

Transformational Economic Development
Fostering Growth and Progress in the Pacific Northwest

Empowering Second Chances
Lafayette, Louisiana's 2nd Chance Job Fair

The Wildcat Internship Program
A Gold Standard in Talent Development and Educational Partnerships

Spurring Investment and Building Community
The Birth of the Asian District Mesa AZ[®]

Welcoming Workplaces
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The International Economic Development Council (IEDC) is the premier international association dedicated to leadership and excellence in economic development. IEDC can equip you with the tools and resources that are helping to shape economic development throughout the country and around the world. Our services include:

- *ED Now*, a twice-monthly newsletter
- *Economic Development Journal*, a quarterly publication
- Improved access to resources and information
- Enhanced educational choices
- Stronger advocacy and access at the Federal level
- Expanded networks and alliances
- Industry-leader publications
- Expanded research and technical assistance
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Dr. Eloisa Klementich,
CEcD, Ph.D.
IEDC Chair of the Board
of Directors

dear colleagues

It is my pleasure and honor to serve as Chair of IEDC's Board of Directors for 2024. I am excited to take on this new role and am thankful for all of those excellent leaders who came before me and who have helped support my own career journey. I am also humbled and proud to be the fourth female and first Latino chair in the history of IEDC. Just as the face of economic development has and is changing, so is the representation and leadership of IEDC and we are excited for the future of the organization.

Last year, IEDC underwent the most comprehensive strategic planning process in its history. This new strategic plan was unveiled at the IEDC Annual Conference in Dallas, highlighting three main priorities for the organization:

- Impact on the individual and organization;
- Impact on the profession; and
- Impact on the global community

Now comes the hard part, driving the implementation and success of this plan. That cannot happen without each and every one of us stepping up and stepping in alongside the IEDC team. Our new shared vision is one in which IEDC leads the future of economic development as an essential, relevant, valued profession that fosters inclusive prosperity throughout the world.

To accomplish this, IEDC has adopted a new mission, that: Through bold leadership, collaborative partnerships, and innovative programs and solutions, IEDC will equip stakeholders to drive equitable and sustainable outcomes for the communities we serve as:

- the best place to work;
- the best place for economic developers to learn and connect; and
- the premier professional association for economic development in the world.

This year we will build upon our foundation, strengthening our operational excellence to truly deliver impact through our three priorities. To do this, we will need transformative creativity and bold leadership. I personally believe that this is what the new strategy for IEDC does. It expands on our influence as a profession, it shows our commitment to our members and highlights the commitment to see every individual and every local community reaching their fullest potential.

This now rests in our collective hands. We are the ones who will bring this vision to life, who will help demonstrate the profession's value. Economic developers are a small fraction of the population, but we are making a big difference in the community. Together, we will build upon our foundation and shape the future of our organization. We need you to be engaged, to lead, to participate and volunteer, to share your story, the economic development story of your community, and the story of IEDC. We hope that you will get your colleagues engaged, get your local elected officials involved, and partner with your local stakeholder. We need everyone at the table to share ideas, to push us forward. On behalf of the Board of Directors of IEDC, I look forward to the year ahead and *thank you* for your continued support and engagement.

Greetings,

Dr. Eloisa Klementich, CEcD, Ph.D.
IEDC Chair of the Board of Directors and President and CEO, Invest Atlanta

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by Sarah Wheeler with contributions from Monica Mitchell and Justin D. Hilliard

Since early 2020, Job Training Albuquerque (JTA) has helped create opportunities and better career outcomes for Albuquerque’s workforce, surpassing 1,176 employee participants in 2024. The program offers in-demand, transferable skills that meet the needs of local small businesses. JTA received two IEDC Gold Awards in Partnerships with Educational Institutions and Talent Development & Retention.



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The starting point is fairly straightforward. *There should be no conflict between economic development and environmental sustainability.* But, of course, as we all know, there is conflict. For centuries our acquisition, use, and disposal of natural resources was not much of a concern because there was always more land and there were always more resources to acquire and put to use. But then the Industrial Revolution began.

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in the ever-evolving landscape of economic development, addressing the critical issue of the workforce housing shortage has emerged as a paramount challenge for communities worldwide. The authors delve into real-world examples of successful initiatives and shed light on the pivotal role economic development plays in shaping the housing landscape.

