

UNITED STATES CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

# ACCREDITATION

## Accreditation Application for State Chambers

### Section 1: Governance



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Updated - January 2013

## **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

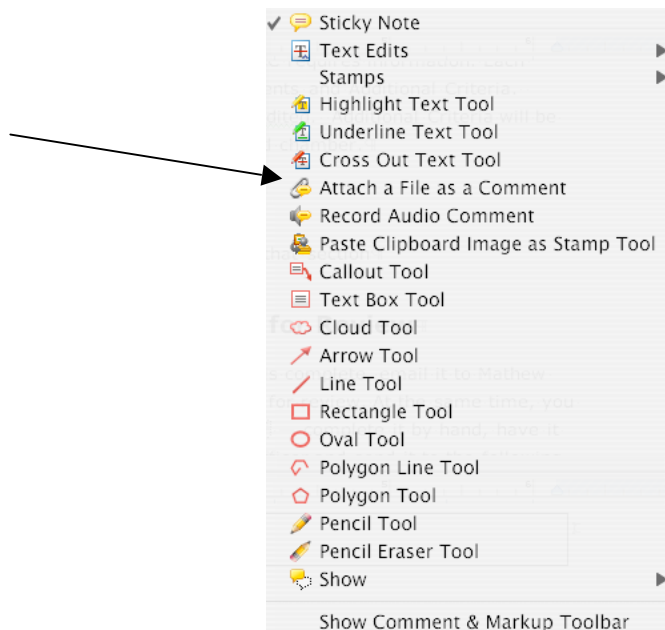
1. Go to the menu at the top of the screen. It looks like this:

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.

- 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:



- 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.

# 1. Governance

## Standard

An Accredited chamber defines the architecture of its governing system. There is a clearly developed purpose and mission statement that is shared by board members and staff alike. The organizational structure is defined and the board of directors and staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities.

## Minimum Qualifications

- Articles of incorporation or charter
- Mission statement: clear and feasible
- Bylaws:
  - Regulate the fundamental areas of chamber structure and operation
  - Are adequate for the laws of the state and the protection of both the organization and its members
  - Have been shared with the board
  - Have been reviewed by legal counsel
- Organizational structure
  - Organizational chart(s) are clear and appropriate to the chamber's size, structure, and goals
  - Organizational chart(s) depict proper flow of information, hierarchy, and subsidiaries.
- Functional board of directors: term limits and job descriptions in place
- Board meetings: held on a regular basis and minutes retained
- Ability to monitor the performance and attendance of officers
- Proper committee descriptions and structure in place

## Required Attachment Checklist

- A 1.1 Current articles of incorporation or charter
- A 1.2 Bylaws
- A 1.3 Organizational chart(s) with staff assignments
- A 1.4 Sample job description for the board of directors
- A 1.5 Minutes for the three most recent board meetings
- A 1.6 Board evaluation form or board evaluation criteria
- A 1.7 List of chamber committees and a description of their purpose

## Additional Material Attachment Checklist

- A 1.8 Orientation program for the board of directors
- A 1.9 Committee support materials or orientation material

# Section 1: Governance Minimum Requirements

## A. Articles of Incorporation or Charter

1. In which government jurisdiction is the chamber's incorporation or charter filed? \_\_\_\_\_

**A 1.1 Attach a copy of the current articles of incorporation or charter.**

**Attachment :** \_\_\_\_\_

## B. Mission

1. Provide the chamber's mission statement.

2. Does it clearly state what the chamber is, what it does, for whom, and where?  Yes  No

3. How often is the mission statement reviewed by the board or other governing body? \_\_\_\_\_

## C. Bylaws

1. Do the bylaws mention the following?

a. Limitation of methods (e.g., do the bylaws follow laws of the state to protect the chamber and its members?)  Yes  No

b. Board term limits and attendance policies  Yes  No

c. Quorums required for board, executive committee, committees, and membership meetings. )  Yes  No

