

## TEAM

*By Maury Forman*

### **WASHINGTON STATE'S APPROACH TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

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America. While some urban communities continue to find success in recruiting businesses, rural communities are spending time, money, and resources unsuccessfully in their efforts of growing their economy. Washington State has focused on a new strategy for rural communities, called TEAM, that supports practitioners, entrepreneurs, and small businesses with Technical assistance, Education and training, Access to capital, and Mentoring and networking. Washington has created a network of unique and innovative programs, publications, and partnerships that have proved successful in creating businesses and jobs in rural communities by investing locally.

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# TEAM

By Maury Forman

**T**he tools used for economic development, whether at the state, regional or local level, haven't changed much over the years. For the last five decades or so, the economic development mantra has been to live or die by the three-legged stool theory.

Those legs, of course, are Business Recruitment, Business Retention/Expansion, and Community Development. As the theory goes, if one or more of these legs are broken or are not part of your strategy, your economic development strategy is doomed from the start.

What we've found more recently is that economic development is not a one-size fits-all strategy for success. Communities have discovered, particularly in rural parts of the country, that business recruitment can be an extremely heavy lift. This is due largely to long lead times on major projects; often three to five years, sometimes even longer.

Unfortunately, landing a big project is still attractive to elected officials who hold the purse strings to many economic development budgets. While these projects make front-page news in communities, they rarely pay off as a long-term investment since they often require tax credits, deferrals, and even large payouts of cash to land them. While these incentives are attractive to businesses, they rob communities and states of additional revenue and resources, often for decades. To make matters

worse, they make existing companies feel ignored with outsiders reaping all the benefits.

I understand that some companies may have very good reasons to relocate. Companies need to grow just as communities do for all sorts of reasons – increased profits, faster supply lines, access to markets, expanded inventory, product development, innovation requiring larger or different skilled workforce – to name just a few.

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But many companies leave because of the way they are treated by a community or because of laws and regulations passed by elected officials and implemented by bureaucracies. They believe they are not supported with resources, policy or legislation that will help them grow and become sustainable in their existing location.

## 50 Ways to Leave a Community

Some years ago I wrote a training exercise with a site selector. It was based on a parody of Paul Simon's 1975

hit, *50 Ways to Leave Your Lover*. We called it *50 Ways to Leave a Community*. The goal of the exercise was to identify what communities do that cause a business to leave town.

If you are a millennial and have no idea who Paul Simon is, the song had a catchy little refrain to it. To save you time Googling it, the lyrics went something like this:

*Slip out the back, Jack, /  
Make a new plan, Stan, /  
Hop on the bus, Gus, /*

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His recognitions include IEDC's Jeffrey A. Finkle Organizational Leadership Award and the AEDC (now IEDC) Richard Preston Award for Educational Merit.

He has written 18 books on economic development. His latest, co-authored with Michael Shuman, is *Washington Dollars, Washington Sense: A Handbook for Local Investing*. (maury.forman@gmail.com)

## WASHINGTON STATE'S APPROACH TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic developers have been practicing the same strategies in their profession for decades. They have focused on luring businesses to their area with incentives and credits that get paid for with future revenues. Amazon recently received almost 250 proposals for its HQ2 from communities all over North America. While some urban communities continue to find success in recruiting businesses, rural communities are spending time, money, and resources unsuccessfully in their efforts of growing their economy. Washington State has focused on a new strategy for rural communities, called TEAM, that supports practitioners, entrepreneurs, and small businesses with Technical assistance, Education and training, Access to capital, and Mentoring and networking. Washington has created a network of unique and innovative programs, publications, and partnerships that have proved successful in creating businesses and jobs in rural communities by investing locally.

Washington State has certainly seen its share of business recruitments and as part of a larger strategy, recruitment is still important in communities large and small. Increasingly, though, economic developers throughout the state, especially in rural counties, are looking at a new stool – a four-legged one – to drive growth and strengthen communities from within.

