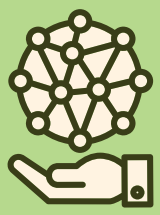
Horizon 2035

# Linchpin, Timeless, and Timely Forces Shaping our Future



# The 1st Chambre de Commerce was established in 1599 in Marseille, France 🇫🇷 to promote regional economic interests.

This model spread to America with New York's statewide chamber in 1768 and Charleston's local chamber in 1773. **Despite centuries of difference, these early chambers share much of the same core mission as those we lead today:**

**Advocating for business interests, improving infrastructure, and shaping economic policy.**

**The role of chambers has never been more crucial. Trust in businesses and chambers is strong.**

A 2024 Harris Poll survey, conducted on behalf of ACCE, found that ***81% of U.S. adults agree that their local chamber of commerce is a trusted resource and partner for businesses.***

Nine in 10 feel that their local chamber has an impact on growing the local economy (90%) and addressing challenges within their community (88%). We have tremendous momentum to bring even more bold leadership and lasting impact to our communities.

# In the next decade, chambers will shape – and be shaped by – three spheres of influence:

## Linchpin Influences

**fundamental to chambers' role as trusted community leaders**

## Timeless Influences

**that every generation of chamber leader faces**

## Timely Influences

**highly relevant now and possibly in the future**

Recognizing these influences requires a keen perception of the larger picture of what is driving societal change.

Chamber leaders must think like futurists and be able to discern weak signals that could evolve into trends that affect businesses and communities.

**Horizon 2035 is designed to keep you a step ahead by highlighting key future-facing influences. The influences below create both challenges and opportunities. There is no silver bullet. Smart chamber leaders must create targeted strategies based on their community's needs and social dynamics.**

**Linchpin**  **:**
a **central** or most important **element that holds together** the other parts of something, whether an **idea**, **system**, or **organization**.

**Linchpins hold things together.**

For over 400 years, chambers have helped hold their communities together - as conveners, connectors and trusted community leaders. And if you look inside the most effective chambers, you see these Linchpin Influences at work.

# Catalytic Leader

**Chambers have the potential to lead era-defining change and broad-based prosperity.**

- **How does a chamber provide catalytic leadership?**

How does a chamber provide catalytic leadership? When it defines its vision in terms of what it will **BE** rather than what it will **DO**. Chambers then view themselves as instigators of change, not merely as a resource to help manage it. Catalytic leaders take proactive steps to shape the future instead of simply responding to the actions of others.

Catalytic chamber leadership has transformed many of America's greatest communities. They are vibrant, growing, imagining the next big thing, and going for it! Catalytic leaders don't have to go it alone. In fact, the power of partnerships is even greater than ever, bringing more clout to an issue. Chambers bring others alongside them, developing another generation of catalytic leaders.

- **Where can your chamber play the role of catalytic leader?**

# Belonging & Gathering

**The nature of belonging and gathering has transformed dramatically in recent years.**

Today communities exist both physically and virtually, unrestricted by geography or traditional social boundaries. Yet, many feel isolated and alone, especially as many of our community institutions no longer serve as gathering places of connection for our communities.

Chambers showed how their convening power extends beyond in-person meetings during the pandemic, when they helped navigate the crisis and rallied the community to support local businesses and restaurants. We can capitalize on the collective eagerness for reconnection, while also providing a blueprint for leveraging cross-sector partnerships to tackle big challenges.

These changes create both an opportunity and a challenge for chambers:

- **How can place-based, membership-driven organizations that rely on volunteers create a sense of belonging when people can instantly connect worldwide without intermediaries?**

**Not affected by the passage of time,** having an enduring quality that **remains relevant** or valuable **regardless of era.**

***Some influences are timeless.*** *The following will continue to be critical to chambers through 2035, just as they were to our forebearers over four hundred years ago.*

## **Political** and **Social Fragmentation**

**Polarization–creating "us-versus-them" division–is as old as time.**

While some people thrive on it, one of chambers' enduring roles is to find common ground. Chamber leaders must adapt by strengthening their facilitation skills, fostering inclusive dialogue and promoting collaborative solutions to benefit the broader community.

**The reasons for this are clear:**

- Business leaders represent a variety of political interests and parties. Chambers work on behalf of all members.
- Businesses share common interests that transcend political or social differences like the need for skilled workers, an interest in keeping taxes fair and a pro-growth regulatory environment.

Political issues have evolved over the centuries, but the fundamental need for businesses to have a voice in these discussions has only increased. What's more, the voice of business has a positive effect; while elected officials often find themselves at the bottom of "most trusted" lists, business leaders and chambers of commerce are often at the top.

