



INTERNATIONAL
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
COUNCIL

Clay County Economic Recovery and Development Strategic Plan 2022-2024

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I. Executive Summary

Purpose

In the fall of 2021, the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) was brought on by the Clay County Economic Development Group (CCEDG) and Clay Center Chamber of Commerce (CCCC) to work with the economic development community of Clay County for the development of a two-year strategic plan, as part of IEDC's economic recovery and resiliency services made possible by funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration. This document aims to serve as the guiding plan for the newly merged organization between CCEDG and CCCC to advance their economic and community development goals, addressing challenges related to economic recovery and opportunities to build a resilient future.

To accomplish this objective, IEDC recruited a team of three experienced economic development professionals to conduct meetings with CCEDG, CCCC, and focus groups to inform the strategic plan. The professional team included:

- ◆ **Mary Ann Moon**, CEcD, FM, HLM, Executive Director, Prosper, TX Economic Development Corporation
- ◆ **Adam Grinold**, Executive Director, Brattleboro, VT Development Credit Corporation
- ◆ **Kellie Hinkle**, Deputy Director, St. Mary's, MD County Department of Economic Development

IEDC staff included:

- ◆ **Delaney Luna**, Senior Economic Development Associate
- ◆ **Chance Robinson**, Economic Development Associate

IEDC conducted background reporting and economic analysis to inform the plan using data from a range of sources including the U.S. Census Bureau, Chmura JobsEq, and economic and community information provided by CCEDG. The team met regularly with CCEDG and CCCC staff to discuss the economic development environment, economic recovery and development challenges, and both short- and long-term goals for Clay County, and conducted four focus group meetings with a variety of community stakeholders. These stakeholders represented the interests of the County's businesses, public officials, community life, and core sectors.

The 2022-2024 Clay County Economic Recovery and Development Strategic Plan aims to provide the newly merged organization and the community's economic development stakeholders with achievable goals and strategies for implementation. These goals take advantage of Clay County's strengths while addressing the need for new approaches to economic and community development to advance economic recovery, growth, and opportunity.

Executive Summary

With the new economic development organization, Grow Clay County, to lead the way, Clay County is positioned to embark on a new chapter for economic development and recovery efforts in the coming years. Though the community has faced challenges relating to population retention, past natural disasters, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Clay County demonstrates resilience to these difficulties, as well as a commitment to building back better with forward-thinking and innovative economic development strategies.

Clay County is a unique community with many key assets, including strong infrastructure, distinctive attractions and recreational offerings, and active business and economic development ecosystems. Above all, Clay County is built on a philanthropic, dynamic community, whose willingness to engage and push the County toward its goals for the future will work hand in hand with strategic economic development efforts.

Central opportunities for Clay County align with four focus areas and seven core goals for the community, including:

Placemaking and Marketing: Rethinking and expanding tourism attraction, community marketing, and placemaking efforts.

Workforce Development: Enhancing talent attraction and targeted population retention efforts.

Downtown Development: Revitalizing and fostering increased development in Clay Center.

Business Retention, Expansion, and Resilience: Developing structured business retention and expansion (BRE) programming, and providing resources to the business community in ongoing recovery efforts from COVID-19 and natural disasters.

The plan's recommended strategies aim to accomplish seven core goals:

- 1. Establish a brand for the community, building on a cohesive vision and tagline.**
- 2. Develop a community marketing plan that focuses on digital platforms.**
- 3. Engage or expand upon a regional approach for tourism.**
- 4. Expand upon and develop workforce initiatives to meet need and demand.**
- 5. Promote and expand downtown development opportunities.**
- 6. Institute a structured business retention and expansion program.**
- 7. Support businesses' recovery and resilience to economic disruptions.**

For each of the seven core goals, the plan lays out a set of practical strategies for focus and implementation.

To close, the plan identifies two areas, **childcare** and **housing**, that may continue to present challenges for the community, with recommended actions for the merged economic development organization to address with its local and state partners. The plan also offers recommendations for **organizational management**, to enhance the new EDO's presence and impact in the community.

Clay County, through a dedicated approach to economic development that leverages the community's offerings while exploring opportunities for thoughtful growth, is on the path toward sustainable recovery and economic opportunity. Provided with adequate resources and funding to implement these strategies, Grow Clay County and the community at large can invest in Clay County's future together.

II. Background

Demographics

Located in America's heartland, Clay County is a small community in North Central Kansas with a population just over 8,000. The population of the county seat, Clay Center, makes up over half of Clay County's population. Additionally, Clay County includes seven other towns and communities; Clifton, Green, Longford, Morganville, Oak Hill, Vining, and Wakefield. The County's makeup is 49.9 percent male and 50.1 percent Female, with a median age of 42.5 years. Population decline is a significant concern for the community, experiencing a 6.5 percent decline between 2010 and 2019, presenting challenges for businesses to find the workers they need. Business downsizing and reductions in employment numbers also relate to the population out-migration. There are concerns that large employers are struggling to find employees in Clay County.

The County's population has a relatively dispersed age distribution, but is showing signs of aging, with 24 percent under 18, 16.3 percent between the ages of 18 and 34, 23.1 percent between 35 and 54 years, and 36.7 percent 55 and older. The racial demographics of Clay County are predominantly White, with 96.5 percent of the population identifying as White. Two or more races and Hispanic or Latino are the other Census categories above 1 percent.

Clay County has a well-educated population. The county has higher population percentages of high school graduates and associate degree holders than the rest of Kansas and the country, with 29.7 percent holding high school diplomas and 10.7 percent with an associate degree, and just 6.7 percent without high school diplomas. 20.9 percent of Clay County's population holds a bachelor's degree, while 10.3 percent hold a postgraduate degree. These numbers are only one or two percentage points below the rest of Kansas and the United States.

Clay County has strong socioeconomic indicators for its population. Compared to the national average of 13.4 percent, 8.1 percent of the population lives under the poverty rate, while 3.8 percent of the households receive Food Stamps or SNAP. Clay County has 0 percent disconnected youth; disconnected youth are 16-19-year-olds who are not in school, not high school graduates, and are either unemployed or not in the labor force.

Economy

The top five industries in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) are Agriculture, Health Care and Social Assistance, Retail Trade, Manufacturing, and Educational Services. In 2020, Clay County's total nominal GDP was \$253,514,000. From 2019 to 2020, GDP in Clay County grew by 1.1%, which follows a growth of 2.0% in 2019. The GDP growth implies that even through the COVID-19 pandemic, Clay County was able to sustain and exceed previous production levels. The Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting industry had the highest GDP for Clay County, contributing close to \$37 million, in large part due to the significant output of the large agricultural manufacturer AGI Hutchison. Clay County has a regional labor force of 3,954 with a labor force participation rate of 63.1 percent. For their prime-age labor force, Clay County has a labor force size of 2,216 with a participation rate of 85.4 percent.

The county's largest industry sector in terms of jobs is Health Care and Social Assistance, employing over 550 workers. Retail Trade and Educational Services are the next two largest industry sectors in terms of jobs, with Retail Trade employing 486 workers and Educational Services employing 353 workers. High location quotients (LQs) indicate sectors in which a region has high concentrations of employment compared to the national average, with one being the national average. The sectors with the largest LQs in the county are Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting (6.84), Public Administration (1.74), and Retail Trade (1.31). The regional sectors with the best job growth over the last five years are Retail Trade, Construction, and Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting. Industry sectors with the highest average wages are Management of Companies and Enterprises, Utilities, and Transportation and Warehousing.