*You don't need to be coy, Roy, /  
Just drop off the key, Lee..."*

Our class parody paralleled it:

*Ignore the biz, Liz,  
Create a new tax, Max,  
Write a bad reg, Meg,  
Just need more space, Grace,  
Limited talent pool, Jewell...  
Got no lifestyle, Kyle*

The class came up with dozens of reasons. Many of them, if realized, would have kept any company from relocating. People in the class told stories about what they could have done to retain a business they eventually lost and how they were going to change their practices when they got back to the office. It seemed as if the exercise went from class instruction to group therapy. I won't bore you with all the lyrics that were written. Suffice it to say, it was a great exercise, which one day could turn into a Grammy Award winning song that could end up making millions or become the national anthem for economic developers sung before every IEDC annual meeting.

At a minimum, the song could be a good launching point for remembering that it is far more productive to help a local company become big than trying to attract the proverbial "big fish" with monetary bait. It could be a financial boon to communities who go from searching for the big fish to growing the big fish.

Washington State has certainly seen its share of business recruitments and as part of a larger strategy, recruitment is still important in communities large and small. Increasingly, though, economic developers throughout the state, especially in rural counties, are looking at a new stool – a four-legged one – to drive growth and strengthen communities from within. This TEAM strategy focuses on mapping assets, developing entrepreneurs, and investing in existing local companies through:

Technical Assistance  
Education and Training  
Access to Capital  
Mentoring and Networking

The TEAM strategy came to fruition in 2013 when the state joined the Kauffman Foundation to celebrate **Global Entrepreneurship Week**. GEW, an international event of entrepreneurship, is the world's largest celebra-

tion of innovators and job creators and focused on the primary needs of successful entrepreneurship: Technical assistance, education and training, access to capital, and mentoring and networking. In 2015 GEW in Washington involved more than 200 events statewide, including business plan competitions, symposiums, workshops, and panels. Each event or program was locally inspired and implemented with minimum dollars. Over 10,000 people attended at least one of the 200 events. Entrepreneurs were born, made, supported, highlighted, and celebrated in every single county during this one-week period. Given that there were so many events packed in one week, the following year, Governor Jay Inslee issued a proclamation proclaiming the entire month of November to be Global Entrepreneurship month.

This TEAM focus has tremendous community benefits. First, the buy-in is relatively low, since many of these programs are low or zero cost. They can easily be customized and localized, meeting the unique needs of communities large and small. Best of all, they are scalable. You can start small, adjust as the program grows, and make incremental changes as you gain insight and data into how the programs are working in your own community.

TEAM should be in every community's toolbox that can add value and growth to entrepreneurs, existing businesses, and the community. Since technical assistance, education and training, access to capital, and mentoring and networking can take many forms, I thought I would offer some of the programs Washington State economic developers and their team of partners have launched to give you an idea how simple the TEAM concept can be to initiate, manage, and grow.

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

In 2016, the Washington State Department of Commerce developed a **Community Outreach** program where members of a team visit rural communities on a regular basis to connect local needs with state resources. Commerce has more than 100 programs available to address various community and economic development issues. The outreach team's role is to identify problems and leverage these programs as well as other state agency services, non profit and for profit organizations, land grant universities and community colleges, and elected officials

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to address them. The outreach team members practically live in their cars as they travel from one community to another, meeting with local leaders and stakeholders to find out what assistance and resources are needed and making recommendations and referrals. They played an incredibly important role this past year as a result of the terrible impacts on rural communities due to infrastructure problems, severe mudslides, and record-breaking forest fires. The outreach team facilitated the recovery of many rural communities by utilizing every aspect of the TEAM strategy.

At the entrepreneur/small business level, the state created a comprehensive resource website, **Startup.Choose WashingtonState.com**, which has how-to articles, grant opportunities, book reviews, co-working space locations, investors, resources for targeted sectors, and other technical assistance for communities and practitioners. The site receives thousands of visits each month since it was launched. In addition, several communities have co-branded startup with their county and provided links to the site.

