

Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission

Regional Summits

Summary of Outcomes

Economic Drivers and Suggested Project Priorities

Participants at each regional summit worked in small teams to review six previously identified economic drivers. Thirteen teams were formed in South Boston and twelve work teams in Abingdon. Each work team identified their top two or three economic drivers and then listed the types of projects that they considered to be of highest priority in terms of potential economic impacts and return on investments.

All suggestions were then combined under the appropriate economic driver. Similar ideas were sorted into categories to identify the key types of desired projects. Economic drivers are listed by the number of comments received for that driver. Project descriptions are not listed in any order of priority.

Education and Workforce Development

1. TRRC scholarships and tuition assistance.
 2. Training for high demand occupations, as defined in partnership with regional businesses and industries, including STEM-H opportunities.
 3. Efforts to retain and retrain existing employees and recruit new employees, and their spouses, into the region to support high demand jobs.
 4. Training for K-12 educators to help them understand and support potential career opportunities and partner with regional businesses and industries to expose students to a diversity of options upon graduation.
 5. Work-based education such as internships, apprenticeships and on-the-job training programs.
 6. Training and support for small businesses and entrepreneurs.
 7. Sustainable funding for proven workforce development programs.
- TRRC scholarships especially and CTE
 - Scholarships, tuition, assistance for workforce training students (especially related to major economic development initiatives)
 - More affordable education
 - Increased scholarship funding requiring future work obligation within region
 - Support/continue granting scholarships
 - Use Giles County's ACCE program as a model to incorporate in other counties and give students opportunities to attend community college for free (partnership is w/ Giles & New River CC)

- Use Carroll County's STEM lab as a model to expand and incorporate agriculture, healthcare, etc. to feed people into the workforce pipeline.

Funds to support demand occupations

- Training funds for demand occupations with direct employers' involvement (i.e. Apprenticeships)
- Labs and instruction for CTE Regional training and support for dual enrollment
- bring public and private sector together on planning/funding of programs workforce and quality of life
- type of training needs to come from the region and blank to the region needs
- Customized workforce training
- Healthcare education
- AG sciences (related to specialty crops and healthcare) starting in elementary schools
- Funding to support NCRC testing - profiling
- Training/programs that benefit the area and match available jobs or those with highest demand that could come to area
- Expand centers for excellence (2) new regional centers
- Clinical/medical education--> exposure for students to make good career choices/ mentorship
- Graduate medical education Con. Residency training
- Soft skills training programs
- Teach business management to farmers & Ag students. Fund agribusiness certificate program
- Training for alt. employment of dying industry
- Training programs for healthcare-- mentorships, job shadowing, etc.
- Business/educational partnerships

Small Business and Entrepreneurship

- Training for entrepreneurs and small business
- Create and market regional 'hub and spoke' model
- Infrastructure supports the 'hub and spoke' model

Recruitment and retention

- recruitment and retention of skilled workforce and young professionals
- Retaining workforce - workers live in their work community. Better public relations for our localities. What can we do to bring workforce to live in our communities
- Spousal recruitment enhancement (medical & industrial & academic)

Sustainability

- Consistent/sustainable pipeline of skilled workforce. Supported by long-term funding.
- Problem: start funding a program fund for 4 years, then stop funding it and then start doing a different program. We need to build on what we have funding

K-12 Training

- Regional K-12 education alternatives/public
- K-12 funding to hire teachers to do workforce and training
- K-5th - workforce education and exposure programs (manufacturing)

- Connect existing business/industry w/ K-12 education system to inform educators about local jobs within region so they can incorporate needed skills into curriculum.
- Entrepreneurial curriculum K-12
- Funding for CTE projects (K-12)

Work-based Learning

- Cradle to career program - connection b/n education and industry (work-based learning)
- Funding to support work-based learning experiences (internships, apprenticeships, OJT, etc.)
- STEM/STEM-H funding at all levels. Career pathways aligned with regional economic development
- "Non-conventional" training
- Internship opportunities
- Regional apprenticeship programs
- Regional career/ job fairs
- Paid internship program for high school community college or certified programs - locally managed
- STEM - employment, post-secondary training and retraining

Infrastructure

1. Broadband, including "last mile" funding, and telecommunications projects (cellular, wireless and emergency communications), that help eliminate dead zones and digital divides for businesses, schools and residences.
2. Access to public utilities including water, natural gas, sewer and alternative energy resources.
3. Transportation infrastructure improvements including public transportation.
4. Development and marketing of industrial parks.
5. Protection and enhancement of architectural and cultural resources and tourism support.