d. Method of board member or officer removal  Yes  No

e. Election of directors or officers, including procedures to elect and timing  Yes  No

f. Officer duties  Yes  No

g. [Indemnification](#)<sup>i</sup> of officers and directors  Yes  No

h. Membership qualifications criteria and membership categories  Yes  No

i. Dues, resignations, delinquent accounts, and expulsions  Yes  No

j. Fiscal year  Yes  No

k. Auditing procedures and audit requirements  Yes  No

l. [Bonding requirements](#)<sup>ii</sup>  Yes  No

m. Parliamentary procedures or rules of order  Yes  No

n. [Dissolution clause](#)<sup>iii</sup>  Yes  No

o. Procedures for amendments  Yes  No

2. Has each board member received a copy of the bylaws?  Yes  No

3. Has legal counsel reviewed the bylaws in the last five years?  Yes  No

**A 1.2 Attach a copy of the bylaws.** Attachment : \_\_\_\_\_

### D. Organization Structure

1. Does the chamber have a chart that depicts the organization's governance structure?  Yes  No
2. Does the organization chart have definitions of leadership, names of individuals, lines of authority, and responsibility?  Yes  No

**A 1.3 Attach a copy of the [organization chart](#)<sup>iv</sup> with staff assignments.** Attachment : \_\_\_\_\_

### E. Officers and Board of Directors

1. How many officers serve on the board? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many directors serve on the board? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Are term limits for directors in place?  Yes  No
4. What are the term lengths and limits of the directors? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Are there detailed job descriptions (other than bylaws) outlining responsibilities and authority of the elected officers and directors?  Yes  No

**A 1.4 Attach a copy of a job description for the board of directors.** Attachment : \_\_\_\_\_

6. Are board minutes recorded and distributed to officers and directors on a timely basis?  Yes  No

**A 1.5 Attach the minutes from each of the three most recent board meetings.** Attachment : \_\_\_\_\_

7. Is there a documented (written) process in place to evaluate the performance of officers and directors?  Yes  No

**A 1.6 Attach a copy of the [form or criteria](#) used to evaluate the performance of officers or directors.<sup>v</sup>** Attachment : \_\_\_\_\_

### F. Committees

1. Are there job descriptions for committees showing purposes, goals, authority, accountability, and reporting procedures?  Yes  No

**A 1.7 Attach a list of the committees serving the chamber and their purposes.** Attachment : \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 1: Governance Additional Criteria

### A. Vision and Values

1. Provide the following if applicable:

a. The chamber's [vision statement](#)<sup>vi</sup>

b. The chamber's [values statement](#)<sup>vii</sup>

2. How often are the vision and values statements reviewed by the board or other governing body? \_\_\_\_\_

### B. Officers and Board of Directors

1. Is the board representative of the business community?  Yes  No

2. Is there an annual board and leadership orientation program?  Yes  No

**A 1.8 Attach a copy of the orientation program for the board of directors.** **Attachment :** \_\_\_\_\_

3. Are board members trained to consistently and clearly act as advocates of the chamber and to speak for the chamber in the public arena?  Yes  No

4. Are board members recruited according to specific needs?  Yes  No

5. How are board members recruited? (Check all that apply)

Email or mail invitations  Personal invitations

Leadership training opportunities  Website

New member orientation  Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. Are background checks performed for prospective board members?  Yes  No

7. Are references checked for prospective board members?  Yes  No

8. Is there an interview process for prospective board members?  Yes  No

9. Are there contractual agreements with board members?  Yes  No

10. Is there a process for the dismissal of an ineffective board member?  Yes  No



**Essay Question #1**

Within the past two years, what innovative ideas have board members contributed that resulted in positive change for the chamber, its members, or the community served? In a couple of paragraphs, please use the space below to describe one to three noteworthy examples.

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 :** \_\_\_\_\_

**Essay Question #2**

How are volunteers recognized and rewarded? Please use the space below to list and describe three ideas that the chamber uses to reward these volunteers.

