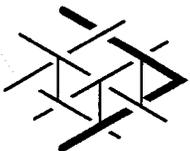




ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT LINKAGES GUIDE

*Volume 2 in the series "Promising Regional Practices"
Spring 2001*



NARC
Building Regional Communities

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13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words) This document is Volume 2 in the series "Promising Regional Practices." Economic development strategies never occur in isolation. They always depend on the availability of a skilled workforce, material resources, land-use regulations, physical infrastructure, and other conditions. Community-based strategies and plans for such objectives as environmental protection, effective transportation, and affordable housing also contain elements of economic development planning. It therefore follows that, in times of limited resources and increased emphasis on collaboration and partnerships, regional councils are linking economic development efforts with efforts in other disciplines, such as community development. Economic development at a regional level is linking disciplines across jurisdictional boundaries, as councils of government pool their resources and provide the best services to communities to boost their region. This guidebook describes seven cases where regional councils are fostering economic development with linkages to another community-based strategy: to transportation, to workforce and job training, to environmental protection, to technology, to statewide economic development planning, to land-use planning, and to redevelopment and residential planning.				
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Introduction

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES have never occurred in isolation. They have always depended on the availability of a skilled workforce, material resources, land use regulations, transportation and physical infrastructure, and other conditions. Community-based strategies and plans for environmental protection, transportation, affordable housing, etc., have equally contained elements of economic development planning.

It comes, then, as no surprise that, in times of limited resources and increased emphasis on collaboration and partnerships, regional councils are linking efforts in economic development with efforts in other disciplines such as community development.

Across jurisdictional boundaries and out of the traditional "silos" of the community programs, local governments and their partners are tackling larger spheres of issues simultaneously. Economic development at a regional level is linking disciplines across jurisdictional boundaries as councils of governments pool their resources and provide the best services to communities to boost their region.

This guidebook describes seven cases where regional councils are fostering economic development with linkages to another community-based strategy. These cases represent a variety of linkages—to transportation, to workforce and job training, to environmental protection, to technology, to statewide economic development planning, land use planning, and redevelopment and residential planning.

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Case Studies

THE EXAMPLES WERE SELECTED from recommendations solicited from regional councils and metropolitan planning organizations across the country. They are only a few of the efforts combining the resources and strategies for comprehensive community and economic development.

The seven case studies are:

Berkshire Connect—The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission in western Massachusetts sought to increase the telecommunications resources capacity that its residents and businesses sorely needed, in order to bridge the regional “digital divide.”

FAST Corridor—In Washington State, the Puget Sound Regional Council employs a transportation planning partnership to create a strategy to facilitate the movement of goods and people through its ports and to the rest of the state and country.

Industrial Ecosystem Development—The Triangle J Regional Council of Governments in North Carolina promotes industrial partnerships among area businesses to reduce landfill waste and to encourage materials reuse.

Focus 2050—Middle Rio Grande Council of Governments in New Mexico presented its regional plan for economic vitality and land use for the next 50 years.

Livable Centers Initiative—Atlanta Regional Commission is using its transportation planning process to study and target investment in development and redevelopment in regional centers.

Texas COGs and CEDS—Texas councils of governments and economic development districts sought how to best utilize EDA’s new Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) to enhance economic development planning throughout the state.

Northwest Piedmont Job Training Consortium—In an area of western North Carolina, workforce development training and social services are helping to provide area industries with skilled able employees

Regional connections

The National Association of Regional Councils is proud to present *Economic Development Linkages Guide*, part of a series of guidebooks about regional economic development. NARC and its members are pleased to be able to showcase and discuss how concerted regional efforts can result in thriving economic conditions throughout the nation.

Contacts have been provided at the end of each case study for further information. The Web sites for regional councils and their partners in these economic development projects are listed where available.

NARC thanks its members and partners for their contributions and assistance with this publication. This guidebook was made possible through a grant from the Economic Development Administration of the Department of Commerce.

Note: This guidebook is posted on the NARC Web site at www.narc.org.

Berkshire Connect: Spanning the Digital Divide

Summary

The “digital divide” is one of the nation’s hot issues. The President of the United States and the voices in the smallest communities herald it as the latest barrier to socio-economic parity. Bringing affordable and efficient telecommunications infrastructure to every man, woman, and child—“spanning the digital divide”—is as cutting edge an effort as the Internet itself.

Background

In the scenic Berkshires of Western Massachusetts, this barrier is about to fall before it becomes insurmountable. The plan of Berkshire Connect, a joint effort by the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MTC), and the Massachusetts Department of Economic Development, is to improve the region’s technological infrastructure capacity in an affordable way.

Issues of quality of life have frequently led people to the bucolic Berkshires region in Western Massachusetts. With its scenic vistas, universities, museums, and environmental conditions, it is a highly attractive destination for all ages. Unfortunately, the distances between people, goods, and services, can drive costs to unreasonable levels. A balance was sought between these costs and the benefits.

Berkshire Connect began its mission in 1997 at the urging of local legislators and businesses. The members of its Task Force immediately began working to identify the technological and telecommunications needs of the region. Task Force members include business, civic, educational, cultural, and other local leaders. “The inclusive, countywide nature of the Berkshire Connect approach was purposely chosen by the Task Force to provide access for organizations throughout the county at a uniform price,” said Nathaniel W. Karns, Task Force Chairman and Executive Director of BRPC. “This process has brought the county together in a profound way and is a good example of a regional collaboration that worked. The benefits to the county, especially in the marketing and competitive advantages that the establishment of state-of-the-art infrastructure brings, cannot be overstated.”

Project description

The efforts of Berkshire Connect are intended to support a growing cluster of technology-dependent businesses and generate new and significant economic activity in the western Massachusetts region. Berkshire County is adapting to a new economic landscape where small, sophisticated businesses are emerging that require the most up-to-date communications technologies. With advanced communications technology in place, these businesses can compete in global markets, while offering their employees a high quality of life.

The Berkshire Connect’s initial report compiled by MTC, An Assessment and Recommendations Report, compiled technology user needs, assessments of available technology, regulatory and organizational issues, and provider information. MTC is an independent economic development organization established by the state that promotes sustainable growth and works to strengthen the Commonwealth’s Innovation Economy through the advancement of technology-based industry in Massachusetts. It supports regional technology-based clusters, publishes research that fosters a better understanding of the forces that shape the economy, and serves as a public policy laboratory for technology-related initiatives.

Seeking the next level of technical and business development, Berkshire Connect then hired the firm of Flack + Kurtz, a New-York-based engineering consultant. The consultant prepared two reports: Assessment of Technology Options and the Berkshire Connect Business Plan. In the event there were no local service providers able to meet the needs identified by Berkshire Connect, the option of forming an independent service provider was explored—the Business Plan followed this thinking.

The 12-member, volunteer Steering Committee of the Berkshire Connect Task Force began the process of selecting a partner to provide the telecommunications service in June and July of 1999 with an initial round of meetings with numerous telecommunications providers. Working with Flack + Kurtz, this was a straightforward process.