As of 2021Q2, total employment for Clay County was 3,405 (based on a four-quarter moving average). Over the year ending in 2021Q2, employment increased 4.8 percent in the region. The average worker in Clay County earned annual wages of \$35,822 as of 2021Q2. Average annual wages per worker increased 8.4 percent in the region over the preceding four quarters. Occupations with the highest average wages in Clay County are Management Occupations at \$65,000, Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations at \$63,800, and Architecture and Engineering Occupations at \$62,000. The unemployment rate in the region varied among the major occupation groups, from 1.1 percent among Management Occupations to 8.0 percent among Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations.

The pandemic caused increases in unemployment for Clay County, but these increased rates quickly retreated. The community's experience with unemployment is similar to the rest of the country, but fortunately not as severe. For Clay County, the unemployment rate in February

2020 was 3.0 percent. During the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, Clay County's unemployment peaked at 8.4 percent in April 2020. These rates have experienced a full recovery, with unemployment hitting 1.7 percent in December 2021.

County Seat - Clay Center and Downtown Developments

The county seat, the City of Clay Center, is the major downtown area for Clay County and has a variety of assets that can support a strong downtown economy. The first major asset is the free zoo provided by the Clay Center Public Utility Commission, though there have been recent concerns about the ability to continue providing free admission due to a combination of factors including a lack of marketing. There is also a significant mural movement taking place in downtown areas across Kansas, with 13 murals in downtown Clay Center. These murals are a valuable marketing resource for attracting short term tourists into the downtown corridor and represent opportunities for increased collaborations between businesses and community marketing efforts to develop a strong placemaking strategy for the County. Downtown Clay Center also hosts a farmers' market on Saturdays, helping drive foot traffic downtown and benefiting local businesses. Clay Center's downtown corridor provides a unique and boutique retail shopping experience which helps support Clay County's retail trade industry. Finally, the Piotique Festival is held in September each year, drawing hundreds of people to downtown Clay Center. Clay County has a completed downtown master plan that looks to utilize these assets to grow the local economy and strengthen downtown Clay Center. However, there have been community concerns with the budget required to implement the downtown plan and how to move forward with it.

COVID-19 and Disaster Impacts

In March of 2020, President Trump approved a major disaster declaration for Kansas, providing federal emergency aid to the state and local governments in response to COVID-19. In Clay County, several restaurants closed down due to the pandemic and the strain placed on the food industry. The pandemic has also decreased the number of tourists that Clay County would typically host. In response to COVID-19, multiple local and regional EDOs established relief funds. The North Central Kansas Regional Planning Commission established the NCK Business Relief Fund for businesses adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic to help preserve business and jobs. The Clay Center Chamber of Commerce used their Small Business Fund to support local impacted businesses. To help raise funds during the pandemic, the Chamber began to provide shirts to donors who made a \$25 dollar or more donation to the Small Business Fund. In addition to shirts, the Chamber made an additional \$10 dollar donation in the

donor's name for the Clay Center Community Improvement Foundation's COVID-19 Fund. The 2020 COVID-19 Recovery Fund at the Clay Center Community Improvement Foundation was established to receive donations to benefit those in the Clay County area who were in great need as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to the COVID-19 disaster, Kansas is a state that regularly experiences severe thunderstorms, tornadoes, and high straight-line winds. From 2016-2019, FEMA declared a natural disaster in Kansas each year. A storm in 2019 caused \$10,320,460 worth of damage to public infrastructure throughout Kansas. The storm caused a \$6.33 per capita impact in Clay County. When multiplied by the county's population, the total impact for the county was \$51,159.06.

III. Challenges and Opportunities - SWOT



Key Challenges

Visioning and Championing

Residential and Workforce Attraction

Key Opportunities

Leadership of Merged EDO

Leveraging Community Partnerships

IV. Recommendations and Strategies

Spotlight On: Ohio County EDA Website

The Ohio County Economic Development Alliance (EDA), winner of IEDC's Silver Award for General Purpose Websites in 2021, recognized the importance of an EDOs website to inform and attract. As a rural community with big economic development goals, the Ohio County EDA knew they would have to deliver compelling content to a broad audience to stand out among the crowd. Ohio County EDA utilizes the Gold Shovel Agency to manage their website and its provided content. The Ohio County EDA realizes that their website is their gateway to the rest of the world and an effective website is needed to achieve their goals and reach their targeted audiences.

The website is laid out in different sections, making it easy for the various audiences to navigate. Sections of the website include Why Ohio County, Site Selectors, Data, Business, Workforce, Jobs, and News & Events. Within each section are several subsections, making it easy for audiences to find what they are looking for. The Ohio County EDA website is a superb example of what content to include in your website, as well as how to sort the content, ensuring website visitors do not have to work hard to find what they are looking for.

Source: <http://www.ohiocountyky.com>

Placemaking and Marketing

1. Goal: Establish a brand for the community, building on a cohesive vision and tagline.

Clay County economic development organizations can collaborate to establish a unique brand for the community. In addition to an economic development tagline, this vision should capture goals and missions across related sectors including business development, tourism, workforce attraction, and community development. This visioning process can be carried out between the committees of Grow Clay County: Entrepreneurial and Business Development, Community Outreach, Downtown and Mainstreet, and Travel and Tourism.

Example questions to ask during this visioning process include:

- ◆ How do residents see Clay County?
- ◆ How is Clay County seen by surrounding communities? By potential visitors or residents?
- ◆ How do you want Clay County to be seen?
- ◆ What makes Clay County unique?
- ◆ What will Clay County look like in five years? What should change and what should stay the same?

Clay County demonstrates a need for both talent and tourism attraction. Rather than

focusing on two separate branding and marketing campaigns for these target groups, the brand

should reflect the common areas of attraction between the two. The county should be reflected holistically as an attractive place to live, work, visit, and do business, featuring the unique amenities and community attractions that make Clay County stand out among surrounding communities.

The county's newly merged economic development organization will require a new website and marketing plan, which presents an opportunity to develop and launch the new brand with the website and other digital platforms such as social media and professional accounts.

Recommendations for developing a new website are expanded on in the excerpt below.

Featured Excerpt: *IEDC Economic Development Marketing and Attraction Manual*,
Chapter 7 "Technology Related Marketing Tools."

II. Website Basics

Businesses, citizens, and non-profits increasingly use the web to access information about a community or a particular program. An EDO's website is a critical site selection and marketing tool that has evolved over the past decade. A website is not just an information brochure, but also a figurative front door to your establishment, and the center of your entire commerce engine for dealing with clients. It is a potential client's first impression of the city/region/people with whom they may be collaborating. Websites are expected to be a hub of information providing demographics, economic data, maps of the region, business information, and workforce data.

Top Ten Web Pages Requested Nationally on ED Websites

1. About Us (about the organization);
2. Programs (that the organization offers);
3. Data Center;
4. News;
5. Relocate and Expand;
6. Find Property;
7. Site Selection Services;
8. Workforce data and Information;
9. Database of Companies or Largest Employers;
10. Maps of the Area.

For more information please visit: ED Solutions, Atlas Advertising, or Development Results.

