

# EDJ

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## From Lone Rangers to Collaborative Communities

*By John Accordino, Ph.D., AICP, and Fabrizio Fasulo, Ph.D.*

### FINDING THE CUTTING EDGE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE

Economic development was traditionally practiced by lone individuals and single organizations that focused primarily on attracting new business investment. Although competitiveness in the global economy now requires regions to wield a much wider variety of tools, existing jurisdictional, institutional, and sector boundaries may limit a region's ability to organize all of its resources to optimize economic development performance. However, some regions are finding ways to overcome structural barriers through innovative, collaborative partnerships to design and implement region-wide cluster development strategies and provide creative business development services. This article profiles some of these collaborative initiatives and draws lessons for economic development practice.

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# from lone rangers to COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES

By John Accordino, Ph.D., AICP, and Fabrizio Fasulo, Ph.D.

## INTRODUCTION

Economic development practice has come a long way since the days of Mississippi's Balance Agriculture with Industry program of the 1930s and successive generations of smokestack- and chip-plant-chasing. During that era, economic development was often pursued by lone individuals who ventured forth to hunt for new manufacturing businesses on behalf of their governments. Their work was largely unknown to the average citizen, except when newspaper headlines announced the opening of a new plant, and they were not always appreciated even by other government agencies, whose missions appeared to conflict with economic development goals.

In recent decades, the practice of economic development has gradually changed, as states and localities have begun to pay more attention to the development of competitive regional clusters, the retention and growth of existing businesses, the commercialization of research and new business creation, and the value-generating activities of skilled and creative workers. And even successful recruitment, we now know, relies on more than just access to materials, markets, and labor but also on quality-of-life factors and an entire complex of supportive local businesses and institutions. This broader notion of what constitutes local economic development has necessarily required states and localities to broaden their activities, link operational units of government, collaborate across local jurisdictional lines within regions, and develop a wide variety of public-private partnerships.



Virginia's Region 2000 has been successful in gaining community support for their objectives. Here, business, community, and government leaders come together to help Region 2000 staff members plan a comprehensive economic development strategy for the region.

It is one thing to understand the benefits of collaboration across institutional and jurisdictional boundaries, but it is quite another to be able to practice collaboration in the face of pressures that push in a different direction. And opposing pressures remain strong. Most of America's local economies – its metro areas – are still governed by many independent governments whose fiscal base remains rooted, to a large degree, in real property taxes and retail sales taxes, both of which push governments within the same metro area to compete with each other for business. To make matters worse, the general public still often does not understand the benefits of a regional economic development strategy, and this further encourages local politicians to support a narrow and sometimes self-destructive economic development policy.

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## FINDING THE CUTTING EDGE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE

*Economic development was traditionally practiced by lone individuals and single organizations that focused primarily on attracting new business investment. Although competitiveness in the global economy now requires regions to wield a much wider variety of tools, existing jurisdictional, institutional, and sector boundaries may limit a region's ability to organize all of its resources to optimize economic development performance. However, some regions are finding ways to overcome structural barriers through innovative, collaborative partnerships to design and implement region-wide cluster development strategies and provide creative business development services. This article profiles some of these collaborative initiatives and draws lessons for economic development practice.*

Related to metropolitan political fragmentation is the fragmentation among economic development functions that hampers some local efforts. In some cases, this may be due to the fact that a community's economic development approach has developed in stages over time, with new concerns – e.g., business retention and expansion, new business formation and development, infrastructure development, or knowledge creation and commercialization – being viewed as the mission of some other organization. In other cases, notably workforce development, federal government funding has required the development of separate entities that have traditionally been disconnected from economic development agencies.

For some time now, metropolitan government and tax-base sharing arrangements have been advocated as remedies for the problems of local political fragmentation. But these ideas remain political non-starters in most parts of the United States. So how can economic development practitioners best work within the parameters of existing local government political, fiscal, and institutional structures and still promote development effectively?

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A recent survey of “best-practice” economic development cases reveals a number of ways that regions can make great strides in economic development through skillfully organized collaboration across jurisdictional, institutional, and sector boundaries. These communities were identified by nationally known economic development professionals as exemplary practitioners of one or more of the traditional economic development tasks of business recruitment, retention/expansion, new business formation/development, and workforce/talent development.

