gallons per year by 2020, and that's no small goal. To meet it, Clean Cities coordinators have to recruit and engage a wide variety of stakeholders, including those in the private sector. According to the 2010 Automotive Fleet Fact Book, America's commercial fleets included more than 2.7 million cars and trucks in 2010, representing huge potential for petroleum reduction.

One way to reach out to these private-sector fleets is to get involved in your chamber of commerce, a local organization that serves and advocates for businesses in your city or region. In most large metropolitan areas, chambers represent thousands of large and small businesses. The Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce has 5,000 members. Chambers of commerce in Denver and Dallas each have about 3,000 members. Even in smaller cities, chambers can provide direct access to hundreds of businesses.

The primary goal of most chambers is economic development. That includes attracting new business to the region and fostering the use of new technologies that give the region a competitive edge. This makes Clean Cities' work with alternative fuels and advanced vehicles a natural fit with a chamber's mission. Together, Clean Cities coalitions and chambers of commerce can develop new business opportunities, create jobs, and make their communities cleaner, healthier places to live.



The local chamber of commerce is one of the best resources available for a Clean Cities coalition seeking to reach out to the business community and build partnerships with private-sector fleets. *Photo from iStock/9506988*

Benefits

Resources, networking, visibility, and advocacy opportunities are just a few of the many benefits to joining your local chamber of commerce.

Resources: Gain access to experienced business professionals, training, educational programs, local contacts, and organizational strategies.

Networking and Visibility: Build name recognition in your community and develop relationships with businesses that may someday become enthusiastic participants in Clean Cities events and activities.

Advocacy: Find local champions for your coalition's mission and activities.

Getting Involved

The benefits of chamber membership depend directly on your active involvement. From volunteering at events, to participating on a committee, to attending classes and workshops, there are many opportunities to get involved in your local chamber of commerce. Select your activities based on your coalition's needs and resources.

Orientation: Attending an orientation session is the first step in partnering with your chamber. This session not only covers membership benefits, but also allows you to hear first-hand from active members about how a chamber can help build successful partnerships. Ask as many questions as you can during this session to help you decide whether chamber membership is right for your coalition.

Most chambers have a few different tiers of membership, each with different levels of benefits and corresponding dues or fees. If membership cost is a roadblock, find creative ways to offset it, such as swapping membership in your Clean Cities coalition.

Events: Attending events hosted or sponsored by a local chamber is the easiest way to get to know other chamber members and build relationships that could benefit a coalition. The next hand you shake could belong to a future Clean Cities supporter or champion.

Leads Groups: Leads groups are industry-specific groups of chamber members who gather to exchange contacts, provide referrals, and spread the word about their services and products. Coordinators or stakeholders could participate in these groups, and some stakeholders may be willing to pay the nominal participation fees that are sometimes charged. If your coalition joins a leads group, be sure to follow up quickly on the leads you gather during meetings.

Committees: Each chamber has a unique set of local priorities that it addresses through the work of various committees. Coordinators who actively participate in these committees become leaders in the business community, and they may be able to influence decisions on issues like transportation, economic development, or energy policy.

Workshops and Training: Chambers provide a wide variety of opportunities to build skills and knowledge. Strategy and planning workshops can help you develop and refine your coalition's vision



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Chambers of commerce offer a wide range of opportunities to meet potential partners and to build leadership skills. Photo from iStock/12681402

and program plan. Most local chambers offer leadership programs, consisting of a series of workshops that focus on valuable leadership skills.

Ambassador Programs: Local chambers are always seeking to increase their membership and enhance participation by existing members. By serving as an ambassador, you'll reach out to prospective and new members, reconnect with existing members, and encourage involvement. Ambassadors have greater access to chamber programs, and they benefit from the networking that naturally comes with the role.

Sponsorship: Sponsoring chamber events is an excellent way to build recognition for your coalition and get a seat at the table in important community discussions. Many chamber events relate directly or indirectly to the Clean Cities mission.

In addition to these opportunities, there may be many other productive ways

for you to get involved in a local chamber of commerce. But taking the time to get to know your local chamber and the resources it offers has the potential to take your Clean Cities accomplishments to new heights.

Contacting Your Local Chamber

Getting in touch with your local chamber of commerce is as easy as turning on your computer or smartphone. A quick Internet search will lead you to the Web sites of multiple chambers in your region. Most sites have membership sections that outline benefits and fees, list chamber contacts, and tell you how to join.

For more information, contact Andrew Hudgins at 303-275-4382 or andrew.hudgins@nrel.gov.