Businesses and site selectors are particularly drawn to websites that provide comprehensive information that is easy to navigate. That is websites should be responsive to user needs, simple to use,

searchable, and capable with mobile-phones. In terms of content, EDO websites should contain:

- Customizable location data, which allows users to select relevant information including demographics, economic profile, quality of life, and labor force characteristics as well as:
 - Market demographic information (radius maps for markets);
 - State business climate data;
 - Database of existing companies and the largest employers;
 - Workforce data and training options;
 - A searchable interactive inventory of available buildings, facilities, and sites;
 - A section on business assistance tools for relocations and expansions;
 - A summary of government processes, such as zoning, licensure, and permit information as well as a local resource guide of governmental agencies and contacts;
 - Local and state incentives information;
 - Categorized and tailored information for target industries;
 - Regional, state, and national maps that illustrate the benefits of the location.
-

Summary of Strategies

- a. Collaborate between new EDO committees and stakeholders to develop cohesive vision and tagline, which is unique and representative of the amenities and experience the community offers.
- b. Use this brand to unite efforts advancing business development, community building, and visitor attraction.
- c. Build a new website around this brand.

2. Goal: Develop a community marketing plan that focuses on digital platforms.

A community marketing plan developed by Grow Clay County presents an opportunity to highlight and celebrate what makes Clay County a unique place to live and work, delivered through the community's newly updated website and digital programming. The plan can develop strategies to inform both residents and potential visitors about exciting attractions, business opportunities, and available resources.

As the county will be furthering its efforts to clarify its brand and tagline, the marketing plan can build on this branded vision and identity. The merged EDO's new website is the perfect opportunity to launch this new brand, and can serve as the strategic platform for the community marketing plan and its action items. Along with the website, enhanced social media presence of the new EDO on platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram can all be leveraged in a digital campaign to market the community's brand, as guided by the community marketing plan.

For Clay County, a successful plan would address attraction targets across sectors of attraction for residential, business, and tourism growth, and follow a cohesive placemaking vision. The plan would identify population and business attraction targets for tourism, workforce development, and business retention and expansion. Additionally, the plan would explore opportunities to advance partnerships between community attractions, such as the Mural Movement and the downtown business corridor, and leverage their popularity to draw visitors, residents, and businesses to different parts of the County. The success of one attraction can contribute to the success of another, and of the community as a whole.

A successful marketing plan has clear objectives and action steps to accomplish them. Additionally, the plans identify committees and partners to champion the different responsibilities laid out in these action steps. Developing the plan presents an opportunity to bring in partners throughout the community, and further establish the new economic development organization as both a leader and collaborator.

A marketing plan is a chance to tell Clay County's story. In the strategic planning panel's conversations with the community, stakeholders expressed enthusiasm for opportunities to use social media to provide a platform for both businesses and residents to tell their stories and highlight their contributions to the community. The marketing plan can include steps to develop a weekly newsletter or Zoom sessions, for instance, or a spotlight series on new residents, new businesses and programming, entrepreneurs, anniversaries, and new developments from popular attractions such as the Mural Movement and the zoo.

For more information on developing a marketing plan, please see Appendix A, *IEDC Economic Development Marketing and Attraction Manual*, Chapter 5 "Designing a Marketing Strategy".

Recommended components of the community marketing plan include:

- ◆ Promotion of Clay County businesses, including restaurants and retail.
- ◆ Promotion of Clay County attractions and activities, such as the Mural Movement, Clay Center Zoo, PRCA Rodeo, sporting tournaments, and outdoor recreation.
- ◆ Promotion of community amenities, such as proximity to the airport, proximity to outdoor recreation opportunities, community safety, and high quality infrastructure such as fast broadband speeds and accessibility.
- ◆ Assignment of roles and responsibilities to EDO committees and community partners.

Summary of Strategies

- a. Develop a Community Marketing Plan to:
 - i. Highlight and promote Clay County businesses.
 - ii. Highlight attractions and activities (Mural, PRCA Rodeo, tournaments, lodges)
 - iii. Feature community amenities.
 - iv. Advertise livability.
 - v. Identify attraction targets.
 1. Tourism
 2. Workforce
 3. Business
 4. Population
- b. Structure a digital marketing campaign through the new website and social media platforms to:
 - i. Accomplish the marketing plan's objectives
 - ii. Offer ongoing opportunities to tell the community's story.
 - iii. Connect marketing efforts to Clay County tagline and brand.
- c. Utilize a new website to both launch the brand and serve as a platform for the Community Marketing Plan.

3. Goal: Engage or expand upon a regional approach for tourism.

Clay County economic development partners can strengthen and build upon their relationships with regional tourism bodies and surrounding communities to advance a collaborative approach to tourism development. Clay County offers exciting recreational opportunities, including proximity to a lake and outdoor sporting activities, a popular baseball tournament that brings in visitors from across the state, downtown offerings such as retail and a cutting edge brewery, as well as sophisticated artistic attractions through the Mural Movement. These all make the community a unique and interesting place to visit, and are central to successful tourism messaging.

However, for areas that Clay County may be lacking, such as lodging offerings for overnight guests or extended trips, access to large museums or other historical sites, or other recreational activities not available within the community, the County can position itself as an attractive asset of a larger region. Drawing visitors to regional tourism attractions presents an opportunity to fill tourism attraction gaps that may be missing from Clay County while highlighting what the community does provide and how it fits into an attractive region. The county can work with state and regional tourism bodies, as well as surrounding communities, to identify how their

assets work together and how they can collaborate on joint marketing efforts. Recommended state and regional tourism partners, such as Meet Kansas and North Central Kansas Tourism, are included in Appendix B.

When taking stock of the county's tourism assets, opportunities for product development can also be identified and pursued. Suggested products include the expansion of different types of lodging offerings that can cater to the niche visitor, such as a boutique hotel, hunting lodges, and other offerings to enhance overnight stays or stays directly linked to the county's attractions. Additionally, existing attractions can work together to enhance experiences and package amenities to convene Clay County as a robust stop in the region.

Currently, Clay County relies on a bed tax for tourism revenues and funding, which does not align with realistic tourism targets for the community. As the majority of Clay County tourism is sourced from day trips and short term visits, and there are at this time limited lodging options in the community for visitor spending, it is recommended that tourism revenue sources be adjusted to reflect the real makeup of visitors.

Case Study: Destination Southern Maryland

Through resource and information sharing, regional economic development partnerships can help member counties and EDOs achieve goals that may not have been possible before. Destination Southern Maryland has helped communities in Southern Maryland grow their tourism industry by combining and advertising the assets the region has as a whole. Destination Southern Maryland is the public face of the Southern Maryland Heritage Area Consortium (SMHAC). SMHAC is one of the 13 Heritage Areas in Maryland and was founded in 2003. Their mission is to enhance Southern Maryland through innovative heritage tourism experiences, comprehensive cultural and natural resource conservation, and excellence in educational opportunities. SMHAC is also an economic engine, providing product development and increased economic activity throughout the region through grants, partnership building, and sustaining regional identity.

Destination Southern Maryland uses its resources to advertise the numerous tourist attractions and opportunities that Southern Maryland has to offer. In December 2020, the State of Maryland performed an economic impact study on Destination Southern Maryland, providing evidence on Destination Southern Maryland's success. Overall, Destination Southern Maryland has made a \$187 million economic impact on the region. In addition to this, Destination Southern Maryland has supported and sustained 2,637 jobs, as well as created \$25.3 million in state and local tax revenue.