A close analysis of these organizations revealed that they pursue these missions through innovative collaboration across jurisdictional and institutional lines, and they enlist a wide variety of partners and volunteers to participate in achieving their missions. Many have gone a considerable distance toward educating the public and making economic development a shared, community-wide endeavor, thereby creating a strong foundation upon which to build further efforts. (See methodological note.)

This article provides profiles of the collaborative aspects of a sub-set of these cases. It focuses first on a couple of exemplary practitioners of inter-jurisdictional or inter-institutional collaboration. The article then highlights a few innovative, collaborative partnerships and



*Virginia's Region 2000 Partnership works with local companies to identify opportunities for growth. Here, Bryan David, executive director, (right) discusses recent changes in manufacturing operations with RR Donnelley's plant manager, Bob Leveque.*

initiatives; some noteworthy peer-to-peer collaboration efforts (in which businesses advise each other through well-structured processes) and the creative use of volunteers in economic development; and finishes with an example of how an aggressive regional branding campaign can build support for economic development. The article concludes with a brief discussion of the lessons to be learned from these cases. No single cause seems to have brought these initiatives into being, but all are characterized by a willingness to think beyond traditional boundaries. Although quantitative analyses of the impacts of these efforts are beyond the scope of this article, it reports the results as related by program staff.

## INTER-JURISDICTIONAL AND INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL COLLABORATION

**Research Triangle Regional Partnership (RTRP, North Carolina)** is arguably the poster child of regional collaboration. It is a public-private partnership comprised of 13 counties, 34 chambers of commerce, 30 CEOs, six university presidents, and nine institutional partners, including the Raleigh Chamber of Commerce and the Small Business Development Council. It is governed by a 56-member Board of Directors with representatives from each of the 13 counties, and it works with the North Carolina Department of Commerce and a wide range of public and private partners. An Economic Development Advisory Committee comprised of economic developers from each of the 13 counties meets monthly to plan and implement strategic marketing efforts.

The primary reason why this far-flung organization exists is the Research Triangle Park itself, a powerhouse that has enjoyed strong leadership since its inception a half century ago and which lies near the geographic center of the RTRP region. The park exerts a unifying force on the region and fosters a strong norm among all private and public sector partners of “play nice or go home,” as a staff member put it, which keeps both urban and rural communities engaged.

RTRP's cluster development strategy, devised and implemented since 2001, illustrates how collaboration works in this region. The 2001-02 recession stimulated RTRP to take a recently completed cluster analysis of the Research Triangle region conducted by Michael Porter as part of a national study, and make it usable for local development purposes.

RTRP identified eight clusters (most in the science and technology fields, especially health care related) considered to hold the highest potential for boosting economic growth. This was followed by a process in which RTRP staff held over 100 meetings with numerous stakeholders throughout the region to discuss the technical results and their implications for the region. In this way, the RTRP leadership developed a shared understanding about what economic development really means and how it could be connected to a particular strategy – in this case, the cluster-based development strategy.



*TREO's Economic Blueprint was the result of an intensive process where community events like this one portrayed in these pictures played an important role.*

The RTRP leadership then met four times to consider clusters as the basis of a regional development strategy, and the specific clusters that had been identified. The leadership voted to pursue the cluster strategy. The results in terms of business development and job growth have been so satisfying that the RTRP has made cluster-based development the core of its approach.

Implementation of the RTRP cluster strategy entails a number of actions, including regular meetings of the CEOs of the cluster groups themselves and very close work with the universities that are key players in the clusters to link research and product development with production facilities in the region. Other informal groups have regular so-called “alignment” meetings. These include monthly informal meetings of foundation presidents, chamber of commerce representatives, and RTRP staff, where the region's big economic development issues are written on a white board and discussed.



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These processes build upon, and also enforce, the region's “culture of collaboration,” as one RTRP staff member called it. People are asked to come to meetings and to think about regional development opportunities in which their organizations can participate, and they do so.

**Tucson Regional Economic Opportunities, Inc. (TREO)** is the lead economic development agency that serves the Tucson MSA, which is comprised of Pima County and includes the city of Tucson. Established in 2005, it pursues an integrated, cluster-based approach that includes new business creation, business expansion and attraction, and workforce development and attraction. Its development and implementation of the Economic Blueprint, an economic development plan for the Tucson area, shows that the pursuit of a true cluster-based strategy requires not only strong technical analysis but also the active engagement of multiple institutions and stakeholders, which, in turn,

requires collaborative decision making, implementation, and monitoring of results.

