

GWA Chamber of Commerce

Proudly serving our members and communities in the
Gateway to the Genesee Country
Scottsville – Mumford – Caledonia – and Surrounding Areas

Operations Handbook

REVISION: 1.0

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DOCUMENT SUMMARY: This document builds on the organizational requirements established in the Chamber's By-Laws by providing further, more detailed guidance, operating structures, policies and procedures to help ensure the organization functions in a professional, sustainable and overall successful manner, delivering value for the membership, area businesses and communities served.



Document Change History

Amendments incorporated into each revision of these By-Laws are summarized and listed in the following table. Specific document section numbers refer to the current revision of the document for clarity purposes.

Revision	Document Section	Amendment Description
1.0	General	Initial release of document.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The GWA Chamber of Commerce, Inc. is a New York State Not-for-Profit Corporation with a Certificate of Incorporation filed with the Department of State and consent received from the New York Attorney General’s Office, Antitrust Bureau. The Corporation is referred to as the “GWA Chamber of Commerce” or simply the “Chamber” in this document.

The purpose of the GWA Chamber of Commerce is to promote common business interests in the Towns of Wheatland, Caledonia and the surrounding area of Western New York State, for the benefit of its members, all local commercial enterprises and the communities served. The Chamber is a membership driven enterprise constituting an association of interested parties working collaboratively together to further the general interests and common goals of the organization, with activities directed at the improvement of general business and economic conditions while helping to facilitate a suitable quality of life across the communities served.

1.1 DOCUMENT PURPOSE

The GWA Chamber of Commerce is governed by a set of By-Laws¹ that define the basic rules for the conduct of the corporation’s business and affairs that are consistent with all applicable federal and state laws and regulations, as well as the statements contained in the Corporation’s Certificate of Incorporation.

The GWA Chamber of Commerce By-Laws establish a strategic view of the organization to help guide the operations, behavior and actions of the Chamber. This Operations Handbook document builds on the organizational requirements established in the Chamber’s By-Laws by providing further, more detailed guidance, operating structures, policies and procedures to help ensure the organization functions in a professional, sustainable and overall successful manner.

Figure 1.1-1 identifies the overall organization governance infrastructure.

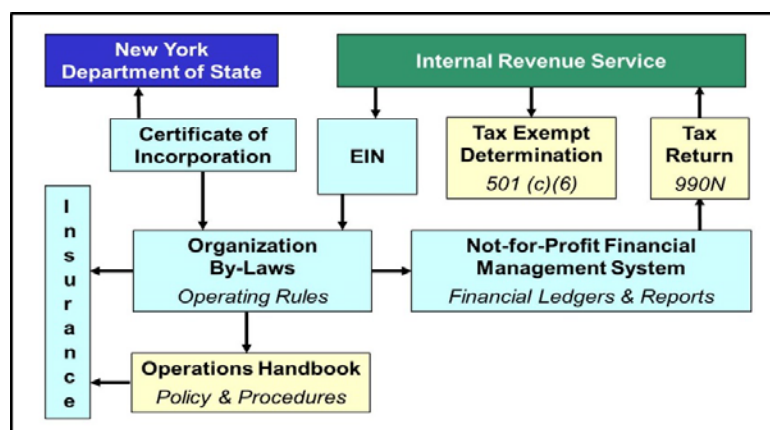


Figure 1.1-1 Organization Governance Infrastructure

¹ BY-LAWS of the GWA Chamber of Commerce, Inc., Mark R. Turner, April 15, 2023 Revision 2.8

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Developing and delivering value to the Chamber's members, businesses and communities served is the key tenant of the organization's intended operations. Refer to the Chamber's By-Laws for descriptions of the organization's vision, mission, core values and member value proposition. The remainder of this section describes the Chamber's use of strategic planning to help guide operations.