Emergency Communications

- Regional emergency communications solutions (dead zones)

Broadband Expansion

- MBC continue to support high-speed into current 'dead zones;
- Support for providers of lower-cost last-mile broadband
- Rural broadband initiative
- Last mile funding for broadband
- Broadband
- Broadband (household and business) Southern VA Halifax, Charlotte, Franklin
- Broadband - last mile
- Broadband and last mile
- Wireless
- Broadband & cellular--> virtual jobs in rural areas; erase digital divide for students. Build towers that all carriers can use.
- broadband/wireless 4G--> availability & cost
- infrastructure--> broadband development
- infrastructure--> last mile fiber optic connectivity (combine to reach out to rural areas)

Natural gas

- Access to natural gas, public transportation
- Initiative for natural gas access (no dollar for dollar match)
- natural gas lines to schools still burning coal

Community assets

- Unique assets (architecture) beyond river district - region marketing
- lifestyle enhancement
- tourism attention/expansion

Water

- Water (capacity and quality)
- Affordable utilities
- Water, gas, sewer - connections to natural gas pipelines
- Quality water

Industrial parks

- Pre-paving industrial parks (site ready/certified sites)
- Build it and they'll come concept needs to include assistance to market availability of sites/buildings.
- funding regional industrial parks

Alternative energy

- alternative energy infrastructure
- Most bang projects - solar, windmill, broadband, water infrastructure (Chatham 90 year old pipes)

Transportation

- Regional transportation infrastructure
- Transportation (public) buses to work, light rail
- Lack of public transportation
- Funding/matching funds for Southern VA Regional Transportation project
- Improve transportation infrastructure- particularly for far southwest VA.

- Update schools

Entrepreneurship and Small Business

1. Financial assistance in the forms of grants or forgivable loans tied to performance agreements.
2. Low interest loans and revolving loan funds to provide access to capital for startup and expansion
3. Cost share programs for small businesses to support entrepreneurship programs and internships.
4. Loan guarantees or interest rate buy downs to increase access to capital.
5. Technical assistance to small businesses to help them identify trends and opportunities, develop funding and sustainability plans and business training.

6. Regional programs that support marketing, education and funding.
7. Assistance to strengthen agribusinesses, Agritourism and ecotourism.

Financial support

- access to capital, loan fund, loan less-- rezone for small emerging businesses
- financing for hospitality related businesses
- ID small business programs for rural (working capital, plant & equipment, part loan (forgivable w/ performance agreement))
- leverage SBIC impact fund from SBA
- small business startup/ expansion grants (version of TROF)
- Entrepreneurship and small business scholarships and incentives to support 'hub and spoke' model - Requires 3 years commitment to work in region
- small business revolving loan fund (lease access to capital)
- Small business - being able to afford infrastructure ie. Broadband
- new business/start up financial assistance - grant, line of credit, prequalification approval so available when needed
- easier access to TRRC funding when positive outcomes have previously been produced on a prior commitment
- Cost share programs for small businesses (support programs in entrepreneurship) (internships among all businesses) (extend to tourism/retail-related businesses)
- Funds/process for small initiatives
- Tobacco Commission to fund interest 'buy down' for small business
- Tobacco Commission influence to bring in CDF/s
- VC and Angel (priority)
- Low interest loan programs

Technical assistance

- entrepreneurship & small business--> counselling for year 2+
- assist in vetting ideas and start up process and funding start ups
- resources that assist the startups into moving more into commercialization
- TC-pre application program to identify best funding program for 'their' business a company may want to apply for
- availability of regional marketing research studies and data - shared services - feasibility, engineering, marketing
- Tobacco Commission to help sustain existing small business with funding of training, development to grow job rate, sales
- Support technical assistance to small businesses to reduce failure rate (funding to provide technical assistance)
- Center for excellence for small business

Regional

- Incentive programs for regional collaboration to address specialized needs in business/industry (education programs) (discourage 'silos')
- Coordination of regional ecosystem
- Regional groups that small businesses can go to support regional concepts smaller \$'s (\$10k +/-) seed money

- Build regional backbone organization for tourism and other stuff

Marketing

- "Buy Local" educational and awareness campaign among individuals and businesses
- Funding local marketing efforts to promote assets. Public relations strategy, communication efforts, digital assets. Someone within TRRC to help manage?