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INTERNATIONAL
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transformational

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

By Joey Gunning and Gary Ballew, CECD

On June 16-18, 2024, Spokane, Washington will proudly welcome hundreds of economic developers to the region, as the host city for the 2024 International Economic Development Council's (IEDC) Economic Future Forum. A historic event for the region, this marks the first time the IEDC conference will be held in the Pacific Northwest. The theme of the Forum will be "Transformational Economic Development." Economic development is a transformational practice. Our communities are changed with each business we assist or talent we help to develop. This transformation is often slow and difficult to perceive. But occasionally, a project will create transformational change that moves a community forward by leaps and bounds. In 2024, Spokane will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of our transformational event, The World's Fair (also known as Expo '74).

A BRIEF HISTORY

Spokane, founded by James Nettle Glover in 1873, initially named Spokan Falls, witnessed significant transformation in its early years. Natural resources attracted settlers to the area, leading to its incorporation in 1881. The city faced a catastrophic fire in 1889, but resiliently rebuilt with substantial brick and stone architecture.

The arrival of the Northern Pacific Railroad in 1881 and the discovery of gold in the Coeur d'Alene mining district sparked a rapid boom in Spokane, establishing it as the commercial hub of the Inland Empire, comprising eastern Washington, northern Idaho, and western Montana. By 1909, Spokane's population grew to over 100,000, boasting immense wealth and diverse architecture. The city's foresighted leaders focused on urban planning, forming the parks board in 1907 and engaging the Olmsted Brothers to ensure Spokane's continued beauty. Nearly all of Spokane's many beautiful parks and parkways were first conceived by the Olmsted Brothers, of New York's Central Park fame, including Manito Park,

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The Historic Davenport Hotel opened in 1914 and has served as a beacon of culture and refinement throughout the region.



The Spokane County Courthouse is a government building home to numerous Spokane County offices such as those of the assessor, auditor, and clerk, as well as courtrooms for the Spokane County Superior Court.



The grand American Legion Building was one of the first structures in Spokane to be built with fireproof structural steel and have high speed electric elevators.

FOSTERING GROWTH AND PROGRESS IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

The 2024 IEDC Economic Future Forum will be held in Spokane, Washington, marking a historic moment for the Pacific Northwest. The theme, "Transformational Economic Development," reflects on the city's rich history, particularly the impact of the 1974 World's Fair (Expo '74). From overcoming challenges to hosting a groundbreaking event, Expo '74 transformed Spokane. The upcoming forum will focus on tracks such as community stability, sustainable economic growth, post-COVID transformation, and the role of arts in revitalizing communities. Attendees will also celebrate Expo '74's 50th anniversary, reflecting on its legacy and envisioning a future of sustainable development in the Pacific Northwest.

which includes 78 acres of native and cultivated landscape and 20 acres of world class botanical gardens.

Spokane's rich history is mirrored in its architecture. After the devastating fire of 1889, the city experienced an unprecedented building boom, erecting substantial brick and terra cotta structures that define its downtown. Architects like Herman Preusse, Kirtland K. Cutter, and John K. Dow were instrumental in shaping the city's skyline. Notable landmarks such as the Davenport Hotel, Spokane County Courthouse, and the American Legion Building are testaments to this era.

Today, over 50% of downtown Spokane is designated as historic, with numerous buildings undergoing extensive renovation. The Davenport Hotel, the American Legion Building, and the Central Steam Heat Plant have been meticulously restored, breathing new life into Spokane's historic architecture and ushering in a renewed era of downtown vitality. The preservation and renovation of these historic structures reflect Spokane's commitment to honoring its past while embracing modernity, transforming the old into new and ensuring the city's heritage remains a vibrant part of its present identity.

EXPO '74

From May 4 to November 3, 1974, Spokane hosted the World's Fair. It was the first World's Fair to be held in the United States in 11 years, and it attracted more than 5.6 million visitors. Led by professional executive King Cole, Spokane aimed not only to host the world's fair but also to transform the downtown area into a public park post-event. The idea stemmed from the city's struggle with railroad tracks dividing the city and obscuring the natural beauty of the Spokane River and its falls. Over time, plans developed through urban renewal projects, culminating in the vision for Expo '74.

