

AWARD APPLICATION



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Making a Difference

*ACCE's Chamber of the Year Award: Recognizing chamber excellence
in Leading Businesses. Leading Communities.™*

Send three (3) copies of the completed application and supporting materials, each in its own binder. The full application with entry fee must be received by June 2, 2008.

Entry fees are based on your annual dues category:

Under \$200,000: \$260 \$200,000-499,000: \$360 \$500,000-\$1M: \$460 Over \$1M: \$535

Mail your entry to: ACCE, Attn. Chamber of the Year, 4875 Eisenhower Ave., Suite 250, Alexandria, VA 22304

If you have any questions about the application process, please call ACCE at (800) 394-2223.

SECTION 1: CONTACT INFORMATION

Chamber Name The Laurens County Chamber of Commerce
Person Submitting Entry Rob Clapper
Address PO Box 248
City Laurens State SC Zip 29360
Contact Person Email rclapper@laurenscounty.org
Contact Person Rob Clapper

President Rob Clapper
President's Email rclapper@laurenscounty.org

CFO Marlene Owings
CFO's Email mowings@laurenscounty.org

Board Chairman Jim Firmin
Chairman's Company Firmin Ford Inc.
Address 921 East Main Street
City Laurens State SC Zip 29360
Email j-firmin@dealeremail.com
Phone 864.833.2716/ 864.833.3111

Entry Category (choose one):

Annual dues income of:

- Under \$200,000
- \$200,000 - \$499,999
- \$500,000 - \$1 million
- Over \$1 million

Board Size (Do not include ex-officio) 20 Staff Size (FTEs) 3

SECTION 2: ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Excellent organizations follow sound financial, operations, human resources, and other procedures. 50 points.

In your binder, submit each of the following under Section 2:

- The chamber's most recent financial audit.
- The chamber's 990 tax forms from 2005, 2006, and 2007.
- The chamber's current annual budget.
- The chamber's current financial statement.
- The chamber's current strategic plan.

	Yes	No
1. Does your chamber comply with annual federal, state and local income tax filing requirements?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Is your annual budget approved by your board? If so, what month? <u>June</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Does your chamber have a long-range strategic plan? If so, please include a copy.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please use a separate sheet of paper to answer the following:

4. Reflect on your most recent business plan or strategic plan and briefly explain what worked, adjustments you made, and the final or to-date outcome. (300 word maximum)
5. Describe an internal chamber program used within the past year that had an impact on the chamber staff or operations. This program may have helped to increase productivity, solve internal problems, address staff needs, etc. (200 word maximum)
6. How do you engage your board/volunteers to further the mission of your chamber? (200 word maximum)

SECTION 3: MEMBER SERVICES & CONNECTIONS

Membership is at the core of the chamber industry. 50 points.

In your binder, submit each of the following under Section 3:

- Two consecutive issues of your newsletter, e-newsletter, or magazine (hard copy and electronic).
- Two printed communication/marketing pieces. Examples include direct mail, brochure, advertising, etc.

The following information will help us to better understand your chamber's program and communication for its members. (200 word maximum per answer)

1. What is your chamber's strategy in member retention? Briefly explain it and its effectiveness.
2. How does your chamber communicate with members? List three examples. How effective are they?
3. How does your chamber choose which potential members to recruit?
4. What do you do to ensure that your chamber's programs, products, and services support your organization's mission?
5. Does your chamber systematically assess member needs and satisfaction? Describe one example and explain your results.

SECTION 4: Leading Businesses. Leading Communities.™

Leading Businesses. Leading Communities.™

Chambers of commerce exist to build stronger, vibrant businesses and communities. Chambers lead the charge in creating a climate of success and growth for all, and are knowledgeable and involved in important business, civic and social priorities.

"Leading Businesses" reflects the historic success and core equity of the chamber. It also represents what businesses become as a result of participation in the chamber and its programs. "Leading Communities"

speaks to the expanded role that chamber's play in today's communities, as well as what communities become as a result of strong, healthy chambers.

