



City to City: Best Practices



Delegates tour Fenway Park, home to the Boston Red Sox, after a session on professional sports teams.



Opening session in Boston's historic Faneuil Hall.



By Joan Mobley and Ian Scott



Since the practice of economic development is becoming less about “I & I”—incentives and building inventory—and more about “P & P”—product and place, it’s critical for chamber leaders to understand both what the community needs to thrive and how to make it happen. It may seem counterintuitive that regularly taking a multi-sector delegation of your community’s leaders to another city can promote growth at home, but these “intercity visits” can be an important tool for economic and community development.

DEVELOPING THE PRODUCT

The product, in this instance, is all about the workforce—educational attainment, skills and availability—and quality of life. Companies large and small are looking to invest in a city that will make it easier to attract and retain the skilled employees they need. And, workers want things to do after work and

on weekends; they want to bike or bus to work; and they want to ensure that their children get a good education.

Chambers’ community development work to create a great place for people to live and work may focus on roads, workforce housing and educational attainment, parks and the environment, public transit, entertainment and cultural amenities, crime prevention, and K–12 education; in short, the underpinnings of creating a great “place.” By addressing these issues that increase the competitiveness of your community quality of life, community development is in part about building a better product to take to market as you recruit and retain businesses.

Market research is vital to improving any product or service, and the peer-to-peer exchanges that occur during intercity visits provide ideal market research for growing your economy. As your delegation discusses challenges and opportunities your community is facing with leaders from a host community, best

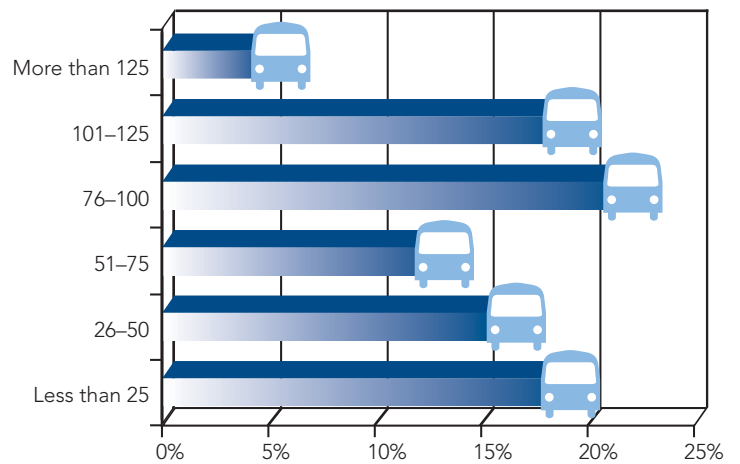
practices and lessons learned form the basis for creating a blueprint for action back home.

VISITS GROWING IN POPULARITY

The increasing recognition of the importance of community development might explain the growing popularity of intercity visits. A January 2008 survey by ACCE found that roughly half of the chambers in the country have organized some form of intercity visit. Typically, the programs comprise an annual trip with a large, diverse group of community leaders; however, some chambers convene smaller groups or make ad hoc trips to address specific issues. While a number of chambers have led annual intercity visits for 20 years or more, the survey indicates that many programs are just getting started: 34 percent of chambers have conducted intercity visits for fewer than three years, and the 54 percent for fewer than eight years.

The size of the participant delegation varies widely. The highest proportion of chambers (43 percent) averaged 75 to 125 people on their visit, yet 20 percent of chambers conduct their trips successfully with fewer than 25 people. The wide distribution illustrates that there is really no magic number for how many people to bring; what's most important is having a broad-based delegation inclusive of business, civic and elected leaders. Some programs involve a single-day bus trip to a neighboring city, while others entail cross-country flights and three days of programming. Again, what's most important is having the right mix of community leaders learning about the issues that matter. While the scale and complexity of these programs varies considerably, they all have two primary objectives: to provide an opportunity to learn best practices, and to foster networking to achieve community cohesion.

How many people do chambers take on intercity visits?



Source: ACCE member survey, January 2008

Over the course of 19 years, the Raleigh Chamber has led intercity visits to destinations such as Albuquerque, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Jacksonville, Austin, Denver and Phoenix. This year, the Chamber visited Nashville, Tenn., a similar-sized city with a comparable economic development agenda. When asked how the Chamber selects an appropriate destination for the intercity visit, **Drew Morteza, IOM**, vice president of government relations, says, "It's important that we pick someplace that lets us compare apples to apples."

