

# INSIDER

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## 2021 Conference Now Slated to Take Place In-Person in Las Vegas February 3-5

With the probability of having the 2021 annual conference in Sacramento becoming unlikely, the W.A.C.E. Board pivoted and voted to move the conference to Las Vegas, NV.

“The decision to hold an event in-person, virtually or even at all is one that all of us have had to make too many times this year,” said W.A.C.E. Chair of the Board Glenn Morris, ACE, president/CEO of the Santa Maria Valley (CA) Chamber. “Like you, the Board had to weigh a range of factors and variables and, ultimately, make the choice that we collectively felt was in the best interest of our members and our organization.

“One of the key factors for me was that doing everything possible to hold an in-person conference supports the message so many chambers are championing, namely that it is possible and necessary to allow our businesses to operate successfully.

“I want to thank the W.A.C.E. staff, the conference committee and Board

members for evaluating options, doing due diligence and making the decision to move forward.

“I’m confident that all involved will do everything possible to ensure the W.A.C.E. annual conference is safe, informative and a launch pad for future chamber industry success. I look forward to seeing you in Las Vegas in February.”

“We are going to deliver the same high-quality program our members have come to expect — all the while adhering to local health orders and guidelines,” said Conference Chair Jeremy Harris, ACE, president/CEO of the Long Beach Area (CA) Chamber. “This will ensure we continue to assist with professional development of our members, provide programming that is beneficial during these uncertain times, and have conference attendees walking away with practical ideas to help their local communities.”

### Registration

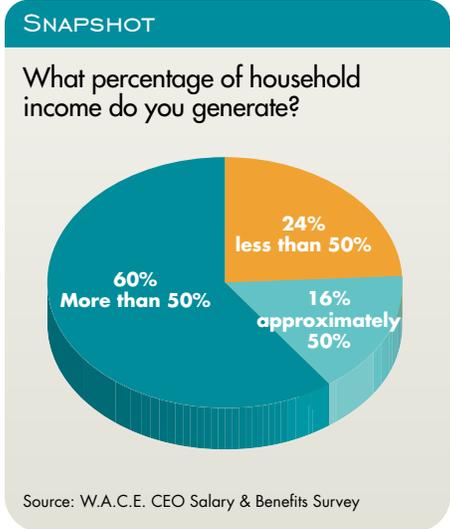
Conference registration information is still being finalized, but is expected to be available in late November or early December.

Mark your calendars for February 3-5, 2021 in Las Vegas!



### Conference Program

Program decisions are well underway, and plans are to include 16 breakout sessions, several general session speakers and roundtables, and bring back “The Future of Chambers” talks that were so popular at the 2020 conference in Portland.



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## COMMENTARY

# Gordon and Tilque Named Life Members

In the music industry there's the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio and the Country Music Hall of Fame in Nashville, Tennessee.

In sports there's the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio and the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.

In W.A.C.E., our version of a Hall of Fame is Life Membership.

Over the 96-year history of the association, we've had (as best I can figure) a total of 75 life members. At the start of 2020, we had 26 current living

members of this illustrious group of Chamber Champions.

Last month, our Hall of Fame grew with the W.A.C.E. Board approving Life Memberships for two very deserving chamber professionals: Randy Gordon and Kathy Tilque.

While it will not do them justice, below is a quick highlight summary.

## Randy Gordon



**Randy Gordon**

37-plus years as a chamber CEO; 26 years at the Long Beach Area (CA) Chamber; member of the W.A.C.E. Board 1996–2003 and chair in 2002; Conference Chair 1999; Executive of the Year 1995; Pettit Award recipient in 2000, past chair of the Southern California Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (SCACCE) and former W.A.C.E. Foundation Board member; Accredited Chamber Executive recipient in 1996 and renewed four times.

