A Call to Action!

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If you are like me, you might get a little nervous when a member says "we should take a position". Chambers of commerce are partners with the communities we serve so being advocates on issues that impact business can sometimes feel a little uncomfortable. But now more than ever it is crucial for chambers to help provide that voice for their business community. At the Plano Chamber, we aligned our strategic plan, our financial resources, and our programming to ensure that the business community had a seat at the table when it came to federal, state, and local issues that were important to our members. Key outcomes included a more robust legislative agenda, successful member education on key issues facing the legislature, increased dialogue between the membership and elected officials, defeat of three bills that would have had negatively impacted businesses, and a post-session scorecard that increased awareness on key votes taken by House and Senate members. Below are a few action items that a chamber of any size could consider implementing:

- To develop our legislative priorities, we brought in experts to share information with our Public Policy Committee and leadership. If you don't have a policy committee, set time aside at each board meeting to feature a presentation on a key issue.
- We surveyed members on what key issues were impacting their business. You won't know 'til you ask them! Keep it simple and phrase the questions so that responses relate to the impact on their business from a particular issue.
- We researched coalitions forming across the state to combat some of the proposed legislation during the last legislative session. Coalitions will oftentimes have newsletters and updates that you can sign up for to stay informed on an issue. Many coalitions are free to join.

The target audience for our increased advocacy efforts included business members, citizens, and elected officials that represent our area. Education is key to successful advocacy initiatives.

Thanks to the work of TCCE board members Eddie McBride (Lubbock) and Steve Ahlenius (McAllen), TCCE recently published "A Guide to Government Relations". The handbook features how to start a new program, how to vet policy decisions, and key basics to understanding grassroots advocacy. You can request a copy by contacting Stephen Dellert at TCCE at sdellert@txbiz.org.

The Plano Chamber's enhanced and expanded advocacy efforts have paid off in several ways. During the 85th Texas Legislative Session, 13 votes were scored in the areas of education, economic development, environment, and taxes. The priorities of our business community were clearly communicated to leaders and the potential impacts of legislation helped direct the conversations and outcomes. Legislators were more engaged with Chamber staff and consultants regarding our priorities and how they would vote.

Find ways that your chamber can engage in the process. It's easier than you think and will help solidify your organization's relevance with your members.