In July, the Steering Committee requested proposals to provide high quality, low cost, reliable data transport service to all geographic regions of the County. In August, the Steering Committee received proposals from seven major telecommunications providers. The Global Crossing Ltd. and Equal Access Networks, Inc., proposal was selected after an extensive review process and offers a countywide, facilities-based solution to the county’s telecommunications needs, closely representing the concept outlined in Berkshire Connect’s Summary Business Plan.

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Bell Atlantic had long been the sole provider but as the publicity surrounding the regional effort grew so did the available provider options. In February 2000, an agreement was signed between Berkshire Connect and Global Crossing Ltd. and Equal Access Networks, Inc. The partnership will provide a full range of telecommunications services at rates comparable to Boston and New York markets—a savings of almost 50% from current rates. No public infrastructure investment is required, since the construction of a multi-million dollar facilities-based network will be borne by the partnership. This network will provide potentially unlimited options for the full range of telecommunications services including voice, Internet, data, video and others.

“The critical legacy of Berkshire Connect is not primarily the technical solution, not even the installation of a world-class telecommunications network in a region which others had written off,” said Joseph D. Alviani, president of MTC. “The sustainable legacy is that a community, due for the most part to the civic entrepreneurs of this region, overcame its own doubts, disappointments, divisions and skepticism to achieve a result the positive ramifications of which will in the future touch and provide opportunity for every one of its citizens.”

Funding

Funding for the initiative came from the state, with an initial grant of \$250,000. The grant was provided through the state’s Information Technology Bond Bill of 1996. Without the support of state government and legislators this project would not have moved so quickly.

Fostering partnerships

“Berkshire Connect is a good example of local solutions made by local people with the encouragement and support of their government,” said Massachusetts Governor Paul Cellucci. “This approach should serve as a model for other regions of our state as they struggle to offer residents access to cutting edge technology at an affordable price. With this initiative, Berkshire County can reclaim its place in today’s vibrant Massachusetts economy.”

Beyond the partnership that is Berkshire Connect, is the partnership between Berkshire Connect and the new service provider. The Berkshire Connect Steering Committee invited potential partners to propose how they would implement the overall goals of the business plan. This opportunity was given to local, regional, and national service providers that expressed interest in being involved in Berkshire Connect. They were encouraged to provide their own approach and technologies, provided that their approach was consistent with the goals outlined in the business plan.

Challenges/Advice to others

The advice of Berkshire Connect and its partners to others seeking to copy their success:

- Don’t underestimate the power or determination of telecommunications service providers to make the largest profit possible. The competition is growing ever more fierce, even as more players become involved.
- Enlist local and state officials’ financial and political support. All local and state legislators were contacted to help with the development of this project.
- Be open to options. At an early stage of the planning process, the Berkshire Connect considered starting its own company to be the service provider.

Partners

Berkshire Athenaeum
Berkshire Broadcasting Co., Inc.
The Berkshire Eagle
Berkshire Health Systems, Inc
Berkshire Life Insurance Company
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
Berkshire-Taconic Community Foundation
BNIC, LLC
Central Berkshire Chamber of Commerce
CDC of South Berkshire
The Clark Art Institute

Country Curtains
Crane & Company, Inc.
Donahue Institute
First Massachusetts Bank
GE plastics
Grinnell, Dubendorf, & Smith
Lee Community Development Corporation
Lockheed Martin Integrated Business Solutions
Mass MOCA
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The Norman Rockwell Museum
Williams College
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FAST Corridor: Puget Sound Region, Washington

Summary

The Freight Action Strategy (FAST) Corridor in the central Puget Sound Region is a successful example of partnerships solving regional transportation problems. Sponsored by the Puget Sound Regional Council and the Washington State Department of Transportation (DOT), the FAST Corridor focuses on making transportation improvements along the Interstate 5 corridor, fixing freight mobility problems and commuter delays that occur where rail and road systems cross. The first phase of FAST Corridor is a jointly developed package of three port-access projects and twelve rail grade-separation projects—a total of 15 projects, to be completed between 1999 and 2003.

Background

The Puget Sound Region is a major North American gateway for trade with Pacific Rim countries. Nearly one in four jobs in Washington State relates to international trade. Efficient freight mobility is critical to local jobs and businesses, as well as to the supplies of food and services. Puget Sound is the second-largest freight gateway for containerized cargo in North America. Over 70% of imported containers at Puget Sound ports pass through to other points.

Puget Sound's fast-growing economy has outpaced transportation improvements over the last decade. While the region has enjoyed employment growth 70% better than the national average during the last three years, the region has also been recognized as one of the worst places in the nation for traffic congestion. Regional and state leaders recognized that it was important to the state and local economy to improve this dynamic.

In 1994, Puget Sound Regional Council and the Economic Development Council of Seattle & King County convened the public-private Regional Freight Mobility Roundtable. This Roundtable provides wide consultation between agencies and private parties, and supports coordination among government agencies. The Roundtable has no independent authority, and is not an advisory group within any single agency or program. The group was created as a forum for sustained engagement around the broad and shared interest of multi-modal freight mobility.

In addition to broad consultation, an action-oriented initiative among public agency participants also has been underway since 1996. This initiative is known as the FAST Corridor. Along with the Regional Council and Washington DOT, the inter-agency FAST partnership includes 11 cities, two counties, the ports of Everett, Seattle and Tacoma, and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe and Union Pacific railroads (ex-officio members). The FAST Corridor coordinates a lot of splintered agendas to achieve a common and locally based goal.

Project description

In 1999, the FAST partners approved a \$470 million cost-sharing agreement to fund the first phase—three port-access projects and twelve rail grade-separation projects—with contributions from the private railroads, the federal government, the state, ports, cities, and counties. This agreement depends upon independent and linked actions at all levels and has won unified support at the regional level, in the state Legislature, and from the entire state congressional delegation.

FAST Corridor cuts across planning, economic development, and transportation issues. As a transportation solution, the FAST Corridor is reflected in the Regional Council's Metropolitan Transportation Plan. Under VISION 2020 (the region's plan for growth management, economic development, and transportation investments) it is also an action step recommended by the regional economic strategy. By successfully addressing freight and people mobility through this action-oriented partnership, the FAST Corridor effort helps assure the steady growth of Washington's ports and continued success of the central Puget Sound region and state as a major gateway for international trade. At the same time, FAST helps ensure the improved flow of commuters on both road and rail. The conflict points between road and rail are not the jurisdiction of any single agency; therefore, it was vital that a new type of partnership be developed to deal with these issues.

Following the first phase, the FAST Corridor focus will be on improving freight information, and on developing solutions to truck-related issues on the public roadway system, as well as on continued partnership building for the overall system of roads, railroads, air cargo, marine and intermodal facilities.