2.1 STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The GWA Chamber of Commerce utilizes "*Strategic Planning*" as a systematic way to manage, change and achieve desired outcomes, transforming visions into realities. Not-for-Profit organizations face some significant challenges to deliver greater value in today's world, including:

- a. The world is becoming a ***much more dynamic environment*** for business and communities, facilitating ***progressively more complex problems*** to overcome.
- b. There is a ***growing burden of resource limitations***, including: time, money and effort (coupled with people engagement). There is considerably more competition today for people's time and attention. Scarce resources require that organizations use what is available in the best and most strategic ways.
- c. ***Ineffective balancing of decision making*** between long term interests and daily actions can stymie an organization through the inefficient allocation of resources, resulting in wasted effort and missed opportunities.

Research suggests that the chances for organizational success are much greater with a strategic plan, especially when driven by a proactive vision². Organizational success rarely occurs by accident rather, it is the result of hard work directed toward achieving something desired. Strategic planning is much more than a roll of the dice; it is a wager based on predictions and hypotheses that are continually tested and refined by knowledge, research, experience and learning³. A high-quality strategic plan can translate into much more than just a written outline of the future. On the practical, day-to-day side, a strategic plan, by virtue of its structure, has the ability to enhance efficiency, boost effectiveness and improve decision-making within and across organizations, while also helping to minimize inconsistency, and limit miscommunication.



² Michael Allison, Jude Kaye. "*Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations: A Practical Guide for Dynamic Times*", Wiley Nonprofit Authority, 3rd Edition April 2015

³ Fred R. David, *Strategic Management, A competitive Advantage Approach*, 14th Edition. Copyright @2013, 2011, 2009, 2007, 2005 by Pearson Education Inc., publishing as Prentice Hall.

The GWA Chamber of Commerce uses a three-level, hierarchically structured strategic framework to facilitate the organization’s strategic planning process. The top-most level of the framework provides the broadest view of the organization’s expectations and purpose, while the middle level of the framework constitutes the Chamber’s Strategic Plan in terms of goals, objectives and strategies. The lowest level of the framework includes detailed sets of actions intended to incrementally move the organization towards accomplishment of the Chamber’s goals and objectives, provided in the form of Annual Operating Plans. Figure 2-1 provides an overview of the Chamber’s strategic framework.