Source: <https://destinationsouthernmaryland.com>

Summary of Strategies

- a. Identify regional tourism assets and leverage their proximity to attract visitors to Clay County.
- b. Identify gaps in Clay County's tourism offerings and opportunities to fit the community within a larger tourism region.
- c. Identify opportunities for product development - missing tourism assets to develop in Clay County.
- d. Explore opportunities to align revenue sources with realistic tourism targets.
- e. Pursue support and resources from the state to market the community (Appendix C).

Workforce Development

Spotlight On: Northern Alabama Labor Study Recommended Next Steps

Launch 2035, a regional economic development partnership in Northern Alabama focused on future growth and competitiveness, conducted a comprehensive labor assessment in 2019. The area, facing talent attraction challenges and opportunities similar to many rural communities, identified three focus areas for the region's next steps.

1. Initiate a multi-year, multi-pronged approach to increase net migration

This includes educational grants, home-buying subsidies, student loan support, diversifying the housing supply, and developing a nationally branded affinity marketing campaign about the Huntsville region.

2. Identify alternative approaches to finding in-demand talent

This includes more communication among HR managers to prevent poaching of talent, and to learn what other markets HR managers have had success recruiting talent from to the Huntsville area.

3. Increase investment in early education

The region must continue to invest in educating parents and students on the alternatives to a four-year degree; also, companies should collaborate to support programs at the high school and middle school levels to increase awareness and familiarity of skills in high demand (cyber, IT, applied engineering) – for example, more corporate support of FIRST Robotics teams and similar programs.

Source: <https://launch2035.org/about>

4. Goal: Expand upon and develop workforce initiatives to meet need and demand.

Clay County has demonstrated a need for workforce initiatives with incentives for talent attraction, retention, and training. As a community facing population decline, the county's future workforce concerns will include the attraction and retention of younger workers and families, as well as the development of incentives for untapped sources of workers and entrepreneurship such as retired workers. Examples of workforce development incentives, such as remote worker incentives and "come home" programs, are listed in Appendix D.

Clay County can also invest in workforce training by enhancing relationships with local, regional, and state academic and vocational institutions. Emerging and persisting needs for skills can be addressed through curriculum development to fill gaps in the workforce.

Other aspects of workforce development include the enhancement of services and supporting infrastructure to make working easier and make entry more accessible. The County is facing challenges in sustaining support services such as childcare, which can prevent workers with families from taking full-time, and even part-time, jobs. The merged economic development organization can identify community partners to work

with to address the need for daycares and other opportunities to fill the child care gap. Other opportunities to make employment more accessible include the development of telework and remote work opportunities. Clay County boasts reliable, high speed internet access, which can be taken advantage of to advertise the community as a place to easily work in a remote capacity. Co-working spaces in Clay Center can also be explored as a joint effort to enhance both workforce and downtown development.

Case Study: Kossuth/Palo Alto County Economic Development Corporation Intern Program

EDO-supported internship programs can be a great way to engage and develop an area's students and younger workforce members. Internships can create opportunities for students and young professionals that may fill gaps in those available to workers looking to gain experience and build relationships. Internships often serve as the first taste of the real world for students. They learn what to expect in a job and how to handle the everyday stress and pressure of their selected career, and the opportunity provides practical application of skills learned in the classroom. In 1999, the Kossuth County Economic Development Corporation established the Kossuth County Intern Program to help develop and guarantee a future workforce for Kossuth County. The program offers a number of training opportunities and events, including an intern breakfast, golf outing, team building BBQ, CEO networking luncheon, and skill building sessions. The program helps open young people up to what Kossuth County has to offer and lets students know that there are jobs available if they want to come back. Since the program's inception, 224 interns have been hired as permanent employees.

Source: <https://paloaltoiowa.com/jobs/intern-program/intern-welcome/>

Summary of Strategies

- a. Identify workforce attraction targets by job type and skill.
- b. Incorporate marketing for target populations into the community marketing plan.
- c. Develop incentives, such as tuition reimbursement, per target.
- d. Enhance talent retention by developing incentives for young people to locate permanently in the community.
- e. Tap new potential workforce or entrepreneurship pools, such as retired military personnel from Fort Riley.

- f. Enhance outreach and partnerships with local schools, including high schools, community and technical colleges, and universities. Communicate emerging needs for skill training and curriculum development.
- g. Address barriers to workforce entry, such as salary and wage needs, and support such as childcare.
- h. Explore the development of telework and coworking opportunities, and wrap into downtown development strategies.
- i. Build coalitions with workforce development partners, such as the Kansas Works State Board and other regional bodies.

Downtown Development

5. Goal: Promote and expand downtown development opportunities.

Clay Center offers opportunities to enhance many aspects of the county's economic development goals, including workforce development, business retention and expansion, and placemaking. Some challenges identified for downtown development, such as zoning issues and land use, should be discussed with City leaders to develop a plan of action. Planning issues have been raised as a concern for commercial and residential development, such as the construction of new housing developments. In some instances, small communities may simply lack the capacity to individually handle complex development issues or disputes. In others, processes can be improved around issues like the transference of ownership, payment for legal processes, and auction timelines.

Another challenge raised is the vacant property issue in Clay Center, as well as throughout the county. It is recommended that the merged economic development organization work with relevant partners to explore the formation of a land bank, which can enable the county to speed up the process of turning over persisting vacancies for development. More resources on land banks are included in Appendix E.

Clay County can look to Main Street America for resources and strategies for further developing Clay Center. The program's model, which has been successfully deployed in over 1,000 communities, focuses on Transformation Strategies implemented through four points; Economic Vitality, Design, Promotion, and Organization. The Main Street approach can serve as a basis for Clay County's efforts to identify its downtown assets and implement both existing and future development plans. Further information can be found on Mainstreet America's website at <https://www.mainstreet.org/mainstreetamerica/theapproach>.

The merged economic development organization should also identify opportunities to develop working groups between the businesses and professionals located in Clay Center. Alongside attraction efforts for young professionals, the formation of a young professionals group can help address retention by providing young people with a supporting network within the community. Similarly, a downtown business group can help businesses in Clay Center collaborate to address the challenges they face together.

Summary of Strategies

- a. Work with city leaders to address zoning issues.
- b. Address vacant storefront and housing issues.
- c. Explore the formation of a land bank
- d. Identify strategic uses for vacant spaces.
- e. Support the development of professional groups: young professionals and downtown businesses/organizations.

Explore opportunities for mixed-use development in the downtown area; utilize mixed residential and commercial development to increase traffic downtown and create attractive housing options for younger populations.

Case Study: City of Covington Rent Subsidy & Façade Improvement Programs

Small businesses are key to local economies: they create jobs, attract visitors, and help support vibrant and bustling downtown corridors. In Kentucky, the City of Covington has established a Small Business Program to help get businesses into buildings, as well as aid established small businesses with expansions and façade improvements. The Ritte's Corner Small Business Program was created in 2016, with a goal to help restore underutilized and deteriorating properties, while attracting new businesses to the business district. The program provides financial assistance to new businesses in the form of a rent subsidy incentive, or to property owners of vacant commercial spaces in the form of a forgivable loan to promote façade improvements. Since the creation, the Small Business Program has been opened to all Covington small businesses, not just those in the Historic Preservation Overlay zone of Ritte's Corner.