But the fair did not come without its challenges. The audacious idea to host a World's Fair was thought to be crazy at first. No city as small as Spokane – which had a population of about 170,000 – had ever hosted a World's Fair. Financing such a massive project was a primary concern. Initially, the idea faced resistance and skepticism, particularly regarding funding sources and the economic vitality of hosting a World's Fair in a city as small as Spokane. Overcoming this hurdle involved extensive negotiations, lobbying efforts, and

The fair's theme, "Celebrating Tomorrow's Fresh New Environment," focused on environmental issues and the conservation of natural resources, serving as a catalyst for positive change in the community. Expo '74 sparked a transformation in the heart of Spokane. Once a dying industrial town, Spokane became a vibrant, forward-thinking city.

seeking both public and private funding. There were also doubts about Spokane's ability to successfully organize and execute an international event of this magnitude. Skeptics questioned whether the city could attract enough visitors, secure global participation, and deliver a fair that would meet international standards. But despite the challenges, proponents of Expo '74 persistently pursued their vision, and the bold idea to host a World's Fair became a reality.

The fair's theme, "Celebrating Tomorrow's Fresh New Environment," focused on environmental issues and the conservation of natural resources, serving as a catalyst for positive change in the community. Expo '74 sparked a transformation in the heart of Spokane. Once a dying industrial town, Spokane became a vibrant, forward-thinking city. Spanning 100 acres along the Spokane River, the fair showcased numerous innovative and environmentally-friendly exhibits. One of the most popular exhibits was the U.S. Pavilion, which featured a 50-foot-high geodesic dome that housed educational exhibits focused on environmental issues. Today, the Pavilion exists as a flexible use event space for a summer concert series, an outdoor giant screen film festival, dynamic light shows, and more.

Beyond the exhibits, Expo '74 offered a rich lineup of cultural and entertainment events, featuring performances by the Spokane Symphony, the Spokane Opera, and the Spokane Ballet. The fair also attracted popular musicians such as Duke Ellington and Harry Belafonte.

The World's Fair had a significant economic impact on the Spokane community. It created thousands of jobs and generated millions of dollars in revenue for local businesses. The fair spurred the development of new hotels, restaurants, and other businesses in the area. The transformational impact continues to this day, as the grounds now serve as Riverfront Park, a revitalized public space which recently underwent a major five-year renovation to provide new amenities and



Top: The Pavilion was a gift to Spokane from the United States government for Expo '74.

Bottom: Today, the Pavilion is a flexible use event space that hosts everything from a summer concert series to an outdoor giant screen film festival.



Prior to Expo '74, the Riverfront Park area was filled with railroad tracks, lumber, and profitable businesses.



Riverfront Park area during Expo '74. The industrial riverfront was cleared out to make way for the fair, completely changing the landscape and the future of downtown Spokane.



Today, Riverfront Park serves as a premier meeting location, event space, and downtown destination for all.

art installations. The park anchors the development around it, including new sports facilities on the North Bank, the establishment of two medical schools in the University District, and redevelopment in downtown Spokane.

UNIVERSITY DISTRICT

Spokane's University District is deeply rooted in the transformative impact of Expo '74. The aftermath of the fair saw concerted efforts to rejuvenate and reimagine Spokane's urban landscape, particularly the downtown and riverfront areas. This created an environment allowing for growth and innovation, setting the stage for the University District to evolve over the next several decades.

In the fall of 1992, the Joint Center for Higher Education released a master plan to guide the development of what was named the Riverpoint Campus in Spokane. The blueprint outlined a vision for Eastern Washington University and Washington State University to transition from leased downtown spaces to the old rail yard east of downtown, adjacent to Gonzaga University's campus, forming the foundation of the University District.

In 2002, the Health Sciences Building opened in the new campus. At the time, the working scientists who helped design the facility said there was "Nothing else like it in the country." The building's 21,000 square feet of wet and dry labs were designed to support research in diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, reproductive biology, exercise immunology, human nutrition, infectious disease, and more. The facility housed both Washington State University Spokane and Eastern Washington University health science education, research, and public service programs.

