

UNITED STATES CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

ACCREDITATION

Accreditation Application for State Chambers

Section 5: Program Development



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Updated - June 2021

Accreditation Overview

Welcome

Welcome to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Accreditation application program. We are excited that you are interested in standing out from the crowd and moving ahead. We want to help you through the Accreditation process by explaining our procedures, walking you through the steps to complete the materials, and clarifying what you can expect from us.

The Accreditation Application is divided into nine sections with a complete set of instructions at the beginning of each one. If you have already completed a section and you are familiar with the instructions, click on the Governance Overview icon in the Bookmark Section to the left of your screen. Otherwise, the background and instructions should be reviewed in detail starting with the Accreditation Overview, below.

Accreditation History

In 1964, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce began offering its Accreditation Program to state and local chambers of commerce nationwide. The program was designed to provide a continuous self-analysis of an organization's growth and development, with an opportunity for the organization to reassess its objectives and resources, program of work, procedures, and achievements. Since the Accreditation program's launch, more than 750 chambers have met the required organizational standards and have earned the title "Accredited."

Accreditation means that a local or state chamber of commerce has been recognized by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce for having sound programs and organizational procedures and for continually creating and maintaining positive change in the community.

The U.S. Chamber Accreditation program establishes criteria for judging the quality of performance for state and local chambers of commerce, determines the extent to which organizations meet these criteria, and issues a public announcement that organizations are found to be of superior quality.

The U.S. Chamber understands that state and local chambers are diverse and have unique programs of work, operations, merit, dues structure, and program policies. As a result, the Accreditation program has separated the state chamber Accreditation process from the local chamber Accreditation process. Distinct applications have been created to recognize these differences.

Accreditation does not mean that an organization is perfect in every respect. Competent examiners acknowledge the quality of an organization and make recommendations where there are areas of deficiency and recognize chambers for areas of special distinction.

Effective chambers of commerce operate above and beyond minimum standards. As each chamber prepares its Accreditation application, it seeks ways of improving its performance in the community. These criteria or standards become a tool for management control and self-discipline.

Mission

The mission of the Accreditation program is to establish a standard of organizational competency and an objective set of criteria for assessment. The achievement of standards by state and local chambers as determined by an examining committee will be recognized with Accreditation by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Procedures to Apply

We want to make sure you are properly entered in our database. If you have not yet entered your contact information, click here <https://www.uschamber.com/intent-apply-accreditation> and follow the steps. Upon receipt, U.S. Chamber staff will enter the information into a database, allowing the applicant chamber to receive updates about the Accreditation process and invitations to conference calls discussing the application process. **Do not send the program fee at this time.**

If clicking the link doesn't work, make sure your computer is set up to access the Internet and try again. If you still experience difficulty, call Ali Ehrlich at (202) 463-5760.

Access the Application Documents

There are nine sections of the Accreditation application:

1. Governance
2. Finance
3. Human Resources and Staff
4. Government Affairs
5. Program Development
6. Technology
7. Communication
8. Facilities
9. Benchmarking

Copies of all nine sections of the Accreditation application can be found on our website at <https://www.uschamber.com/members/chambers/accreditation/state-chamber-application>.

These files can be completed by one person at the chamber or distributed to other chamber staff or volunteers to assist in the ultimate completion of the application.

To assist in distributing the files, chamber staff or volunteers may go directly to the website to download the sections of interest to them.

No matter how many staff members or volunteers are working on the application, the chamber's designated staff contact person should be the only one to communicate with the U.S. Chamber staff.

Review the Application

Review the application in its entirety — all nine sections — to determine whether the chamber is prepared to begin the Accreditation process. Use the glossary at the end of the each file to familiarize yourself with the language of the application. Glossary items can also be accessed by clicking on highlighted text. In the glossary a link is provided to return to the highlighted text.

Complete the Application Documents

Each applicant chamber is required to complete all nine sections of the Accreditation application.

Each of the application's nine sections is a self-contained document including:

- Application instructions and overview
- Section's standards as defined by the U.S. Chamber
- A list of minimum qualifications to achieve Accreditation for that section
- A checklist of attachments
- A digital application form

Please note: The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Accreditation application is purposely divided into sections for ease of use and scoring. For this reason, we ask that you not modify the PDFs in any way (i.e. merging sections together, adding pages, removing pages, etc.).