Funding

The overall \$470 million package covers the 15 projects' funding packages that are mutually supporting. The initial funding shares were 15% lead agency, 19% federal, 9% TEA-21 earmark, 33% state, 9% ports, 5% railroads, and 10% other. The formula varies from one project to another. The Regional Council has reallocated a large share of its Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) funds to the FAST Corridor to partially offset losses of state funds from a 1999 public ballot repeal of the State Motor Vehicle Excise Tax.

Fostering partnerships

The Puget Sound Regional Council, the Economic Development Council, its consultants, and the members of the Freight Mobility Roundtable have been very successful in creating a viable public-private partnership. The private freight sector operates under different time frames and constraints from government and civic groups, with profit margins a high priority, which can be a stumbling block. However, they do like several things about the Roundtable process: networking and interacting with their peers, giving freight a voice in the planning process, educating the public sector about how their business works, and getting support for specific improvement projects. The private freight sector can remain enthusiastic about the process if they see concrete results.

The public and the private freight sectors work together to make the freight group productive and beneficial to both sides. Above all, education and communication are the basis for a successful effort.

Challenges/Advice to others

The FAST Corridor suggests that others seeking to create a successful transportation partnership:

- build on small successes, but also maintain a broad systems focus that matches interconnected freight issues, and that ties transportation to the regional and local economy;
- establish a forum that is committed to public-private communication and to near-term and long-term agency and inter-agency actions;
- work outside the box—align individual agency actions toward the larger freight mobility and economic picture;
- pay attention to “details” that matter in your region;
- cut through obstacles and the “fog” factor by communicating—“put a face on freight.”

Additional information can be obtained from more detailed case studies and from comments offered at the National Association of Regional Councils' annual meeting in St. Petersburg, June 2000. Contact Puget Sound Regional Council.

Intermodal Freight Transportation Planning: Primer on Best Practices with Strategies for Overcoming Impediment. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Final Report (Cambridge Systematics, Inc., Sydec, Inc., Porter Wheeler), February 25, 1998.

Public-Private Freight Planning Guidelines. For FHWA, by American Trucking Associations and Pennsylvania State University, 1996.

Planning & Environment—“Case Study: Improving Mobility in the Puget Sound Region,” Intermodal and Statewide Programs. USDOT, (<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep10/freight/puget.html>)

“The FAST Corridor: A Step toward the next larger Questions”, Peter Beaulieu, Puget Sound Regional Council, June 20, 2000.

Partners

City of Algona
City of Auburn
City and Port of Everett
City of Kent
City of Pacific
City of Puyallup
City of Renton
City and Port of Seattle
City of Sumner
City and Port of Tacoma
City of Tukwila

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King County
Pierce County
Puget Sound Regional Council
Washington State Department of Transportation
Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad
Union Pacific Railroad

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Industrial Ecosystem Development in North Carolina

Summary

IN 1997, TRIANGLE J COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (TJCOG) initiated the Industrial Ecosystem Development Project in a six-county area of North Carolina. The purpose of the project is to promote partnerships between different businesses for the reuse of materials, water, and energy, and to reduce the amount of waste going to landfills from business and industry.

Background

TJCOG serves the thirty local governments in the six-county area in and around the North Carolina State capital, Raleigh. The population is approximately one million. The largest industries in the region are pharmaceuticals, computers, and telecommunications manufacturers. There are a large number of medical, university, biotechnology, and research facilities. Other employers include state and federal agencies.

There were several reasons TJCOG initiated the project. First, businesses and institutions located in the region might find opportunities to save money. Second, industries already considering locating in the region might find it helpful to know what materials might be available for use in new partnerships. Third, the project might identify opportunities for creating new local enterprises to fill in gaps in the cycle of materials flows in the region. Finally, the project might discover opportunities for reducing the use of water and energy as well as materials.

Project description

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provided funding to TJCOG for two years in order to jump-start the project. TJCOG formed a partnership with several other organizations including three local universities, six local economic development organizations (one from each county), and the state pollution prevention agency. TJCOG also convened a group of representatives from ten local industries to get advice on the best way to approach industries and gather information.

The first step in the project involved asking a cross-section of industries and institutions in the region whether they would be interested in sharing information on byproducts that they could not use and on the byproducts of other businesses that they could use as inputs.

Second, a list was developed of companies and institutions that had one or more of the following characteristics:

- discharged wastewater directly into surface waters or discharged significant amounts of wastewater into the sewer system;
- filed federally-required reports on hazardous or toxic materials;
- had a large number of employees;
- had some past involvement with pollution prevention programs;
- represented a variety of facility types and locations throughout the region;
- were located very near several other types of industries.

These companies represented the types targeted for inclusion in the program. After this list was assembled, other companies were added that might need or have materials, water, or energy complementary to those reported by companies contacted initially. A total list of 343 businesses and institutions was compiled. These businesses were then invited to participate in the project.

Of the 343, 75% either agreed to participate in the project or said they might be interested but wanted further information. All of these received the survey booklet and were contacted to schedule an in-plant interview. Another 22% of the original group of 343 dropped out, primarily because the facilities were too busy to schedule an interview within the time period of the project. Survey responses were collected from 182 facilities visited over a one-year period. This represented 53% of the 343 facilities that were contacted.

Of those who did not participate, 45% said they thought they didn't have any relevant inputs or byproducts; 31% were too busy to do it during the project period; 11% were closing or downsizing; 9% said they were not interested; and 4% had other reasons.

The average survey respondent listed eight items as reusable inputs or byproducts. Fourteen of the 182 respondents listed twenty or more items. The business advisory group had suggested that the survey contain a chart listing reusable items so that the survey respondent have a prompter when analyzing business inputs and outputs. A total of 46 specific reusable materials were listed in the survey.

Of the facilities participating in the project, 48% or 88 facilities were identified as potential partnerships. This did not include any partnerships regarding commonly recyclable materials such as cardboard and scrap metal.

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One of the companies identified handles hazardous materials for other companies. They use vermiculite as a packaging material. It was determined that they could probably use sawdust as a substitute. Coincidentally, there was a cabinet shop across the street that had been sending lots of sawdust to the landfill. A partnership was set up so that the cabinet shop collects its sawdust and the other company uses it. Both companies are saving modest amounts of money, the landfill receives less waste, and the use of newly manufactured vermiculite is reduced.

Another example involves a resin manufacturer that produces methanol as a byproduct. The resin manufacturer was paying for treatment and disposal of this byproduct. A local wastewater treatment plant meanwhile was buying new methanol to remove nitrogen from wastewater. These two facilities were introduced through the project, and they have begun a trial partnership. The potential cost saving for the resin company is \$100,000 per year, while the potential cost saving for the wastewater treatment plant is \$70,000 per year.