TREO employed a collaborative model because it seemed to be the only way to make the economic strategy work. As one staff person stated: “If they [all stakeholders in the community] write it, they'll underwrite it.”

The Economic Blueprint development process included a strong technical component, in which consultants worked with four TREO staff members for several months to identify five key cluster areas. This technical process was embedded within a community-wide participatory process. The process involved not only the industries in the cluster groups but also over 6,000 persons and various public, private, and non-profit organizations through community presentations and meetings, focus



groups, interviews, and one-on-one meetings. Materials describing the development planning process were published in English and Spanish. The Blueprint Steering Committee – which TREO designed with advice from an external consultant – was comprised of 46 members representing public, private, and community leaders.

Using this carefully designed cluster-identification process, TREO developed what one staff person called a “shared conceptual framework of competitiveness.” This shared conceptual framework pays dividends, as TREO frequently refers to the Blueprint in its own messaging and in its encouragement of community and government action on education, transportation, and other elements that support economic development.

To implement the Economic Blueprint, TREO launched an Economic Blueprint Mobilization Strategy, a process of engaging stakeholders in more than 50 organizations to identify five major focus areas for inter-institutional collaboration (high-skilled/high-wage jobs, educational excellence, livable communities, urban renaissance, and collaborative governance). TREO then created an Economic Blueprint Mobilization Council tasked with forging strong ties among partner organizations and TREO to ensure that implementation of the Economic Blueprint occurs.

Finally, TREO commissioned the University of Arizona to develop a Community Report Card to assess annually the community’s progress in implementing the Economic Blueprint. The Report Card results have been very positive to date and the reports themselves have served to keep the subject of economic development and its importance for community well-being before the public.

**Region 2000 Partnership**, which serves the Lynchburg, VA MSA, a region comprised of 2,000 square miles and 250,000 residents, has developed an innovative approach to integrate all of its development-related functions to serve the six independent local jurisdictions in the MSA. In 2007, staff from all of the area’s regional development-related organizations – the Economic Development Partnership, Local Government Council, Technology Council, Workforce Investment Board, Young Professionals of Central Virginia, and the Center for Advanced Engineering and Research – became employees of the Planning District Commission (one of 22 regional transportation and development planning organizations in Virginia). As a result, about 20 staff were co-located in one building.

This ambitious experiment took shape when the community’s private and public sector leaders, who work well together despite the region’s economic challenges, decided that to further modernize the economy and combat structural unemployment in the region they would need to focus as many resources as possible on economic de-



*Seattle Jobs Initiative Office Occupations program graduates Dana Choe (far left) and Lesley Buchanan (back, second from left) with co-workers and supervisors at employer RGA Environmental in Seattle, Washington, 2011.*



*Virginia’s Region 2000 Partnership, with its six independent organizations, went through a re-branding process in 2009 to better communicate the organization’s unique structure. As part of the process, the organization selected a new logo to show the six organizations as one “umbrella unit”.*

velopment programs and minimize the overhead expenses of multiple offices.

The physical co-location is mirrored by functional integration as well. The boards of directors of all of the organizations are cross-populated and staff of the six entities hold regular meetings as a group. The Region 2000 Partnership has a coordinating council comprised of two members from each of the six consolidated organizations, which does strategic planning for the entire partnership, for the entire region. This ties together all of the strategic plans. Co-location enables staff of the various organizations to easily share information, which enhances the performance of each individual organization. In short, the consolidated physical and organizational structure has made possible both continuous in-

formal collaboration and better policy coordination.

Success with this level of collaboration has led to more initiatives, such as a new business park that is shared by two rural counties in the MSA and regional landfill consolidation. As of 2010, the partnership was discussing the possibility of consolidating all of the functions of the local (individual jurisdictions’) economic development offices at the regional level. The main quantifiable impact of the consolidation to date has been the significant reduction in overhead expenses. Also, job gains – the organization’s major metric – outpaced the state in one year, although they fell somewhat behind in the next. Still, the region’s overall performance has been much better than one would expect of a mature industrial-agricultural area that is transitioning to a more vibrant economy.

**Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI)** is not an inter-jurisdictional collaboration, but it is an excellent example of how communication across institutional boundaries can help communities succeed at a notoriously challenging task – workforce development that takes disadvantaged

and structurally unemployed persons through training in marketable skills and into permanent jobs at middle wages. SJI was initiated in 1993 when Mayor Norm Rice, frustrated by the lack of connection between workforce training and economic development, moved the workforce development function into the city's Office of Economic Development.

Almost two decades later, SJI (which is now a private, non-profit organization) continues to succeed, partly because of its ongoing and thorough research of the Puget Sound job market but more so because of its tight linkages with community colleges and other education and training providers on the one hand, and with employers on the other. These linkages are nurtured through three groups that SJI has established:

- *Project Managers* serve as the liaison among students, the community college, community-based organizations (which provide other services), and SJI. Project Managers handle students' life-skills issues, connect with students' social-service case managers, organize pre-training orientation and job shadowing, develop peer mentoring arrangements, and help community colleges develop new programs to better meet students' needs.
- *Employer Brokers* work closely with employers to ensure that the training students get meets employers' needs. They work with community colleges and other trainers to make necessary curriculum adjustments, and they cultivate employers to hire students who have completed their training.
- *Employer Champion Group* is organized by SJI and consists of the human resource managers of employers who are seeking workers, as well as the community and technical colleges. It meets regularly to discuss workforce development issues and new training program ideas.

SJI boasts admirable results to date. According to staff persons, each year 70 percent to 80 percent of the people placed into courses complete them, and 57 percent to 80 percent of these graduates are subsequently placed into full-time jobs with benefits and a career track.

## COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS AND INITIATIVES

**Orlando Medical City** represents one of the most ambitious initiatives to come from multi-lateral regional collaboration among public and private organizations. It was organized principally by the Metro Orlando Economic Development Council, a private-public partnership that serves the Orlando region, as part of its effort to build a life-science and biotechnologies cluster. The idea for investment in biotech came from an initiative in 2003 by Governor Jeb Bush to diversify the economy. The state expended nearly \$1 billion to recruit biotech research institutes over the next five years.

The first major piece of the initiative was put in place when the University of Central Florida started a medical school, demonstrating to the business community its

commitment to make the life-science and biotechnology sector grow. The potential for bio-tech research growth became even more evident when the Metro Orlando EDC recruited the Burnham Institute for Medical Research to Orlando's Lake Nona. Soon after, the Metro Orlando EDC led the process of forming a life-science council. Over a period of 180 days, focus groups, personal interviews, extensive research, and travel to 12 life-science regions in North America occurred. The result of this collaborative work was the launch of the bioOrlando Council in July 2007.

One of the bioOrlando Council's most important accomplishments was the founding of Orlando Medical City as a location in which to concentrate the region's budding life-science and biotechnologies cluster.

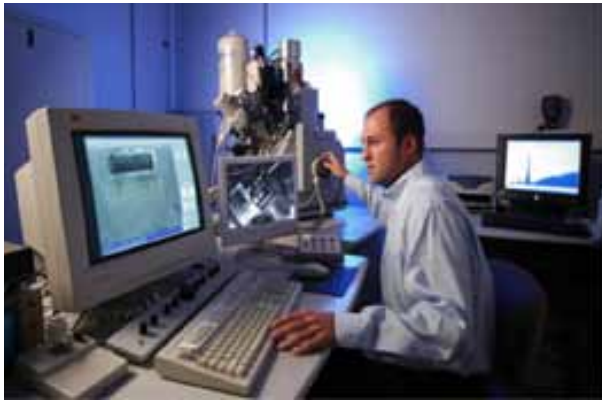


*Aerial views of Orlando Medical City under construction in Lake Nona.*

Photo Credits: MacbethPhoto.com - courtesy of Lake Nona

One of the bioOrlando Council's most important accomplishments was the founding of Orlando Medical City as a location in which to concentrate the region's budding life-science and biotechnologies cluster. To bring this about, Metro Orlando EDC coordinated a number of private and public stakeholders, including a large, private landowner; two universities; the Burnham Institute; the Orlando hospital system; and some of the local jurisdictions served by Metro Orlando EDC. The University of Central Florida decided to create a new biotech research capability and saw the opportunity to team with the Burnham Institute and other top medical and research entities. Both institutions decided to locate in a common site and to attract other business and research institutes to the site, understanding the economies-of-scale that could be captured there.