The digital application form is divided into two categories; the minimum requirements which must be met for the chamber to be Accredited, and the additional criteria which will be evaluated to determine the star ranking of an Accredited chamber.

Complete the Conclusion and Signature Page

The Conclusion and Signature Page can be found on our website <https://www.uschamber.com/members/chambers/accreditation/state-chamber-application>. The U.S. Chamber requires two copies of this document; a hard copy of this form with signatures authorizing payment, as well as a digital copy for processing. The digital copy should remain "clickable" in order to be processed correctly (i.e., the text boxes should be blue and remain active).

Prepare the Application Materials for Delivery

Copy the nine pdf files and the conclusion page and signature page to a CD or USB drive. Print and sign the completed Conclusion and Signature Pages, and enclose the payment form with a signed check or credit card information for \$699 for U.S. Chamber members; \$1,199 for non members.

Mail the Application Materials to the U.S. Chamber

The application materials should be put into an envelope with the completed Conclusion and Signature Pages and the payment and mailed to:

Ali Ehrlich IOM, CAE
Director of Operations
Political Affairs and Federation Relations
U.S. Chamber of Commerce
1615 H Street, NW
Washington, DC 20062-2000

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Review Process

Review

Once the completed application and program fee have been received, U.S. Chamber staff will review the chamber's submission for minimum requirements. Due to the volume of applications received, we ask that you please do not contact the U.S. Chamber to inquire about the status of the chamber's application. In the event that minimum requirements have not been met or there are missing materials, U.S. Chamber staff will contact you.

An experienced Accreditation consultant will review the application and make recommendations. The consultant may contact the applicant to ask questions that might arise during the review. Based on the findings, a confidential report with recommendations will be prepared and sent to the Accrediting board, the governing body of the Accreditation program made up of business and chamber executives. The Accrediting board will review the recommendations and approve or disapprove the chamber's Accreditation status.

Recommendations will be presented to the Accrediting board at the February, June, and November board meetings. The day following the Accrediting board meeting, the applicant will be notified about the chamber's Accreditation status.

Awards

All Accredited chambers must meet the minimum requirements for each section of the application. Upon meeting these requirements, the chamber will be granted Accredited status. If the applicant completed the additional criteria sections of the application, the Accreditation consultant will review the additional material and designate the chamber as Accredited with Distinction, if the chamber earns at least 90% of the total number of additional criteria points available.

Post Accreditation Materials

Upon receiving Accreditation, the chamber will receive a marketing kit with the following:

- Letter of congratulations from Tom Donohue, U.S. Chamber President and CEO
- Press release
- Certificate of achievement
- Recommendations for improvement
- Sample newsletter articles and Web page blurbs
- Camera-ready logos
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce resource guide

Each chamber receiving Accreditation will be acknowledged on the U.S. Chamber's website.

Maintaining Accreditation

To maintain Accreditation, a chamber must submit an Accreditation application every five years. Chambers will receive an email from U.S. Chamber staff during the fourth year of Accreditation. It will remind them of the need to renew and provide links to the materials required for the renewal.

Confidentiality

The U.S. Chamber agrees to maintain the confidentiality of information received throughout this application except in cases where (1) the information is or becomes publicly known from sources other than the application itself (2) the information is received by the U.S. Chamber without restriction from a third party (3) the information is independently developed by the U.S. Chamber, or (4) the information is disclosed by the U.S. Chamber pursuant to judicial action.

Tech Support

Navigation

The Accreditation application uses bookmark navigation to assist the applicant in navigating the application. Please note that the pages of this file are divided in two. The left-hand side presents "bookmarks" that can be used to take you directly to specific pages in the document. Clicking on the triangle beside the bookmarks will "open them up" and provide you with a more detailed set of bookmarks for the section.

If you have had no experience with this type of navigation, give it a try and become comfortable with it before going on.

Completing Each Section

"Yes/No" Radio Buttons

Radio buttons — — are used for "yes/no" questions. If you inadvertently click a "yes" button, you can change your answer by clicking on the "no" button, and vice-versa. Radio buttons are also used to "check off" items on a list. If you inadvertently click a "check off" button, you can change your answer by clicking it a second time.

Short Answers

Space is provided to enter short answers. For example, the question, "In which government jurisdiction is the chamber's incorporation or charter filed?" should be answered like this:

Washington, D.C.

In some cases, the answer may exist in another file. It can be copied and pasted into the text box.

Where the answer is best provided by entering the entire file, the file can be attached, see below.