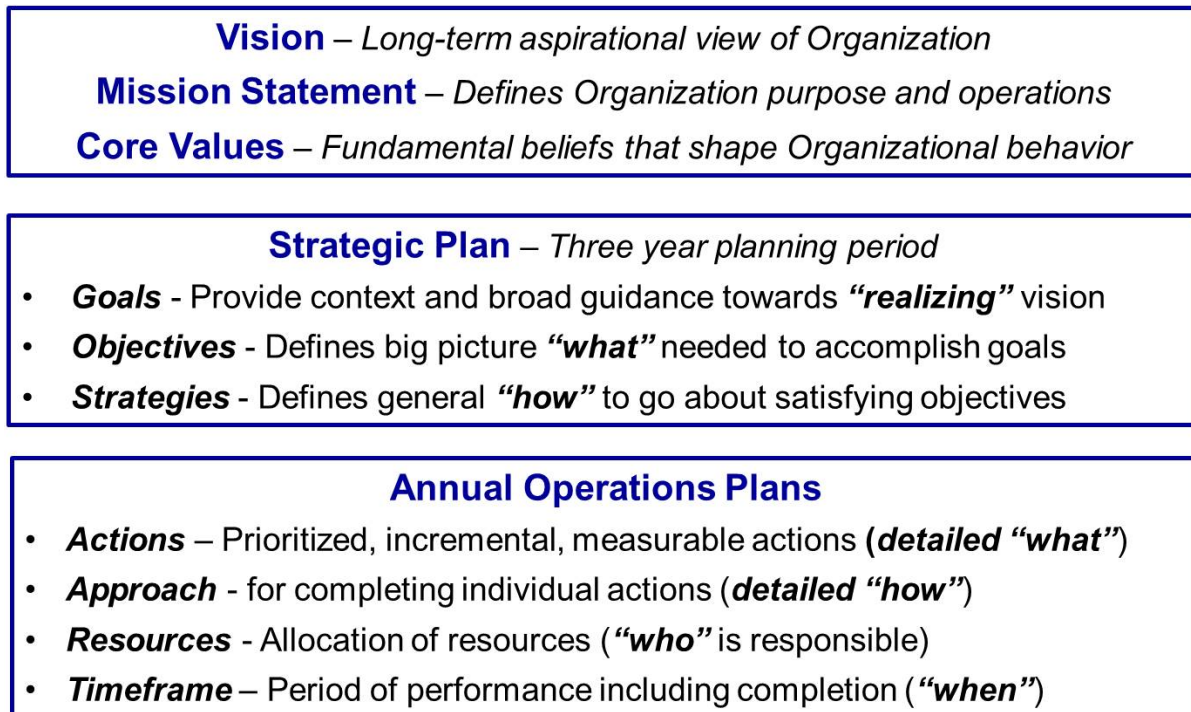


Figure 2-1 Strategic Framework Overview

3. OPERATING MODEL

The GWA Chamber of Commerce utilizes an operating model as a continuum of functional activities that provide a coordinated blueprint for how the organization is structured, how it defines and achieves organizational goals and objectives, how it recruits and retains members and generally how the Chamber functions. Figure 3-1 identifies activity categories for the model.

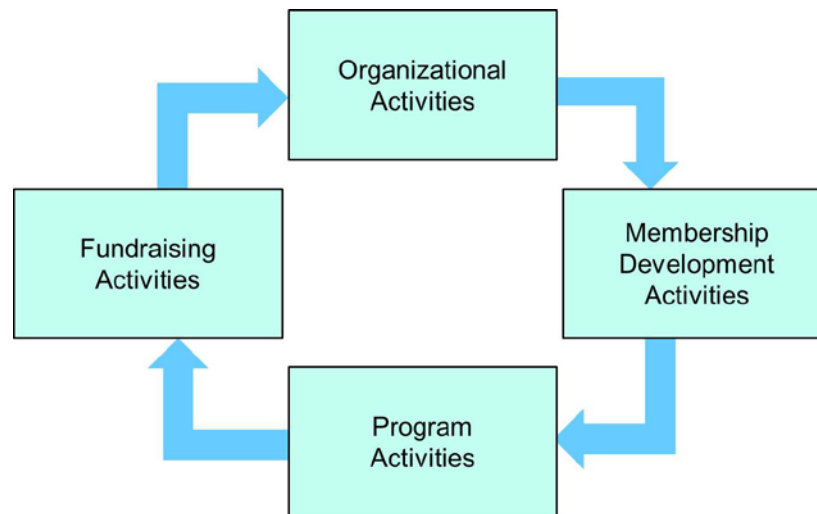


Figure 3-1 Chamber Operating Model Continuum of Activity Categories

3.1 ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Organizational Activities represent the foundational constructs of GWA Chamber of Commerce operations and are designed for conducting the business of the organization by the Chamber's Board of Directors. This category includes the following activities:

- a. **Governance** activities involve the overall management and operation of the GWA Chamber of Commerce in accordance with the Chamber's by-laws, policies, and approved board resolutions. Specific governance activities include:
 - o creation and maintenance of organizational policies and procedures used to manage the Chamber in a successful, consistent and equitable manner,
 - o developing Chamber strategic and operating plans in accordance with the Strategic Framework defined in this document to ensure delivery of sufficient to the membership and communities served,
 - o monitoring Chamber plan execution performance, documenting and reporting on progress to the membership., includes an Annual Report.

- b. **Committee Oversight** activities include the formation of Chamber Committees and monitoring Committee progress and results by the Board of Directors. ***Committees are the mechanism employed by the Chamber to work on and complete tasks and actions*** for Chamber initiatives (i.e., programs, projects and events). Committees provide Chamber members and others outside the organization with opportunities to collaborate and help the organization towards accomplishing established goals and objectives. The Chamber has a Project Management capability that is used to help manage programs, projects and events where applicable. Activities include:
- formation of Committees that include a defined Charter and Work Plan,
 - review of Committee status and progress, and termination of the Committee upon work completion.
- c. **Financial Management** activities support compliance with all not-for-profit corporation legal and financial requirements while adhering to sound accounting principles that produce reliable financial information and ensure fiscal responsibility for the organization. Financial management activities include:
- managing the financial assets of the organization,
 - performance of all financial operations, accepting and processing of revenue, approvals and payment of organization financial obligations, accurate bookkeeping and account management,
 - preparation, approval and tracking of an annual operating budget,
 - preparation and approval of financial reports; support for financial audits,
 - preparation and filing of income tax returns,