With the goal of stimulating small business creation and expansion, the Small Business Program has been utilized to revive Covington's historic districts and their storefronts. The façade improvement program offers property owners a 50 percent matching forgivable loan (up to \$6,000) to update their commercial building's façade. It is the perfect way to update lighting, windows, painting, signage, and other exterior building improvements visible from the street. The facade improvement program has been offered to Covington developers, like those who used the grant to transform a former grocery store into a mixed-use development, with commercial space on the first level and apartments on the second. Developers used the grant to update the windows, paint, bricks, and add flower boxes.

The Small Business Program has utilized a rent subsidy program to create new small businesses and offer other businesses the opportunity to expand their businesses with a second location. The rent subsidy incentive offers financial assistance in the form of reimbursement of rent payment of up to half of the business's monthly rent or \$500.00 per month (whichever is less). Eligibility for assistance is up to twelve months, anytime within the first eighteen months of business. The business must sign at least a two-year lease and create at least one Full Time Equivalent (FTE) job. In Covington, a vacant building in a vital area of Covington had been an eye-sore to the community until a local businessman decided to refurbish it so he could open a second coffee shop and cafe. The rent subsidy encouraged this business owner to revitalize a historic building and expand his businesses' operations. This project has led to further neighborhood investment and is expected to create 15 new jobs for Covington.

Covington's Small Business Program has been a success during its five-year lifespan. In December 2021, after five years, the small business program provided financial assistance to its 100th business. During those five years, the small business program has filled or improved 98,000 square feet commercial space. Of these 100 projects, 35 of them have been to businesses owned by minorities, women, and/or military veterans.

Source: <https://www.covingtonky.gov/government/departments/economic-development/-incentives>

Business Retention, Expansion, and Resilience

6. Goal: Institute a structured business retention and expansion program.

Business retention and expansion (BRE) is a core economic development function. BRE programs demonstrate to businesses that they are important to the community, help form relationships between the business community and EDOs, identify business concerns and opportunities to address them proactively, and when successfully implemented can lead to job and income growth, as well as increased investment. A BRE program should be structured around team-building, relationship-building, needs assessment and response, case management, and follow-up.

A structured BRE program presents an opportunity for the merged economic development organization to strengthen its relationships with the business community, and to identify goals and action items for its Entrepreneurial and Business Development committee. A BRE program would also offer opportunities for consistent engagement between the new EDO and the community, including regularly scheduled meetings providing relevant information and solutions to address challenges for Clay County businesses. As the previous Chamber of Commerce is part of this merged organization, the new EDO can draw upon, grow, and leverage these existing relationships with the businesses community to provide structured and strategic support.

Additionally, Clay County relies on a large agricultural manufacturing company, AGI Hutchison, to provide a significant level of employment. A successful BRE program would identify these types of large employers and develop incentives or services with the goal of retention. The loss of large employers should be considered in contingency or economic diversification planning, with forward-thinking services that ensure their retention through future industry changes, population changes, or other economic disruptions.

Components of a successful BRE program include the following:

- ◆ Identification of challenges and barriers
- ◆ Contingency planning
- ◆ Confidentiality and code of ethics
- ◆ Business visitation and surveys
- ◆ Technical assistance and case management
- ◆ Industry-specific development
- ◆ Infrastructure management

- ◆ Workforce development
- ◆ Financial assistance, incentives, and resource development
- ◆ Responsiveness to changing needs of the community and disruptions
- ◆ Resiliency

Further details on the development and implementation of BRE programs is included in Appendix F, which includes excerpts from the *IEDC Business Retention and Expansion Manual*, Chapter 2 “Creating and Managing a Business Retention and Expansion Program.”

Summary of Strategies

- a. Develop a structured BRE program that includes regular contact with local businesses, proactive needs assessment and response, and business incentives.
- b. Address retention of large agricultural manufacturing employer.

7. Goal: Support businesses' recovery and resilience to economic disruptions.

Clay County faces compounded impacts from both natural disasters and the pandemic faced over recent years. Both disruptions have highlighted the need for enhanced resiliency and preparedness planning for the community and its businesses. The merged economic development organization, as part of its Entrepreneurial and Business Development committee activities, can develop a resiliency plan outlining business continuity contingencies in the face of natural disasters or other disruptions. Recommended components of a business resiliency and continuity plan include:

For Businesses

- ◆ Identifying critical business functions
- ◆ Supply checklist
- ◆ Insurance information and updates
- ◆ Backup locations and data systems
- ◆ Emergency contact information for businesses
- ◆ Emergency contact information for employees

For EDOs

- ◆ Establish organization capacity and responsibilities for disaster preparedness and recovery processes
- ◆ Identify at-risk business functions
- ◆ Collect critical contact information for business community
- ◆ Develop plan for business reentry system
- ◆ Prepare for post-disaster business financing
- ◆ Develop plan for crisis communications and messaging
- ◆ Identify disaster recovery resources that fill gaps in those available locally
- ◆ Identify strategies for redevelopment and re-use

For more information on business continuity planning, please refer to the “Disaster Preparation Measures Chapter” from the IEDC publication *Leadership in Times of Crisis: A Toolkit for Economic Recovery and Resiliency* linked in Appendix G.

As part of this preparation effort, the organization should identify underserved or otherwise vulnerable businesses, such as businesses operating for less than one to five years or businesses in vulnerable industries, and develop preparedness targets specifically to assist those businesses that will be hit hardest. Risks to assess include vulnerability to impacts such as property damages, capital losses, revenue losses, employment disruptions, or risks related to close contact.

The organization should also serve as an information hub for businesses and community members. Preparedness, recovery, and resiliency resources to keep up to date include:

- ◆ Updates from relevant local, state, and national agencies
- ◆ Updates on status of infrastructure impacts or closures
- ◆ Updates on businesses and community safety protocols
- ◆ Lists of financial resources available to businesses
- ◆ Contact information and directory of point persons
- ◆ Planning templates, guides, checklists, and other preparedness resources for businesses

Summary of Strategies

- a. Address the need for a Business Resiliency Plan.
- b. Assess which businesses are underserved or more vulnerable to economic disruptions and develop preparedness targets.
- c. Provide businesses and community members with disaster preparedness, recovery, and resilience resources.

V. Looking Ahead

Childcare

Many stakeholders raised access to childcare services as a challenge faced by both workers and employers. Due to the closure of childcare facilities in the community, additional burdens have been placed on workers with young children, while employers face challenges with talent attraction and retention due to this strain on the workforce. The merged economic development organization will need to work with both public and private community partners to determine the best way to incentivize and assist the development of these services to meet the identified needs.

One of the first steps to advocating for enhanced childcare services in the community would be a market assessment to gather data on the community's childcare needs and existing gaps in the market. It is recommended that Clay County work with state partners to obtain this data, which can then be used to support calls for funding and other resources from state and local partners.

Housing

Another avenue for talent attraction and population retention is supporting housing development. The community has the potential to expand housing options for young workers and recent graduates, as well as the development of mixed-use housing and retail in downtown Clay Center. There is also potential to develop and revitalize vacant lots and unused properties throughout the community. Grow Clay County can work to obtain data on vacant housing rates, as well as market assessments of housing types most in demand among its target population groups. This data can be used to support development efforts and partnerships centered around housing and revitalization. Additionally, the organization can explore incentive programs for land development and revitalization, such as tax incentives, rent subsidies, and historic restoration programs.