In Florida, Jacksonville is another community that has reaped tremendous value from intercity visits. The **Jacksonville (FL)**

“ [Raleigh’s] new hotel and convention center, I MAX theater, downtown redevelopment project, the performing arts center, and the formation of the Regional Transportation Alliance — these are just a few of the ideas generated from previous [intercity] trips. ”

— Harvey Schmitt, CCE



TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE IMPACTS

It is impossible to measure the full impact of an intercity visit. Literally hundreds of important programs, infrastructure, buildings and projects throughout the country were initiated because of ideas brought home from intercity visits. **Harvey Schmitt, CCE**, president and CEO of the **Greater Raleigh (NC) Chamber of Commerce**, says, "The lessons learned on our Inter-City Visit and Leadership Conference have had a significant impact on Raleigh and Wake County's quality of life and economic future. Our new hotel and convention center, I MAX theater, downtown redevelopment project, the performing arts center, and the formation of the Regional Transportation Alliance—these are just a few of the ideas generated from previous trips."

Regional Chamber of Commerce has conducted intercity visits every year since 1980. Over the years, its delegation has visited cities from Seattle to Cleveland and dozens of places in between. Throughout the mid- to late-80s, it examined professional sports recruiting and support in cities like San Diego, Pittsburgh and Boston. Those visits built a foundation of understanding that helped the community win its bid for the Jacksonville Jaguars NFL expansion team in 1993. Trips to San Antonio and Baltimore spurred the development of the Jacksonville Riverwalk, a downtown entertainment district. Jacksonville public schools launched career academies after visiting Nashville and Austin.

Jerry Mallot, CCE, is executive vice president of the Jacksonville Regional Chamber as well as executive director of



Delegates participate in a "hands on" demonstration at the Adventure Science Center in Nashville, Tenn.

He also values the opportunity to discuss important community agenda items on the trip. "In my opinion, the greatest value from the intercity visit is the opportunity to bring top business leaders and government officials together to discuss centrally important issues that we are never able to spend time on at home," he says.

Though perhaps less tangible, the networking and relationship building that happens on an intercity visit is equally important for community development as learning best practices. Through shared experiences and a common foundation of understanding, delegates return home as a more cohesive team working to solve problems on behalf of the community.

"The experience is a chance for deep network development," says **Ralph Schulz**, president and CEO of the **Nashville (TN) Area Chamber of Commerce**. "It gives participants the one-on-one exposure to other community leaders that is necessary to forge strong working relationships." He adds: "It's about forming cohesive leadership around the community's needs; it is a vital component of our community agenda-setting."

Raleigh's Schmitt echoes a similar sentiment, saying "What is, perhaps, more important than the lessons learned is the relationship building among participants that leads to better cooperation and coordination when folks come back home."

Economic development organizations gauge their success by the retention or expansion of existing companies and the attraction of new companies, measuring results in terms of job growth. However, organizations that are successful at economic development realize that they must view their community as more than just a place to work—they must look holistically at their regions as locations where people want to work, live and play.

Chambers are well-positioned to take an active role in addressing the quality of life issues that will make the community more attractive to employers, and the intercity visit program is a great tool in that effort. Chambers that invest the time and effort to organize intercity visits could never put a price on the value their communities have reaped in return. The trips yield new ideas, fresh perspectives and strengthened connections that translate to big wins for the community as a whole. ☐☐

Joan L. Mobley is president of JTM Consulting, Inc., a leadership-training firm specializing in leadership development for individuals, communities and non-profit organizations. She can be reached at (843) 705-5476 or jtmconsult@aol.com. Ian Scott is ACCE's manager of public policy. He can be reached at (703) 998-0072 or iscott@acce.org.

For more information about intercity visits, including a detailed guide for getting the program started, check out ACCE's new publication, *A Guide to Intercity Visits: a Community Development Program of Leadership Exchange*. Copies will be available at the ACCE convention complimentary or online at www.acce.org/icv.

This publication was made possible through the generous support of Administaff, IBM, and Small Business Network, Inc.

Cornerstone, an affiliate organization charged with promoting economic development for the northeast Florida region. Mallot, who has been on more than a dozen intercity visits during his time with the Jacksonville Chamber, has seen the value of these trips in the way they galvanize the community. "Seeing examples of successes in other cities excites our group," said Mallot. "It helps them prepare to say 'yes' to the next big project we propose."

Picture it: [Your name here], CCE

*Are you ready to add this prestigious designation to your professional credentials?
More than 475 chamber professionals have - so can you!*



"Today, I am more prepared to face the rigors and opportunities of my career. I have the confidence and knowledge that I have achieved the highest recognition of my profession."

Nancy Eisenbrandt, CCE
COO & Chief Workforce Development Officer
Nashville (TN) Area Chamber of Commerce

Start taking the next step in your career today! The application process begins in the fall of each year. Review the eligibility criteria, and when you're ready, complete our "Intent to Apply" application found on www.acce.org/cce.

For more information, contact Toni Crouch at 703.998.3536 or visit www.acce.org/cce