- d. **Membership Management** activities are focused on the definition and use of equitable membership structures that balance member affordability with the financial needs of the organization, including:
- establishment of membership categories to differentiate between types of members (i.e., business, not-for-profit, municipality),
 - establishment of annual membership fees based on membership categories in conjunction with the period covered by the fees,
 - establishment of enhanced value memberships,
 - establishment of sponsorship opportunities (including financial contributions levels) in support of Chamber initiatives.
- e. **Formal Agreement Management** activities include the development, review, acceptance of terms and corresponding execution of a binding agreement between the Chamber and one or more other parties. The President of the Chamber (or formal designee) is responsible for the consummation of all formal agreements. Formal agreements may take various forms, including:
- a Contract,
 - a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU),
 - a Partnership Agreement, a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA),
 - a Service Agreement, a Resource-Sharing Agreement.
- f. **Communications Management** activities support the creation and dissemination of Chamber information to its members, communities served and beyond. All formal, public communications on behalf of the GWA Chamber of Commerce shall be made officially through the Chamber President (or a representative delegated by the Chamber President). Communications Management activities include:
- developing strategies for the effective and consistent creation and delivery of Chamber public communications (i.e., press releases, articles, Letters of Support and electronic postings)
 - developing and maintaining online communications platforms that support delivery of consistent communications (i.e., website, social media) and organizational liability protection,
 - establishing, maintaining and promulgating a recognizable brand for the organization across all communications delivery media.

- g. **Resource Management** activities include the prioritization of tasks and actions in conjunction with the identification, allocation and assignment of appropriate people resources to a Committee or other tasking.
- h. **Strategic Relationships** involves activities to explore, develop and engage in collaborative, mutually beneficial relationships with other organizations. Strategic relationships can expand and diversify the impact of the organization (i.e., programs and services) while broadening credibility and further building the reputation of the organization. There are various types of strategic relationships that can be used by the Chamber including:
 - o liaisons with other organizations (i.e., local municipalities, regional entities)
 - o mutually beneficial collaborations, including associations, joint programming, shared services,
 - o formal partnerships.



3.2 MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Membership Development Activities are focused on the GWA Chamber of Commerce realization of its stated member value proposition in conjunction with **member recruitment and retention**. This category includes the following activities:

- a. **Member Value Proposition** activities involve establishing, maintaining and promoting a member value proposition and subsequently delivering tangible benefits delivered to the membership. The Chamber's Board of Directors periodically reviews and updates the published member value proposition.
- b. **Membership Management** activities consist of the collection and organization of member and candidate member data.
 - o Member data can include contact information, payment of membership fees, among other items. Sensitive member data is maintained as private.
 - o Member recognition through establishment of meaningful awards.
 - o Membership campaigns are used for the pursuit of member renewals and new member pursuits that includes the preparation and delivery of Chamber promotional material and membership invoices.
 - o New members are formally recognized by the organization.



- c. **Member Networking** activities involve connecting Chamber members with other Chamber members, connecting Chamber members with members and community organizations and with organizations that have a strategic relationship with the Chamber. In addition, networking activities provide the opportunity for Chamber leadership to share information with members and identify member needs and interests.



*Before Hours
Business Networking*

- d. **Advocacy** activities are performed on behalf of the organization’s membership in the aggregate and/or the broader business community. These activities are used to spread awareness of an issue or a need within the region served by the Chamber or at times beyond those areas. Advocacy activities can also be used to influence or shape policy in local or regional government laws and regulations towards business or community friendly positions or support other relevant community initiatives (i.e., municipal grants). Chamber advocacy positions need to be well conceived and considered in sufficient detail as they reflect on not only the Chamber membership, but the organization as a whole.

- e. **Marketing & Advertising** activities involve the promotion of the Chamber as an entity, its members or the region served. These activities include:

- sharing of member marketing and advertising materials,
- creation and distribution of Chamber marketing collateral, such as brochures, flyers and rack cards,
- development of informative and promotional articles in printed or digital forms, “member spotlight” (i.e., web communications channel delivery),
- leverage of partner marketing and advertising platforms,
- creation and delivery of business directories in printed or online formats.