Ag

- Agritourism and ecotourism
- Farm-to-table
- incubator kitchen for food ventures
- Regional cannery

Access to Quality and Specialty Healthcare

1. Improved access to physical, behavioral and oral health care through mobile health services, transportation assistance and tele-health capabilities.
 2. Increased services for the elderly to help them access services and age in place to reduce stress on the current workforce.
 3. Drug rehabilitation programs that incorporate job training and placement.
- Tele-health for mental health
 - Funding for community health workers
 - Funding to support oral health
 - Services for elderly (especially aging in place) and adult daycare, medical transportation, PACE, program of all-inclusive care for the elderly
 - Mobile health services
 - continued investment in healthcare technology
 - Drug rehab/behavioral health counseling and training program to assist people with addictions and help them get proper training to obtain employment incorporate job placement as part of program
 - Focus on low to moderate income families to deliver primary/behavioral/oral healthcare via service delivery program. Also include pharmacy
 - access to transportation to access healthcare

Regional Assets and Opportunities

1. Archeological and historic/cultural research that supports tourism.
 2. Connecting communities to outdoor recreational opportunities and related businesses to support adventure tourism.
 3. Historic preservation and repurposing of obsolete buildings with development potential.
- Downtown development - popup program funding
 - Support of archeological and historical research which supports tourism
 - Historic Preservation

- connecting communities to outdoor rec opportunities & related business--> adventure tourism
- demolition and repurposing of obsolete/rundown buildings
- funding for localities
- investment in rehabbing older buildings
- place making projects
- strategic recruitment initiatives

Leadership and Community Capacity

1. Efforts to increase local and regional long-range planning, commitment and collaboration.
- clear community vision that illustrates long range planning

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Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission

Regional Summits

Participant Feedback on Operations

Reflections and Suggestions on Current Operations

Participants at each regional summit worked in small teams to review current TRRC operations and policies and provide comments on what needs improvement and what is working well. Similar ideas were sorted into categories to identify key themes. Themes are not listed in any order of priority unless it is noted in the description.

Areas for Improvement

Communication

1. Grantees and potential grantees reported sometimes experiencing difficulties in accessing information on funding cycles, past grant awards and outcomes, meetings and deadlines, and funding policies via the TRRC website.
2. Increased outreach to the public is suggested to help citizens better understand the mission and history of the Commission, its funding sources and the many success stories throughout the region.

Consistency

1. Greater transparency and consistency is needed regarding funding priorities and strategies and who makes the final funding decisions. What are the specific evaluation criteria that are used? What funding formulas are in place?
2. Initial grant award requirements should remain in place for the life of the project and not change until completion. Need more consistent oversight and follow through on investments to help ensure everyone is meeting their obligations and requirements are consistently applied and enforced.
3. Increase consistency of reporting requirements, lead time on data requests and allocation standards.

Coordination

1. MOUs should be required of and honored by all project parties.
2. Commissioners can be more engaged in projects and actively participate in local related events. Networking opportunities between commissioners and regional partners should be increased.
3. Roles and expectations between the Commission, regional and local economic development professionals and organizations, COEs and other institutes of higher education, and funding partners can be better clarified and communicated. The Commission should serve as a liaison to related state and federal agency partners.

Flexibility

1. Programs and funding decisions can be more agile to meet the changing needs of businesses, especially for small businesses and startups.
2. Some projects require a longer timeline to demonstrate success such as R & D projects and infrastructure improvements and greater flexibility in expectations is needed.
3. Consider more flexibility in grant cycles or rolling submission deadlines to greater position the Commission to support quickly emerging and time sensitive opportunities.

Match Requirements

1. Current matching fund requirements are difficult for some localities to meet and concern was expressed that “wealthier” localities have a competitive advantage. More flexibility is needed regarding match requirements, especially the cash amounts, based on a formula that determines relative ability to meet.
2. Provide assistance on obtaining matching funds through philanthropic organizations or other sources.

Outcomes

1. Increase analysis of funded projects to better document successful and unsuccessful projects and the factors that influenced those outcomes. Communicate these findings to localities, stakeholders and funding partners.
2. Develop clear policies regarding Commission funding and project sustainability. Should there being a funding timeline limit or will some projects be supported for a long time?

Policies

1. Re-evaluate the funding distribution based on current economic conditions and challenges throughout the entire region served. Make sure it makes sense and is equitable.
2. Focus on projects that directly support Commission goals and have the broadest community benefits. Don't distribute funding too widely.
3. Many awards are very large. Consider reserving a portion of funding for smaller projects under the various Commission programs.