Organization Management

As Grow Clay County commences its work with the community, there will be many opportunities for new partnerships, initiatives, and visioning. Setting a cohesive mission from the start will be essential in keeping the organization and its committees focused on productive and achievable goals that tie into the long-term vision for the community. It will be important

moving forward that these partners communicate and meet regularly, and receive the support and resources they need to carry out these goals. Funding for the organization will be especially vital, with financial and capacity-building support from local, county, and state partners aligning with both the community's short and long-term economic development needs.

VI. Appendix

Appendix A. Excerpt from IEDC Economic Development Marketing and Attraction Manual, Chapter 5 “Designing a Marketing Strategy.”

I. The Marketing Plan

Once the economic developer has identified the community’s competitive advantage and the target markets, their characteristics, preferences and needs, the next step is to develop a plan for the marketing effort.

A marketing plan provides a guide for all marketing activities. A plan outlines a strategy for achieving the marketing goals, the specific activities, and timetables to realize those goals. In addition, it includes the financial resources and staff needed to support marketing activities, as well as how to evaluate the effectiveness of those activities. An economic development organization’s marketing plan should:

- Ensure limited resources are used efficiently;
- Develop a singular clear message;
- Better understand prospects’ business functions/needs;
- Reduce time spent attracting companies not compatible with the community;
- Communicate the community’s message succinctly;
- Formulate a consistent and distinctive image of the community;
- Set out clear and attainable goals.

In the bigger picture, a marketing plan helps a community to:

- Reach global and underserved markets;
- Network and link the community or region to the rest of the world;
- Create jobs and recruit a highly motivated and skilled workforce;
- Promote the maintenance and expansion of a diversified tax base.

Much of the marketing plan will be based on the competitive advantages of the community. Remember that what you want to highlight in your marketing profile is what it is about your community that makes it unique and the best location for a specific industry. If you provide only general information on your community, the probability is that your community will not be remembered. By focusing on your competitive advantages, you can highlight what makes your community different and best suited for your potential client’s investment.

As you develop a marketing plan you will need to be cognizant of what industries you want to specifically target. This will be influenced by your community profile and the existing strengths in your community. You do not

want to target businesses for which your locality has no capacity. Whatever type of industry you try to attract, you must indicate what local assets you have to support that type of industry.

Developing and writing a marketing plan may seem time consuming and unnecessary; however, it is imperative since a marketing plan:

- Communicates to the community, government officials, and board members what the organization is trying to achieve, why, and how it will do it;
- Provides a guide for management actions and resource allocations;
- Allows the organization to shape its future rather than react to situations as they arise;
- Coordinates activities of different members of the marketing effort;
- Provides a control system to monitor deviations from assumptions that underlie the plan, as well as results, that do not meet targeted goals;
- Provides justification for funding; the plan lays out how funds will be spent and the expected return on the investment.

Steps in Developing a Marketing Plan

Step One: Identify Players and Stakeholders

Key community leaders should be included in the development and implementation of a marketing plan. These leaders include representatives from government, neighborhood associations, business, labor, developers, private financial institutions, and other organizations involved in marketing the community. These community leaders can lend support for the implementation of a plan, including financial and human resources, advice, message consistency, verbal support, and so forth. To provide this level of support, the community leaders must understand and approve the goals of a strategic market plan. For example, attracting a specific industry to the community may be a good development strategy from a technical and economic perspective, but if the local government does not support the initiative, either their attitudes must change or alternative strategies must be pursued.

Holding small community meetings is a useful way to garner this support. These meetings can provide a source of information for local economic development, a mechanism for economic development practitioners to inform others about their activities, and a means for involving other organizations in the development and implementation of the marketing plan. The meetings can also help identify stakeholders in the marketing effort and specific groups within the community that may be opposed to the plan, as well as help to uncover funding and other resources. Recruit a diverse group for the greatest variety of view points; this same group will help you at the implementation stage, as they were an active part of the process.

Step Two: Assess Competitive-ness

Assess the local community and economic competitiveness:

Profile and assess the economic environment, community resources, and barriers to local development. Look at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the area involved as well as an analysis of the local economy and trends. The marketing plan should be based on the analysis of the community, its competitive

strengths, and resulting opportunities. A SWOT analysis helps to identify and prioritize the main issues facing a community that a strategic marketing plan should address.

Step Three: Identify Potential Markets

Identify potential markets:

Concentrate on those industries that are best suited for your community, based on sound market research and analysis. Details from the community profile will help determine what businesses to target. Do not market to industries that cannot operate economically in your area. If your water supply is limited, for instance, avoid wasting time with industries that require large amounts of water.

Promotion is the communications function of marketing to potential clients. There are two components to promotion: developing the message and determining the appropriate channels to convey that message. In choosing a message and marketing technique, a marketer should determine:

- The target: What are the characteristics of the target audience and what the group knows about the community?
- The purpose: What does the group need to know? Is it to increase awareness, inform, persuade, educate, or convert the target audience?
- The desired response: How the audience will use the information. Is the desired response of the target audience to request further information, visit the community, visit a particular site, or something else?

Step Four: Goals, Objectives, Strategies

Formulate realistic goals, objectives, and strategies:

Identify feasible goals, objectives, and strategies based on the community assessment, as well as the external environment, internal opportunities, constraints, and budget. Goals are the overall vision or desired outcome of the marketing activities. For example:

- To increase economic activity and generate employment;
- To diversify the economic base of the community;
- To change the existing image of the community;
- To reach global markets.

Objectives are the specific targets to be achieved in realizing the goal. There may be many objectives per goal. Objectives should be measurable and have a target completion date. For example:

- Attract a major manufacturing plant or high technology company to the community.
- Develop business assistance services that reduce the cost of business creation, expansion, or relocation.
- Generate recognition of the community, particularly among site or facility selectors or advisors who are interested in a preliminary examination of a community.
- Increase the population of young professionals living in the community.

Strategies describe how to achieve the identified goals and objectives. Each strategy answers questions about what programs, procedures, and activities will help reach the marketing goals. Both short-term and long-term strategies should be developed. Short-term strategies include activities that take up to one year. The objective of short-term strategies and activities is to optimize a community's existing resources. Examples include developing an advertising campaign or participating in a trade show. Long-term strategies are those that will take two or more years to execute. Examples of long-term strategies include developing a new facility or redeveloping the downtown.

Strategies include:

- Develop a marketing message for the program or project
- Communicate that message
- Make the community more attractive to prospective investors, improving infrastructure, creating a one-stop business center, or targeting workforce-training activities.

Step Five: Plans of Action

Develop plans of action:

Plans of action spell out the sequence of events and resources necessary to achieve the stated goals. This includes overhead, staff, information, financial capital, as well as the capabilities and resources available to the EDO. This also includes inventorying organizational resources, such as personnel (e.g., their availability and capabilities), financial resources, assessing past and present promotional activities for what has and has not worked, and identifying organizations and business that support or may support your organization's marketing efforts. These organizations can include state economic development agencies, utilities, and financial institutions, real estate developers and brokers, business associations, chambers of commerce, and local government. For each proposed strategy, an action plan should indicate:

- Who will be responsible for each activity; identification of potential partners; public and private-sector groups within the community;
- How the activity will be implemented;
- Personnel requirements;
- Cost estimate;
- Expected impact;
- Timeline and completion date.