Please select two programs you've completed in the past two years and write two synopses, following the outline below. The first synopsis should address a program from the area of impact, advocacy, or focus. The second synopsis must address a program from the area of economic opportunities. In your binder please clearly separate the two synopses and supporting materials. *100 points.*

Step 1: Select Programs/Products/Services within a Core Chamber Strength

Economic Opportunities

The Chamber enhances and leverages the talents and resources of its members to improve economic opportunities for all.

Impact

The Chamber provides unique opportunities for individuals and businesses to make a difference by connecting them to important community issues.



Advocacy

The Chamber is an advocate for its broad and diverse member businesses, creating a climate of growth and success that benefits all.

Focus

The Chamber helps build stronger communities by staying focused and involved in the top business, civic, and social priorities.

Examples of programs that could fall into one or more of the core chamber strengths:

- Small business development services
- Workforce development programs
- Economic development programs/campaigns
- Public policy/advocacy
- Tourism campaigns
- Community pride programs
- Networking programs
- Special events
- Membership or total resource campaigns

In each entry synopsis, be sure to address each of the elements below, clearly labeling each heading and subheading as listed below. Background and supporting material should also be included. For a sample synopsis, visit www.aaa.org/aw

1. Program/Service name.
2. The Core Chamber Strength(s) addressed.
3. Program/Project summary.
Please summarize the nature of and the key outcomes of your program. (125 words maximum)
4. Needs Identification. (175 words maximum)
 - a. Identify your target audience(s) and the needs your program/service meets. Needs should be clearly identified and ties to the organizational mission should be demonstrated.
 - b. Discuss your needs identification and data collection process for your project or program.
 - c. Include as exhibits your anecdotal or formal evaluation results, such as research, key facts, figures or trends about your community or target audience, situational analysis and/or copies of any survey instruments if used.

5. Program objectives. (125 word maximum)
 - a. Discuss the goals and objectives for the program, relative to your identified needs and target audiences. Objectives should be clearly stated, specific, measurable, and time-sensitive ("SMART"). Goals and objectives must relate to the achievement of at least one of the following statements:
 - The chamber is an advocate for its broad and diverse members businesses
 - The chamber leverages and enhances the talents and resources of its members to create a climate of growth and success in the community
 - The chamber offers unique leadership opportunities, volunteer efforts and business-building programs focused on critical business, civic and social priorities
 - The chamber improves the economic vitality and quality of life for its members and the community
 - b. Include electronic and/or hard copies of strategic or project plans as supporting material.
6. Methodology. (175 word maximum)
 - a. Discuss the methods used to reach the objectives. Please list specific actions taken.
 - b. A detailed budget should be included, indicating expenses, revenues, and in-kind contributions.
7. Communications. (175 word maximum)
 - a. Provide an outline of your chamber's communications strategy for the program or service, including specific marketing, communications, advertising, and/or public relations vehicles (if used).
 - b. For each description of the communications vehicle, include the communications points and/or call to action communicated as well as the target audience you intended to reach.
 - c. Briefly describe how your chamber developed and then executed its communications strategy to inform your intended target audience(s) about your program/service.
 - d. Appropriate supporting materials include the web page(s) describing the program, ads, brochures, guides, press releases, speeches, etc.
8. Evaluation. (300 word maximum)
 - a. Demonstrate the impact your program or service had on your community and/or membership. Outcomes of your program or service should be related to your stated program objectives. Partial or projected information is acceptable.
 - b. Demonstrate the outcomes of your communications related to your program or service. Partial or projected information is acceptable.
 - c. Appropriate supporting materials include data about increased sales, awareness, and membership; participation and satisfaction survey results; member or participant testimonials.

Include in your binder, under Section 4, one copy of each of the following for the programs described above:

- A hard copy of program materials.
- A hard copy and electronic copy (on CD) of the marketing materials for the program.
- A hard copy of the budget, listing revenues and expenses, for the program.