3.3 PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Programs are context oriented endeavors intended to achieve broad goals and objectives of the Chamber over a relatively long term horizon and sometimes program have no effective ending timeframe (i.e., ongoing). Programs generally provide an overarching framework that supports multiple, smaller, coordinated activities over time in order to accomplish incremental results towards realizing broader goals and objectives.

Program activities can take the form of projects, events, or a combination thereof, where these activities typically have a specific purpose with clearly defined deliverables and a certain period of performance. Projects generally have different beginning and end times, while events tend to occur at a singular time. Programs (along with constituent project and events) are typically managed by Chamber Committees using the Chamber's project management capabilities where appropriate. The Chamber may employ strategic relationships or program specific partnerships in order to accomplish program goals and objectives, including the use of external resources and funding. The Chamber may also participate in the programs, projects and events sponsored by other organizations.

In order to best serve the needs and interests of Chamber members and the communities served, the GWA Chamber of Commerce plans to maintain a portfolio of high-value programs across various categories, including:

- a. **Community Benefit Programs** provide value for the Wheatland and Caledonia communities, in conjunction with GWA Chamber of Commerce members. These programs typically deliver a valuable service, capability, recognition or other tangible contributions that are visible within the communities and aligned with the Chamber's mission. Many times these programs offer good will opportunities for Chamber members to directly support with either resources or financial assistance, while providing for associated marketing and promotion of their respective businesses. The following are examples of Chamber Community Benefit Programs:

- school scholarship programs,
- recognition programs (i.e., Wheatland Community Hall of Fame)



- b. **Education Programs** consist of activities that support the development of knowledge and skills across a variety of business and community related topics. The Chamber intends to develop and grow Education Programs and associated activities over time. It is expected that these programs may take the form of online education, partnering with other organizations, or a speakers series with local subject matter experts.

- c. **Economic & Community Development Programs** involve activities that are intended to help improve the economic well-being and quality of life for communities, including: improved infrastructure and services, and fostering ways to incentivize and attract new businesses, and to better sustain existing businesses. The following are examples of Chamber Economic and Community Development Programs:

- o The Chamber is an active participant in the Genesee Valley Trail Town Initiative (GVTTI). The GVTTI is a program that aims to boost outdoor recreation and tourism in the Genesee Valley region, creating more resilient communities through the identification, promotion and preservation of communities' unique recreational assets. This program is intended to help revitalize rural communities by growing outdoor tourism and small businesses.



3.4 FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

Fundraising activities are intended raise funds that support Chamber operations, membership development and program activities. Fundraising activities generally take the form of events such as raffles, drawings, silent auctions among others. The following elements are typically required for fundraising activity success:

- a. Identification of a fundraising opportunity,
- b. planning for the fundraising activity (i.e., operating expenses, venues)
- c. preparation (i.e., collection of donations / sponsorships, marketing & promotion),
- d. execution,
- e. maintenance of records for future reference.



4. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

This section defines operational guidelines for the GWA Chamber of Commerce in terms of policies and procedures. These policies and procedures serve as an integrated set of unified principles and requirements to help ensure the organization is managed consistently, in a fair and equitable manner. No member shall knowingly violate defined Chamber policies and such violations may be subject to disciplinary action by the Board of Directors.

4.1 EMPLOYEES AND INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS

The GWA Chamber of Commerce shall not have employees or utilize independent contractors (i.e., contract labor) to support its operations and activities. The Chamber may subcontract defined work scope to another organization in accordance with the Chamber's By-Laws.

4.2 VOLUNTEERS

The GWA Chamber of Commerce sponsors and participates in activities that support its membership and communities served, some of which may be fulfilled through volunteers. A volunteer is someone who freely gives time, effort and talent to support Chamber operations and activities without compensation (financial or otherwise). As a condition of becoming a GWA Chamber of Commerce volunteer, every volunteer candidate (including Chamber member representatives and Friends) must consent to serve in accordance with Chamber requirements and approved policies. In addition, all Chamber volunteers shall as a minimum:

1. Agree to assume all risk associated with Chamber volunteer participation and also agree to waive and release the Chamber, its members and other supporting participants from liability,
2. Be solely responsible for their own medical conditions, including any and all costs related to medical assistance when participating as a Chamber volunteer,
3. Grant full rights to the Chamber for content and materials or derivative works created in the course of Chamber related volunteer activities.