- **How can chambers stake out the moderate middle on issues of importance to members amidst an increasingly polarized world?**

# Changing Business Models

**From royal charters to modern not for profits, chambers have continually reinvented their business models.**

While membership dues remain important, successful chambers have mastered the art of balanced innovation - finding new revenue streams without compromising their core mission. Chambers are reassessing their value propositions to align and engage stakeholders around meaningful priorities. While membership continues to be a driver of income, chambers are reimagining membership models to better reflect the realities of their regions. Creative non-dues revenue is where many chambers will see significant growth – and sustainability - in the future.

The key tension? Maintaining financial sustainability while staying true to purpose. The most successful chambers walk this tightrope skillfully, avoiding mission creep while embracing strategic opportunities for revenue and growth.

- **Does your chamber's membership model reflect the needs of local businesses?**
- **What avenues of non-dues revenue are most relevant for your chamber's market?**

# Changing Expectations of Chambers

Chambers of commerce have proven their effectiveness as community change-makers leading to increased expectations from their constituencies. As a result, community members are now bringing new, oftentimes complex community issues to chambers viewing them as trusted problem solvers. This shift has required chamber leaders to adapt and develop new leadership skills and approaches to meet elevated expectations.

Chambers are increasingly focused on the evolving member and community expectations about economic vitality and community vibrancy. They are seeking ways to capitalize on their community's assets to stimulate economic development and create a sense of belonging for residents. This includes supporting broader societal initiatives, solving challenges that other institutions historically were charged with addressing and contributing to regional prosperity, all while maintaining core business support functions.

- **What new forms of leadership are required to respond to the community's new and increased expectations?**
- **How can you ensure your work portfolio is aligned with community needs in a way that also allows for bandwidth when new opportunities arise?**

# Inclusive **Economic Growth**

**As the American population becomes increasingly diverse over the next fifty years, creating an environment for economic opportunity for all will be essential for the future of our communities.**

Demographic shifts and labor force changes are causing chambers to think differently about the future of the businesses they serve and the workforce those companies will need. Declining birth rates, workers reaching retirement age, changes in immigration practices, new segments of the population pursuing entrepreneurial business ventures, cost of living and other factors all impact a community's potential for economic prosperity.

Our communities must harness broader perspectives, talents and innovations to drive creativity and efficiency in their economies. Inclusive growth ensures that all people have access to opportunities and resources, helping to bridge gaps in income and employment, ensure economic mobility and reduce systemic inequalities.

Chambers are at the center of this conversation as they look to convene community discussions and develop strategies for their communities' future. A diverse population is already prevalent in some communities, while others will experience a transformational shift over the next few decades.

- **How can chamber leaders develop strategies that anticipate shifting demographics and greater diversity to create broad-based prosperity, from business hiring practices and corporate cultures to inclusive community amenities, education, housing and transportation?**

# Digital **Transformation** and Technological **Innovation**

The strategic adoption of new technologies and a commitment to innovation are essential for chambers to enhance their operations, improve member communication, and broaden their range of services. Forward-thinking chambers can embrace artificial intelligence, data analytics and automation to increase efficiencies and innovate their products and services. Digital engagement strategies will also be crucial to maintaining connections and trust with younger generations.

At the same time, chambers should ensure members are well informed of the opportunities and impacts on the local market, their operations and consumer expectations.

As technology advancements outpace legal and regulatory structures chambers must play a role to ensure responsible and ethical use. Challenges related to disinformation, deep fakes, algorithmic bias, and data privacy will only increase. Chambers must focus on ethical leadership to build trust to meet the evolving needs of their members and remain relevant in a digitally transforming landscape. Likewise, chambers' role as a trusted resource means we can be a crucial filter that provides trustworthy information to stakeholders in our region.

- **How can chambers meet the evolving needs of their members and maintain their relevance and credibility in a digitally transforming world?**

# **Timely Influences** relevant to the present time or circumstances and likely of critical importance in the future.

As important as long-term influences are, there remain influences that require immediate and timely work to take advantage of an opportunity or mitigate possible adverse effects. These timely influences have necessitated the rise of different leadership abilities in chamber executives.

While dealing with these influences might require crisis management skills at the start, it is not uncommon that a skilled chamber executive must also be adept at converting to mid to long-term solution management. One need only look at the numerous examples of the chambers' work during the COVID-19 pandemic for a clear example. In many cases, programs and processes put in place as a stopgap measure during the pandemic have evolved into valuable assets that will continue into the future.

The following reflects the current influences that require immediate attention. These may, in time, take on Timeless status, but for now, chambers must pay special attention to them as they are especially relevant now, into the next decade.