LAURENS COUNTY

SOUTH CAROLINA

Program Name

Laurens County's Women In Business

Core Chamber Strength:

Impact & Advocacy – The Chamber provides Professional Women the opportunity to connect with one another and the chamber while focusing on community issues.

Program Summary:

Women In Business for Laurens County is a network that brings together and supports women who are in business. The network provides a creative environment in which to develop your business and find solutions to problems. It facilitates opportunities to promote inter-trading and provide training events that are relevant to helping you and your business grow.

Women In Business consistently works to promote the business needs of women and recognizes that women face certain challenges in business. It does not have social or political agendas and meetings are held in a positive and friendly environment. Members are from a wide range of businesses, some are just starting out and others have been in business for a number of years.

Since the launch in 2007, Women In Business has delivered several wide range of business workshops and initiatives to over 200 women in Laurens County and has formed other links with similar organizations across the Upstate region.

Women In Business evolves all the time to reflect the members view and what is relevant in the world of business today.

The Laurens County Chamber's Women In Business has as one of its main goals to create an environment where equal numbers of women and men are starting and growing businesses.

They aim to achieve this by promoting and raising awareness of women's enterprise and the organizations that support this key area of economic growth, lobbying on their behalf to create a policy environment and opportunities which support the overall development of women.

Needs Identification:

- a) The targeted group of leaders were women professionals who work in the county and who have not had a networking or support organization targeting the challenges encountered by women business owners and leaders. Additionally, the program was to leverage potential civic leaders for the future and the chamber in addition to the diverse leadership Laurens program. The program was built on the ability to provide social opportunities, networking, leadership training, while engaging leaders in civic issues.
- b) The Chamber of Commerce has used the program as a way to identify potential leaders within the community. By identifying leaders we can now recruit the needed leadership for civic projects and to help guide the next phase of our community development. The initial meetings have exceeded expectations and attendance. Currently the popularity has caused the Chamber's Board of Directors to consider moving the meetings from a quarterly to a monthly meeting.

Program Objectives:

- Quarterly Networking

Networking evenings will alternate monthly with Workshops to bring opportunities to share best practice and promote your business. The Workshops will provide training in areas of both personal and business development.

- Opportunities to share best practice

This is done in an informal way at the Networking evening and also outside of the Network

- Advertising and promoting

This can be in the form of hosting an event at your premises or a 10 minutes showcase of your company to the other Women In Business members. At every Network Evening there will be a Trade Table to enable you to promote your business so make sure you have lots of literature and business cards. "I Know A Woman Who Can" this is a service which enables Members to seek help and advice for a problem they may be experiencing.

- Help, advice and funding for a business

Signposting information available from various agencies that provide help with, business planning, business strategy, marketing, loans and credit unions and banking assistance.

- Advice on career change and confidence/self esteem building

Help can be sourced to help you if you are thinking of a change of direction or maybe need a boost in confidence as well as, women specific health issues.

- Mentoring and Support

The Leadership Group offers help in various forms and is the most effective way of building a support group of like-minded individuals to bounce ideas at. A specific Business Mentor Program is something that we hope will also be spin off from this organization.

Methodology:

a) Actions taken include:

1. Identified the need
2. Researched current and successful programs that were similar to the vision
3. Organized a Steering Committee
4. Secured Corporate Sponsorship and Support from the Business Community
5. Planned, Promoted, and Executed Inaugural Event
6. Use participant feedback as a measurement for improvements
7. Plan and coordinate future events

b) Budget: Corporate Sponsors cover the TOTAL cost for each event and support

Communications:

Strategies:

- Gained unanimous support and endorsement by the Chamber Board of Directors.
- Secured FULL Corporate funding allowing the program to not be an additional expense for the chamber.
- Encouraged and engaged leader participation through chamber networking, Leadership Laurens, and targeted marketing.
- Inaugural Program Launch with a goal of drawing a crowd of 30 professionals
- Continued Program Promotion and Awareness