## Kathy Tilque



**Kathy Tilque**

32 years in the chamber business; 24 years as the CEO of the Gilbert (AZ) Chamber; member of the W.A.C.E. Board 2000–2006; Conference Chair in 2004; W.A.C.E. Outstanding Program Award recipient in 2016 and 2018; one of the first to embrace W.A.C.E.'s 3C Chamber Brand research; past chair of Arizona Chamber Executives; Accredited Chamber Executive recipient in 2004.

Writing this article reminds me of the importance for all of you to have mentors you can turn to and who will give you honest advice, even if you don't like hearing what they tell you.

Randy Gordon and Kathy Tilque have been mentors and truth tellers for many chamber executives. W.A.C.E., the chamber industry and chamber professionals all around the West are much better because of their leadership.

Congratulations to Randy and Kathy! The current plan is to present them with their Life Memberships at the 2021 annual conference in Las Vegas.

*Dave Kilby is president and CEO of W.A.C.E. and executive vice president of corporate affairs at the California Chamber.*

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Santa Maria Valley (CA) Chamber  
(805) 925-2403 • glenn@santamaria.com

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Vail Valley (CO) Partnership  
(970) 476-1000 • cromer@visitvailvalley.com

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Long Beach Area (CA) Chamber  
(562) 436-1251 • jharris@LBChamber.com

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**Brittany Quick-Warner**  
Eugene Area (OR) Chamber  
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### Past Chairman

**Todd Sanders**  
Greater Phoenix (AZ) Chamber  
(602) 495-2195 • tsanders@phoenixchamber.com

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The Chairman's Circle is a special group of members that have committed to support W.A.C.E. through sponsorships. If your business would like to become a member of the Chairman's Circle, please contact Dave Kilby, W.A.C.E. president and CEO, at (916) 930-1202 or email [dave.kilby@calchamber.com](mailto:dave.kilby@calchamber.com).

## GUEST COMMENTARY

# New Business Booming; Chambers Should Be Too



**Jill Rowland-Lagan, ACE**

“High propensity to succeed” is the category assigned to businesses that apply to the IRS for an employer identification number and are identified by the U.S. Census Bureau as being highly likely to turn into

businesses with payroll.

I am sure every applicant would like to think the Census Bureau would give them this label of encouragement as best positioned to survive and thrive. The numbers in that category are a significant predictor of whether the economy may be closing in on the end of a recession or pandemic disruption. Business applications in the third quarter of 2020 were record setting.

## Activity Surge

“This pandemic is actually inducing a surge in employer business startups that takes us back to the days before the decline in the Great Recession,” John Haltiwanger, a University of Maryland economist, told *The Wall Street Journal*.

The 77% increase in applications in the third quarter of 2020 over the first quarter of 2020 marks the highest quarterly level on record. No other rich-world country is experiencing the same rise in entrepreneurship.

Some of the stats may represent people trying to claim stimulus funds, and a backlog of unprocessed applications that were left on desks during the complete closures. Nonetheless, the numbers reflect a rise in American ingenuity and signal that the labor market may recover more quickly from the pandemic financial crisis than after previous recessions.

## Contrast to Last Recession

High-propensity business applications fell off the cliff after the last recession and new business creation has been on a downward spiral for decades, according

to the U.S. Census Bureau data.

Researchers offer two reasons that startup creation had been slowing: stagnant population growth and established corporate powers making it difficult for new business ventures to enter the marketplace.

But with the pandemic shining a light on the cracks in the dams of big business and the government relief efforts prioritizing income protection over job protection, people gained both the need and means to take the leap into the entrepreneurial world.

These newbies will address a need and fill a gap. Some are new entrants into an existing industry with just a “pivot” to meet the new need. Others are truly resourceful and the business activity was not around prior to COVID.

## Need for Support

But all will need to build a support system and network that will help them create the web that will catch them if they fall, springboard them to success in communicating within their sectors and neighborhoods, and be there to represent them even when they don’t know it is happening on their behalf.