4.3 COMMITTEES OPERATIONS

Committees approved by the Board of Directors shall create a **Charter** that defines a statement of scope for the group in terms of an intended mission and one or more key objectives. In addition, each approved Committee shall create a corresponding **Work Plan** that defines the actions to be undertaken to achieve the objectives expressed in the Committee's charter. Committees that operate in more than a single Chamber fiscal year, shall review and update the respective Work Plan each fiscal year. The Board of Directors shall review and approve all Committee Charters and Work Plans, including all updates.

4.4 CHARITABLE DONATIONS

Charitable donations are not part of the mission statement of the GWA Chamber of Commerce and therefore member fees and funds raised shall not be used to donate or sponsor any charitable event or program.

4.5 POLITICAL NON-PARTICIPATION

The GWA Chamber of Commerce shall not promote or endorse political issues, groups or individuals.

4.6 PLANNING

The GWA Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors shall develop and utilize a strategic plan⁴ to help govern the organization. The Chamber's strategic plan shall have a view of at least three years and the Board of Directors shall review, update and approve the strategic plan on at least an annual basis.

4.7 NON-DISCRIMINATION

The GWA Chamber of Commerce, its Directors, members and volunteers shall treat all individuals involved with the organization without regard to race, religion, creed, color, national origin, disability, marital status, sex, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, genetic information, or any other protected class in accordance with applicable federal laws. Violation of this policy may result in membership termination or removal as a Chamber volunteer.

⁴ Michael Allison, Jude Kaye. "Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations: A Practical Guide for Dynamic Times", Wiley Nonprofit Authority, 3rd Edition April 2015

4.8 ANTI-HARASSMENT

All GWA Chamber of Commerce Directors, members and volunteers are responsible to ensure the organization maintains an operating environment free of all forms of harassment or intimidation. Any person who feels that they have been subjected to harassment should immediately report the matter to the President of the GWA Chamber of Commerce (or the Vice President of the GWA Chamber of Commerce if the President is the alleged source of the harassment). The GWA Chamber of Commerce will investigate all complaints of harassment thoroughly and promptly. To the fullest extent practicable, the Chamber will keep complaints and the terms of their resolution confidential. If an investigation confirms that a violation of this policy has occurred, the Chamber will take appropriate, corrective action, including the possibility of membership termination or removal as a Chamber volunteer.

4.9 WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION

The GWA Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors shall be open to receiving information that may bring awareness to an issue or problem occurring amongst leadership, members, volunteers or others affiliated with the Chamber. If whistleblower information is reported to the Board of Directors, a Committee will be convened to evaluate to issue and make a recommendation to the Board of Directors. No person shall take any action of retaliation against any person for providing accurate information to the Board of Directors or to legal authorities relating to a problem or concern in the organization as described above.

4.10 ANTI-TRUST AVOIDANCE

The GWA Chamber of Commerce shall operate in strict compliance with all Federal and State antitrust laws, rules and regulations. Chamber members shall not take any action or make any agreements which may eliminate, restrict, or impact competition in the marketplace and could be a violation of antitrust laws. In accordance with State and Federal Antitrust laws, certain topics are not appropriate for discussion at any GWA Chamber of Commerce meetings or other functions of the organization. As such there shall be no discussion of any items that may appear to be anti-competitive, including competitive practices, current or future prices, fees or charges, discount offerings, terms of service, profitability, credit terms, or refusal to deal with other industry members or partners. The following antitrust policy reminder or other similar verbiage shall be included in all meeting agendas:

“It is the policy of the GWA Chamber of Commerce and its members to be in full compliance with federal and state antitrust laws and as such there should be no discussions of agreements or actions that may restrain competition or impact prices.”

