



Fredericton Chamber of Commerce
2003 – 2004

Strategic Plan

November 7, 2003



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I. The Challenge of Change

Substantial changes have occurred at the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce over the past 5 to 10 years. The Fredericton Chamber of Commerce has grown to become the third largest Chamber in Atlantic Canada (behind Halifax and Moncton respectively) with membership standing at 755 as of October 2003. As its membership has grown, the Chamber's role has evolved to reflect the increasing needs of its members and the changes within the community at large. In 1990, total membership was 341 with a staff of one. In 1992 an additional staff person was added as membership increased to 368, and a third staff person at 479 members. In 1998, a 4th staff person was added as membership approached 550 members.

During this period of time, the role of the Chamber evolved from a primary focus on events and benefits, to an expanded role in advocacy and economic development initiatives. To date, the five key areas of focus of the Fredericton Chamber are: benefits for members, economic development, education activities, advocacy, and networking opportunities.

Also, during the period 1998 to 2003 revenues of the Chamber increased \$198,749 to \$309,204, a dramatic increase of 56%.

The increasingly competitive economic development field on a global level has led the Chamber into a larger role in economic development, culminating in the highly successful Airline Travel Bank initiative during 2002-2003. This success has generated increased requests for partnerships and participation in additional economic development initiatives. As well, a restructuring of economic development organizations by the Provincial Government, and the formation of Team Fredericton, has led to an increased level of communication and cooperation on various initiatives.

While the Fredericton Chamber is financially strong, increased requests to participate in economic development initiatives have diminished the organization's financial reserves.

The operations of the Chamber have grown to include operating 17 internal committees, representatives on 7 additional external committees, and approximately 50-55 events and functions per year on average.

In terms of advocacy and special projects, the Fredericton Chamber has taken an increased role in “eco-social” issues, issues of a social nature that have a significant impact on the business community. Health care and education are primary examples.

As the role of the Chamber has grown within the region, the increased activities have dramatically increased the level of activity on volunteers and staff. For example, recent Chamber Presidents have cited that they have attended in excess of 200 meetings and functions on behalf of the Chamber during their one-year term as President.

The success of the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce has been recognized regionally and nationally. Since 1997, the Fredericton Chamber has received the “*Chamber of the Year Award*” 5 times from the Atlantic Provinces Chamber of Commerce, and the General Manager has received the “*Executive of the Year Award*” twice during this time frame from the Chambers of Commerce Executives of Canada.

During the introductory portion of the strategic planning session, a presentation on the *Challenge of Change* indicated a number of concerns that may have an impact on the future of the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce:

- Leadership – due to increased workload of volunteers, will the Chamber be able to recruit high quality leaders to serve in Executive positions (ex. President)?
- Funds – will the Chamber be able to generate sufficient funds to grow the organization?
- Balance – can the Chamber successfully balance the demands placed upon the organization as it grows?
- Human Resources – will the Chamber continue to be able to recruit and retain highly motivated staff and volunteers?
- Competition – will the Chamber be able to sustain growth of membership, sponsorship, and events as other organizations become increasingly competitive?
- Limited Staffing – limited support staff and sales staff limits the ability to achieve opportunities

In concluding the *Challenge of Change* presentation, a number of areas of future sustainable growth opportunities were identified:

- Recruit new members
- Retain existing members
- Sponsorships
- New events
- Enhanced benefits
- More effective advocacy role

A discussion was held regarding the “key issues of the Chamber’s future” during which the following topics brought forward:

- relocation of offices
- coping with success
- expansion of boundaries
- increased role in advocacy

The following strategic plan addresses the issues raised above, and probes into the effectiveness of the Fredericton Chamber in fulfilling its mandate in the five key areas of benefits, economic development, education, advocacy, and networking. Feedback from a membership survey (October/November 2003) and feedback from economic development partners was taken into consideration during discussions.

Participants of the strategic planning session were as follows:

Don Good, President
Dan Koncz, 1st VP
Laura O’Blenis, 2nd VP
Ron Sauntry, Treasurer
Tammy Bilodeau, Executive Member
Dave McMullen, Executive Member
Steve Burns, Director
Ron Forsythe, Director
Terry Avery, Director
Janet Pratt, Director
Dan Coleman, Director
Peter Lindfield, Director
Mitch Smith, Director
Weldon LeBlanc, staff
Gail Steeves, staff
Kerry Atkinson, staff
Jennifer Merrill, staff
Michael Ircha, facilitator

II. The Chamber and its Partners in Economic Development

Consultations with Downtown Fredericton Inc. and Main Street Business Development Association was conducted prior to the meeting. While each of these organizations rated the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce high in terms of communication and lobby efforts, there were concerns raised relating to efforts involving highway signage from both organizations. DFI

gave mediocre ratings in the areas of economic development, educational opportunities, and networking activities.

