*Date: May 15, 2015*

**US Russian Initiative Group Meeting Minutes**

**Participants:**

* Thierry Ajas – President of the BoD for French Chamber of Commerce (FCC) in Minnesota
* Anastassia Maxwell
* George Maxwell

**Meeting Minutes:**

The meeting focused on how French Chamber of Commerce is organized and operating. The following is the summary of Thierry’s presentation of the topic.

1. FCC structure:
   1. FCC has 12 Board members. Thierry finds it appropriate since he feels that a deep compromise must be achieved for any decision to be final.
   2. FCC has 80 paid-in members.
   3. FCC Committees: Events, Business Development, Membership, Life Sciences.
2. Suggested items related to BoD to be included in the future CC bylaws:
   1. Rotation of Board Members (some Directors at FCC Board are not doing anything and not rotating out);
   2. Maximum number of renewals;
   3. Must be paid-in members;
   4. Mandatory committee participation while on Board (members must be active);
   5. Mandatory attendance of BoD meetings (ex., if you miss more than 2 in one year, you have to rotate off the BoD);
   6. Clear expectation of commitment of time and accountability;
   7. President’s rotation every 2 years seems too short to implement any changes.

Thierry expressed some frustration with some FCC BoD members being obsessed with titles without contributing anything to the organization.

1. BoD Suggestions:
   1. Emphasized importance of each president’s successor and Board members “grooming”. It’s important that members are familiar with the organization, participate in its activities, pay in their dues, help with committees prior to join the Board.
   2. Suggested that we have different types of professionals on BoD: at least one attorney, at least one business-woman, at least one person heavily connected with the financial world.
2. Suggested not to limit ourselves to Russia focus only. Engaging Russian- Speaking community will help with membership.
3. Suggested that a Chamber of Commerce should have a Focus. At the beginning, we might want to avoid stretching ourselves into different focus groups. FCC used to be more like a social club with business aspects. Now, they are trying to gain focus and become more like a Chamber of Commerce not like a social club. By not focusing on business, the group became loose and ineffective. He is trying to run it more like an organization less as a group of volunteers.
4. New Chamber promotion:
   1. Once opened, he suggested to organize an event to promote/ introduce ourselves to other Chambers, maybe even find points of cooperation (AM: we could inquire about collaboration on programming, it seems to be the highest expense for FCC). This event could introduce us to the business community and add us to the business map.
   2. Events, if organized, should have some difference from other events to attract attention. Having business partners with local businesses might be helpful for Russian CC. For example, having a promotion reception in a Russian Museum or a similar unconventional venue might boost attendance.
5. Collaboration with other CC:
   1. Russian CCs might really help with programming and funds. Ex., German CC gets lots of help from Chicago German CC with programming and funds that guarantees stable interest in the organization and stable membership;
   2. Opportunities to meet Head of Russian Trade Mission might be attractive to some potential members. Being able to talk to such people in person and get a feel for Russian policies could valuable to many;
   3. Boosts memberships if members find connections with other states important.
6. Membership:
   1. Thierry emphasized importance of recruiting energetic people;
   2. Need to make sure that all involved members can articulate the benefits of the organization:
      1. Networking for business and pleasure,
      2. Individual business development,
      3. Emotional connection with the community,
      4. National pride, sense of your country’s support.
7. Meeting Space:
   1. Sometimes FCC BoD has meeting at Thierry’s company’s conference room;
   2. Now they are leasing a conference room from an ad agency in the Northeast Minneapolis for up to 12 hours once a month for a very small sum.
8. Paid Director Position:
   1. Such person provides admin and support work, supports image of the organization;
   2. FCC has a part-time director. Still to expensive and not very effective;
   3. If hired, he suggested to include financial incentives into the director’s position (ex., bonus or % of each big corporate or individual membership;
   4. If hired director wants more money, financial incentives will be positive motivator for working more;
   5. Need to be careful of tax-exempt organizations rules for financial incentives of its employees, need to make sure to set it up so that it is legal.