Other examples and information are available in a report that can be downloaded from the TJCOG partnerships at <http://www.tjocog.org>. The project report also summarizes which types of industries reported which types of inputs and byproducts. All of the data gathered in this project was linked to Geographic Information System (GIS) maps showing the locations of all the facilities. This allows a search of all companies with a particular byproduct within a specific radius of any facility. The facilities on the map are linked to the detailed data regarding the amount and type of that byproduct from that facility.

Funding

TJCOG is exploring how this project can be economically self-sufficient. EPA funded the first two years of this project with \$90,000 per year.

Fostering partnerships

TJCOG was surprised to discover that 75% of the facilities expressed an interest in sharing information in the hope of finding a partnership. Staff speculates that one reason for this success might be that initial contact was made with the environmental health and safety manager, believed to be the most likely to understand the project goals.

Twenty-two companies did not participate because they believed that they did not have relevant inputs and byproducts. Potential partnerships were found, however, for other companies of the same type.

Concerns about confidentiality did not prevent people from providing information. The survey form stated that it was assumed that confidentiality was not an issue with regard to the information being provided, and so it is assumed that businesses chose to provide information only on things that were not confidential. In addition, liability concerns also did not keep people from participating. For some materials liability was an issue, but participants just focused on other materials. This flexibility on the part of the various firms returned a high level of participation, even if participants did not provide a long list of inputs and byproducts. Participation at any level allowed the beginning of a dialogue about partnerships that could possibly expand to cover other materials in the future.

Creative thinking about potential partnerships increased, and the more people talked, the more new ideas they generated. After people filled out the survey and were interviewed at the plant, the survey respondents usually came up with more partnership ideas. If they gave a plant tour, they usually came up with even more ideas. When meeting representatives from different companies to talk about partnerships, they became even more creative.

Another important lesson learned was how useful it was to collaborate with the publicly owned wastewater treatment plants. Several plant managers were interviewed and together they provided a long list of reusable inputs and byproducts, so they made good potential partners. They were also a very good source of information about local industries, since their federally required reports from wastewater dischargers were more comprehensive in describing manufacturing processes than any other central source of information.

The larger conclusions from this project were that local businesses found enough cost-saving opportunities to make this type of industrial ecosystem development valuable to them, and local economic development professionals also found the project valuable to them in developing potential new industries in the region. For this work to become institutionalized, these are the professionals that need to be convinced that it is valuable.

A few ideas for new businesses have come out of the project to date. For example, manufacturing spills absorbents, manufacturing shingles using coal ash, and recreating large lumber pieces from smaller pieces. Overall, this project information has been useful to local economic development professionals working with industries on site selection for a plant in the region. This information has mainly been used to give these new industries ideas about companies already in the area that could use their byproducts.

Challenges/advice to others:

The main skills needed to conduct this project are those of an organizer and facilitator. Most communities have access to technical expertise once people are committed to addressing a particular partnership. What is lacking in most communities is an agent to promote the vision of a Web of materials, water, and energy flowing between neighbors. Without a local champion for this vision, it is difficult for businesses to go beyond normal buyer and supplier relationships to examine neighborhood relationships.

In addition to promoting a vision, a facilitator plays an important role in actual matchmaking between facilities. In several instances with the project, company representatives called on TJCOG repeatedly to keep partnership talks moving when one side lost momentum.

Since this project has only been in operation for a little over two years, TJCOG feels that they have just scratched the surface in finding opportunities for reducing the use of resources in the area. Information takes a long time to collect and relationships take a long time to develop. However, TJCOG believes that it is well on the way to creating an industrial ecosystem in the six-county region. When it began the project, virtually no one was systematically creating these types of partnerships. Now many are saying that promoting these partnerships is one important part of working toward a sustainable economy.

Contact

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Focus 2050 Regional Plan: Middle Rio Grande Region, New Mexico

Summary

On February 10, 2000, the Focus 2050 Regional Plan was approved by the Board of Directors of the Middle Rio Grande Council of Governments (MRGCOG). Focus 2050 was a four-year regional planning effort of MRGCOG and the local governments in the central New Mexico counties of Bernalillo, Sandoval, Torrance, and Valencia. The purpose of the Focus 2050 planning process was to create a vision and strategy for managing long-range growth and development and attaining sustainable economic vitality. This plan does not take the place of local planning or regulatory functions; rather, it establishes the regional system characteristics with which local plans and regional functional plans should be generally consistent.

Background

The study area for the Focus 2050 Regional Plan is comprised of the four county area of Bernalillo, Sandoval, Torrance, and Valencia counties. This 9,300 square mile area contains a great deal of diversity in settlements, ecosystems and vegetative zones. It includes urban, small town, and rural areas, and remarkable natural environmental features. Public and Indian managed lands figure prominently in the character of the region's land use patterns, with 42% of SPDD 3 falling in these categories.

Population in the Regional Plan study area was forecast to increase by 117% from year 1995 to year 2050, growing from approximately 700,000 to 1.5 million persons. The proportion of the region's population living in Bernalillo County has been gradually declining due to stronger growth in surrounding counties. Despite significant employment growth in Sandoval and Valencia counties, most of the region's new job creation had continued to follow a long-term trend of occurring in Bernalillo County. The region holds the preeminent position in the state's economy and has historically experienced a steady positive growth. After World War II, military and defense expenditures largely fueled the region's growth. Over the past three decades, there has been increasing diversification of the economy.

Project description

The Focus 2050 Regional Plan was prepared in compliance with New Mexico's Regional Planning Act. This statute enables the formation of regional planning agencies, such as MRGCOG, and requires them to prepare plans for the development of the region. Focus 2050 is the first general regional plan prepared for the region of Central New Mexico and the first plan accomplished under the state Regional Planning Act. Land use, with related growth management strategies, is the central planning element and comprises the Focus 2050 Regional Plan.

Focus 2050 required an integrated set of activities progressing through a number of phases. The Executive Board of MRGCOG was the policy-making body guiding Focus 2050. Technical committees working on various topical elements of Focus 2050 were formed throughout the process beginning in 1996. The Regional Land Use Task Force was the overall technical advisory committee.

Focus 2050 identifies how and where growth should occur within the region. The two central principles of the Regional Growth Strategy are 1) improving the jobs/housing balance, both in existing communities and in new communities, and 2) maintaining a similar distribution of growth balance by counties and communities by 2050 as is present today. The approach is guided by the vision of a high quality of life as defined by housing choices, job opportunities, healthy environment, and accessible open spaces. The strategy also proposes a framework for guiding and managing the impacts of growth as projected population and employment more than double over the next half-century.

The Focus 2050 Regional Plan contains goals and land-use strategies specific to community identity and livability, economic development, housing, irrigated agriculture, transportation and water. The core strategies of the Regional Plan are a summary of the policy direction of the plan:

- Limit the expansion of urban uses into areas of irrigated agriculture
- Focus most new metropolitan and small town development in and around areas in which urban development is already an established part of their identities.
- Create new distinct communities that use land efficiently and have a full complement and balance of land uses.
- Distinguish separate communities through a general system of linked open spaces and protection of irrigated agricultural lands.
- Achieve a balance of jobs and housing within communities and major sub-areas of the region.
- Increase the proportion of new residences designed for smaller households and reduce the proportion of new residences in rural residential areas.
- Place enough jobs and residences in designated corridors to promote high quality, cost-effective transit service.
- Place the economic growth projected through year 2050 in appropriate locations to achieve economic sustainability of the region.

