

## BMOs & member services

### Introduction

BMOs exist to provide services to their members. Often, they start because businesses have a grievance about a public policy. But to take on a life of their own, they need to do more than simply representing and advocating for their members. If they do not, the danger is that members will not keep paying their subscriptions. So BMOs need to provide a range of services which not only benefit their members but also are sufficiently attractive that members want to remain members.

### Member services

BMOs therefore need to think carefully about the services that they may be able to provide, which services might perhaps be provided at no cost (other than the cost of membership) and which services might incur an extra charge. For those extra, paid-for, services, BMOs need additionally to consider whether they should only be available to members or whether they would also provide them to non-members, albeit at a higher cost. Table 1 sets out some of the services offered by business member organisations.

**Table 1: Types of services delivered by BMOs**

Services	Examples
Trade and market development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Organising exhibitions and trade fairs</li> <li>▪ Facilitating market research</li> <li>▪ Information on export markets</li> <li>▪ Bringing together buyers and sellers</li> <li>▪ Trade delegations</li> <li>▪ Group marketing (possibly allied with standards)</li> <li>▪ Group procurement</li> <li>▪ Develop codes of conduct</li> </ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Management training</li> <li>▪ Technical and vocational training</li> <li>▪ Development of training manuals</li> <li>▪ Development of training curricula and standards</li> </ul>
Advice and consultancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Best practice benchmarking among members</li> <li>▪ Business counselling and mentoring</li> <li>▪ Information on regulatory requirements</li> <li>▪ Legal services</li> <li>▪ Financial and taxation advice</li> <li>▪ Accountancy and bookkeeping services</li> <li>▪ Quality standards, ISO 9000</li> <li>▪ Environment standards, ISO14000</li> <li>▪ Hygiene standards, HACCP and ISO22000</li> </ul>
Information and networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Regular business meetings</li> <li>▪ Industry clubs and committees</li> <li>▪ Internet-based business contacts</li> <li>▪ Newsletters and publications</li> <li>▪ Membership directory and database</li> <li>▪ Annual report</li> </ul>

Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify issues of concern</li> <li>▪ Lobby for changes in public policy affecting all members</li> <li>▪ Support individual members on specific cases</li> </ul>
Office facilities and infrastructure services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Secretarial services</li> <li>▪ Computer services</li> <li>▪ Telecommunications</li> <li>▪ Internet access</li> <li>▪ Providing arbitration services</li> </ul>
Delegated government functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Business registration</li> <li>▪ Issuing certificates of origin</li> <li>▪ Registration of samples</li> <li>▪ Develop and supervise industry standards</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from World Bank, "Building the capacity of business membership organisations", 2005

Think carefully about the services you provide, or would like to provide, and whether these are expected by members as part of their subscription or whether you could charge extra for them. Will you charge a low subscription – and then rely on additional charges for services? Will you charge a high subscription – and give members a wide range of service in return? Do the services make a sufficient 'offer' to attract members because they perceive the benefits are worth more to them than the cost of membership?

It is not enough simply to offer a range of services and hope for the best. You need to ensure that you offer a service which is second to none. That way, members will continue to use the service – and will recommend that other businesses join as well. You also need to ensure that all of your services confer benefits for members.

## Benefits for members

There are many benefits associated with membership organisations including:

- Forming a cohort of businesses who can engage in dialogue with regional, national and local government on policy issues of collective interest;
- Forming a body for official contact, consultation and contracting with local and national government or foreign organisations wishing to deal collectively with businesses;
- Contributing to building a comprehensive database – including evidence of practices and lessons from other countries – enabling the association to understand other stakeholders' viewpoints on public issues and to advocate more effectively on behalf of its members;
- Uniting like-minded businesses towards common goals by the creation of a forum for exchange of ideas;
- Creating a body for empowerment and capacity building of participating businesses;
- Enhancing the capability to implement larger scale activities than any one member could undertake on its own;
- Enabling small businesses to increase their bargaining power in regional, national and local affairs of mutual interest;
- Promoting the integrity, public accountability and professionalism of all the members.



Copyright © 2020 Irwin Grayson Associates

The Business Advocacy Network is an initiative of Irwin Grayson Associates and intended to support business member organisations (BMOs) to engage in public private dialogue and to advocate improvements to the business environment. This factsheet has been written by David Irwin. You are free to use the factsheets and other materials provided that the source is acknowledged. The Business Advocacy Network can be found at [businessadvocacy.net](http://businessadvocacy.net). IGA can be found at [irvingrayson.com](http://irvingrayson.com) and contacted at [david@irwin.org](mailto:david@irwin.org). You can follow David Irwin on twitter at [@drdaavidirwin](https://twitter.com/drdaavidirwin).