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 :** \_\_\_\_\_

## C. Committees

1. Is there a method to select committee chairpersons, vice chairs, and members?  Yes  No
2. Is there an orientation program for committee chairs?  Yes  No
3. Is there an orientation program for committee members?  Yes  No

**A 1.9 Attach a copy of the committee support materials or committee orientation program only if the documents are significantly different from board orientation.** Attachment : \_\_\_\_\_

4. Are minutes of all committee meetings maintained?  Yes  No

5. How often does the chamber evaluate committee performance? \_\_\_\_\_

6. How does the chamber evaluate committee performance?

7. Do committees have the option to conduct their work electronically on bulletin boards, shared electronic files, etc.?  Yes  No

8. Have any committees been disbanded in the last three years?  Yes  No

9. Describe the process used to determine committee dissolution.

## D. Affiliates

This section relates to [affiliates](#)<sup>viii</sup>. If the chamber does not have affiliates, you may skip this section.

The term “affiliate” describes a purposeful, relatively formal relationship between the chamber and other entities performing a wide variety of functions.

The following are examples:

- Convention and visitors bureaus
- Downtown development associations
- Group benefit trusts
- Industrial development foundations
- Manufacturers’ councils
- Private economic development councils
- Purchasing agents associations
- Research groups
- Retail promotion groups

1. Does the chamber have affiliates?  Yes  No

If yes, answer the following:

- a. Does the affiliate staff answer to chamber staff leadership?  Yes  No

- b. Are affiliates included in all financial audits conducted by the chamber?  Yes  No

- c. Is the chamber board of directors the ultimate authority for decision making regarding the affiliates?  Yes  No

## 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 : 

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<sup>i</sup> **Indemnification:** The Accrediting Board requires the indemnification of officers and directors be stated in the bylaws. Indemnification is a financial protection provided by a chamber to its directors, officers, and employees against expenses and liabilities incurred by them in lawsuits alleging that they breached some duty in their service on behalf of the chamber. For sample bylaws including an indemnification clause, refer to the best practices Web page at

<https://www.uschamber.com/members/chambers/accreditation/best-practices>. [Return to Page 11](#)

<sup>ii</sup> **Bonding requirements:** The Accrediting board recommends that the chamber have bonding requirements to further protect the chamber from financial crimes. Employee and/or board dishonesty insurance may substitute for bonding requirements, but it is at the discretion of the Accrediting board as to whether the policy meets this requirement. [Return to Page 11](#)

<sup>iii</sup> **Dissolution clause:** The Accrediting Board requires that a dissolution clause be included in the bylaws. A dissolution clause makes provisions as to what should happen if the chamber is dissolved. For sample bylaws including a dissolution clause, refer to the best practices Web page at

<https://www.uschamber.com/members/chambers/accreditation/best-practices>. [Return to Page 11](#)

<sup>iv</sup> **Organization chart:** An organization chart is a chart which depicts the chamber's governance structure. The organization chart should have definitions of leadership, names of staff, lines of authority, and a listing of staff responsibilities. For sample organization charts, refer to the best practices Web page at <https://www.uschamber.com/members/chambers/accreditation/best-practices>. [Return to Page 12](#)

<sup>v</sup> **Board evaluation form or criteria:** The Accrediting Board requires the applicant to develop written criteria or evaluation forms that are used to evaluate the board of directors. For sample board evaluation materials, refer to the best practices Web page at

<https://www.uschamber.com/members/chambers/accreditation/best-practices>. [Return to Page 12](#)

<sup>vi</sup> **Vision statement:** Outlines what a chamber is looking to be. It concentrates on future and provides clear decision-making criteria. [Return to Page 13](#)

<sup>vii</sup> **Values statement:** Main values protected by the organization and reflected in the organization's culture and priorities [Return to Page 13](#)

<sup>viii</sup> **Affiliate:** An entity that is related to the chamber, but not completely controlled by the chamber. [Return to Page 15](#)