

INSIDER

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

The Importance of Community for Chambers



Chris Romer, ACE

Does your chamber exist to be...
 ...the Catalyst for business growth?
 ...the Convener of leaders and influencers who make things happen?

...the Champion for stronger community?

Important questions are posed by the 3 C's, and fortunately these principles have been implemented by chambers around the country.

Chambers have been forced into being catalysts, conveners and champions over the last year and have stepped up to the challenges posed to our communities and members by COVID-19 and the resulting public health restrictions and business impacts.

Another 'C'

There is another "C" that is on my mind as I step into the role of board chair for W.A.C.E., and that word is "community." The past year has reinforced and reiterated the need for

chamber executives to nurture their networks and grow their community.

Every day we hear the word "community" used by government officials, businesses, news anchors and — yes — chambers of commerce. But what does it really mean?

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, community can have many meanings, but the one that most closely defines the way I see it is "a unified body of individuals," further explained as "a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society."

Your neighborhood is a community. Your gym, your child's school are all communities. For us, it is our professional association — W.A.C.E. — which is also a community.

It makes sense that the communities we gravitate toward, both personally and professionally, are made up of like-minded people who make us feel uplifted, encouraged, inspired and supported.

What Community Means

Being part of a community gives us a sense of belonging. But what, exactly, does community mean and how does it manifest in our lives?

Just as denoted by the root and the suffix of the word (common-unity), a certain segment of the population is united by a familiar thread. In our case, it is running chambers of commerce.

Community is where we find comfort in difficult times. It isn't a luxury, a nice thing; community is essential to our well-being. Community is about growing with, and providing support to, others. The very idea of community comes into being because people like to cooperate with each other.

Being a part of a community makes us feel as though we are a part of something greater than ourselves. It gives us opportunities to connect with people, to reach for our goals, to make us feel safe and secure. A true community is about being connected and responsible for what happens — not just watching, but actively participating and making a difference through their actions.

Our professional communities allow us to develop our own internal relationship capital and grow personal and professional friendships.

Chamber Community

It is my hope that our chamber community — nurtured by W.A.C.E. — can help everyone grow their network and build their professional community. The truth is, every one of us is put in this world to contribute and make a difference in our own unique way and we do that every day at our chambers. We contribute and work with the intention of doing good and helping others. It is meaningful, yet often exhausting, work.

We cannot be expected to do it alone; we need our tribe, a collection of others who understand the challenges and the opportunities, others with whom we can share our successes.

It is not getting easier and as our chambers and communities continue to recover and face challenges in the months ahead, I encourage you to ask yourself: How can I use W.A.C.E. to build my network and expand my professional community?

Chris Romer, ACE is the 2021 Chair of the W.A.C.E. Board and president and CEO of Vail Valley (CO) Partnership, the regional chamber of commerce. Learn more at VailValleyPartnership.com.

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COMMENTARY

Words Matter: Here's a Few to Keep Top of Mind



Dave Kilby

Chamber Leadership Podcast, I asked **Rob Engstrom**, former senior vice

Make no mistake about it: whether it's an email, a headline, your mission statement or a discussion about membership or sponsorships... Words Matter.

In a recent W.A.C.E.

president with the U.S. Chamber: "What are your three key words for chambers and chamber CEOs to keep top of mind in 2021?"

Rob responded with: "**UNITY, SOLUTIONS and INSPIRATION** — those three words capture fully what chambers of commerce across the United States do every day and are poignant in this particular moment."

"Inspired" by Rob, I reached out and asked the same question to several chamber professionals who are, or have been, in the business of working with chamber executives on a day-to-day basis.

9 Words

I've decided to focus on one of the words from each of them, to give us a nice list of 9:

- **BELIEVE** from **Ruth Littlefield**, who manages the Oklahoma Chamber Executives: "In order to get ourselves into an inspired state, we need to truly believe. Beliefs are ground zero for success."

- **CONFIDENCE** from **Tammy Long**, director of the Missouri Chamber Federation: "You need to have confidence to know that you are the best at what you do!"