After the visioning process, the Balanced Communities Scenario was created through developing and evaluating several alternative land use scenarios. The scenarios were modeled using a Geographic Information System (GIS) application called the Land Use Analysis Model, developed for this project. Of all scenarios the Balanced Communities Scenario was found to best meet the Vision Statement. The result will be that there are diverse opportunities in housing; community and lifestyle choices are retained; the jobs and housing balance in communities is improved; and the importance of open space and irrigated agriculture is emphasized.

The Focus 2050 Regional Plan process is continuing with development of an implementation section and eventually a plan update within three years, as directed by the MRGCOG Board of Directors.

Community Involvement

Public involvement was critical throughout the process and included the Regional Visioning, FutureScape and Town Hall Live events. The visioning process consisted of multiple rounds of public meetings in each of the MRGCOG counties. The general public was invited and over 400 persons attended. The workshops were supplemented by community interviews and facilitated discussions with the planning commissions of the region and with various individuals and groups concerned with development issues. This culminated in the development of the Vision Statement at the Vision Forum held in December 1997. The MRGCOG Board of Directors adopted the Vision Statement in January 1998.

Focus 2050 Vision Statement:

"We are a diverse community of urban, suburban, village and rural agricultural lifestyles, sharing various cultural, historic and political traditions; and we practice strong participation, which assures protection of individual rights.

We preserve and enhance this community by coordinating regional and local planning of transportation, water resources, and air quality with local land use.

We balance economic and housing opportunities and development patterns with protection of the unique character of our land, open spaces, and communities."

The FutureScape series consisted of group discussions, open houses, and conferences held throughout the region. The Town Hall series of meetings were the final set of public and technical meetings in creating the draft regional plan. Listening sessions with local elected officials, appointed commission members and staff were held in each of the MRGCOG counties, supplemented by community interviews.

Fostering partnerships

The Plan could not have been accomplished without the involvement of elected officials; local, state, and federal technical staff; private sector citizens; non-profit sector representatives; and concerned members of the general public. Presentations on Focus 2050 were made at numerous meetings of elected officials, planning commissions and other groups throughout the region. Meetings were organized before the Regional Visioning, FutureScape and Town Hall events. Progress on the plan and meeting dates were announced through extensive mailings and notices in newsletters. Newspapers throughout the region covered Focus 2050, using regular news releases submitted by MRGCOG as well as other sources of information.

Challenges/Advice to others

The approval of the Regional Plan was considered by the region's authorities to be a monumental event, preceded by years of technical involvement and comprehensive citizen involvement. The real work follows this approval, as MRGCOG's member governments, the developers, and citizens begin the thousands of actions that will be required to make the plan a reality.

The foundation and direction for developing an implementation program for the Plan have begun to be created. Initial details for implementation are due by the end of 2000. With the adoption of Focus 2050, the framework of the regional plan will be set. Other elements besides land use must be added to provide clear guidance on coordinated planning activities on a regional level. These elements and time frames are in the development stages. As other elements are developed, changes may be required in the land use models to keep everything consistent. The on-going process of planning requires a regular review process. Implementation strategies and the implementation of the plan itself are the next challenge that lies ahead. Continued support of local citizens and governments will be the key to the future.

Economic Development Linkages Guide

Partners

City Of Albuquerque
City Of Belen
Bernalillo County
Village Of Los Ranchos De Albuquerque
Village Of Corrales
Village Of Los Lunas
City Of Moriarty
City Of Rio Rancho
Sandoval County

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Livable Centers Initiative: Atlanta Region, Georgia

Summary

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) board adopted policies in its Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) proposal for the U.S. Department of Transportation in May 1999 to include investment policy studies and transportation projects for activity and town centers. This program of studies and investment has become known as the Livable Centers Initiative (LCI). The primary focus of the program is to encourage increased residential development, mixed-uses and connectivity at the activity and town center level as one alternative to standard suburban or strip development. The study element of the program, known as Activity Center/Town Center Investment Policy Studies (ACTIPS), will define detailed plans that support the adopted policy of the Regional Development Plan (RDP) to encourage activity and town center development.

Background

The idea for the program was formed in 1998 by a panel known as the Land Use Task Force, which represented local government staff, environmental groups, and transportation officials. The Land Use Task Force was one of five panels that were formed to assist in the identification of policies to enact through the 2025 Regional Development Plan developed by the ARC (as the Metropolitan Planning Organization [MPO]) for the Atlanta region.

The Land Use Task Force identified the need to provide incentives for local governments to take land use actions that supported efficient transportation in town centers and activity centers in the region. The Land Use Task Force determined that a program was needed to facilitate local development of planning studies in activity and town centers that focused on the link between land use and transportation investments. ARC identified all municipalities as town centers (63 existing) and over 15 activity centers in the region.

In May of 1999, the ARC board approved policies for the 2050 Regional Transportation Plan that included planning study funds and transportation investments related to the implementation of the LCI study programs. Planning study funds and implementation funds have been programmed in the annual Transportation Improvements Program.

The kick off of the LCI program and the first round of LCI planning funds were initiated in November 1999 in conjunction with a town and activity center workshop. Fifty-one applications for planning study funds were received by the deadline in January 2000. The first round of twelve application approvals was announced in March 2000.

Project description

The LCI program focuses on redevelopment and in-fill of existent town centers and activity centers that have historically been the identified location of urban uses. The development patterns of the Atlanta regions during periods of expansion have created the need and opportunity to create livable villages throughout the region.

The ARC board's policy recognizes the region's need to reinvest in existing developed areas to promote more joint live and work opportunities, greater use of transit, reduction in congestion and sprawl, and improvement in air quality. This focuses on a policy of investments without regard for jurisdictional boundaries with the realization that all counties of the region have opportunities for greater planning and investment in town and activity centers.

In May of 1999, the ARC also adopted updated RDP policies. The RDP's policies list broad land use goals including densification of town centers and rail station areas as a method of reducing sprawl. The LCI program represents the implementation tool of the RDP policies.

While similar programs have been developed in other regions, ARC believes the amount of funds directed to a program for investment in town and activity centers is unprecedented in the United States. The large amount of planning funding linked with commitment to implementation funds is a significant new direction by ARC and its member jurisdictions to fundamentally change the way the region develops. The program is expected to have broad impact, even in areas that are not funded, as the study findings and media reports are shared throughout the region.