Focusing on the expansion of our successful businesses, the Department of Commerce teamed up with the Edward Lowe Foundation and its National Strategic Research Team to assist numerous second stage companies throughout the state. This **Economic Gardening** program targeted rural growth-oriented firms in underserved areas that have moved beyond startup but haven't reached maturity yet. It included peer learning and strategic information geared to help Washington companies to continue growing. In less than a year, 35 CEOs in various sectors had completed the program with commitments to grow jobs. CEOs have been so impressed with the results that they willingly reach out to other CEOs in the state to be a part of the program.

Statewide, the Department of Commerce helped local economic development practitioners become certified in Economic Gardening. Providing small grants, the training provided participants with the critical knowledge of the Economic Gardening framework as well as the process followed in company engagements. This allowed them to attend the CEO conversations and continue to assist in their business expansion and retention efforts. Thirteen people became certified from a variety of organizations that ranged from economic developers to chamber presidents to community college administrators to state employees. This inexpensive strategy, combined

The **Regulatory Roadmap** online business planning tools distill all local, regional, and state requirements into easy-to-understand sequential worksheets and checklists for opening a restaurant, and gauging feasibility of sites for manufacturing facilities. Work is underway to create a **Regulatory Roadmap** for contractors, in accordance with legislative direction and funding. Other sectors and several local jurisdictions have expressed an interest in developing **Regulatory Roadmaps** for additional business sectors.

with CEO endorsements, proved to be an important marketing effort in rural communities.

**Make it in Washington** is one of ten Make it in America grants offered in a cooperative federal venture. It required an on the ground partnership between the Innovate Washington Foundation, Impact Washington and the state's Workforce Board. The project offered both technical assistance and sponsored education options to small manufacturers in 31 rural counties across the state. As a result of this project, more than 260 businesses in 29 counties were contacted and supported with technical assistance. Fifty of those businesses participated in the educational program and 132 of their student/employees completed 1,360 courses, advancing not only their employer but their careers as well.

The Inland Northwest Partners (INP), a 501 c-3 community economic development educational non-profit based in Liberty Lake, Wash., is working with the Washington Department of Commerce for the continuation and enhancement of the Startup Washington 365 Program for Whitman and Asotin Counties. The professional services provided focus on connecting entrepreneurs with resources to further their development, act as a champion for entrepreneurship, and promote the **Startup Washington 365 Program** throughout the region. Since inception in 2015, Startup Washington has helped nearly 200 entrepreneurs who have succeeded in establishing 51 new ventures. As a result of its success, the Washington state legislature approved \$250,000 to fund Commerce's Startup Washington 365 rural economic development programs in those rural counties through the 2017-19 biennium.

Most small business owners are concerned with regulatory issues that make it difficult to do business. The Department of Commerce partnered with local jurisdictions, state regulatory agencies, and the business community to create **Regulatory Roadmaps**, an online navigational free guide that helps improve the business regulatory experience. The Regulatory Roadmap online business planning tools distill all local, regional, and state requirements into easy-to-understand sequential worksheets and checklists for opening a restaurant, and gauging feasibility of sites for manufacturing facilities. Work is underway to create a **Regulatory Roadmap** for contractors, in accordance



*Economic Gardening growing second stage companies in Washington.*

with legislative direction and funding. Other sectors and several local jurisdictions have expressed an interest in developing Regulatory Roadmaps for additional business sectors.

The Department of Commerce has been recognized nationally for its economic development publications. They have produced over 20 books to assist practitioners and businesses. One of the more unique and practical books has become a must read for business owners. As any economic development professional knows, a manmade or natural disaster can wreak havoc on even the most successful business. To help companies plan for and minimize the effects of a disaster, the Department of Commerce produced a do-it-yourself crisis planner, **When Disaster Strikes**, which walks business owners through the process for identifying potential business disruptors, minimizing risk, predicting outcomes, and getting back in business after a crisis passes. All Commerce written and produced publications are downloadable for free on <http://startup.choosewashingtonstate.com/>.