- **CONNECT** from **Dot Miller**, CAE, who runs the Association of Colorado Chambers: "People are feeling disconnected from everything right now. Disconnected from their family, their co-workers, their clients, their chamber. In order to retain members, they need to feel connected with you and your organization. Find ways to connect."

- **FLEXIBLE** from **Colene Martin**, with Oregon State Chamber: "Be ready to adapt to a change in course at any time. Have a Plan B at the top of mind, so you can smartly and gracefully transition."

- **IMAGINE** from **Shelley Short** with the Arkansas State Chamber: "Now that we are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel and aren't in pure reaction/survival mode, take time to imagine the

organization you'd like to have. Explore what your chamber should be doing and be willing to act."

- **INNOVATION** was highlighted by **Lisa Weitzel**, who manages the Illinois Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives: "We need to create programs of work which encompass the need to move beyond events as a primary revenue generator, understand the bigger role chambers should play and move toward engaging in that space."

- **LISTEN** from **Tiffany Fulmer**, who manages many state chamber executive associations, including Georgia, the Carolinas and Pennsylvania: "It will be important for chamber leaders to go out and listen to what their member (and nonmember) businesses say they need in a post-COVID environment and figure out how to provide those resources."

- **MODERATION** was one of the words mentioned by **Chris Mead**, author of *The Magicians of Main Street*: "Traditionally, most chambers have flinched from extremism, and that's a good thing. We need that hometown chamber spirit now."

- **STORY** was one of the words mentioned by former Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE) President **Mick Fleming**: "In the past, events were the story of your organization's visibility. Now you must constantly TELL your story — without being repetitive. The secret is to tell 'their' stories."

To wrap this up, here are three more words that W.A.C.E. Chair **Chris Romer**, ACE, president and CEO of the Vail Valley (CO) Partnership, has emphasized: "**Focus, Value and Leadership!**"

As always...we have serious work to do.

Stay safe and stay strong.

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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Published by: Western Association of Chamber Executives, P.O. Box 1736, Sacramento, CA 95812-1736 (916) 442-2223, Fax (916) 444-6685.
Website: www.waceonline.com
Opinions expressed in articles are those of the author and not W.A.C.E.

LEADER TO LEADER

Pandemic Keepers: Virtual/Hybrid Meetings, Telework, Special Currency for Community

What, if anything, has your chamber implemented during the pandemic that you find to be an improvement and you plan to continue even once things return to “normal”?



Bridget Dixon
President/CEO
Santa Fe (NM)
Chamber
The Santa Fe Chamber of Commerce created the first Virtual Roundhouse of New Mexico to

provide the citizens of the state easy, safe and free access to the state’s governmental leaders throughout the legislative session, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In collaboration with organizations and chambers across the state, the Virtual Roundhouse has been an opportunity to engage in presentation from community organizations, cabinet secretaries, and legislators in one-on-one virtual office hours.

The event has been so well-received and well-attended that we intend to incorporate a virtual component to all future legislative events to support the State of New Mexico’s access to important information.



Mark Turner
President/CEO
Gilroy (CA)
Chamber
Several things come to mind, but the one thing that stands out is the remote work effort by some of the staff. During

this period, we have discovered work can continue to be done as effectively and efficiently as prior to the pandemic.

What I can see doing more than anything is developing a modified remote work policy where we have staff in the office one to two days per week and

allowing remote work the other three. The flexibility for staff will create a happier and more productive environment.



Marnie Uhl, ACE
President/CEO
Prescott Valley
(AZ) Chamber
The Chamber’s Board of Directors moved to virtual meetings due to following guidelines issued by the local

health department for group gatherings. We found that we had greater attendance by the board members since they did not have to travel.

We have resumed in-person meetings, but have also adopted a hybrid model where the meeting can be attended virtually through a Zoom link and in person. Again, we have better attendance and usually full participation by the board members.

We have adapted our board room with large televisions, microphones and cameras, which makes a Zoom meeting easily accessible to all participants. We also amended our bylaws to allow for quorums for electronic attendance.