Action:

- 1.) *Chamber staff will follow-up with these organizations to clarify concerns and work to improve relationships in these areas.*
- 2.) *Chamber staff will contact Team Fredericton and Enterprise Fredericton to obtain feedback.*

III. What our Members Think: Results of the Recent Membership Survey

An on-line survey was conducted with the Chamber membership during late October to early November:

- 285 surveys were opened
- 235 surveys had at least one question answered
- 48 had no responses
- 156 surveys were completed in its entirety

In discussing the amount of effort the Chamber places on the five key areas noted above, those present were comfortable that the focus of the Board of Directors is placed on policy development in the areas of:

- Economic development
- Advocacy

The resources of staff focus on the following operational areas:

- Education
- Benefits to members
- Networking opportunities

When asked to rate the Chamber on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being poor, 5 being excellent) members responded as follows (ranked in order of preference):

	<u>What's Important to members?</u>	<u>How Good are we doing?</u>
1.) Economic Development	<u>4.3</u>	<u>3.8</u>
2.) Networking	<u>4.2</u>	<u>4.4</u>
3.) Advocacy	<u>4.0</u>	<u>3.8</u>
4.) Education/Training	<u>3.9</u>	<u>3.7</u>
5.) Benefits	<u>3.6</u>	<u>3.8</u>



In summary, the results of the survey indicate that the Chamber is exceeding member's expectations in the areas of benefits and networking; while more effort is required in the three other areas of economic development, education/training, and advocacy. (see table below).

To address the discrepancy regarding “*what is important to members*”, and “*how the Chamber is performing*”, the following actions were discussed:

Action(s):

- 1.) *Economic Development – ranked #1 in terms of importance, survey results indicate that the membership believe that the Chamber should have a strong role in this area (4.3); however, the results indicate that members believe the Chamber is functioning less than expected (3.8)*

Generally, it was believed that the Chamber could play a more significant role in economic development; however, there would be additional costs associated with this enhanced role. It was suggested that the Chamber could participate in various Trade Missions and strategic initiatives in an effort to enhance its profile and exceed the expectations of the Chamber membership.

- a. *Form an economic development committee to clarify the role of the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce in terms of economic development*
 - b. *Increase awareness of the Chamber's role relating to economic development*
 - c. *Identify key strategic economic development initiatives/projects in which the Chamber should take a key leadership role*
 - d. *Identify other economic initiatives/projects in which the Chamber should take a supporting role.*
 - e. *Enhance the Chamber's relationship with Business New Brunswick*
 - f. *Work with Team Fredericton to enhance the “Business Ambassador” program*
 - g. *Explore budgetary considerations associated with an enhanced role in economic development*
- 2.) *Benefits – members have identified this area as a lesser priority (3.6) and believe the Chamber is placing the appropriate amount of effort in this area (3.8)*
 - a. *Obtain feedback from members to determine possible additional benefits*
 - b. *Prioritize additional benefits for members*
 - c. *Based on feedback, initiate new member benefits where possible*
- 3.) *Education – members have identified education as a lesser priority (3.9), but believe that the Chamber can do more in this area (3.7)*

- a. *Massage survey data to more accurately pin point what size business member identifies education as a higher priority*
 - b. *Strategically initiate educational activities to meet this groups needs*
 - c. *Work more closely with economic development partners and service providers to deliver educational programming, and selectively promote educational activities that are not presented by the Chamber.*
 - d. *Prepare a long-term sustainable education strategy for the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce.*
- 4.) *Networking – ranked #2 in importance (4.2.), the Chamber is exceeding expectations in this area (4.4).*
- a. *Explore possible “screening measures” for Business After Hours hosts to ensure that the Chamber continues to present a high caliber program. Measures to include amount of floor space available at the host’s place of business, and ensure that adequate liability insurance exists.*
 - b. *Investigate revenues and expenses associated with presenting the Business After Hours program, and explore the possibility of increasing fee charged to host a Business After Hours.*
- 5.) *Advocacy – while ranking 3rd in terms of priorities, advocacy still remains a high priority to members (4.0), with the Chamber performing just slightly below expectations (3.8). Of interest to note is the ranking of 3.5 by members to the question regarding their level of awareness of the Chamber’s advocacy efforts.*
- a. *Increase communication with members to obtain enhanced feedback on issues*
 - i. *Initiate regular polls*
 - ii. *Communicate results to members/media*
 - b. *Continue to focus the resources of the Chamber on macro issues of the business community*

IV. The Chamber's Vision and Mission

The topic of the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce’s vision and mission was discussed, however, there was not consensus to bring resolution to the topic. It was believed that there was insufficient time to focus on this area during this session. Generally it was agreed that the Chamber should maintain a high focus on economic development and advocacy, while maintaining sufficient effort to exceed member’s expectations in the areas of education, networking, and benefits.