The core of the LCI program is the development of regional living, working, and shopping choices for citizens. ARC recognizes that there are unmet housing needs in the region, particularly for mixed-income housing close to the central business district. The LCI program seeks to create incentives for local jurisdictions to take land use actions that create not only greater housing choices in town and activity centers but also the ability to live and work in close proximity.

The LCI program provides funding to local governments or town- and activity center-focused, non-profit organizations to identify tools, land use changes and programs that will create greater housing opportunities and mixed-use development in the centers. The jurisdiction then will identify those transportation investments that will facilitate the livability, connectivity, and

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accessibility between those uses and greater use of transit. The resulting program of transportation investments will be eligible for the pool of funds, based partly on the local jurisdictions' implementation of other supportive actions to implement the study findings.

Even before the studies had been initiated or implemented, the LCI program had significant impact in the Atlanta region. The 51 applications submitted for the LCI study funds demonstrated that many local governments were interested in implementation of the program goals. This regional emphasis on the study of land use and transportation linkages, mixed-use and mixed-income development, transit-oriented development (TOD) and traditional neighborhood development (TND) in town centers and activity centers has brought to the Atlanta region a new dynamic in growth and transportation incentives.

In the past five years, the real estate market and citizens have been returning to the close-in older neighborhoods, towns and activity centers in the Atlanta region that are better served by rail and bus transit infrastructure. The LCI program has provided ARC with the ability to provide leadership in the areas of land use and growth-related issues where local governments, because of home rule authority, have dominated in the past. The ability to connect study funds, land use and transportation planning and transportation investments through the LCI program has created a strong incentive for local governments to take actions in support of the RDP policies and changing past patterns of growth.

Funding

The ARC board approved an allocation of \$5 million over the next five years to fund the ACTIPS program. The study projects will be awarded on a competitive basis to local governments and non-profit sponsors such as Transportation Management Associations (TMAs) for producing plans to define future center development strategies and supporting public and private investments. Increased residential choice is a primary development strategy that will be investigated.

To be considered for funding, study scopes must demonstrate:

- A local planning outreach process that promotes the involvement of all stakeholders, particularly low to moderate income and minority citizen;
- A diversity of mixed-income residential neighborhoods, employment, shopping and recreation choices at the activity center and town center level;
- Access to a range of travel modes including public rail transit, roadways, walking and biking to enable access within the study area.

A local match of 20% of the total study budget must be provided by the sponsoring local government or non-profit organization. The funds may be used in conjunction with other local funds to leverage larger study scopes. An ARC staff committee will select those projects that best meet the program goals. As the ACTIPS program is a multi-year commitment and funds are limited each year, the program will seek to fund various types of studies in suburban and urban locations. The first \$1 million in funds was included as an amendment in the FY2000 Interim Transportation Improvement Program (ITIP).

The ARC board also approved an allocation of \$350 million over the next five years for priority funding for projects resulting from ACTIPS. The first \$20 million in funds are incorporated in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for FY2003. Following development of center studies, representative projects and strategies will be programmed in the TIP. Examples of projects that may be funded include bicycle and pedestrian projects that connect mixed-use areas, streetscape projects, transit access improvements, parking coordination efforts, etc. Transportation project funds will be considered in the context of a larger plan of actions to enhance mixed-use/residential characteristics and livability of an activity and town center.

Fostering partnerships

ARC, through LCI program goals and the application documents, has directed the development of stakeholder involvement in the LCI studies. The basis for this position is to ensure broad community support for the study work program and also to provide for participation from all organizations, including private and civic groups, property owners, and low- and moderate-income minority citizens. ARC, through contracting with the local agencies, will ensure each LCI study meets these goals of enhanced stakeholder involvement in terms of members and opportunities for meaningful participation. The program makes a conscious effort to identify and include minority, low-income and traditionally underrepresented elements of each community.

ARC partners with local organizations in the development of activity center and town center plans, providing technical assistance. ARC staff will work with local staff, attend public meeting and provide technical assistance when applicable. In addition, ARC staff will assist local staff with implementation of study goals during future years. The ARC Geographic Information Systems (GIS) staff will provide study maps, aerial photography and other information to local organizations to assist with study development.

The ARC Community Choices program will also provide assistance to local organizations in several distinct areas. The Community Choices program will develop a toolbox of model ordinances, benchmarks, and other programs currently used in the Atlanta region and Georgia for local governments to consider in the implementation of the Livable Centers goals.

Community Choices will also assist local governments during presentations to citizens by developing computer visualization capability that will enable different development types to be modeled on the local properties and streets. These visualization tools will allow consideration of alternate development types, densities, mix of uses, and urban design requirements through images of examples and graphic models on computer screens.

ARC may recommend the involvement of other organizations as appropriate during study development to assist local applicants with identification and implementation of center goals.

Challenges/Advice to others

ARC believes the substantial level of funding, incisive program goals, diverse implementation opportunities (in terms of jurisdictions and types of study areas), opportunity for discussion and implementation of the RDP policies and Smart Growth programs, and enhanced stakeholder involvement makes the LCI program both original and transferable. ARC has already had a number of regional councils from across the country inquire about the program. Within the state of Georgia, the Georgia Municipal Association, and Association of County Commissioners have already discussed with ARC the creation of similar efforts statewide.

ARC has enhanced its leadership role in directing growth through development of the LCI program. During the next five years ARC, through the LCI program, will have a substantial impact on growth patterns of the regions through study of more than 50 critical town and activity centers.

Partners

Atlanta Regional Commission
City of Atlanta
City of Canton
City of Chamblee
City of Conyers
City of Douglasville
City of Duluth
City of Marietta
City of Morrow
City of Peachtree City
City of Stockbridge
Sandy Springs Revitalization, Inc.

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Texas COGs and CEDS

Summary

At its March 1999 meeting, the economic development committee of the Texas Association of Regional Councils (TARC) discussed the new Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) of the Economic Development Administration. The committee agreed that TARC should explore how to implement CEDS to be much more than EDA's Overall Economic Development Plans had ever been. These discussions represented the beginning of the Texas CEDS Project.

Background

During the early months of 1999, some of the Council of Governments' (COGs) directors who have economic development districts (EDDs) began discussing the U.S. Economic Development Administration's (EDA) new Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), in the context of the state statutory comprehensive planning requirements.

The shared vision for the resulting project was twofold: enhance the CEDS process and final product to better support regional development efforts, and, integrate the regional CEDS as the foundation of state-level planning for economic development as well as housing, transportation, workforce, technology, etc.

The vision came from a general acknowledgment from Texas COGs that the old Overall Economic Development Plans (OEDPs), albeit meeting EDA requirements, were more likely to end up on a shelf than to be used as a guide supporting development in the region's communities. The second part of the vision resulted largely from the frustration felt at the local level over the state government's "top down" approach to program development and implementation. A third aspect of the project was added later to explore whether the regional CEDS could be substituted for planning requirements of other federal and state agencies.