Step Six: Implementation

Implementation:

Implementation is the carrying out of the action plans. It is important that a marketing plan is one that an organization is capable of implementing and committed to supporting over an extended period of time. Based on the community's competitive advantage, and what the target businesses are looking for, the organization must determine the best way to share information on its community to those target markets. Be creative in thinking from the perspective of the company to determine what would most likely catch their attention. For example, consider the following:

- What are the best ways to market to your targeted market?
- What is the most effective way to get your message out?
- What medium gets the most responses (e.g., social media v. print media)?
- Given the budget, which are the most effective marketing tools?

Step Seven: Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluating outcomes:

It is important in strategic planning to set specific and measurable goals and objectives so that marketing activities can be evaluated for effectiveness and to ensure that the goals are met. The ability to demonstrate the effectiveness of a program is also important in justifying economic development policies and programs.

Monitoring of established goals, objectives, and strategies should be an on-going process. Evaluations should be conducted on a periodic basis such as monthly, quarterly, semi-annually, or annually. However, if evaluations are too frequent, the marketing staff can become disillusioned by not meeting goals or milestones; the time between evaluations should be long enough to generate a realistic and helpful evaluation.

Factors that should be tracked over the life of the marketing effort include:

- Actual progress of each strategy compared with the scheduled progress, as laid out in the marketing plan;
- Dollars spent compared to outcome and/or resources allocated;
- Number of inquiries generated;
- Number of jobs created or retained;
- External changes that may impact the marketing plan.

Step Eight: Plan Adjustment

Retrofitting and adjusting

Adjust the plan regularly to meet changing conditions and outcomes. Even if the marketing plan is based on reasonable intelligence and organizational best practices the plan will need to be regularly revisited and adjusted. For example, EDOs will need to examine and evaluate the “vehicle” that delivers the community’s message. Newspapers and other forms of print media have consolidated in recent years as social media outlets have become the vehicle of choice for many marketing campaigns and advertisements.

In summary, a marketing plan typically includes the following elements:

- Mission Statement: Mission of the organization;
- Situation Analysis: An overview of local strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats;
- Goal & Objectives: An established list created during planning process;
- Target Markets: Lists of markets that describe their needs and preferences, and their potential benefit to the community;

- Strategy: It delineates how the community will achieve its goals, its promotional strategies, its budget sources, and the use of funds;
- Implementation and Measurements: Succinct documents, schedules, responsibilities, and benchmarks for employees to follow;
- Appendix: Provides supporting documents.

Appendix B. State and Regional Tourism Partners

- ◆ Kansas Tourism Division <https://www.travelks.com/travel-industry/>
- ◆ North Central Kansas Tourism
https://www.facebook.com/ExploreNorthCentralKansas/community/?ref=page_internal
- ◆ Meet Kansas <https://www.travelks.com/meet-kansas/>
- ◆ Sports KS <https://www.travelks.com/sportsks/>
- ◆ Tour Kansas <https://www.travelks.com/tour-kansas/>
- ◆ Kansas State Historical Society <https://www.kshs.org>
- ◆ Travel Industry Association of Kansas <https://tiak.org>
- ◆ Kansas Bed and Breakfast Association <https://kbba.com>
- ◆ Kansas Outdoor Industry Association <https://outdoorindustry.org/state/kansas/>
- ◆ Kansas Department of Wildlife and Sports <https://ksoutdoors.com>
- ◆ Kansas Department of Commerce <https://www.kansascommerce.gov/tourism/>
- ◆ North Central Regional Planning Commission <http://www.ncrpc.org/>

Appendix C. Tourism Resources

- ◆ Kansas Attraction Development Grant Program (ADGP)
<https://www.travelks.com/travel-industry/programs-and-resources/grants/attraction-development-grants/>
- ◆ Kansas Tourism Marketing Grant Program (TMGP) <https://www.travelks.com/travel-industry/programs-and-resources/grants/marketing-grants/>
- ◆ Tourism Attraction Sub-grants for Kansas (TASK) program
<https://www.travelks.com/travel-industry/programs-and-resources/grants/task-grant/>
- ◆ U.S. EDA Travel, Tourism, and Recreation grants <https://eda.gov/arpa/travel-tourism/>
- ◆ NCRPC Attraction Development, Kansas PRIDE, and TMGP grants
<https://www.ncrpc.org/resources/funding/travelandtourism/>

Appendix D. Workforce Development Incentive Examples

- ◆ Ignite Fredericton: Fredericton Region Five-Year Immigration Strategy
<https://www.ignitefredericton.com/news/191/fredericton-puts-immigration-at-the-forefront-with-five-year-strategy>
- ◆ State of Maine “Back-to-Work” Grant Program <https://www.maine.gov/covid19/back-to-work-grants>
- ◆ Tulsa Remote - Tulsa, OK <https://tulsaremote.com>
- ◆ State of Vermont Remote Worker Grant Program <https://accd.vermont.gov/economic-development/remoteworkergrantprogram>
- ◆ New Worker Relocation Grant Program <https://thinkvermont.com/relocation-incentives/>
- ◆ Life Works Here Initiative - Northwest Arkansas Council
<https://findingnwa.com/incentive/>
- ◆ Remote Tucson - Startup Tucson <https://www.startuptucson.com/remotetucson>
- ◆ Come Home Award - St. Clair County, MI <https://www.stclairfoundation.org/come-home-award/>
- ◆ Savannah Technology Workforce Incentive - SEDA <https://seda.org/resources-and-data/incentives-database/creative-incentive/>
- ◆ First Children's Finance - Rural Child Care Minnesota Department of Human Services
<https://www.ruralchildcare.org/>
 - Rural Child Care Innovation Program Kandiyohi, MN https://ba1670d4-347a-481f-954a-7aee60549d85.filesusr.com/ugd/fdb178_23b928a5053746e0b8b886d4681331c_e.pdf
- ◆ North Coast Opportunities - Rural Communities Childcare
<https://www.ncoinc.org/programs/rural-communities-child-care/>

Appendix E. Land Bank Resources:

- ◆ Center for Community Progress: Land Bank FAQ
<https://communityprogress.org/resources/land-banks/lb-faq/>
- ◆ Center for Community Progress: National Land Bank Map
<https://communityprogress.org/resources/land-banks/national-land-bank-map/>

- ◆ National Housing Conference: Land Banks and Community Land Trusts
<https://nhc.org/policy-guide/land-based-solutions/land-banks-and-community-land-trusts/>

Appendix F. Excerpts from *IEDC Business Retention and Expansion Manual*, Chapter 2 “Creating and Managing a Business Retention and Expansion Program.”

Action Plan

Once a SWOT analysis has been completed, there should be a clear picture of the competitive position of the community. Now the economic development organization must develop an action plan to target limited resources to those areas where they will have the greatest impact.

Objectives and Goals

The BRE team, community and business leaders should set the priorities and establish goals and objectives for the program. The strategy defines what needs to be done to assist local businesses, such as identifying creative solutions to challenges facing a business, building a network between resources and the business, or fostering partnerships between a business and service providers.

The first step is to develop a series of realistic objectives and goals for the BRE program. These should take into consideration what was learned through the SWOT analysis and should:

- Leverage existing strengths so as to capitalize on the best opportunities available to the community.
- Address major weaknesses that, if left unattended, may pose threats to the community’s ability to retain and expand its existing employment base.