Jim Johnson
President/CEO
Georgetown (TX)
Chamber
Hybrid events. In the summer of 2020, we implemented hybrid events that provided attendees the

opportunity to attend live or virtual.

We quickly realized that members value the content of the program as much as they do the in-person connections and will pay a fee when they believe in the program. This option will continue and has shown a revenue stream for the organization and additional member engagement.



Ailis Vann
Executive
Director
Greater Palmer
(AK) Chamber
We developed “Palmer Bingles,” which are a form of currency that can be spent only at chamber

businesses. We gave them away as prizes for our fall raffle as well as our Christmas Festival contest winners.

The bingles have been well-received by the community: businesses purchased them for their employees for holiday gifts, spouses purchased them for stocking stuffers, and people are continuing to purchase them for other occasions. The chamber sells the bingles and then reimburses the businesses for the bingles they submit.

The bingles ensure that money stays in our economy at our locally owned shops and eateries. They are a uniquely Palmer design and we are definitely going to use them for many years to come!



Rick Lee
CEO
Rock Springs
(WY) Chamber
At the Rock Springs Chamber of Commerce, we now have a good working relationship with our community’s

health organization. We are connected to an area of business that we had not worked with much before, but found that the chamber can be a valuable asset in times of crisis.

We are now “checking in on” all businesses in the community to see how they are doing and what we can do to help. The experience has encouraged us to be more relevant and essential and to better understand our role in the community. We have had to rethink, recalculate and reset everything we do.

2021 Emerging Leaders Council



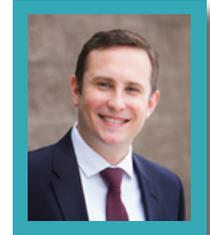
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Vail Valley (CO) Partnership



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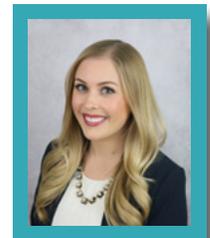
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Brea (CA) Chamber



Molly Schiff
Communications Specialist
Santa Maria Valley (CA) Chamber



Samantha Shapiro
Director of Operations &
Government Relations
Simi Valley (CA) Chamber



Jessica Stuk
Senior Manager, Programs
& Development
Greater Phoenix (AZ) Chamber

More Best in the West



Mark Turner, president/CEO of the Gilroy (CA) Chamber, was named W.A.C.E. Executive of the Year during the 2021 virtual conference.

Conference Sponsor Message



MemberClicks provides a platform of integrated software solutions designed to simplify chamber management. Put simply, MemberClicks provides all the tools chambers of commerce need to thrive under one roof. Solutions include chamber management software, learning management software, event management software (for both in-person and virtual events), job board software, and more. Through refreshing technology and a heart for service, MemberClicks currently helps more than 3,300 organizations fulfill their missions. Learn more about [MemberClicks](#).

GUEST COMMENTARY

A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats



Bryan Starr

Over the last 16 years of my career in association management, one consistent challenge I have noticed is that organizations struggle to penetrate through the constant flow

of information to get their message out to the constituencies they serve.

Given that we serve our entire communities, this challenge is especially true for chambers of commerce. All of us have websites, newsletters, and most routinely post on various social media platforms, but is it compelling enough to get the attention of our target audiences?

How well is your chamber's brand recognized? How do you improve message penetration and brand recognition, and therefore community relevance? I believe the answer to be fairly simple: Tell the stories of others, and they will tell yours.

When I came to the Greater Irvine Chamber, my then-board chairman told me that the chamber was the "best-kept secret in our region." My response was that was a shame and if he felt that way a year later, he should find my replacement.

I knew the assets we had and how well we served our community. It was time to turn up the volume.

In his famous book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie said, "Talk to someone about

themselves and they'll listen for hours." I find this to be exceptionally relevant in how we as chambers communicate.

Communication Challenge

After assuming my chamber role in Irvine and evaluating our communication strategy, I realized our immediate communication challenge. We were talking only about ourselves and how great we thought we were and that others ought to know it.

We had member testimonials and newsletters that talked only about chamber activities and events. We even produced a magazine that included little more than stale content and advertisements. It was incredibly boring to me, and I am the CEO.