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Washington State has had an Education and Training program in the Department of Commerce since 2001. Partnering with Business Oregon, its goal was to provide regional training to Northwest practitioners from five states and British Columbia in all aspects of economic development through the IEDC **Basic Course**. Each state and province contributed registration scholarships to its rural participants so that no practitioner was denied the opportunity to learn about economic development.

In order to add a bit of fun to a rigorous day of lectures, the course designers introduced “game show learning” in the evenings to review the day’s lessons. Over the next several years, this gave birth to *Economic Development Jeopardy*, *Community Feud*, *Who Wants to Be an Economic Developer*, *Economic Development Match*, and the *Economic Development Dating Game*. States competed with each other for local prizes from each participant’s community. This not only taught students about regional assets but also created camaraderie and lasting friendships. The basic course would soon become known as “The Games” throughout the Northwest. More than 2,000



High schoolers pitching their idea to judges at the Pitch It Business Plan Competition in Walla Walla.

economic developers have graduated from the award-winning course.

In addition to taking home regional assets, each participant was given the Commerce produced book **Learning to Lead: A Primer on Economic Development Strategies**. This book in its third printing also included the first ever comic strip about an economic developer, drawn by David Horsey, two time Pulitzer prize winner for editorial cartooning. The strip was rejected for syndication but word of mouth made it popular at economic development conferences. The book is now available on line for free and has been downloaded by thousands of people and used as a basic introduction to the profession.

Because of a demand for more education and training beyond the basics, an outgrowth of the Games was **Community Survivors**, a spin off of the popular TV show but without the participants getting thrown off the island or out of the classroom. This multi day workshop brought in presenters from other states to highlight their best practices and introduce new strategies to economic developers in the region. It also introduced board games into the education format such as **Cluster Land**, designed by the Thurston Economic Development Council, which taught practitioners about different sectors in the economy and their importance to the workforce.

With more successes came more demand for workshops. The education program broadened its focus to support a regional education ecosystem for rural and urban communities that helped communities, existing businesses, startups, and a workforce to grow from within. This effort is driven by partnerships with community colleges, nonprofit organizations, local economic development leaders, and private industry.

It is no coincidence that TEAM is not only a strategy for Washington State rural economic development initiatives but also the top four types of support that entrepreneurs voted in a survey that would help them be successful. In order to engage youth and adults in the concept of entrepreneurship, numerous rural communities focused on business plan competitions that included not only education and training but also technical assistance, access to capital, and mentoring. Over a dozen rural counties



Playing games and learning about Washington's economic sectors at Community Survivors.



Global Entrepreneurship Week Business Plan Challenge competitors in Wilbur, Washington.

conducted variations of a business plan competition. For example:

Walla Walla staged its business plan competition in 2013 as part of Global Entrepreneurship Week. The competition, which initially was open only to students and sponsored by the three area colleges, was called “**Pain in the Glass**” and was centered on developing a business to address the lack of glass recycling resources in the Walla Walla area. It was a small competition (four plans submitted), but had good energy and brought forth innovative ideas that were developed into solid business plans. Over the four years since, the competition has evolved into **Pitch-It** - a “pitch” event in which students and adults compete for their shot at \$10,000 in start-up funding and resources as well as mentorship from local entrepreneurs and business leaders to help participants launch their businesses. The competition has grown to dozens of entrants, includes public and private sponsors, and has resulted in the creation of a new vegan catering business, an art & photography studio, and a burgeoning manufacturing business created around value-add services to the local wine industry to name just a few start-ups that evolved as a result of the event.