The Unpolished Startup will walk through the doors of its local chamber on Main Street to ask for help. Will your doors be unlocked?

The Lucky Startups will have a neighbor or friend who had a positive experience at the chamber tell them to call you. Will you be answering the phones?

But the truly wise, educated and informed Entrepreneur who had known already the chamber is an asset to their area—because they had witnessed the chamber championing business formation for a stronger community, being a resource tool as a catalyst to the success of the local businesses, and acting as the convener in leading change and progress in their city—that business startup already had their chamber standing by their side and supporting them in every step toward success and in seeing their front doors open.

Sheree Anne Kelly at ACCE reminds us that our missions “must be clear,

impactful and community focused. If we are solving the greatest challenges facing our communities, and optimizing our opportunities, then our value proposition is undeniable.”

She further says, “Your mission is the passion that drives your work and your community impact. Whether your focus is economic development, workforce and talent, public policy and advocacy, inclusive and equitable growth, or other high-level purposes, all your work must be driven to accomplish goals tied to this mission.”

## Being Prepared

The success of our chambers in trial comes from being prepared. We can better manage the disaster for our own corporation, all the while helping everyone around us, if we have the pillars in place to support the structure while under a little duress.

Position your chamber now to better weather the next storm and be ready to assist the startups that arise from opportunity. The field is ripe for a harvest. Are we prepared to assist those entrepreneurs to go from startup idea to high-propensity business owner?

The statistics paint the picture. Chambers should be flooded with new members as we usher in the exciting times for startups and possible additions to communities that will eventually assist in job creation, economic stability and community vibrance.

Just like Lori Mattson’s (Tri-Cities Regional, WA) dad told her, as quoted in the September *Insider*, “Always expect the unexpected.”

Who expected third quarter data to tell us that right now people want to be engaged in small business for themselves? But what an unexpected opportunity it has presented to chambers and the country.

Do you believe the Census Bureau would consider you a “high propensity” chamber that is already best positioned to survive and thrive?

*Jill Rowland-Lagan, ACE, is CEO of the Boulder City (NV) Chamber.*

## LEADER TO LEADER

# Cautious Income Projections, Flexibility, Planning for Contingencies Key in 2021 Budgets

*What are your thoughts and tips for chambers regarding budgeting for 2021?*



**Nancy Lindholm,**  
ACE  
**President/CEO**  
**Oxnard (CA)**  
**Chamber**

My advice for budgeting has always been to be conservative with income projections and

liberal with expenses. That's really a great position to put yourself in if your cash flow will support it.

Also, flexibility will be key in the COVID era. I'm assuming we are going to be in a state of modified lockdown for Q1 and Q2 of 2021. I believe we will have a vaccine readily available in Q3, and we will be developing a new-normal lifestyle in Q4.

Always be ready to amend your budget if unforeseen conditions develop, and pivot your programming to reflect the demands of your investors.



**Chris Romer,**  
ACE, IOM  
**President/CEO**  
**Vail Valley (CO)**  
**Partnership**

Chambers—like all businesses—must be flexible when budgeting for 2021. Specifically,

chambers can take immediate steps to improve their budgeting processes in 2021:

- Apply your learnings from 2020.
- Stress-test scenarios and

assumptions to counter uncertainty.

- Reimagine the chamber from a zero base and focus on key value drivers.
- Hold back some spending as contingent resources to build flexibility into budgets and to give yourself options.
- Focus on the highest-priority areas of your organization.
- Rethink decision making to speed up and debias your decision-making processes.

A "perfect" budget for 2021 may not be achievable—but a better budgeting process certainly is.



**Cathy Burwell**  
**President/CEO**  
**Helena Area**  
**(MT) Chamber**

In my 30 years of managing chambers, preparing a budget for 2021 will be the most difficult. As we

navigated 2020's many challenges, the hardest part was predicting the impacts to our chamber of 750 members here in Montana's capital city of Helena.