Imagine how irrelevant that content must have been to the audience with which we aimed to engage. In short order, we were able to remedy this by turning the focus of the lens outward.

Telling the Community Story

We are incredibly blessed in our region to have some of the best community resources in the world. More than 60 years ago, the City of Irvine was master-planned to be an economic powerhouse, which is precisely what we have become.

This is the story that needed to be told. And the best way would be to tell the stories and successes of others. So, we did, and it worked.

We told the stories of our world-class research university — University of California, Irvine — and the 15 other

colleges and universities in our city, our top-ranked K–12 school district, our robust nonprofit community, our exceptionally managed city government, our impressive public safety record, our beautiful parks and open space, and of course our vastly diverse business community that fuels our strong local economy.

Being a mouthpiece for others fostered a huge reservoir of goodwill and brought a great deal of attention (and revenue) to the chamber. Businesses, nonprofits, and educational institutions took notice, and our membership began to grow. Our Leaders Circle portfolio, which is our highest-paying group of investors, nearly doubled.

Our Champions

Becoming a champion for others resulted in others being champions for us. No longer did we need to tell our chamber story. Others were doing it for us. Our brand became well-recognized as the convener of our community, positioning us to be a catalyst for not just business growth but also the strength of our community.

It's a simple but effective concept that I encourage others to explore. If you're talking only about yourself, who will listen?

Be the tide that lifts all the boats in your community.

Bryan Starr is president and CEO of the Greater Irvine (CA) Chamber.

Save the Date
August 8-11, 2021
 Sacramento, California

ACADEMY

Registration Information Available in early April

Opinion Poll



WESTERN ASSOCIATION
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Chamber Health & Membership

Conducted in Feb 2021 with responses from 215 chambers.



NOTEWORTHY

What Chambers Are Doing Around the West

This month we are highlighting our 2020 Outstanding Chamber Program Award recipients who were honored at our Virtual Conference last month.

Outstanding Achievement

Arvada Resiliency Task Force

At the start of the pandemic, the **Arvada (CO) Chamber** convened organizations from across their community to form the Arvada Resiliency Task Force. This collaboration worked to understand the impacts of COVID-19 and respond quickly with programs, resources and policy shifts, working urgently to provide all business in Arvada with the necessary breadth of resources to survive and thrive in 2020. Through these efforts they were able to secure \$700,000 in grants and sponsorships.

For more details, visit www.arvada-chamber.org.

Community Resilience Campaign

The **Greater Irvine (CA) Chamber** developed their Community Resilience Campaign to help the Irvine business community cope with the sudden economic impact caused by recent shutdowns. This campaign focused on helping businesses navigate and access recovery resources, providing reassurance to business leaders and residents, recognizing companies, organizations and individuals helping weather the crisis, and keeping the community actively engaged with the chamber.

Full details can be found at www.greaterirvinechamber.com.

Washington D.C. Virtual Fly In

Annually the **Vegas (NV) Chamber** convenes a group of Nevada business advocates and community leaders in Washington to advocate for policies and bolster economic development. This year the event was replicated virtually, providing attendees with the same experience while remaining socially distant. The event exceeded expectations with a large number of elected officials and community leaders participating.

Read a detailed article about the event in the chamber's [Business Voice Newsletter](#).

Honorable Mention

Smart Design, Safer Places

To address an increase in public safety concerns in their community, the **Billings (MT) Chamber** created their Smart Design, Safer

Places program to empower their business community by identifying opportunities for cost-effective safety upgrades to commercial properties and spaces. This program helps businesses improve both real and perceived safety, not only for their business, but also the community as a whole.

For more details, visit www.billings-chamber.com.

Variance Protection Program

To help businesses stay open as much as possible, the **Grand Junction Area (CO) Chamber** partnered with the local newspaper and county health department to create their Variance Protection Program. This is a rating system to showcase businesses that are implementing and enforcing COVID-19 guidelines in the hopes of keeping the variances ahead of the rest of the state.