Project description

After the TARC meeting in March 1999, the TARC economic development committee proposed the vision to the Director of the EDA Austin Region in June 1999. The committee sought funding for a technical assistance project that would position the CEDS as the predominant planning tool in Texas. EDA agreed to fund the project, asking that the Capital Area Economic Development District (CAEDD) be the grantee due to its central location and accessibility to both EDA and the other COGs/EDDs.

CAEDD, working with the TARC economic development committee, formed a working group that developed the scope of the project for the application during August and September 1999. The working group developed the request for proposal (RFP) to select a consultant in November 1999, then evaluated proposals in December to recommend a contractor to carry out the project. Texas International Partnership, Inc. was selected and the project commenced in January 2000.

Key components of the project include:

- Identification of data sources and analysis techniques to strengthen the role of COGs/EDDs as regional information clearing-houses. Inherent in this component is the effort to position the COGs/EDDs with the capacity not only to have the best regional data, but also to drive regional strategies through analysis of trends and projections of growth.
- Input from regional leaders, economic developers, and other local officials on how to make the CEDS a more valuable, user-friendly tool with consideration to type of data and methods for distributing it.
- Input from state officials with regard to the feasibility of using the CEDS as a foundation for state planning by agencies or ad hoc efforts.
- Review of planning requirements of various state and federal agencies to determine if the CEDS could be utilized in lieu of current requirements.

Expected outcomes:

- A comprehensive guideline for Texas CEDS that links the COG/EDD to multiple data sources and provides detailed guidance to analyze data, including recommendations to build capacity for data analysis and distribution.
- A plan on how to use the CEDS as the foundation for state planning to include benchmarking of other state's regional plans and sample legislation.
- A list of state or federal agencies that require similar information for planning for which the CEDS could be substituted.

The project unfolds in three phases producing the outcomes listed above. By the end of May 2000, the first two phases were completed and presented in a workshop setting at EDA's Albuquerque conference May 30-June 1, 2000. The project results are to be presented to state officials and legislators to garner support for the CEDS as a recognized planning tool for state programs.

Phase I resulted in a Guide for Texas CEDS that is to be used as a regional planning tool with emphasis on improved data collection and analysis. Phase II of the project included recommendations for integrating state and regional economic development planning with one another. Phase III is the analysis of how CEDS meets other federal and state planning requirements.

Funding

The Texas CEDS Project was funded with an EDA Technical Assistance Grant of \$120,000 in August 1999. To meet EDA's match requirement, nineteen COGs and one EDD made in-kind commitments totaling \$48,480. The consultants for the project are the Texas International Partnership, Inc. and the Perryman Group.

Fostering partnerships

All 20 of the Texas COGs/EDDs were invited to be part of the working group. COG staff represented on TARC's economic development committee became a driving force for the project, but there was also participation from an EDD that is not part of a COG.

Challenges/Advice to others

The working group and the consultants reported:

- To have CEDS recognized as the most effective regional planning tool in Texas, developing a new relationship with key state officials was an important part of the project.
- The timing of such a project can impact the intended success—at the time of the Texas CEDS Project, the future of the state's economic development agency was in question, and thus the mechanism for economic development planning.
- The most important factor in working with a large group of organizations is to ensure they have a stake in the project. Project development was a very inclusive process and it is hoped that, as a result, the majority of EDDs will implement the recommendations.
- A challenge facing EDDs in implementation of the results is the large disparity in technology among EDDs—some hardly use computers and e-mail while others have extensive Web sites with GIS capabilities and WANs serving their service areas. The Austin EDA Regional Office has indicated that it will consider a subsequent grant for implementation of the first project depending on the availability of funding; this will target building capacity at the district level to achieve parity statewide, so that data and analysis are consistent and available.

Finally, since many of the state's COGs/EDDs participated in the project, over the course of time, there were several different interpretations of the process and intended outcomes. Clear communication is always a crucial element of any successful enterprise.

Partners

Capital Area Planning Council
Texas Association of Regional Councils
Texas Councils of Governments
Texas Economic Development Districts
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Northwest Piedmont Job Training Consortium: Western North Carolina

Summary

The Northwest Piedmont Job Training Consortium of the Northwest Piedmont Council of Governments (COG), in western North Carolina, is a federally funded agency that works in partnership with private industry to train workers to serve local businesses. It locates applicants who are in need of job training and helps them to become proficient, responsible workers. This provides businesses with valuable training services and a dedicated skilled workforce.

The Consortium established a Job Resource and Training Center in Rockingham County, in order to promote human development and education by providing marketable job skills and supportive services that contribute to economic self-sufficiency.

Background

The statistics demonstrate that this is not a region of prosperity. Approximately 86,000 people live in Rockingham County. Of these, 10,000 persons live in poverty. Nearly 3,000 households receive food stamps and 10% of the population does not have access to an automobile; 52% of the labor force has not finished high school, 20% have less than an 8th grade education.

To address unemployment and poverty issues in Rockingham County, the Northwest Piedmont Job Training Consortium was formed with support of local and state government and private industry. The Northwest Piedmont Council of Governments serves as the administrative entity. The Consortium, in turn, created the Job Resource and Training Center (JTRC) in 1993. The State Department of Employment and Training has approved JTRC training services to assist its clients.

JTRC works in conjunction with the Rockingham Community College to supply services and training. The college provides instructors for both hard (i.e. typing, computer usage) and soft (i.e. phone manners, office demeanor) skills training. The training is intensive and short term to allow job seekers to return to the job market as soon as possible.

Project description

Training uses a holistic approach. Basic skills are offered for participants who are interested in completing their GED or upgrading their academic skills. Seminars are scheduled to address the barriers the participants may encounter that would affect their employability. The eight-step process for job-seekers provides comprehensive skill building and counseling. The process is as follows:

Assessment—The JTRC offers CareerScope. An electronic assessment tool, CareerScope combines academic testing with a job interest inventory to ensure that job seekers are matched with suitable training. The assessment tool is used to assist “basic skills” testing with identifying remedial work that might be necessary. A counselor then provides the participant with an explanation of test results. The counselor and participant develop an employment strategy. The strategy lists the steps that the job-seeker would take in order to complete his/her goals, addressing barriers that may hinder success or completion of goals.

Counseling—This is an on-going process the participant receives while attending the JTRC. Staff meets with the job-seeker on a bi-weekly basis to ensure the job-seeker is on track with his/her goals. The counselor can also identify and address supportive services that would be necessary to assist the job-seeker with successfully completing training and removing any barriers that may hinder self-sufficiency.

Skill sampling—Once the skill area of training has been determined, the job-seeker is placed in the skill-training area for two weeks. Available skill training areas on-site at JTRC include: basic computer, office practices, customer service, nursing assistant, human resource department, business writing, business math, notary, self-esteem building, masonry, and basic electrical. Classes are scheduled to simulate a full workday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. in order to assist the job-seeker in acclimating to the working environment. It is required that the job-seeker considers the JTRC as an employer, with a time clock indicating actual hours of attendance.