Our chamber depends on approximately 45% of our budget to come from our events and programs. Taking our \$140,000 tourism budget out, our chamber's budget is about \$604,000. We have backfilled anticipated losses in 2020 with \$123,000 in grants and stimulus dollars, plus with strong renewals (surprisingly), we anticipate ending 2020 well into the black. So, all extra dollars will be placed into reserves that may definitely be needed to fill in next year if events continue to be delayed, put on hold, or canceled.

I plan to put forth pretty much a "bare bones" budget that will limit expenditures and underestimate income. My staff has brainstormed a list of new money-making projects to help backfill lost income from canceled events. Then, we will hope and pray that our normal events and programs resume normal participation and income.



**Anne Glasscock,**  
ACE  
**CEO**  
**Kaufman (TX)**  
**Chamber &**  
**Economic**  
**Development**  
**Corporation**

I am cautiously optimistic

budgeting for 2021. We recently lost a staff member and are looking at this as an opportunity to reconfigure our office.

We will still plan for revised versions of our fundraisers, and reduce the budgeted net, while hoping for in-person events in 2021. Our sales tax numbers this year have been above 2019 numbers and several employers are hiring. Additionally, our new memberships have been consistent this year, so we anticipate that this will continue as well. For our member events, we will likely do a mix of virtual and in person as long as guidelines can be followed.

We are ready to be with our membership and resume all the in-person networking, etc., but are aware of the shifts in business practices and want to be able to connect with those who aren't able to attend in person yet.

## OPINION POLL

# Chambers Optimistic on Relevance, Finances; More Work Needed on Communicating Value

For this month's opinion poll, we decided to measure how optimistic chambers are feeling, both at an organizational level and as an industry. We surveyed executive members and received 193 responses.

Asked when they saw their chamber returning to 2019 levels of fiscal health, 8% of chambers stated that they were already at those levels, 29% projected 2021, 50% projected 2022, 13% projected 2023 or later, and no one answered never.

"These stats show that despite the loss of revenue, local chambers as a whole remain cautiously optimistic that funds will bounce back within the next two years," explained W.A.C.E. Vice President Jennifer Johnson. "Hopefully these are conservative estimates and we are able to see chambers recover even faster than they originally anticipated."

Interestingly, 52% highly agreed (score of 8 or 9) that their chamber's best days are ahead of them, while only 36% highly agreed that the chamber industry's best days are ahead.

## Relevance vs. Value

When asked if they agree with the statement "Our chamber is more relevant today than ever before," 66% of chambers highly agreed.

Only 24% highly agreed with the statement "Our members clearly understand the value of our chamber."

"These results show that while chambers have increased their relevance during the pandemic, we still are leaving a lot on the table when it comes to communicating value," Johnson said.

"The pandemic and ever-changing regulations have left us in a crisis mode where we have excelled at responding quickly to solve problems and fill needs, but in the urgency often forget to make sure our members know all of the hard work the chamber is doing on their behalf."

## Top Issues

Survey participants were asked to identify the No. 1 problem facing their chamber, besides the pandemic/economic recovery. The top issues mentioned were membership, financial viability, no event revenue, staff issues, member participation and communicating value.

Likewise, we asked about the No. 1 problem facing their community. Top answers included businesses struggling and failing, workforce issues, homelessness, housing issues, and political polarization.

"While many of these issues are not

new, the more local chambers can unify and innovate to find solutions to these issues, the more we ensure, not only our own long-term relevance and value, but also that of our industry as a whole," Johnson summarized.