These variances have demonstrated a focused effort to open safely and keep case counts low, which has allowed Mesa County businesses to operate at higher capacities and with looser restrictions than almost 90% of the rest of Colorado.

During the recent rise in cases, the Governor of Colorado allowed any businesses with a 5-star rating from this program to remain at their current level of operation while the rest of the state rolled back to more restrictive guidelines.

Learn more [here](#).

Sustainable Candidate Promotion

The **Long Beach Area (CA) Chamber** sought to find an environmentally friendly solution for campaign signs, which end up scattered all over a community after an election. City sidewalks were power washed with a stencil of the campaign sign using only water, leaving the sign visible to pedestrians.

Once the election concluded, the sidewalk was completely power washed again, leaving no trace of the stencil, allowing important candidate promotion while serving the community by cleaning public areas.

Contact [Christine Bos](#) for details.

Save Small Business Coalition

The **Greater San Fernando Valley (CA) Chamber** organized 160 chambers and business organizations representing 28 states to form the Save Small Business Coalition. The coalition is committed to the survival of a vibrant business community

in the face of severe economic hardships.

The coalition partnered with Howard Schultz's Emes Project, the U.S. Chamber and other associations nationwide to help introduce America's Recovery Fund to Congress.

See who was involved and learn more about the coalition's efforts at savesmall-businesscoalition.org.

Rapid Mural Program

In March 2020, businesses began boarding up their storefronts. The **Tacoma-Pierce County (WA) Chamber** responded with its Rapid Mural Program, which created a roster of local artists who could create beautiful murals over the blank plywood. These efforts not only serve as a deterrent to unwanted graffiti but also provide support to the affected businesses, create a revenue stream for local artists and offer hope to community members. As a result of the program, more than 21 murals have been installed throughout the community.

View photos of the murals and learn more at www.tacomachamber.org.

Welcome Home Neighbor

As a community dependent on tourism, the **Vail Valley (CO) Partnership** knew it needed a thoughtful strategy to quickly bring much-needed revenue into the community during the pandemic. The partnership created the Welcome Home Campaign Toolkit, a collection of graphics and messages that invite their second-home owners to move to Eagle County at a time when other communities were defensive and unwelcoming.

This toolkit, combined with an ambassador network of more than 200 organizations, allowed the partnership to connect with second-home owners and locals and lead the community toward economic recovery.

Learn more about the program at www.vailvalleypartnership.com/welcome-home.

Are We on Your Mailing List?

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.

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

Chamber Executives in the News

Suzanne Clark has been named as the next CEO of the U.S. Chamber. Clark currently serves as the president of the organization and will succeed **Tom Donohue**, who is retiring after 24 years of service.

The Silicon Valley Central (CA) Chamber has hired **Christian Malesic** as their new president/CEO. Malesic previously served as the CEO for the Pennsylvania Society of Association Executives, Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical Society and Melbourne (FL) Regional Chamber.

Gina Blom is the new executive director of the Turlock (CA) Chamber.

Visit Hood River (OR) has announced that **Katie Kadlub** will be their new executive director. Kadlub previously served as the director of business development for Mt. Hood Meadows.

Nathan Ahle, ACE, IOM, will take over as the new president/CEO of the Tulare County (CA) Economic Development Corporation this month. Ahle most recently served as the president/CEO of the Fresno (CA) Chamber.

Sherry Menor-McNamara was recognized as a Woman of Distinction by the Girl Scouts of Hawaii for her

dedication to the community over the last year.

Eddie McBride, president/CEO of the Lubbock (TX) Chamber, has announced that he will be retiring January 31, 2022 after 23 years of service.

In Memoriam

Richard Luehrs, former president/CEO of the Newport Beach (CA) Chamber, recently passed away. Luehrs was the 1990 president of the board of the California Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (CACCE), our association's name before we became W.A.C.E.



**Thank you W.A.C.E. Foundation
for all you do
for our members!**

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Conference Webinars

- March 17: Streamlining Strategies: Doing More With Less
- March 24: Economic Recovery
- March 31: Chambers Leading Through Crisis

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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.