During this period of time the job-seeker has an opportunity to experience the skill training and decide if the training selected is appropriate. This also gives JTRC staff a chance to observe attendance, attitude and motivation during the skill-sampling period. A case manager meets with the job seeker and a decision is made to continue in training or consider other training options.

Unit Team Meeting—The Unit Team is comprised of members of other agencies that have contributed to the support of the job-seeker. Meetings are scheduled every other Wednesday to discuss the progress of the job-seeker. The Unit Team Meeting allows for exchange of dialogue between the referring agency and the contracting agency. The Meeting gives everyone involved a clear picture of the job-seeker’s progress toward goals.

Life skills workshops—These workshops are scheduled once a week to provide job-seekers with information that will allow them to become knowledgeable about issues that contribute to their happiness and well being. The JTRC solicits input from job-seekers to determine the type of workshops scheduled. Past topics have included first-time home buying, credit counseling, and car repair.

Basic skills—All job-seekers are required to test out Basic Skills to ensure that they have a level of competency to comfortably reach their training goals. It is required that the participant who does not have a high school diploma work toward the goal of receiving a GED while attending the JTRC. Classes are scheduled as the need arises to make the job-seeker more attractive to the labor market. These include notary public, conversational Spanish, medical office practices, first aid, and CPR.

Job development—The job developer at JTRC will assist the customer in securing full time suitable employment after they have completed 70% of their training. The Job Developer has a network of employers that support the efforts of the JTRC. The Job Developer also works in collaboration with the representative from the state Employment Security Commission. The state's Employment Security Commission is on-site in JobLink, adjacent to the JTRC. The Rockingham County JobLink Career Center offers a wide variety of services for individuals. On-site assistance is available from a variety of state and local agencies.

Follow-up—Counselors monitor the progress of the job-seeker after a new job has been secured, to determine the progress and comfort level of the new employee. Follow-up will also determine if skill training that had been provided meets the needs of the new employer.

During FY 1999-2000:

- 199 job-seekers received services from JTRC
- 17 job-seekers completed GEDs
- 14 job-seekers completed portions of GEDs
- 93 job-seekers obtained full-time employment
- 15 job-seekers are attending local community college

Funding

The training program uses funding authorized by the Workforce Investment Act's Intensive and Training programs, allocated by the US Department of Labor.

Fostering partnerships

The collaborative efforts of the non-profit and private industry in the county have been instrumental for the success of the citizens of Rockingham County attending the JTRC. Rockingham Community College provides instruction for the Skill Training and shares in the expense of equipment and supplies. The Council on Aging assists with transporting the job-seeker to the JTRC and any children of the job-seeker to daycare centers. The State Department of Social Services shares in the costs of training job-seekers that are referred to the JTRC and are enrolled in Work First programs. The State Employment Security Commission provides an employment counselor in the referral and placement process of job ready customers. Job Ready has an on-site representative that offers linkage to the public school system. The State Departments of Mental Health and Vocational Rehabilitation are partners that have provided services to the JTRC as the needs arose. The demonstrated support and willingness of the state to centralize services in the county encouraged non-profit entities to come together as a JobLink Center, in November 1999.

Challenges/Advice to others

There are numerous challenges associated with bringing the undereducated and poverty stricken into the workforce. The approach by JTRC is multi-pronged. By addressing both the academic and skills needs of clients as well as social and personal service needs, JTRC is able to help make the transition easier for job seekers.

By partnering with human service agencies and non-profit groups as well as local government and private industry, the needs of both the job seeker and the employer can best be served. With all these partners at the table, the maximum amount of resources can be identified for use to serve these clients

Economic Development Linkages Guide

Partners

HELP, Inc.
Job Corps
NC Council on Aging
NC Department of Mental Health
NC Department of Social Services
NC Department of Vocational Rehabilitation
NC Department of Workforce Development
NC Department of Youth Services
NC Employment Security Commission
Northwest Piedmont Council of Governments
Rockingham Community College
Rockingham County Chambers of Commerce
Rockingham County Government
Rockingham County Partnership for Children
Rockingham County Sheriff's Department

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Conclusion

The seven case studies presented in this guidebook demonstrate that regional economic development is being carried out with linkages to other strategies for community development and planning.

These profiles provide the following themes and guidance:

- It is a diverse group of participants in these linkage projects, with regional councils leading the charge. Berkshire Connect brought state legislators, local businesses, and worldwide telecommunication providers together. Triangle J had neighboring industrial companies recycling, reusing, and renewing, where formerly they were using landfills. Puget Sound convened truckers, railroad operators, planners, and citizens. Regional councils, their member communities and their partners in the public and private sectors are banding together to build strong economically vital communities. They all have a good understanding of broad-based community and economic development. Regional councils have not only this understanding, but the tools, resources, and ties to the sectors that can complete the projects.
- The reasons for linkages are also diverse. In the Puget Sound Region, economic development and transportation planning were done together to pool funding resources and also streamline the movement of goods and people. In Atlanta, planning for redevelopment of centers and transportation together was targeted as one way to decrease sprawl, provide affordable housing, increase usage of public transportation and make the best use of existing infrastructure. Workforce development and training in western North Carolina provides jobs for the unemployed and also provides businesses with skilled workers. Telecommunications infrastructure allows Western Massachusetts businesses to remain competitive and stay connected to the global marketplace. No matter what their reasons, regional councils recognized that by thinking in broad-based terms about economic and community development, successful enterprises would be facilitated.
- The common elements among these many cases are the new partnerships developed; a strong communication emphasis; broad-based thinking; pooling of resources; bringing in consultants for specialized expertise; and having a strong vision. As it often is found that two heads are better than one, combining strategies in a flexible fashion is also often better than a single focus plan. Seeking linkages has allowed regional councils to leverage their communities' resources for creative economic development. With this creativity and flexibility, these regional groups have also been able to address many of the hot topics across the nation and in government: workforce development, environmental protection, technology, and smart growth.
- Other regional councils can follow suit and/or champion their regional efforts. There is more and more emphasis at the federal level on creative use of funds to accomplish program goals. Regional Councils can draw from a number of federal, state, and local government resources to carry out their economic development linkage strategies. For example, EDA, EPA, and DOT were among the federal agencies that were funding partners with regional councils on these projects. With more and more familiarity with these successful creative linkage projects, resource providers may allocate increased funding. With that support, leveraging of local support from businesses or other private sector groups could easily follow.

Success in these types of projects should be a source of pride for these councils as well, and that pride is not something that needs to be hidden. These success stories are able to help others learn and serve as examples of the creativity found in all parts of the country. Serving as a peer resource can provide regional groups with additional contacts for inspiration and support.

Finally, the communities are the main beneficiaries of these projects. With a strategy for economic development that includes a link to another community development strategy, citizens are receiving efficient government service. The resources, both human and fiscal, are being used to their maximum capacity. The outcomes are successful and strong regional economies.

