

CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE CASE STORIES

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ACTION COLLABORATIVE ON BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT IN BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES & FTI CONSULTING

Local and regional chambers of commerce play varied roles in the building of healthy communities. This is one of a series of case stories about chambers that are active participants or leaders in promoting community health and well-being.

Each story shares insights about what motivates engagement and explains successes, and lessons learned that can inspire and instruct others.

If you would like to share your Chamber's story you can do so [here](#).

This piece was developed by the Action Collaborative on Business Engagement in Building Healthy Communities, an ad hoc activity associated with the Roundtable on Population Health Improvement at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (the National Academies). The piece does not necessarily represent the views of any one organization, the Roundtable on Population Health Improvement, or the National Academies and has not been subjected to the review procedures of, nor is it a report or product of, the National Academies.

Aurora, Colorado Chamber of Commerce

A Healthy Workforce Contributes to a Healthy Bottom Line

Submitted by: Mitzi Schindler, Communications Director Aurora CoC.



What is the role of the Chamber of Commerce in improving community health in Aurora?

The Chamber's role is to engage our member organizations in the Worksite Wellness Initiative. The goal of The Chamber's partnership with Tri-County Health Department in the Worksite Wellness Initiative is to engage organizations to adopt best practices and policies to provide a healthy workplace environment. By encouraging employers to support their employees in practicing healthy behaviors during the workday, the initiative is part of national strategies to decrease obesity and chronic diseases in our communities.

Why did the Chamber decide to engage in community health?

We engaged in community health because we understand the value of a healthy workforce. We like to say that "a healthy workforce contributes to a healthy bottom line." For the Chamber, it reflects our commitment to the community and its health. Public health and businesses are partnering to form local networking groups where employers can access worksite wellness resources. This is part of a state-wide strategy, through the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's Cancer, Chronic Pulmonary Disease Prevention Program to improve the health of our communities, one worksite at a time! We were approached by Tri-County Health Department to partner with them in the Worksite Wellness Initiative, in order to create a worksite wellness coalition and promote the benefits of employee health to local employers, with a goal of engaging them in the Coalition.

The Worksite Wellness Initiative's goal is to engage organizations to adopt best practices and policies that create a healthy workplace environment. The program began with a three-year initiative (July 1, 2015-June 30, 2018), providing resources, assessment tools (Health Links), counseling (through Tri-County Health Department), conference attendance (paid through grant funds), and funding for Chamber member businesses that are committed to joining the coalition to supplement their worksite wellness program. These programs are individualized for the needs of each business, and include a variety of creative, "healthy" ideas, from providing fresh fruit in the breakroom to bringing in a massage therapist. We have monthly meetings with the 'wellness champions' from each of the businesses involved – and we seem to actually have some fun doing that!

What was the chamber seeking to address by engaging in worker, community health, and well-being?

As a Chamber of Commerce, one of our major goals is "jobs in the community," as well as helping our members grow their businesses. We wanted to help our member organizations address, understand, and profit from the benefits of supporting and encouraging a healthy work environment. The Aurora Chamber of Commerce had been involved in earlier efforts related to worksite wellness and work/life balance, including a program with the local YMCA and the Sloan Awards through When Work Works. When the Chamber was approached by the Tri-County Health Department to join the initiative, we also had a history of being a source of useful information about healthcare trends and issues provided to industry experts through our Health Series.

Who are the stakeholders the Chambers is involved with?

We work with Tri-County Health Department & Health Links. Tri-County Health Department serves over 1.5 million people in Adams, Arapahoe, and Douglas counties and also serves as the credible convener for this initiative which is marketed to Chamber members as a membership benefit.

Health Links™ is a program of the Center for Health, Work & Environment at the Colorado School of Public Health. In partnership with researchers and local community advisors, [Health Links](#):

- Assesses organizations' health and safety policies and programs
- Advises on actionable goals in one-on-one advising sessions
- Connects like-minded businesses with one another and to local resources
- Certifies qualifying employers as Healthy Businesses

How does the chamber work with stakeholders to drive the vision and its programs?