Evaluation:

- a. The achieved outcome was an increase in professional women connecting through civic and social networking. The greater outcomes were an increased awareness, enhanced image, and a useful resource for professional women throughout the Laurens County community.
- b. Participation has continually grown and surpassed expectations. The inaugural event was held with a goal of thirty attendees. The final count was over 60 attendees and standing room only. The next two events saw an even greater attendance and energy. Additionally, we have had 4 of our board members take an active leadership role in guiding the group and the program has become one of our most praised programs.
- c. The marketing for the events has been very effective and surprisingly simple. The professionals throughout the community have begun to send other female leaders from their organizations and followed up with sponsorship commitments for the future.
- d. Finally the real success was measured by the impact on the Chamber's bottom-line costs. This event has more than 100 participants now and has begun to generate a consistent revenue stream for the chamber. Corporate sponsorships are at an all time high and we do not foresee a change in the near future.
- e. Please see attached literature used throughout the process.

“The clearest and most direct path to being a successful female business professional starts with surrounding yourself with the right people; but integral to this step is finding the right kinds of educational resources. In addition to business support groups such as Women In Business, she said women can now have a resource to connect with coaches and business-focused peer groups, many of which have specific sub-groups just for women business owners.”

- Jamie Adair, Director of Marketing for the Laurens County Health Care System

Women in Business
 Wednesday, November 27th
The Power of Pink Luncheon
 at
MUYSKOVE
 11:30-12:00 Networking and Fellowship
 12:00-1:00 Lunch with presentation on
A Women's Guide to Financial Freedom
 by author of Financial Peace
 and
The World of Breast Cancer
 by Susan Johnson
 This event is free of charge, but there is a limited number
 of 10 seats available, so please RSVP ASAP!
 If you have any questions please
 contact Rainna Reif at 833-0414



Women in Business
THE POWER OF
Dead
 WITH LUNCH
Tuesday, February 26, 2008
 The Garden Room of
 The Hummingbird Cafe
 11:30-12:00 Networking and Fellowship
 12:00-1:00 Lunch with presentation on
Kimberly New, MD
 Dying Well
Glenda Doles - Motivational Speaker
 The Art of Survival
 This event is free of charge, but there is a
 limited number of seats available.
 Please RSVP by Feb. 22
 If you have any questions please contact Rainna Reif at 833-0414
 SPONSORED BY
Laurens County
Health Care System

Women in Business
THE POWER OF
Presbyterian Home
 AT 11:30
TUESDAY, MAY 20, 2008
 PRESBYTERIAN HOME
 CUSTON, SC
 DONNA JACKSON
 MANDY THOMSON
 President, Presbyterian Home
 of South Carolina



LAURENS COUNTY

SOUTH CAROLINA

Program Name
The 2007 Legislative Report Card

Core Chamber Strength:
Advocacy

Program Summary:

In the 30 year history of the Laurens County Chamber of Commerce, there has never been a Governmental Affairs Committee or a formal legislative agenda. Furthermore there has never been an legislative wrap-up that grades our elected leaders on their successes for our community. That all changed in 2007. Under new leadership and an aggressive lobbying effort, the Laurens County Chamber of Commerce paved a new path.

Ensuring that not only local issues but also state issues would be addressed the chamber held several sessions around the county and in cooperation with the South Carolina State Chamber. After careful scrutiny of issues and continued discussion with business leaders it was made clear that there were seven key points that the 2007 Legislative session needed to consider. Therefore, in December 2006 the newly formed Government Affairs Committee brought an aggressive legislative agenda to the chamber board of directors, subsequently, they unanimously voted to adopt the 2007 Legislative agenda.

Additionally, the chamber and community leaders wanted to ensure there were tools in place to measure the success of the agenda and the efforts of our legislators. Therefore in July 2007, at the end of the South Carolina Legislative Session, a report card was issued and all six areas of the agenda had been addressed and by November had been accomplished. More amazing was the full support and cooperation of our legislative delegation and county elected officials who publicly thanked the chamber for laying the groundwork to the most successful political year in two decades.