While some present believed the Chamber's vision statement, "Taking Care of Business", was still relevant, there were others who believed it was time for a change. It was generally believed that the mission statement was too long and consisted of primarily objectives, as opposed to a specific mission statement.

Action:

1.) a special meeting of the Board will be held to deal with the possible revision of the Chamber's vision and mission statement.

V. Other Chamber Initiatives

The Fredericton Chamber of Commerce is currently involved in five projects considered to be special projects:

- Fredericton Airline Travel Bank
- Leadership Fredericton
- Muriel McQueen Foundation
- Entrepreneurship Challenge
- Chalmer's Foundation Campaign
- PEMD-I

Discussion around this area noted that generally there are financial costs associated with participation in special projects. This is evident in the Travel Bank initiative and the PEMD-I project. While the Chamber is limited to a support role in the other initiatives, it is recognized that there are HR commitments in terms of staffing and volunteer support.

Action:

1.) develop a set of criteria to assist the Board in determining which projects the Chamber should become involved in

VII. Financial Position

The fiscal position of the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce was discussed at various times throughout the session. It was noted that while the Chamber is fiscally sound, there was limited financial flexibility to allow the Chamber to participate in future initiatives, specifically relating to economic development.

Action:

1. *rebuild surplus - it was noted the Chamber's surplus has been diminished over the years due to participation in unbudgeted strategic initiatives. It was discussed that a concerted effort should begin to rebuild the surplus to allow the Chamber the opportunity to participate in future initiatives.*
2. *investigate "charitable foundation" status for Fredericton Chamber of Commerce*
3. *investigate the possibility of implementing a "capital campaign" to raise funds for the new chamber offices*

VIII. Wrap-up Topics

1.) **Sales Database** - in an effort to assist with increasing the membership of the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce, it was suggested that the Chamber develop a business database to assist with "sales" activities of the Chamber.

***Staff note...** a database of this nature would be useful if the Chamber were lacking in "sales leads"; however, this is not the case. The issue at this time is finding the time to follow-up on potential leads. This should be considered as an "action" item when new member growth reaches a plateau.*

2.) **Obtain Additional Information** - the membership survey conducted recently did not include the written responses to some of the questions. As well, additional data can be obtained by cross-referencing questions to gain more insight into the needs and wishes of the Chamber members.

Action:

This information will be tabulated and condensed into report form and will be available to assist with decision making on specific areas of interest.

3.) **Expansion of Boundaries** - it is unclear regarding the specifics of the current boundaries of the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce. In addition, with other Chambers being established in the area, it would be prudent for the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce to explore the option of expanding its current boundaries.

Action:

Investigate the issues involved in the expanding of the organization's boundaries.

4.) Operational activities – it was noted that the current plan (compiled in 1997) had expired. To more accurately plan for future growth of the Chamber, it was suggested that operational plans be extended 3 to 5 years into the future.

Action:

- 1.) Prepare a 3 to 5 year business plan and marketing plan providing projections for future growth of the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce.*
- 2.) Develop a long-term sustainable plan to address the HR restraints (staffing and volunteers)*

5.) Communication with members – 2003 Membership Survey results indicated concerns by members regarding their level of satisfaction of communication with the Fredericton Chamber.

Action:

- 1.) Tabulate the results of the 2003 membership survey into report form and make available to assist with decision making on specific areas of interest.*
- 2.) Initiate ongoing membership polls to obtain member feedback*
- 3.) Poll membership to explore methods of improving communications with Chamber*

IX. Conclusion

In discussing where the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce would be in five years, the following areas were noted:

- increase role in advocacy
- increased cultural diversity among the business community
- increased bilingualism pressures (organizationally and business community)
- increased pressure to participate in economic development initiatives
- membership could reach 1000 business members

Discussion throughout the strategic planning session recognized that the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce has undergone considerable amount of change in terms of operations and membership size in recent years. The results of the membership survey indicate that Chamber members deem economic development and advocacy as the major focus of the Chamber, with networking, education, and benefits as secondary priorities. Generally, members believe the Chamber is exceeding their expectations in the areas of networking and benefits, with additional effort needed in the remaining three areas. It was recognized that while there are numerous challenges facing the Fredericton Chamber, there were many opportunities for growth.