4.11 RECORDS RETENTION

The GWA Chamber of Commerce shall retain documents in accordance with all federal and state laws and regulations, including documents that must be stored permanently and those that have a specific term of retention. This policy applies to digital documents as well as printed material. Table 4.7-1 below identifies specific types of documents to be retained and an associated retention category. Documents that are not listed below, but are substantially similar to those listed in the schedule will be retained for the appropriate length of time. No documents shall be destroyed that reflect the history of the organization.

Table 4.7-1 Document Retention Requirements

Category	Record Types	Documents
Permanent Retention	General Corporate Records	Certificate of Incorporation; By-Laws Board of Directors meeting minutes IRS Tax-Exempt Status Application, Determination Letter
	Accounting and Tax Records	Financial Statements; Audits General Ledgers IRS 990 Tax Returns
	Bank Records	Check Registers Monthly Statements
	Legal, Insurance and Safety Records	Insurance policies Real estate documents
Non-Permanent Retention	Corporate Records	Contracts (7 years after expiration) General Correspondence (3 years)
	Accounting and Corporate Tax Records	Business Expense Reports (7 years) Invoices (7 years) Sales records (5 years) Cash and Credit Card receipts (3 years)
	Bank Records	Bank deposit slips, electronic fund transfers (7 years) Bank statements & reconciliation (7 years)
	Employee, Payroll, Employment Records	N/A
	Legal, Insurance and Safety Records	Donor records, Acknowledge letters (7 years) Grant applications & contracts (5 years after completion) General Contract after termination (4 years)

4.12 COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA

One of the most significant roles of the GWA Chamber of Commerce is to represent the organization to its members, communities served and beyond through consistent, appropriate and recognizable communications across various types of delivery media.

1. No content shall be communicated by the Chamber that would constitute discrimination or harassment of any kind, defamation and threats, profanity and similarly inappropriate language, constitute violations of copyright and trademark law, violations of anti-trust laws and regulations, or promote illegal activity.
2. The Chamber should establish, maintain and promulgate a representative brand for the organization across all communications delivery media.
3. All formal, public communications on behalf of the GWA Chamber of Commerce, in printed or digital formats, shall be made officially through the Chamber President (or a representative delegated by the Chamber President).
4. No official statements shall be made that conflict with the formal position of the GWA Chamber of Commerce, its By-Laws or approved policies.
5. Web based communications is a collection of various internet based online communications channels including websites, social media and email, all of which are used by the GWA Chamber of Commerce.
 - a. When using Web-based communications, the GWA Chamber of Commerce shall be compliant with all federal, state other Governments and host provider regulations and policies.
 - b. Where permitted, the Chamber shall employ disclaimer notices for Web-based communications as a protective measure to shield the organization and its members from unwanted claims or liability. Disclaimer notices may include terms of use, liability disclaimer, privacy and intellectual property handling policies.
6. Social Media is a form of web-based communications that supports user participation, such as Web community-based input and interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. The GWA Chamber of Commerce understands the value and importance that social media brings to the members of the organization and encourages the use of social media platforms to create brand awareness and facilitate effective communications with broader community in the region served by the Chamber.
 - a. All Chamber social media platforms shall provide one or more links back to the official Chamber website.

- b. Chamber social media platforms shall not contain personal information about members or others and shall also not be used to communicate among the organizations' members.
- c. Chamber social media shall not be used for two way public communications, but will support the use of private messages from social media stakeholders.
- d. Chamber social media platforms shall not be used to "like" other social media platforms, for social media channels that support "liking" capabilities (i.e., Facebook).

4.13 LIABILITY PROTECTION

The GWA Chamber of Commerce shall operate in good faith on behalf of its members and the communities it serves to help ensure the organization is sufficiently protected from undue liability. In addition, the Chamber shall purchase and continuously maintain a *Directors & Officers (D&O) Liability Insurance Policy* or equivalent to protect the assets of the organization and the personal assets of organization's Directors and Officers in the event they are sued for actual or alleged wrongful acts in managing and executing the business of the Chamber. The GWA Chamber of Commerce shall also purchase and continuously maintain a *Commercial General Liability Insurance Policy* or equivalent that as a minimum provides coverage to protect and defend the organization from claims of property damage, personal injury or defamation.