**The Palouse Knowledge Corridor**, which serves rural southeastern Washington and north central Idaho, has an annual **Be the Entrepreneur Boot Camp**. The camp targets entrepreneurs with an idea, ready to launch an idea, and existing businesses looking to pivot. This four-day camp has graduated more than 100 entrepreneurs over the past four years.

Citizens from rural Lincoln County were asked what they saw as the greatest challenge facing the county in the next 10 years. Their response: youth outmigration. The Lincoln County Economic Development Council then partnered with the local school district in Wilbur (population 890) and started a **Business Plan Challenge** for high school students where the “challenge” was that the business had to be located in Wilbur. Now in its fourth year, the classroom project kicks off during Global Entrepreneurship Week and culminates with live presentations in mid-January. The challenge encourages students

to think about their community’s strengths and opportunities; about what it takes to start a new business; and about the impact on their community when they start businesses here.

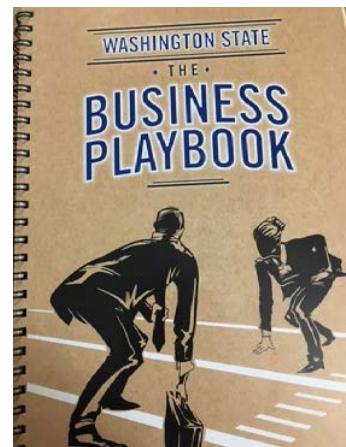
The **Washington Coast Works Sustainable Small Business Plan Competition**, which targets rural and tribal coastal communities in Grays Harbor, Jefferson, and Clallam counties, has 15 finalists that are completing a six-month education process this year that includes ideation, business classes, mentoring, a fast pitch, and a business plan competition. In the last three years, 45 triple bottom line businesses have gone through the program, nine of which received between \$5,000 and \$10,000 of seed financing to push their businesses forward, including three from tribal communities.

The **Launch San Juan Islands** business plan competition provides instruction in planning and marketing, and follow-up mentoring. With access to in-depth business seminars and counseling to everyone in the contest, all participants gain traction with their enterprises and learn what it takes to launch a successful business. Numerous businesses have emerged from this competition with products ranging from interisland food delivery to environmentally friendly marine buoys to an app that encourages people to shop local and now used in three states and British Columbia.

One of the most successful competitions, the **Enterprise Challenge**, started seven years ago in Yakima. Its success has stretched its borders so that it includes participants from two neighboring rural counties. Yakima County Development Association and the Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce now partner to host the annual Enterprise Challenge, a regional three-month business plan contest. The competition includes eight weeks of workshops, extensive mentoring, a trade show, and a shark tank presentation. The winners take home \$17,500 in prize money along with the tools, contacts, and knowledge to make their business a success. Over 150 entrepreneurs have participated and 61 of those ventures are in business today employing over 220 people with annual gross wages of over \$6 million.

Comprehensive education and training programs were not just limited to business plan competitions. Working with local economic development organizations, numerous publications, classes, and workshops were offered to help businesses start and grow throughout the state.

To help business owners navigate the often-complex process of getting a new enterprise up and running, the Department of Commerce produced **The Small Business Playbook**. Written by a Commerce employee with 20 years of experience as an entrepreneur, it contained everything a businessperson needs to



The Department of Commerce produced this playbook that provided entrepreneurs and existing business with all the critical information they needed to start and do business in Washington State. Free downloads of this book can be found at <http://startup.choosewashingtonstate.com/resources/publications/>.

Exporting products overseas is a smart growth strategy for small businesses, but figuring out how to navigate the export market, especially for rural businesses, can be difficult. In 2006, the education and training program added semi-annual export training for practitioners to its statewide curriculum. The course took place twice a year with one class on the eastern side of the state focusing on rural businesses and another class taking place in the western part of the state for urban/rural businesses.

know about starting and running a business, all in a fun football themed guide. The book was written to be homage not only to existing and future entrepreneurs but also to the Seattle Seahawk Super Bowl win. But while the Seahawks lost, Washington entrepreneurs became the winners. Nearly 2,000 copies were downloaded free the first year alone and the book has been co-branded so local economic development organizations can distribute the free publication to their community.