## Chambers as **Unifiers**

**Mobilizing business communities and forging strategic partnerships are crucial for driving community and economic growth. In our current politically charged climate, many chambers are being asked to act as, and successfully serving as, unifiers.**

Chambers bring experience and success in advocating for members and community impact efforts. Through this work, chamber leaders have developed the skills needed to foster dialogue across divides and build consensus. Going beyond simply serving as conveners, they have become trusted sources of leadership on challenging issues. Unsurprisingly, chambers are expected to lead efforts to bridge political fragmentation, promote policies that benefit the broader community and reinforce trust in business leadership.

However, community leadership can sometimes be more art than science. Chamber leaders frequently play different roles depending on the issue and its priority to its member organizations. Leadership is a spectrum. When advocating on certain priority issues, chamber executives may need to take a more uncompromising stand. This does not, however, mean they cannot serve as a unifying force for the community at large.

- **Where do chambers need to unify, and where do they need to catalyze?**



# Leadership **Churn**

Leadership churn, including the retirement and replacement of chamber CEOs, key staff volunteer business executives, and other community pillars poses significant challenges to chamber stability.
The loss of seasoned leaders results in a gap in institutional knowledge, and sometimes loss of long-running chamber champions, necessitating the development of new leaders.

**Turnover among CEOs and key staff, from both inside and outside chambers, requires proactive strategies for leadership continuity and community engagement.**

As experienced leaders retire, it becomes crucial to have already cultivated a pipeline of visionary leaders who can address local issues like housing, economic development and sustainability. Chambers must create strategies for engaging and educating the next generation of leadership within member companies, who may have different expectations, priorities and perspectives on the role of the chamber. Similarly, chambers should have a succession plan for its own leadership.

- **How do chamber leaders strive for continuity on their boards as leadership shift grows nationally?**
- **How can chambers cultivate the next generation of internal chamber leadership and strengthen succession planning?**
- **How can chambers identify and engage elected officials to shepherd growth and sustainability policies through the council or the legislature?**

# **Talent Development** at the Speed of Business

Evolving employer and employee expectations, demographic and population shifts, technological advancements and other factors drive the need for rapid talent development, including adaptive training and industry-aligned skills. Changing business needs and workforce expectations necessitate adaptive workforce training, including ensuring that educational institutions at all levels are cultivating a prepared workforce. Relevant training should be made readily available to upskill and reskill talent where needed to align skills development with industry needs.

Smart employers are changing the way they hire, up skill and promote talent to focus more on skills and demonstrated abilities rather than traditional markers of success. Employees can adapt and thrive in new roles by gaining the right skills to enhance job security, foster career growth and bridge the skills gap that often hinders economic progress. Ultimately, a workforce that evolves with business needs drives individual success and strengthens the region's financial foundation.

- **How are chambers addressing the changing employee landscape and taking action to enhance workforce readiness and ensure a resilient and capable labor force in a dynamic job market?**
- **How can chambers help create new solutions to meet business demands?**

# Global IMPACTS

**American business has undergone a fundamental transformation in recent decades, shifting from a primarily domestic focus to a global orientation driven by technological advances and improved transportation.**

However, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in international supply chains, leading to a complex tension between global trade dependencies and calls for domestic production. Chambers can also serve as a conduit to support local businesses expanding their reach into new markets, and encouraging international organizations to consider participation in their local economy.

**The global marketplace** now extends beyond goods and services to include international talent pools, but businesses face significant challenges in accessing this workforce. Complex visa processes make it difficult to retain foreign graduates or recruit skilled international workers, while unauthorized immigration has become a contentious political issue hindering the ability to grow the talent pool. Chambers of commerce find themselves needing to navigate these challenges, advocating for practical solutions at both state and federal levels to help their members address critical workforce needs while balancing political sensitivities.

**Does your community embrace its role in the global economy?**

**How can chambers highlight the importance of global markets as a source of talent and commerce?**

# The Future is not a place we visit.

# **The Future is what we make it.**

The influences highlighted in Horizons 2035 are compelling.  How we use this knowledge to the advantage of our communities and our chambers is up to us. All chambers of every size and function can use this content to inform and engage its members and community partners. Every region worldwide can leverage this information into action that creates a brighter future.

The biggest, most impactful step is for chamber leaders to use this information to catalyze change. And while additional dynamic tools are being created to complement this work, using this roadmap into the future when thinking about your chamber's role in your community, is a great place to start.

# Meet the TEAM



Leveraging foresight tools, this initiative represents the work of nearly 1,000 ACCE members, partners and staff alongside the team at NEXT Generation Consulting. Thanks to all of you!

Many thanks to ACCE's Horizon Investors, the Horizon 2035 Steering Committee and the ACCE team for their leadership. Each of you provided insightful support during the year-long process, the impact of which will be felt for years to come.

# ACCE Horizon Investors

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