Suppose that a SWOT analysis revealed that the community’s strengths include a skilled labor pool, excellent training programs available through local community colleges, and excellent highway and rail access for transporting goods from suppliers. Further, suppose that the SWOT analysis revealed a major opportunity created by expanded production at an auto assembly plant in a community located 75 miles away but in a neighboring state. Also, another major opportunity was created by recent reforms in a state’s worker’s compensation system that will give a cost advantage to businesses in the state. A realistic objective for a BRE program might then be: “To retain five local metalworking shops, and increase employment in these shops by 100 net new jobs over the next two years.”

This objective is realistic since it builds upon the community’s internal strengths to exploit an opportunity created by external factors. It is practical because many of the resources typically available through BRE programs can be used to achieve it, such as: technical assistance to help the five metalworking shops market their capabilities to the auto manufacturer and achieve ISO 9000 certification, and financial assistance to help them invest in new equipment needed to produce parts to the manufacturer’s specifications.

Taking Action

Once a community has established a set of realistic and actionable goals for the BRE program, the next step is to create an action plan that lists each objective, along with details concerning how the goal or objective will be achieved:

- Which persons or groups are responsible for achieving the objective?
- What specific programs and initiatives will be used to help achieve the objective?
- What is the budget for achieving the objective?
- What is the target date for achieving the objective?

The action plan should be compiled in both a tabular format that lists the most salient points for each objective, and in a narrative format that provides the specific details for each objective. The summary version of the action plan will prove valuable both as an easy-to-reference source and as a quick means of communicating the key elements of the plan to stakeholders who may not have read the more detailed version.

In the case where the economic development practitioner does not exist, or is unable to visit all the businesses, there are some options for engaging volunteers. Some communities enlist elected officials to conduct on-site visits at the larger, more prominent companies in the community. Staff or volunteers can conduct phone or mail interviews with smaller firms in the community.

Monitoring and Evaluation

As with any other economic development program, the impact of a BRE program must be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis. Evaluating results should not be seen as an exercise simply to appease funders. Rather, it is valuable in helping the BRE team understand what is and what is not working, and why. Consideration must be given to the length of time that a program must be operating before evaluation data can be collected. This may be a six-month period or a two-year period. Specific benchmarks set the goals of the program and serve as milestones against which it can be monitored. Analyzed results can be used by inside and outside parties to:

1. Ensure accountability and confidentiality, both of the program and the partners that comprise the program;
2. Inform decisions on the allocation of resources;
3. Provide information for further program planning and revision;
4. Compile data and testimonials that can be used to market the program to the business community, to funders and as part of business attraction literature.

Monitoring and evaluating a BRE program requires follow-up surveying of businesses that have participated in the program. The initial survey or interview provides a baseline of information on the business. Follow-up contact with businesses should collect both the impact of the services received and customer feedback on the overall BRE process. If a business has been identified for long-term technical assistance, it may make sense to survey the business several times during that period to monitor the effectiveness of the services provided.

Follow-up surveys and interviews should evaluate the following:

- **Impact on the business:** Were there any changes in the following: sales; sales per employee; business profitability; competitiveness of products/services; new product capacity; changes in purchases from suppliers; exports; quality; or availability and productivity of labor?
- **Effectiveness of assistance to targeted businesses:** To what extent did the program provide services to the targeted businesses? Were the services appropriate, or is there a need to develop more specific programs for targeted businesses?
- **Jobs created and retained:** Although difficult to assess from the outside, discussions with business owners and managers can create an accurate picture of the number of jobs that were retained or created because of the services provided. This is the most commonly measured impact of a BRE program.

Economic development practitioners need to be aware of any jobs created in their region that was simply transferred from another part of the region. In this case, the actual net job growth was zero. Counting these jobs would paint an inaccurate picture of job growth.

- **Effectiveness of leveraged resources:** Because there are so many potential partners involved in a BRE program, it is important to measure the use of these various resources. Which resources were best leveraged and why? Which resources were not used as frequently as expected, and why?
- **Impact on community:** The impact on the community may take longer to realize given the time it takes to see changes in tax cycles. After two years, an assessment should be made of the increased revenues to the community and state through increased income and taxes. Other factors to consider include a decrease in unemployment rates, reduction in public assistance payments and an increase in the repayment of loans.

Careful attention must be given to ensure that program *outcomes* are measured, as opposed to program *outputs*. Outputs refer to how many people participated in a program. Outcomes are what resulted from those people participating in the program. Outcomes are a much clearer measure of the impact of a program and provide more information to evaluate and improve a program. Outcomes can be both qualitative and quantitative, but definitely require detailed feedback from participating businesses.

Moreover, as the community moves along the learning curve with its BRE program, it will become evident which aspects of the BRE program are working well and which aspects could be improved. The action plan should be updated annually to reflect these changes.

IV. BRE Infrastructure

An effective BRE program must have the appropriate human capital, budget and technology. As mentioned previously, confidentiality and ethics are also a large part of BRE infrastructure. The BRE program itself must be secure, because business actions can be easily disrupted if misinformation is published. BRE data should be used in an ethical manner. For example, the results of a BRE survey should never be shared with competing employers in the community.

Human Capital

A BRE program must have the appropriate personnel to manage the program, conduct outreach, resolve problems, and provide technical assistance. While human capital is the key to any BRE program, many smaller communities do not have the resources to support a full-time BRE program. In this situation, volunteers from the business community and service provider partners play a critical role in implementing the program effectively.

Budget

The BRE program team must determine the appropriate size of the program budget and what costs will be included. Again, in a smaller community, the different partners may be able to provide in-kind amenities or services. Partners must also identify funding for the program in its initial years and then determine how the program will be sustained in the long term. It must also be determined who actually has authority and control of the budget.

Technology

Advances in information technology have made it easier to deploy robust, user-friendly software systems for BRE programs. These systems are typically used to store data collected during outreach, analyze data for trends and opportunities, and monitor assistance provided to each company. How data are collected and analyzed varies from state to state and community to community. EDOs should have a back-up data storage component that ensures data access in case of an emergency.

A variety of BRE software programs are available for data collection and analysis. Several analysis programs include SAS, Excel, and NetSuite. Some communities buy BRE programs off the shelf; others use custom-made programs. Some BRE software programs can be customized to meet specific data-gathering requirements.

In some states, communities choose and manage their software programs independently. However, this can be cost-prohibitive for smaller communities. A more advanced approach is for a sponsoring organization to purchase a license from a software vendor or developer and then make the system available to partner communities for a small fee. This aggregates information from various communities into one database that can be used at the regional or state level. Data can be used for benchmarking among communities that share software.

The most effective software systems are Internet-based, requiring only a computer with an Internet connection. The proliferation of wireless communications and mobile devices such as smart phones and notebook

computers makes it easier than ever to conduct BRE programs. EDOs should work with their regional and state counterparts to ensure software access and compatibility.

Appendix G. Leadership in Times of Crisis Toolkit

Leadership in Times of Crisis: A Toolkit for Economic Recovery and Resiliency provides strategies and tactics for community leaders to focus on for economic recovery and preserving jobs, incorporating useful information for convening private and public stakeholders to identify key economic recovery strategies, tips on how to navigate federal resources for response and recovery, and implementation of recovery initiatives.

Link to access: <https://restoreyoureconomy.org/blog/2015/03/27/business-continuity/leadership-in-times-of-crisis-a-toolkit-for-economic-recovery-and-resiliency/clientuploads/2015/03/IEDC-Leadership-in-Times-of-Crisis-Toolkit.pdf>