**ScaleUp Thurston County** is a comprehensive business-growth training program that includes in-person classroom training with one-on-one coaching to help small business owners plan and achieve their goals. The 14-week training program included 10 weeks of classroom instruction followed by four weeks of exclusive networking events. At the end of the training, businesses had developed a customized growth plan for their businesses. There were 65 graduates of the program. This program began with a grant from the federal government that unfortunately was discontinued by the current administration. It wasn't because the program wasn't successful. One CEO who graduated from the program said that with ScaleUp, his revenue grew 57 percent and increased his staff from 10 to 25. As a result of the success, the Department of Commerce is working with the Thurston Economic Development organization to continue the program.

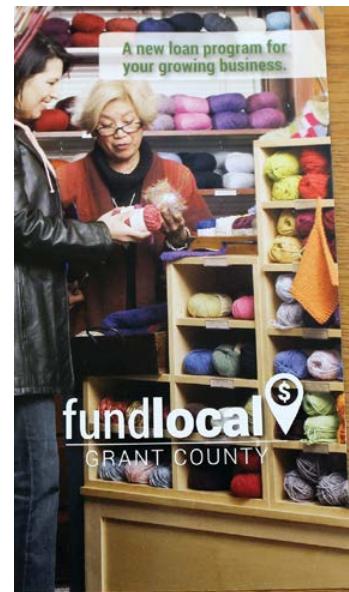
In eastern Washington, the Spokane-based investor-owned utility Avista Corporation has partnered with the Department of Commerce, two community colleges, and the Greater Spokane Inc. The **Avista Centers for Entrepreneurship** in Spokane and Asotin County offer entrepreneurship education in various formats including a credit-based curriculum, accelerated boot camps, and topic-based workshops. Since its inception, nearly 350 students have participated, leading to more than 150 businesses being launched.

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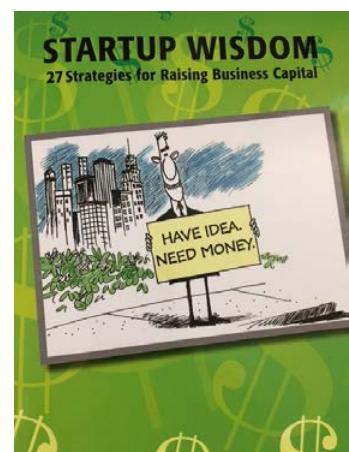
on rural businesses and another class taking place in the western part of the state for urban/rural businesses. With Washington being the most trade driven state, we also added a three-day export class, **The World Is Not Flat**, for new to export and new to market that included classroom training and one-on-one counseling from experts, mentors, and various support agencies. While the national average of businesses exporting is 1 percent, Washington currently has 4 percent of its businesses exporting. Since the program began, Washington increased the number of businesses exporting from 8,042 to 12,656.

## ACCESS TO CAPITAL

It can be a real challenge for small businesses to find the capital they need to grow and expand. To fill this gap, Washington's Department of Commerce worked with Seattle-based Community Sourced Capital to create **Fund Local**, which targets rural community businesses and complements the work CSC was doing around the state to get no interest loans to small businesses through community crowdfunding. It's an innovative public-private partnership that allows companies to crowdsource needed funds from local investors, who are known as "squareholders." Community Sourced Capital has facilitated 96 local loans with over 6,000 people who have loaned \$2 million to businesses in their communities.



Community Crowdsourcing for growing companies.



Startup Wisdom, one of over 20 books available free at <http://choosewashingtystate.com/media-center/publications/>.

