

2014

PROGRAM OF WORK

The Aiken Chamber's 2014 program of work launches a multi-year process that creates viable, proactive mechanisms that drive a force for Aiken's prosperity in the 21st century through **Economic Vitality** initiatives. The purpose of this long-term course of work is to:

- reawaken and re-engage the general public and business community about the needs necessary for business growth and job creation
- raise awareness of the fact that business climate is the #1 factor of a successful community
- begin a five-year evolving plan that leads to the community's long-term prosperity through taking risk, rewarding success, and growing families

The premise of this program of work is based on the fact that cities play a creative and ambitious role as drivers of the American economy by creating and sustaining the local ecosystem for innovation, competitiveness, and productivity through business friendly policies.

(Source: U.S. Chamber of Commerce)

Further, this program of work is based on the need for public and private partnerships with a focus on those things that promote job creation and upward mobility. The Chamber believes it is essential for business and the public sector to seek out common ground and to find ways to bolster each other. Policies and practices that help strengthen a free enterprise system are those that do the following:

- Allow businesses to grow and thrive
- Free businesses from excessive taxes, unnecessary regulations, and onerous local government processes
- Focus government on the critical tasks that are the foundation of economic opportunity, such as infrastructure and protective services
- Help educate, cultivate, and equip the next generation of young entrepreneurs and the workforce of the future

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Expand the Chamber's Economic Vitality emphasis

1. Explore and evaluate programs that develop and deliver experience-based entrepreneurship courses to youth, such as the Young Entrepreneurs Academy.
2. Create a program that fosters an entrepreneurial culture in young people, educators, and the community while instilling the personal, social, and economic values necessary for future leaders.
3. Support Clemson University's Urban Ecology Center efforts to promote an urban live, work, and learn lifestyle in Aiken and to embrace innovation to engage the greater Aiken community in relevant social, economic, and environmental issues.
4. Adapt the Chamber's resources to focus on Economic Vitality as part of its overall objectives

Elevate the critical role of education as a tool to support Aiken's economic vitality

The community's prosperity hinges upon having an educated and trained work force of the future – one that has the critical (and also soft) skills necessary for success. The Chamber's goal is to raise public awareness of the critical role education plays in the community's economic prosperity and quality of life.

1. Study and formulate recommendations, where appropriate, on funding options for capital investment in public school facilities, including one-cent sales tax options, bond referendums, and other options
2. Facilitate site visits to school districts that have modern, technology rich facilities and that have captured national recognition and ranking for academic success, such as Columbia County, Georgia, and Lexington, South Carolina schools districts

Establish an annual community benchmarking process to aid in community decision making

The purpose of the benchmarking is to measure the Aiken community's programs, processes, performance, efficiencies, and effectiveness in meeting the current and future needs of the community. The process will define community best practices and set short- and long-term goals and expectations for Aiken's prosperity in the 21st century. The process will include the community's public and private sectors and establish a baseline for the development of a future communitywide visioning process.

1. Research, establish criteria, and arrange for visits to other progressive cities, where local leaders will travel to and learn about best practices that have been successful in other regions. The goal of these inter-city visits is for the group to bring back at least one idea to implement in the Aiken community.
2. Deploy, as needed, civic forums and marketing strategies based on the findings of the inter-city visits and community benchmarking where Chamber members and community establish mechanisms for creating jobs.