Priorities

1. Numerous priorities for future funding were mentioned:
 - a. Agriculture infrastructure and R & D
 - b. Broadband
 - c. Community facilities
 - d. Credentialing and certification programs
 - e. Downtown revitalization
 - f. Historic preservation
 - g. Incentives to train, attract and retain teachers and professors
 - h. Infrastructure
 - i. Jobs training and workforce development
 - j. Marketing local and regional assets and potentials
 - k. Quality of life initiatives
 - l. Recreational and cultural tourism
 - m. Scholarships and tuition assistance
 - n. Small business
 - o. Transportation
2. Provide incentives for entities to work together on regional projects with shared responsibility for grant liability and progress reporting.

Processes

1. Some parts of the application process are redundant and take too much time. Different sets of criteria for large projects versus small may be helpful.
2. Consider a pre-application process. Planning grants may be useful to properly prepare for larger or more complex projects.
3. Vet projects more carefully at the local level and the Commission level. Make sure decisions are based on project merit and not political considerations, especially if commissioners are involved. Use a consistent scoring method.
4. The online application can be more user friendly and the time stamp needs to be upgraded. Number projects in the order they were received instead of alphabetically.
5. Provide a "coach" for grantees throughout project development to help them understand and meet all requirements, especially if they don't have a proven track record of successful completions.
6. Revamp the reimbursement process to make it less cumbersome and time intensive for grantees.

Structure

1. Reduce the number of elected officials to a minority of commissioners. Increase representation of business interests and citizens.

What is Working Well

Access

1. Regional staff members, conducting meetings in various locations throughout the region and being available and approachable greatly contributes to receiving information and gaining technical assistance.

Accountability

1. Financial reporting and accountability have improved and information is more transparent. Annual reports have helped free up unused funds.

Data

1. The Commission is collecting valuable data on workforce development and other relevant topics and willingly shares this information. The use of external groups for research and evaluation helps drive data-driven decision-making.

Flexibility

1. The Commission has demonstrated a willingness to shift or expand its focus as opportunities and demands shift. Investments in education and technology related projects provide examples. A wide variety of programs have had investments.
2. Support for innovative and creative solutions is strong, including meeting the needs of small businesses and entrepreneurs. Programs try to meet the needs of businesses in various development cycles.
3. The development of workforce infrastructure has taken place beyond rigid silos of bureaucracy.

Funding

1. Strategic and appropriate funding decisions have been made and funding appears to be targeted to areas of highest need.
2. Funds are generally managed well and the capturing of unspent funds has improved, providing more capital for further investments.
3. The low interest loan program and grant funds should be continued. Commission funds are sometimes vital as local match to receive federal funding support.

Input

1. The Commission pursues continuous improvement processes and actively engages stakeholders to gain their perceptions and ideas.

Processes

1. The online application and reporting processes have been successful in helping to reduce time spent on those activities.

2. The timeframe between application, grant award and availability of funds is good. Processing drawdowns is efficient.

Results

1. Funding for a wide variety of projects have helped create positive changes in:
 - a. Education
 - b. Healthcare
 - c. Industrial parks
 - d. Local economic development
 - e. Tourism
 - f. Utilities
 - g. Workforce
2. Investments have increased attention to the region and helped create a more competitive foundation for economic development activities. This has improved the ability to attract new companies and help existing businesses expand.

Scholarships

1. Scholarships and student loans have helped many individuals who otherwise would not have been able to further their education and training.

Staff

1. Commission staff are very accessible and responsive to requests for information and assistance. They demonstrate a passion for the region and what they do. They are willing to meet and discuss any issue.
2. Staff members are knowledgeable about and sensitive to the goals and needs of individual projects. They actively engage in projects and work in a cooperative manner with localities. The relationships between regional administrators and grantees are strong and valuable.
3. Feedback on ideas and applications is provided in a timely and candid manner. Their initial review of potential projects is very helpful and they provide guidance on the best possible funding to pursue. They provide beneficial feedback for projects that aren't approved for funding to help strengthen future applications.

Structure

1. Commissioners stay in touch, are accessible and represent diverse interests that helps them capably represent the region. They take a problem-solving approach rather than being bureaucratic to help get things done.

TROF

1. The TROF program is a success and its procedures are straightforward and efficient.