Needs Identification:

The chamber had not been aggressively involved in local or state political issues affecting our community. This was directly related to fear and lack of credibility. In effort to provide better member services the new President began to talk one on one with business leaders around the county to identify what priorities the chamber could tackle right away to help better support a more pro-business environment. Some of the areas that the county began to focus on were:

Workers' Compensation Reform *(Current Law)*

Achieve comprehensive workers' compensation reform to bring consistency, predictability, and accountability to the system, and eliminate the Second Injury Fund.

Retail Blue Law Repeal *(Current Law Repealed in 1997)*

Conduct a comprehensive review and abolish the outdated "blue laws" that have caused Laurens County to be at an economic disadvantage with neighboring counties. of the current tax system to ensure balance, equity, stability, and predictability, including business protection against future property tax shifts.

Education: *(All areas were funded as based into law)*

Ensure funding to support workforce education efforts (EEDA, CATT, apprenticeships) as well as improvements in the education system from early childhood to adulthood.

Infrastructure *(Current Law - Federal funding for water projects)*

Attract and grow businesses in Laurens County and South Carolina by improving existing roads and bridges and expanding the state's road infrastructure.

Tourism *(Current Law - State funded in the 07 Budget)*

Invest in appropriate marketing campaigns and beach re-nourishment efforts to grow the state's \$15 billion dollar tourism industry.

Economic Development *(Current Law - State funded 300 million dollars)*

Funding to expand the Jasper South Carolina Port and also begin funding for a 280 million dollar Road to the Port of Charleston (The Expansion was supported and more than 130 million dollars was allocated to the Port Road Project)

Program Objectives:

As the premiere advocacy organization in the county, the Laurens County Chamber of Commerce will serve as the unified business voice for promoting an economy of increased productivity and per capita income to achieve competitiveness.

The Laurens County Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with the South Carolina Chamber of commerce, serve as the unified voice of business and industry, serves as a catalyst for countywide increased per capita income and competitiveness through its efforts to:

- Decrease business costs and increase productivity;
- Build a highly skilled, capable workforce;
- Nurture entrepreneurial development;
- Foster a favorable climate among our members and their employees; and,
- Improve quality of life for all of our citizens

Methodology:

In an effort to not only support and advocate for our membership but to also create a way to quantify and grade our legislative delegation in their efforts to better Laurens County, the chamber decided that after 29 years of being on the sideline, it was time to get into the game.

Priority one: Listen to the business leaders and identify needed support

Priority two: Analyze the needs and identify a political strategy to support them

Priority three: Pass a Resolution of support by the Board of Directors

Priority four: Provide the Resolution to the legislative delegation and work with them through the year to accomplish those objectives.

Priority five: Consistently and professionally lobby and advocate for the changes leveraging the more than 500 business' within the chamber and the more than 24,000 members represented.

A.1 In 2000, South Carolina had the 2nd best premium rate in the country. South Carolina has lost significant ground. Today, it has the 25th highest premium rate.

A.2 2006-Retail members saw a profit loss of more than 20% due directly to inability to compete on Sundays, the most traveled day of the week. After the State Legislature failed to abolish the repeal the Chamber lobbying the County Council to abolish the blue laws and allow Laurens County to compete with its neighboring counties. In November 2007, the Laurens County Council temporarily suspended the Sunday Retail "Blue Laws."