Attachments

In each section you are required to provide Attachments to support the application. Instructions for making the Attachments follow. Note that you can terminate the process before it is complete by pressing the escape key (ESC).

Digital files

If the attachment is a digital file in a common format (Microsoft Word, Excel, Powerpoint; Adobe Acrobat pdf, etc.), the file can be attached electronically. Each attachment has an "attachment area" that looks like this:

Attachment: _____

A reminder of the instructions to attach a file can be accessed by clicking the ? icon.

Steps for Making Attachments

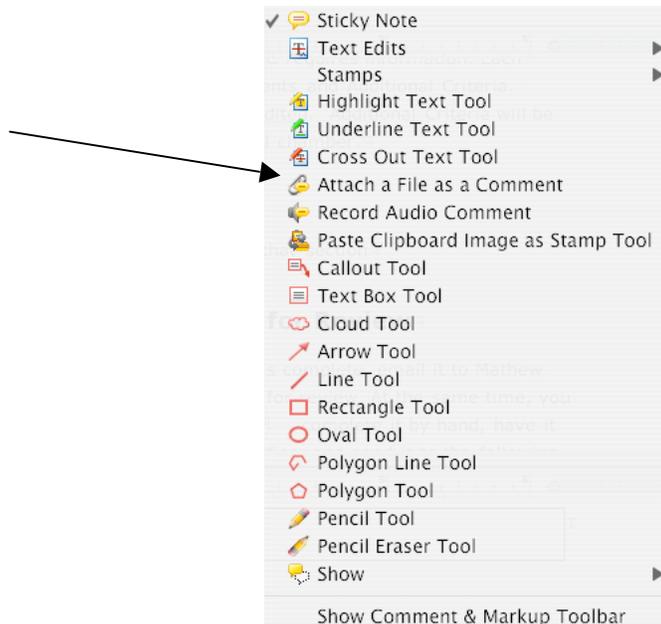
1. Go to the menu at the top of the screen. It looks like this:

Adobe Reader File Edit View Document Tools Window Help

2. Click on "Tools" and a drop-down menu will appear. It looks like this:

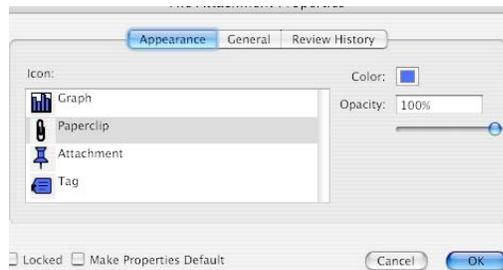


3. Drag the cursor over the words "Comment & Markup" to show the next drop-down menu. It looks like this:



4. Click on the line "Attach a File as a Comment." The arrow points to it. Click anywhere in the "Attachment Area" to trigger your computer's operating system to open.
5. Find the file you want to attach and click on it.

6. Click on the "Select" button at the bottom of the window in your operating system and a new window will appear that looks like this:



7. Click on the "Paperclip" icon, and click the "OK" button.

A "Paperclip" will appear in the "Attachment Area." Clicking on this icon will open the file you have attached. If you want to unattach the file, select the icon with your cursor and hit the delete key.

Printed Files

If your document is in printed form and no digital copy is available, it can be converted to a pdf file by having it scanned. Converting printed files to digital format is the best way to deal with these attachments.

If you cannot have the file scanned, you can send it to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in its printed form. The U.S. Chamber will have it scanned and attached to your application document for a fee of \$1.00 a page.

Essays

Space is provided to enter essays. They must be as thorough as possible and the space will expand to accommodate essays of up to 1,000 words. Each essay response must be as thorough as possible.

The space can accommodate text only. If your essay already exists in a digital format, you can save time by including it as an attachment. If you would like to include tables, charts, or graphs in this section as a way to better clarify or enhance the essays, you can put them into a digital format and attach the file.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