The location in the Southeast and good fortune clearly played a role in this case. However, without strong public and private sector leadership around a goal that was



*"All of the tools necessary to start a successful company are here. The KIZ and its various programs have been very beneficial to our company's growth. Their Technology Transfer grant enabled us to successfully compete for and win a large award from the National Institutes of Health to continue the development of our product."*  
 – William Van Geertruyden, co-owner, EMV Technologies

widely shared by partners throughout the region and without a history of strong partnerships in the area, it is unlikely that the Medical Center initiative could have become a reality. Metro Orlando EDC is tracking the economic impacts of the biotech cluster over time. In the meantime, construction is proceeding on schedule, with almost \$2 billion reportedly invested to date. In addition, the development of the biotech cluster has opened new possibilities for collaborative partnerships with other Orlando industries.

**Southside Bethlehem Keystone Innovation Zone (KIZ, Pennsylvania)** initiative shows how collaborative partnerships can tap the strengths of a major research university and community colleges to help drive an innovative business and talent development strategy. Pennsylvania initiated the KIZ program in 2004 for areas that are home to institutions of higher education, including community colleges and associate degree-granting technical schools. By gathering the combined resources of schools, private businesses, banks, and economic development agencies, partnerships are created that assist entrepreneurs and early-stage businesses and create a "knowledge neighborhood" that enhances the urban environment of innovation and entrepreneurship.

State funding is matched by local (public and private) funds, with the state portion to diminish each year. To date, Southside Bethlehem is reportedly the only KIZ to wean itself entirely of state support.

The Southside Bethlehem KIZ consists of 14 partner organizations (including a local bank, three hospitals, and seven economic development support organizations), selected for their strategic importance to the goal of the KIZ program. This goal is to foster the growth and cultivation of new ideas and new businesses that will drive regional economic growth and create new opportunities. It is administered by the Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation, a private, not-for-profit, full-service busi-

ness and economic development agency that promotes development in Lehigh and Northampton Counties.

The primary activity of the Southside Bethlehem KIZ is to provide seed funding to encourage collaboration among faculty, students, and companies within the designated zone, and also to enhance commercialization in specific areas. For Southside Bethlehem, these areas are information technology, life sciences, advanced materials, nanotechnology, optoelectronics, and financial services. These clusters were chosen because they match Lehigh University's strengths.

To date, the Southside Bethlehem KIZ has funded more than \$450,000 in Technology Transfer Grants to 24 new start-up companies, leveraging more than \$11 million in total investment. Most of the companies that have benefited from KIZ seed funding have been started by undergraduate students. Also, both undergraduate and graduate students are placed into paid internships in advanced-technology businesses in the region, and some

of these internships become full-time jobs. The program is rapidly expanding, and there is a plan to create a business incubator to better facilitate the start-up process.



*Tim Marks (foreground) and Pat Clasen (rear), as Lehigh University undergraduates, invented a novel propeller pump for high-end reef aquariums, the VorTech™ pump, thanks to the KIZ program. Clasen says, "My plan was never to stay here. But because of the programs and the facilities, this is a great place to start a business. We've been able to make this into a functioning business. Hopefully, we're blazing a trail that other student companies can follow."*

## PEER-TO-PEER COLLABORATION AND VOLUNTEERS

Economic developers know that businesses themselves are often the most effective source of assistance to other businesses – their peers. But the trick is to organize this kind of collaboration so that it achieves maximum benefit with the least possible expenditure of time from the businesses. The **High-Impact Program, a creation of Greater Louisville, Inc. (GLI)**, includes such peer-to-peer consulting arrangements. GLI serves a 26-county region in Kentucky and Indiana. It initiated the High-Impact Program in 2003, after Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson had conducted a series of focus groups with area businesses and discovered their dissatisfaction with the lack of attention to the needs of existing, growing businesses.

The High-Impact Program identifies and provides special services to companies that are locally owned and which have a disproportionately higher impact on job growth and development of the metropolitan economy because they are either Gazelles (fast-growth companies at least four years old), Renaissance Companies (companies at least 15 years old, with 10 percent annual growth and undergoing change or revitalization), or Enablers (organizations like incubators, with a vital product or service that enables fast growth in other companies).