We meet once a month to discuss and learn about various well-being topics. Members of the initiative are encouraged to share their successes and their struggles; and to be creative in their worksite wellness strategies. They also are asked to develop policy for their program – which might range from a list of guidelines, to a full policy paper. It is emphasized that each company/organization should operate within parameters that work for them.

How do you approach the decision-making process?

The Chamber was a partner in identifying priorities, with Tri-County Health Department as the lead partner because of their expertise in the area of wellness. In addition, this initiative is funded by the state of Colorado, through the Colorado Department of Health and Environment (CDPHE), and implemented through the Tri-County Health Department, using the existing structure developed by these organizations. The Chamber shared decision making with Tri-County regarding the dates, times, and some of the content of meetings, speakers, and some initiative-related activities.

How is the Worksite Wellness Initiative financed?

Funding for the initiative is through a grant to Tri-County Health Department from the A-35 Cancer, Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Disease Grants Program from the CDPHE. The grant's end goal is to improve the physical and mental health of

employees and lower the risk factors for obesity and chronic disease within our communities. The Initiative has been funded for an additional 3 years (July 2018 – June 30, 2021) – and we are gearing up for the kick-off on September 13, 8-9 am, at The Chamber office, 14305 E. Alameda Ave., Suite 300, Aurora, CO 80012. As the Initiative moves forward, we will identify ways to work towards achieving the initiative's goals when the funding from the State of Colorado is no longer available.

Do you have an evaluation strategy?

The Chamber provides a quarterly progress report to Tri-County Health Department that is also shared with CDPHE. The Progress Reports are 'activity' based and provide updates on the following activities:

Activity 1: The Chamber shall continue to manage the coalition, and follow-up with a minimum of four new employers to engage them with the grant project

Activity 2: The Chamber will work with Tri-County to develop employer benchmarks, to include employer certification, and policy and program implementation.

Activity 3: The Chamber shall increase the capacity of employers to complete the benchmarks by hosting meetings, trainings, and support, in order to complete benchmarks.

Activity 4: The Chamber shall engage employers to develop and implement worksite wellness policies and environmental changes and provide funds to eligible participating employers.

Activity 5: The Chamber shall include in the quarterly progress reports all marketing and communication materials developed for the project.

Activity 6: The Chamber shall work with Tri-County and other regional project partners to grow and sustain the initiative.

Activity 7: The Chamber shall complete quarterly reports, monthly invoices, and other required documentation in a timely manner.

In addition, the progress report asks for success stories, new partnerships, how we are working towards reducing health disparities and addressing health equity, and general comments and feedback.

What has been particularly challenging? How did you overcome that challenge?

It has been somewhat difficult to engage businesses in the Initiative for reasons that could include “time poverty” and a lack of understanding of the business benefits of a healthy worksite. In order to overcome this challenge, we continue to update our positive statistical information about the benefits of worksite wellness, along with sharing success stories as part of marketing the program. We keep moving forward and keep moving!

What lessons would you say are most important for others seeking to engage with community health efforts?

Do not get discouraged if the progress is slow. Keep talking the talk, and gathering and sharing the statistics that show the benefit of community health efforts.

What has been a surprise?

It has been pleasant to hear some of the innovative and inexpensive ideas our coalition members have come up with to encourage wellness at their worksites. For example, using the stairwell as a gallery for artwork of employees’ children is both beautifying the stairwell, and encouraging employees to take the stairs. Another example is using door hangers that indicate that the person in the office or cubicle is taking a ‘wellness break’ and should not be bothered. These are usually limited to 15-20 minutes, at most. Finally, a “salad potluck,” the employer (or wellness coordinator) supplies the lettuce, and employees each bring a topping to share – making colorful and delicious, healthy salads. (Note: There might be a few toppings that are not as healthy as others are, but an important thing to keep in mind is that through this method, employees are given a choice of what they put on their salad.)

*This case story was submitted by Mitzi Schindler perspectives and opinions presented here are solely those of the author.

ABOUT THE COLLABORATIVE

The [Business Collaborative's](#) purpose is to catalyze and facilitate private sector partnerships and actions of business, health, community, and public sectors to work together to enhance the lives of workers and communities by improving the nation's health and wealth. Read more in the collaborative framing document.