The addition of the WSU College of Nursing in 2009 addressed a statewide nursing shortage. The col-

lege continues to excel in nursing education, graduating competent, culturally aware, and prepared nurses. Degree offerings have shifted over time to reflect the healthcare delivery needs of the region, and current degree programs include BSN, RN-BSN, MN, PhD, DNP, and graduate certificates. Today, the Washington State University College of Nursing educates more than 1,000 students annually working towards their bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. It conducts patient-focused research aimed at transforming and improving health care for all.

Spokane's University District is deeply rooted in the transformative impact of Expo '74. The aftermath of the fair saw concerted efforts to rejuvenate and reimagine Spokane's urban landscape, particularly the downtown and riverfront areas. This created an environment allowing for growth and innovation, setting the stage for the University District to evolve over the next several decades.

Expanding its footprint in pharmaceutical and biomedical research, WSU Spokane completed the Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Sciences building in 2013. The \$80 million, 125,000-square-foot structure was occupied by WSU's College of Pharmacy and Medical Sciences researchers. The building also included several laboratories where students could study anatomy by using cadavers.

On April 1, 2015, Washington Governor Jay Inslee signed into law a bill that gave WSU the authority to create an independently accredited medical school in Spokane. WSU won bipartisan support for the proposal in the Washington state legislature. Elson S. Floyd, the 10th president of Washington State University and a nationally respected voice for affordable, accessible higher education, died of complications from colon cancer later that year. The WSU Board of Regents approved a proposal to change the name from the College of Medical Sciences to the Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine, in honor of the late president.

A new Spokane Teaching Health Clinic opened in the University District in August of 2016 that provides primary care to a largely underserved patient population. The three residency programs located here – Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, and Psychiatry

Spokane's University District has witnessed remarkable growth and development over the years, evolving into a vibrant hub for education, healthcare, research, and innovation. These milestones exemplify a collaborative commitment to transformative progress, positioning the district as a beacon for groundbreaking initiatives and fostering a promising future for Spokane's academic and healthcare landscapes.

– learn from each other. This clinic serves as a collaborative training site for residents but also medical students from University of Washington and Washington State University as well as Pharmacy, Nursing, Social Work, Occupational Therapy, and Physical Therapy students.

In 2019, the University District Gateway Bridge opened, giving students and faculty easier access to Spokane's medical district, while providing a safer, more pleasant commute for bicyclists and pedestrians. "The bridge means opportunity for the WSU Health Sciences campus, and for Spokane," said WSU Health Sciences Chancellor Daryll DeWald. "We envision a health innovation district there that will change people's lives in the region and around the globe."

The next year, in 2020, the Catalyst Building opened in the University District. The five-story, 159,000-square-foot Catalyst Building was the first net-zero commercial building made of cross-laminated timber in the state. "With the foundation for the five smartest blocks in the world now in place, Catalyst and the South Landing eco-district prove what is possible when industry leaders work together to think big and test bold ideas," said Scott Morris, chairman and former CEO of Avista. "What we have created is so transformative and innovative, it will serve as a new model for collaboration across industries. Together, we are re-imagining the future of energy and sustainable development."

The University District's next milestone came in 2022, with the grand opening of the \$60 million Gonzaga University and University of Washington medical school building. The building has classroom space for UW graduate students and Gonzaga undergraduates studying human physiology, nursing, and health sciences. Besides classrooms, the facility has a handful of features that cater specifically to the health sciences.

In 2023, WSU Spokane celebrated the completion of the renovation of its Medicine Building. The transformed building will be a central hub for the Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine and expand the educational capacity for WSU's College of Nursing and College of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, also housed on the Spokane campus.

In addition, the newly formed Evergreen Biosciences Innovation Cluster (EBIC) is eyeing the University District for its future headquarters. EBIC's mission is to make Washington State and the Mountain Northwest a magnet for companies providing and consuming expert life and health science contract research, development, and manufacturing services of medicines and medical devices, by enhancing workforce development and services to pharmaceutical and medical devices companies.

Spokane's University District has witnessed remarkable growth and development over the years, evolving into a vibrant hub for education, healthcare, research, and innovation. These milestones exemplify a collaborative commitment to transformative progress, positioning the district as a beacon for groundbreaking initiatives and fostering a promising future for Spokane's academic and healthcare landscapes.