A.3 Additional Funding for the Education & Economic Development Act (EEDA), Apprenticeships, and Life Science & Math Scholarships passed in 2007 with goals to increase high school completion rates, better prepare students for work and college, increase parental involvement, and increase options for students at risk of dropping out of school. (Received Full Funding)

A.4 Sixty percent of all county bridges have been designated as in need of repair. Maintenance of secondary roads has not occurred for six years. Additionally water and sewer projects have remained at a stand still in the last 3 years. Successful federal funding as well as state supported projects will strengthen the economic development position of the region and county. (Successfully secured more than 10 million dollars)

A.5 An estimated potential of more than 38,000 Laurens county jobs can be directly or indirectly impacted by tourism. Therefore it is necessary and imperative that additional marketing and promotion dollars be allocated by the legislature. (2007 Budget allocated more than 20 million dollars for tourism marketing)

A.6 Laurens County's economy must adjust to meet changing expectations and demands, as well as to compete by using its port assets to greatest effect. What we produce as a state may change. Our strategies for competing globally may change. But the need for transportation and shipping infrastructures remains. In fact, it is growing exponentially. International commerce is a two-way proposition to which our ports are intrinsically linked. Clearly, the growth of commerce in South Carolina and recruitment of industries to Laurens County is absolutely dependent on a well-planned, efficient port system. (Received half Funding with the promise of the second half in 2008)

Communications:

We started 2007 off with a meeting of the legislative delegation and our Government Affairs committee. This meeting allowed us to lay out our priorities and give them a chance to respond. The meeting was a huge success with all four legislative members agreeing to sign and support it.

During the legislative session, through email alerts, members are notified of important actions or legislative contacts the business community must initiate to ensure that business-friendly legislation passes and combat any business-negative legislation. The Grassroots Network's online tools make this process easy. Members are able to simply follow directions and click a button within the electronic message they receive to send their legislator a note regarding policy issues.

In addition, active members are able to find their legislator's contact information, see how their elected officials voted on specific business-related issues, monitor business-related bills, and post comments related to those bills. The Chamber makes it extremely easy for Grassroots Network members to get involved and stay involved.

“This is the best thing to come out of the Chamber of Commerce in years. The agenda truly represents the entire business community and holds us accountable. I look forward to a continued relationship with the chamber and am honored to be part of a new era.”

Rep. Adam Taylor – SC -16, Assistant Majority Leader

We then followed up with the “State of Laurens County.” This event was a city, county, and state discussion and an attempt to work together regionally on many issues. The media plan consisted of both television and radio interviews as well as multiple week coverage in the local print media. It all occurred without cost to the Chamber of Commerce. Actually, we made money when the event had concluded.

We have now added a Third Congressional District National Issues Forum to our annual schedule of events.

Evaluation:

Attached you will see an Opt ED piece out of both of the local newspapers. This came unsolicited and was written by the Editor-in-Chiefs.

We consider this monumental step a huge leap!

In our view

Agenda puts county Chamber on right path

The Laurens County Chamber of Commerce hit a bull's-eye with its recent move to adopt a legislative agenda.

The principle is a sound one. The Chamber wants to make sure its voice is heard in Columbia as the state continues to attract manufacturing and business. It is working with the local legislative delegation to make sure that happens.

It's this kind of planning and cooperation that has the Chamber on the right track as it goes forward.

Aside from one very glaring omission - zoning for the county - the Chamber did its homework, making sure that key statewide as well as local issues were addressed as part of the agenda.

Essentially, the Chamber wants to make sure our local students are educated well enough to become part of the workforce in need areas. It wants to assure that our roads and bridges are good enough to attract the manufacturers that will need to use them to transport their goods.

It wants to assure that workers' compensation are applied correctly and that health costs are somehow brought under control. It wants to see that taxes are levied fairly on state and local business owners.

The Chamber wants to support tourism that brings millions and millions of dollars to the state's economy. It would also like to see more of those dollars spent locally with the elimination of antiquated blue laws that force many shoppers elsewhere each and every Sunday.

This agenda is a step beyond simple networking and shaking hands at a Chamber dinner. It is a necessary step toward advocacy for the local business owner and, in turn, the local worker.

At 29 years old, the Laurens County Chamber has matured. With the advent of the county's development corporation, it no longer has the sole burden of business recruitment.

It is now the foremost voice of the local business owner. It is a bright and well-articulated voice that represents some 475 businesses in the county.

And it is well past time that it be heard.