The High-Impact Program's many services include the CEO Roundtables, which are peer-to-peer consulting groups whose members meet frequently to share ideas and serve as an advisory board for each other on how to deal with the challenges of growth. They generate their own agendas but rely upon GLI staff to organize and staff the meetings, and to find information and commission studies from local universities and others on topics of interest to the businesses. According to staff, the success of such efforts is evidenced by the fact that business leaders attend in person, rather than sending representatives, and they keep coming to the meetings.

A similar GLI initiative is **Enterprise Corp.**, whose mission is to increase the number and quality of fast-growth companies headquartered in the Louisville region. Enterprise Corp. works with early-stage, fast-growth companies (younger than four years) that then become prospects for the High-Impact Program when they are four years old.



Former Louisville Metro Mayor Jerry Abramson (right) presenting the High Impact award to Vidya Ravichandran, president of GlowTouch Technologies Inc., also an Inc. 500 company.

Some of Enterprise Corp's most innovative services include peer-to-peer group arrangements. One is the Business Review Board, which is comprised of CEOs, entrepreneurs, Fortune-500 executives, and SBDC consultants. Once each month, prospective entrepreneurs can pitch their plans to the Business Review Board, much as they would to a bank or investor, and receive immediate feedback. The services also include monthly Performance Roundtables, which bring together 10-12 non-competing new business owners (without vendors) who constitute a sounding board for each entrepreneur as s/he formulates and pursues business goals and who provide advice if things do not go as planned.

**Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce** is an excellent example of how motivated volunteers can help achieve an economic development organization's mission. The Greater Austin Chamber relies on volunteers to help run the organization and administer many of

its community-based programs. The chamber raises almost all of its funds from private contributions, so using volunteers helps it to administer programs that it would not otherwise be able to afford, and it also helps the organization maintain community awareness of the chamber's activities, which, in turn, helps to support fundraising activities.

The first level of volunteers helps to guide the chamber of commerce by serving on the Economic Development Board of Directors, which consists of about 25 members who meet quarterly. The next layer of about 65 volunteers represents lead investor companies. They meet monthly to discuss pressing economic development issues and ways to address them. There are also special committees formed for each targeted attraction industry group, with five to 15 people on each committee. Volunteers assist with marketing missions as well.

## REGIONAL BRANDING

Regional branding is not necessarily a collaborative endeavor. However, since good branding has both an internal and an external face, it can play a vital role in creating a community-wide climate that supports collaborative endeavors and economic development generally.

**Kansas City Area Development Council (KCADC)** provides a noteworthy example of good branding. KCADC is a private, not-for-profit organization that leads economic development for the vast, 18-county Kansas City region, which has about 2.4 million residents. Because of the region's size and because there is a natural rivalry between Kansas and Missouri, the two states in which the MSA is located, internal division can easily trump regional thinking and collaborative development.

In order to encourage Kansas City residents to view the area as a single region, KCADC began the ThinkKC and the OneKC branding campaigns in 2004. These campaigns serve as both an internal and external advertisement for the region, and they emphasize the fact that businesses in the region can create advantages for themselves if they act regionally. Many businesses signed an "interdependence contract," and now more than 250 companies and communities use the brand in

their own marketing efforts. Although no formal studies of the economic impacts of the ThinkKC branding campaign have been conducted, staff report that it has now evolved into a true regional brand, aiding both fundraising and business attraction efforts by binding a politically fragmented area into a single economic region.

## CONCLUSION

What can we learn from these cases? The big news is not that there are regional economic development organizations. Most metro areas and many non-metro areas have in place economic development organizations that, at least nominally, serve the entire region. But in many



High Impact Portfolio awards are presented each year to the newly selected companies exhibiting fast growth.



cases, such regional economic development organizations still may be limited to serving as business recruiters for the individual jurisdictions that comprise the metro area, rather than really developing the region's economy in a collaborative way, or, in some cases, their service area may not even include all jurisdictions in the local economy. In the cases profiled here, however, collaboration among jurisdictions, businesses, and sectors (public, private, and non-profit) has become a way of doing business.