Washington businesses and communities are also making a statement that the best way to grow and become sustainable is through local investing. The Department of Commerce teamed with the Post Carbon Institute to produce a free handbook for local investing for entrepreneurs, investors, and businesses. The book, **Washington Dollars, Washington Sense: A Handbook for Local Investing**, profiles 28 local investment tools with



Future entrepreneurs in Thurston County, Washington.

examples of how these ideas have been implemented in Washington State. Dozens of case studies are highlighted that can easily be replicated in any community. It shows that the local economy movement in Washington can and should be significantly larger than it is today.

Access to capital can also help small-medium enterprises (SMEs) expand their operations into new markets. A highly successful program for Washington has been the **State Trade Expansion Program, or STEP**. Using an SBA grant, STEP offers businesses vouchers up to \$5,000 of pre-approved business expenses to support new export sales. This includes translation services; offsets for trade show attendance, B2B matchmaking, and other export-related costs. Over the last five years, 580 small businesses have received STEP grants averaging \$3,500, 170 (30 percent) of which went to small businesses in rural counties. The program has achieved over \$540 million in sales, had an estimated return on investment of about 100:1, and created almost 3,000 jobs. As a result of this success, the Small Business Administration has just awarded the Washington State Department of Commerce a sixth year of funding of \$900,000 in 2017-18 to help small businesses grow through exporting.

### MENTORING AND NETWORKING

In a recent survey of rural businesses in three central Washington rural counties, entrepreneurs said that the #1 thing they wanted was to meet regularly with a mentor and to have more networking opportunities.

Of course, the next best thing to a mentor is to gain access to networking opportunities at the local level. To that end, Commerce created an **interactive asset map** containing every co-working space, incubator, accelerator, and commercial kitchen in the state and then placed it on the Startup Washington website for entrepreneurs. The map continues to grow and currently has more than 100 places around the state where mentoring and networking can take place. It can be found at <http://startup.choosewashingtonstate.com/resources/work-spaces/>.

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Celebrating lemonade day in Dayton, Washington.

Several rural communities recognized the importance of retaining the next generation of entrepreneurs in the community. The Commerce Department connected economic developers and city officials with the **National Lemonade Day (NLD)** program out of Houston, Texas. This inexpensive program was a fun experiential activity that taught kids how to start, own, and operate their own lemonade business and introduced them to the concept of saving, sharing, and spending. Mentors were recruited from each community to teach key analytical skills, financial literacy, and decision-making by using NLD's excellent mentor and student workbooks. In the first year, 60 students, ages 8-13 participated and worked with dozens of mentors.

### CONCLUSION

Each of the programs mentioned under the TEAM's strategy tells a story. And though the data for numbers of jobs created or businesses recruited may win political points, what is important in Washington's rural communities are the stories they tell. The story of a small business person who becomes his own boss; or the story of the entrepreneur who takes pride in the product she created; or the community that helped a business grow through crowdfunding; or the company that sells its products overseas, or the young person who returns home from college and starts a business with the win-

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There may be 50 ways for a business to leave a community, but there are hundreds of ways to show love for your businesses. The result is more stability and more flexibility in meeting the evolving needs of local economies while being scalable to regional and state level efforts to retain and grow business. It took teamwork to make these programs successful. But it took a TEAM strategy to make it happen.

nings from a business plan competition. These programs and stories are just a few examples of the TEAM concept in action in Washington.

While business recruitment and retention continues to be an important part of the state's overall strategy, Washington's rural communities have recognized that success can be gained incrementally, and in many cases, more quickly, using the TEAM approach and investing locally in their entrepreneurs, small businesses and youth.

Even the smallest communities have found a way to implement the TEAM strategy, scaling it to meet the unique needs of their own business community while remaining nimble enough to continually improve offerings.

That's truly one of the beauties of this approach. It invites communities and economic developers to act like entrepreneurs, innovating and inventing, experimenting and modifying to create something that works and was created in their own community and not mandated by the state. The state, often times through the Department of Commerce, did play an important role in many of these

programs by introducing new ideas and providing support and collaboration. But what the state really gave to rural and underserved areas was that it not only re-energized, the economic developer, but also the community.

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