- Q We have documents that we think the U.S. Chamber of Commerce should review but there is no place for them to be attached in any of the sections.
- A An area has been provided at the end of Section Nine — Benchmarking — where additional attachments can be made. Please note that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce will review these items but may not include them in the basic scoring of the application. However, if the material is noteworthy or exemplifies an industry best practice, it may be eligible to receive discretionary points that may affect the chamber's star rating.
- Q There are places where we would like to add a comment but there is no text box available.
- A Generally speaking, text boxes are made available where additional information is needed to determine the chamber's level of compliance. However, if an applicant would like to insert more information, the applicants can always use Adobe Acrobat Reader's "Sticky Note" feature to insert a comment anywhere in the application forms. To access this feature click on the Tools menu at the top of your screen and slide the cursor down to "Comment and Markup." A list of features will appear with "Sticky Note" at the top. Click on the "Sticky Note" icon then move your cursor to the place in the document where you would like to make a comment. Click again and the "Sticky Note" will appear. Write your comment in the space provided then click anywhere in the document to continue.
- Q Completing the forms is time-consuming. Will we have to redo everything when it is time to renew our accreditation?
- A The set of nine pdf files should be kept in a safe place, with backup copies available elsewhere. At renewal, use the original set of pdf files, make changes only and save them under a new name, e.g. Section One – Governance 20??. This new set of files is then sent to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce for review. No need to completely redo the forms.
- Q We have very large files on separate media and cannot attach them to a pdf file.
- A These files can be submitted on separate media (CDs, DVDs, USB drives, etc.) and enclosed in the same envelope used to send the nine sections to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Accreditation fee. A note should be included to indicate what the files are and the section of the application forms to which they apply.

Q Can more than one person be involved in completing the forms? How would this be done?

A While it is best for one person to coordinate the process and serve as the communicator with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, many chambers will want to involve more than one person. Chambers will often distribute the pdf file for certain sections to specialists who are responsible for completing them. For example, Section Two – Finance may be given to the CFO who completes it and sends it back to the person coordinating the application for the chamber.

5. Program Development

Standard

An Accredited chamber has a formal system in place to plan, document, and exercise short- and long-term goals or plans. The chamber has developed methods to monitor and evaluate progress on goals that are used throughout the year.

Minimum Qualifications

- Has an understanding of the issues and needs important to segments of the membership
- Collects member feedback at least annually
- Provides an annual report to the members
- Has a strategic or business plan for the current year
- Understands and is prepared for the impending factors that will affect the chamber

Minimum Requirements Attachment Checklist

- A 5.1 Most recent annual report
- A 5.2 Strategic or business plan for the current year

Additional Criteria Attachment Checklist

- A 5.3 Most recent environmental scan
- A 5.4 Listing of all current chamber programs, products, and services

Section 5: Program Development Minimum Requirements

A. Members

1. What are the three largest business sectors represented in the chamber's membership?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 2. Is membership truly representative of the local business community? Yes No
 - a. If no, what segments are missing? _____
 3. Are issues within the major industries that members represent addressed? Yes No
 4. How does the chamber collect member feedback? (Check all that apply)
 Questionnaires Interviews
 Surveys Focus groups
 Other _____
 5. How often does the chamber conduct a member needs and satisfaction survey of all members?
 Multiple times per year Every three to five years
 Annually Other _____
 Every other year
 6. In the chamber's last member needs analysis, what percentage of members surveyed responded? _____ %
 7. Is an annual report produced? Yes No
 8. Is an annual report shared with members? Yes No
 9. What format does the chamber use for its annual report? (Check all that apply)
 Printed PowerPoint
 Verbal report – state of the chamber Email
 Website Other _____
- A 5.1 Attach a copy of the chamber's last annual report.**

Attachment : _____

B. Strategic Planning and Chamber Goals

1. Does the chamber have a strategic or business plan with specific goals and assignments for the current year? Yes No
2. Does the chamber have a strategic or business plan with specific goals and assignments for the next three to five years? Yes No

A 5.2 Attach a copy of the [strategic or business plan](#)¹.

Attachment : _____

3. Summarize the chamber's top five short-term goals from the chamber's annual business plan.
- a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
4. Summarize the chamber's top five long-term goals from the chambers 3-5 year strategic plan.
- a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.

Essay Question #1

What impending factors will seriously affect the chamber, community, and the local economy in the next three to five years? (e.g., energy availability, environmental concerns, work force)? How is the chamber preparing for these factors?

If the essay already exists in a file, you can attach the file in the space provided and check the box to the left.