Yet, collaboration itself is not the goal in these cases. Rather, collaboration has come about because organizations have needed it to achieve their goals, and they have been smart enough to figure out how to do it well. As one organization director interviewed for this study put it: "People only collaborate when it is in their interests to do so." How do they do it? The following seem to be common features.

**Regional Development Planning:** "Planning is for sissies, or at least some people see it that way," said an economic development expert recently when asked why more regions don't put more time and resources into participatory planning for economic development. In the past, this criticism may have been apt. "Planning" was limited to land-use regulation and other things that seemed to needlessly constrain business, whereas economic development has always been devoted to the serious work of facilitating business development.

But two changes have rendered that view increasingly obsolete. First, communities and planners now value economic development more than they may have done in the past (though they may not yet completely understand it). Second, contemporary economic development is more complex and requires the organization of more local assets, controlled by a wider variety of local actors, than the traditional development model comprehended. Organizing and focusing assets requires good planning and collaboration among the entities that control those assets.

The cases profiled here provide some evidence for that. What is common to all of them is a deliberative process – frequent processes, in fact – involving the region's stakeholders. This may seem time consuming, but there is no other way to establish and maintain a deep and widely shared consensus on the need to support economic development and the specific initiatives that various organizations are pursuing. The organizations profiled here put time and resources into both the technical-analytical side of planning and the stakeholder participation side; they carefully link technical analysis with stakeholder participation and strategy implementation; and they frequently update their strategies through more research and more discussions. These time consuming processes, our informants told us, produce good strategies, as well as supportive political climates for economic development and the initiatives it can produce.

**Regional Thinking:** The planning and development occurring in these communities take a regional perspective, comprehending the entire local economy and its assets, not just some of the political jurisdictions in it.

But regional thinking does not necessarily require restructuring local government to make a single, regional governing body. Most of the communities profiled here are comprised of multiple jurisdictions, each of which needs to collect real estate and sales tax revenues in order to function. But by thinking regionally, they have found ways to collaborate across jurisdictional lines and they are engaging in increasingly ambitious initiatives.

**Regional Leadership:** In each of the communities described here, key projects that launched region-wide collaboration grew from sparks ignited by a handful of leaders. Such leaders can come from various parts of the business and development community – CEOs of major corporations or locally owned businesses, university presidents, politicians, chamber of commerce presidents, and others.

Successful economic development practitioners continually seek to identify such leadership, to facilitate it, and to recognize it publicly when it emerges. In the absence of strong leadership from the business or development community, economic development practitioners themselves may have to exercise more leadership, at least finding ways to educate decision makers and the broader public about the value of regional collaboration and economic development generally. They can also remind decision makers that the more collaborative initiatives occur, the more opportunity they will have to teach their constituents what economic development means and, thereby, build stronger support for it.

Despite the apparent advantages of collaboration, some local officials may be reluctant to embrace it fully, or to devote much time or effort to exploring the possibilities. True collaboration cannot be forced.

**True Collaboration Is Voluntary:** Despite the apparent advantages of collaboration, some local officials may be reluctant to embrace it fully, or to devote much time or effort to exploring the possibilities. True collaboration cannot be forced. The important lesson of the cases profiled here is that, in most regions, at least some political jurisdictions and private sector actors will be interested in finding ways to collaborate. These opportunities should be seized, continually publicized, and rewarded in whatever ways are possible. As they succeed, others will see the advantages of collaboration and join in.

The sun appears to be setting on the Lone Ranger model of economic development. Now and into the future, it seems, communities will owe their economic development successes not to the work of a single individual, a single function, or to single political jurisdictions competing with others in the same metro area but to their ability to collaborate effectively and use their creativity to devise new and unique development initiatives.

### Methodological Note

The article is based upon the results of an extensive study completed for the Greater Richmond Partnership. As part of that study, we asked several nationally-known economic development consultants to name the local (regional) economic development groups that have most effectively organized business recruitment, business retention & expansion, new business formation & development, and workforce development & talent attraction, including cluster-based development. We studied the secondary and web-based literature about these efforts

and then conducted confidential interviews with key staff in each organization. (See Accordino, John, Fabrizio Fasulo and Grace Festa: *A Regional Reset: Building upon GRP's Strengths to Enhance Economic Development in the Richmond Region*, May 7, 2010.)

### Acknowledgment

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