NORTH BANK

In 1995, Spokane saw the dawn of a transformative project, bidding farewell to the historic Spokane Coliseum, making way for the construction of a new arena on the North Bank. This transition marked the beginning of a significant urban shift in downtown Spokane. Over the subsequent three decades, the area witnessed remarkable growth. The arrival of the Podium in 2019 transformed an empty parking lot into a state-of-the-art venue for track events, drawing crowds during traditionally slower tourism seasons (November-March).

Today, with the Spokane Area, the Podium, and One Spokane Stadium clustered together, the area has become a focal point for visitors. Event attendees stay in local hotels, dine in nearby restaurants, and explore the surrounding shops, providing a substantial financial boost to the city. The statistics speak volumes. The Podium alone generated a staggering \$65 million in economic impact within a year and attracted over 150,000 sports enthusiasts. These numbers are projected to rise steadily year after year, painting a promising picture for the area's economic growth.

From the remnants of the old coliseum and vacant lots, a vibrant "stadium district" has emerged. Its significance as a thriving hub for various events is undeniable. These projects embody Spokane's commitment to creating a thriving and lively environment. The impact is not merely about events; it's about the continuous vibrancy of the city and the sustained success of local businesses. The ongoing transformation from an older infrastructure to a vibrant events district epitomizes Spokane's relentless pursuit of progress and economic development.

Sometimes transformational change is a result of unforeseen circumstances, like the closure of a military base or large single employer that requires adaptation just to survive. However, communities can also proactively plan for transformational change by establishing long-term goals for their future. Regardless of the circumstances, we can all relate to the transformational nature of economic development.

From the remnants of the old coliseum and vacant lots, a vibrant “stadium district” has emerged. Its significance as a thriving hub for various events is undeniable. These projects embody Spokane’s commitment to creating a thriving and lively environment. The impact is not merely about events; it’s about the continuous vibrancy of the city and the sustained success of local businesses. The ongoing transformation from an older infrastructure to a vibrant events district epitomizes Spokane’s relentless pursuit of progress and economic development.

WHAT IS THE ECONOMIC FUTURE FORUM?

The 2024 Economic Future Forum will focus on Transformational Economic Development. The Spokane Host Committee continues to refine the track development, but four possible tracks in support of this have been identified:

- 1) Putting the Community First in Transformation
This track will explore how we can stabilize communities to ensure that the benefits of transformational economic development go to those who need them most, without causing gentrification. It will address how to create inclusive development strategies that prioritize the well-being of the community.
- 2) Sustainable Economic Development
This track will revisit the original theme of Expo '74 and explore how we can achieve sustainable economic growth in today’s world. The discussion will cover topics such as the trade-offs we make in the pursuit of chip manufacturing and clean energy manufacturing and how to balance economic development with environmental sustainability.
- 3) Transformation Post-COVID
This track will provide a progress report on how communities are using the Bi-partisan Infrastructure Bill and the Inflation Reduction Act to accelerate economic recovery and transform their local economies post-COVID. The discussion will focus on how to leverage these resources to create more resilient and equitable communities.

4) Arts – the Heart of Your Community and the Savior of Downtown

This track will highlight the role of the arts in revitalizing downtown areas and making them more attractive places to live, work, and play. It will address how arts and culture can be used as a tool of economic development, and how investments in the arts can benefit both the creative sector and the wider economy.

WHY SHOULD YOU ATTEND?

Many communities across North America have experienced transformational projects of varying sizes, from large-scale events like the 1974 Expo to smaller-scale initiatives such as industrial park development to recruit industry and create jobs. Sometimes transformational change is a result of unforeseen circumstances, like the closure of a military base or large single employer that requires adaptation just to survive. However, communities can also proactively plan for transformational change by establishing long-term goals for their future. Regardless of the circumstances, we can all relate to the transformational nature of economic development.

One of the great opportunities 2024 Economic Future Forum attendees will experience are the ongoing events tied to the 50th Anniversary of the Expo. There will be celebrations each week from May to July in five areas related to the Expo. Those five areas include:

- Environment – reflecting on the original theme of the Expo, which focused on sustainability before that term was commonly used, events will showcase sustainable practices and innovations.
- Tribes – celebrations will honor the indigenous communities of the region. Spokane is named after the Spokane Tribe, the Children of the Sun. The Kalispel and Coeur D’Alene also have traditional lands in the region.
- Arts & Culture – Spokane has a long tradition of supporting the arts, but the facilities created for the Expo provided infrastructure for enhancing arts in the community that otherwise would have taken decades. Attendees can explore the legacy of the Expo’s impact on the local arts scene.
- Sports – Spokane is a sports town; hosting Hoop-fest, the largest 3 on 3 basketball tournament in the world; developing the Podium, the fastest indoor

One of the great opportunities 2024 Economic Future Forum attendees will experience are the ongoing events tied to the 50th Anniversary of the Expo. There will be celebrations each week from May to July in five areas related to the Expo.