Attachment : _____

Section 5: Program Development Additional Criteria

A. Members

1. How many businesses does the chamber's marketplace comprise? _____
2. Does the chamber measure its **market penetration**ⁱⁱ rate? (Yes or no) _____
3. If yes, how does your chamber arrive at this figure? _____

4. What three benefits do members use and value most?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

B. Internal Environment – Chamber Goals

1. Who was involved in developing the strategic or business plan? (check all that apply)
 Board Other volunteers
 Staff Consultant
2. How often does the chamber hold a strategic planning retreat?
 Annually Every other year Every 3 to 5 years
3. Was there board consensus regarding the strategic or business plan? Yes No
4. How often are goals reviewed and revised? _____

C. External Environment

1. Has the chamber conducted, contracted for, or participated in the development of an external environmental scan of its service area in the last two years? Yes No
 - a. If yes, what did the environmental scan include? (check all that apply)
 Demographic characteristics
 Economic factors
 Competition (who, what, types of programs, members, etc.)
 Social factors (community attitudes, language, etc.)
 Political factors (friendliness of the local government, etc.)
 Infrastructure (highways, roads, cable, fiber optics, phone systems, etc.)
 Strength, weakness, opportunity and threat (SWOT) analysis
- A 5.3 Attach a copy of the chamber's most recent **environmental scan**ⁱⁱⁱ.**

Attachment : _____

D. Programs, Products, and Services

1. How many **programs**^{iv} does the chamber offer its members? _____
2. How many **products**^v does the chamber offer its members? _____
3. How many **services**^{vi} does the chamber offer its members? _____

A 5.4 Attach a list of all current programs, including those that are being developed. Be sure to include a short description of each program.

Attachment : _____

4. Are current programs, products, and services integrated with the strategic or business plan? Yes No
5. Are chamber programs, products, and services evaluated annually? Yes No
6. Can successes of these programs, products, and services be quantified by available data? Yes No
7. Does the chamber systematically cut programs, products, and services that are no longer meeting long-term goals? Yes No

Essay Question #2

Describe the one chamber program, product, or service that provides the most value to the membership or earns the most revenue and exposure for the chamber. How does the chamber determine this designation? What is being done to ensure that this program stays relevant?

- If the essay already exists in a file, you can attach the file in the space provided and check the box to the left.

Attachment : _____

E. Local Chamber Relations

1. What is the relationship between the state chamber and the state chamber executives organizations (e.g., CCEs or SEANs)

State chamber operates SEAN

State chamber is affiliated with SEAN

State chamber staff sits on SEAN boards

SEAN is entirely separate

SEAN does not exist in the state

Other _____

2. How often does the state chamber meet with local chambers in the state to discuss issues and programs of mutual interest? _____

3. Does the state chamber receive feedback from the local chambers that is used to formulate the annual legislative agenda? Yes No

4. Over the last two years, what percentage of local communities has the state chamber visited to organize events or speak with the local chamber? _____ %

Supplementary Information

Applicants can use this page to enter or attach supplementary information not required by the application.

Please note that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce will review the materials, but does not score supplementary information either as a part of the application process or as a basis for designating the chamber as Accredited or Accredited with Distinction.

Supplementary information may be awarded up to five discretionary points as deemed by the Accreditation consultant for exceptional policies or best practices.

Comments can be entered in the space below.

Additional documents can be attached here :

ⁱ **Strategic or business plan:** The Accrediting board requires that an Accredited chamber have a strategic or business plan with set goals for the current year as well as a long term plan for the next three to five years. The strategic or business plan will state the chamber's goals and map out how it will reach these goals. For sample strategic or business plans, refer to the best practices Web page at <https://www.uschamber.com/members/chambers/accreditation/best-practices>. [Return to Page 12](#)

ⁱⁱ **Market penetration:** Measurement to evaluate the range of the chamber in the business community. Market penetration is found by dividing chamber membership by the total number of potential members in the chamber's operating area. [Return to Page 13](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ **Environmental scan:** A study of the surrounding community conducted by the chamber or contracted with a partnering organization that includes demographic characteristics, economic factors, sources of competition for the chamber, social factors, political factors, infrastructure statistics, or a SWOT analysis. For sample environmental scans, refer to the best practices Web page at <https://www.uschamber.com/members/chambers/accreditation/best-practices>. [Return to Page 13](#)

^{iv} **Programs:** Event-based activities such as workshops, seminars, annual meetings, etc. [Return to Page 14](#)

^v **Products:** Physical entities such as books and magazines or member benefits like credit cards, sales promotion kits, recognition-week materials, etc. [Return to Page 14](#)

^{vi} **Services:** The vast range of activities that are not considered a program or product of the chamber. Services can be listservs, chat rooms, career centers, employment hotlines, legislative advisories, grassroots networks, etc. [Return to Page 14](#)