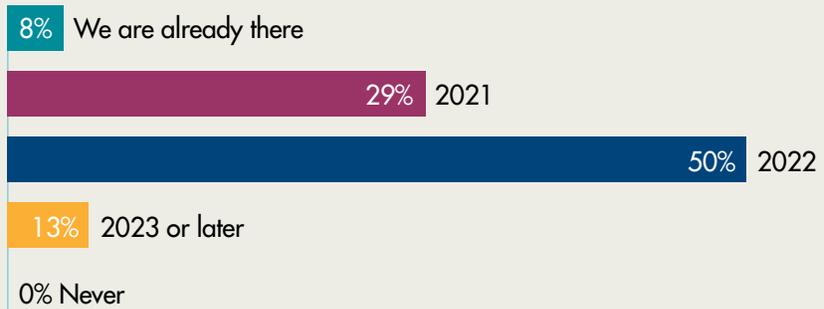
To view all the data from this opinion poll, please visit: [www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-Z6HYKYKP7/](http://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-Z6HYKYKP7/).

## Future Poll Topics?

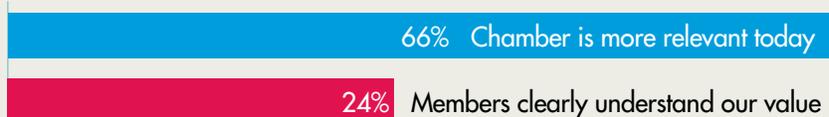
If you have a topic you would like to have considered for a future opinion poll, please email Jennifer Johnson, IOM, at [jennifer.johnson@calchamber.com](mailto:jennifer.johnson@calchamber.com).

## OPINION POLL RESULTS

### Regarding the fiscal health of your organization, when do you see your chamber returning to 2019 levels?



### Relevance vs. Value\*



\*Percentages are those who answered they highly agree (scored 8 or 9)

## NOTEWORTHY

# What Chambers Are Doing Around the West

## Bakersfield Chamber Co-Leads New B3K Prosperity Effort

The Greater Bakersfield (CA) Chamber joined forces with California State University, Bakersfield, the City of Bakersfield, Kern County, Kern Economic Development Corporation and Kern Community Foundation to create B3K Prosperity A Better Bakersfield & Boundless Kern Regional Action for Economic Prosperity.

This collaborative effort is creating “a common agenda for enduring regional prosperity” with a roadmap and investment plan for economic growth and inclusion in Kern County. B3K Prosperity builds upon a rich history of economic development efforts in Kern County, connecting and coordinating existing efforts to create, not just a product, but a process for shared problem solving and vision for the future.

B3K Prosperity is guided by a Core Team of organizations leading economic and workforce development for the region. Rather than focusing economic development solely on traditional metrics, the team instead prioritizes job quality and access to ensure inclusive economic development and regional prosperity. Full details about the effort are available at [b3kprosperity.org](http://b3kprosperity.org).

## Silicon Valley Organization Launches Membership for Startups/Entrepreneurs

The Silicon Valley (CA) Organization has launched a brand-new membership specifically tailored for technology startups. Benefits include being a part of an intimate Startup Resource Network (SRN) with weekly meetings providing education, connections and support catered for technology startups. Membership also provides an opportunity for an individual mentorship session with an investor or industry related corporate executive. View all membership benefits [here](#).

## Phoenix Chamber Helps New Executives Become Engaged in Community

The Greater Phoenix (AZ) Chamber created Find Your PHX, an all-inclusive personal integration program to help new

executives navigate their way around the region and jump-start engagement in the community. “Your company has spent valuable time and resources to recruit the right executive for the job and bring them to Phoenix. Our services will make your new recruit feel like a true VIP as we showcase all that Phoenix has to offer, through personalized tours and personal introductions.”

Several packages are available, ranging from \$2,500–\$5,000. Learn more at [www.phoenixchamber.com](http://www.phoenixchamber.com).

## Fort Collins Holds Virtual Talent Summit as Part of Align, Attract and Retain Talent Initiative

The Fort Collins Area (CO) Chamber held a Talent Summit, established as part of the Align, Attract and Retain Talent initiative in the chamber’s Northern Colorado Prospers Campaign, which was free to attend.

The program consisted of a morning of presentations, including an insight into Talent 2.0, and a discussion on trends and opportunities to pivot during COVID-19.

Attendees were also given the opportunity to download Development Counsellors International’s (DCI) national talent research document, Talent Wars, which offers communities valuable insight into what exactly talent looks for in a new job opportunity, how often people search for new jobs, the top resources talent looks to for information on a new location, and of course, how COVID-19 is affecting talent’s job and relocation priorities.

Learn more about this event and the work to align, attract and retain talent at [www.fortcollinschamber.com](http://www.fortcollinschamber.com) and [www.northerncoloradoprospers.com](http://www.northerncoloradoprospers.com).

## Silicon Valley Chamber Coalition: Local Chambers Come Together to Find Solution to Safely Reopen

Sixteen chambers of commerce in California joined business owners and faith leaders from across the Silicon Valley to successfully push back against overly restrictive COVID-19 measures in place in Santa Clara County.

The coalition held a press conference

and encouraged lawmakers and government officials to safely reopen the economy after many businesses have sat idle for 7+ months because Santa Clara County officials have not created an environment where business can safely reopen and have a fighting chance at surviving.

The coalition also sent a letter to the California Governor, Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors, the County Public Health Officer and the County Counselor. Not long after the press release, a revised Public Health Order was released, easing some restrictions but still not aligning with state guidelines.

The coalition continues to advocate for safe reopening and includes: Silicon Valley Black Chamber, Campbell Chamber, Cupertino Chamber, Gilroy Chamber, Hispanic Chamber of Silicon Valley, Los Altos Chamber, Los Gatos Chamber, Milpitas Chamber, Morgan Hill Chamber, Mountain View Chamber, Rainbow Chamber, Saratoga Chamber, Scotts Valley Chamber, Silicon Valley Central Chamber, The Silicon Valley Organization, Sunnyvale Silicon Valley Chamber.

This is a great example of local chambers joining together as a unified voice to advocate for their business community. Learn more about the coalition at [www.svchambercoalition.org](http://www.svchambercoalition.org) or view the press conference [here](#).

## Are We on Your Mailing List?

Information featured each month in *Around the West* is taken from chamber newsletters and websites that W.A.C.E. receives from its members. We try to share best practices, ideas and programs from chambers working hard to be Catalysts, Conveners and Champions and make a difference in their community. Make sure to subscribe W.A.C.E. to your mailing list, if you haven’t done so already, and you may be featured in a future *Insider*!

Send e-newsletters to: [jennifer.johnson@calchamber.com](mailto:jennifer.johnson@calchamber.com).

Send mailings to: W.A.C.E., P.O. Box 1736, Sacramento, CA 95812-1736.

## Chamber Executives in the News

The **Vail Valley (CO) Partnership** and the **Tulsa (OK) Regional Chamber** were named Chamber of the Year in their respective categories by the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE) at their recent virtual annual conference.

**Valerie Washburn** has retired after 26+ years serving the Redding (CA) Chamber. Washburn most recently served as the operations manager for the chamber.

The Irwindale (CA) Chamber has hired **Nicole Shahenian** as their new

president/CEO. Shahenian previously served as the vice president of government affairs for the Hollywood (CA) Chamber and is a W.A.C.E. Academy graduate.

The Woodland (CA) Chamber has announced that over the course of the next year, longtime executive **Kristy Wright** will slowly transition into retirement and **Cynthia Evans** will be promoted to the position of CEO. Evans has been serving the chamber as the special events coordinator and office manager for the last eight years.

## In Memoriam

**Beverly Liles**, longtime exec at the Kingman (AZ) Chamber and former W.A.C.E. Board member, passed away recently. Rest in peace Beverly.

### MEETING DATES

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#### Chamber Resilience Webinar Series

- December 2: 2020 Takeaways and What Will Be Different in 2021

#### Annual Conference

February 3–5, 2021  
 Las Vegas, NV



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The CalChamber and Local Chambers

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