As we gear up to host the Economic Future Forum, we're not only celebrating the present achievements, but envisioning a future of sustainable growth and development. The Pacific Northwest holds immense potential, and this conference amplifies our commitment to harnessing that potential for the greater good. It is an invitation to the economic development community to collaborate, innovate, and co-create a future where transformation is at the core of our endeavors.

track on the continent; or just enjoying the natural beauty that surrounds Spokane through hiking, fishing, or skiing.

- Legacy – the 74 Expo created a lasting legacy that will be examined. Most of that has been for the good, but equity remains an ongoing challenge that many in the community are trying to address. One feature the organizers of the 50th Anniversary are working on is augmented reality, allowing visitors to use their smart phones to see how Riverfront Park looked prior to the Expo and during the Expo, compared to today.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

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but envisioning a future of sustainable growth and development. The Pacific Northwest holds immense potential, and this conference amplifies our commitment to harnessing that potential for the greater good. It is an invitation to the economic development community to collaborate, innovate, and co-create a future where transformation is at the core of our endeavors.

In economic development, collaboration is vital for transformation. The Future Forum offers a platform for like-minded professionals, policymakers, and stakeholders to come together and share insights, experiences, and best practices. By fostering collaboration, we can tap into collective intelligence, spark innovative ideas, and drive transformative projects that uplift communities and create sustainable growth. 🌐



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CHANCES

By Mandi D. Mitchell, Stacey Zawacki, and Ryan LaGrange

With record-low unemployment rates and higher-than-average workforce participation rates, Lafayette and the surrounding Acadiana region of south Louisiana found itself grappling with a workforce challenge – employers are struggling to find qualified workers, while formerly incarcerated individuals encounter barriers in their journey back to the workforce. To bridge this gap and offer a second chance to formerly incarcerated or justice involved individuals, LEDA and its community partners created the 2nd Chance Job Fair. This innovative project, now in its fifth successful year, addresses the pressing issue of unemployment by offering a lifeline to formerly incarcerated and justice involved individuals striving to reintegrate into society while simultaneously aiding local businesses seeking a robust workforce.

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More than 200 job seekers attended the 2023 2nd Chance Job Fair held at Philadelphia Christian Church in Lafayette, LA.

The 2nd Chance Job Fair allows attendees to connect with potential employers, apply for open job opportunities, and discuss their qualifications with human resource managers who are actively hiring. Additionally, attendees can meet with social service and legal resource providers to address their individual needs, thus offering a comprehensive approach to reintegration. Before the event, community partners host events to help job seekers prepare for the job fair to ensure they are job ready. In 2023, three job fair prep events were held in Lafayette, Abbeville, and Crowley, LA.

WHO BENEFITS FROM THE 2ND CHANCE JOB FAIR?

Ultimately, the entire community benefits from this initiative, as studies indicate that employment is the single most significant factor in reducing recidivism.

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LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA'S 2ND CHANCE JOB FAIR

In a world where second chances are often elusive, the Lafayette Economic Development Authority (LEDA) and its community partners— Lafayette Parish Sheriff's Office, Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, Louisiana Workforce Commission/Acadiana Workforce Solutions, and local church ministries— have been breaking barriers and transforming lives through the annual 2nd Chance Job Fair. The 2nd Chance Job Fair won a Gold Award from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) in the category of Talent Development & Retention and a Silver Award for Economic Equity & Inclusion.

The 2nd Chance Job Fair benefits local employers who are grappling with the challenge of finding workers. The job fair presents an alternative workforce pipeline, allowing companies to tap into a diverse talent pool. Furthermore, employers who are willing to hire formerly incarcerated individuals are instrumental in making the transition from incarceration to society smoother.

At the conclusion of the event, participating employers provide feedback to event organizers. The event was rated as excellent or good by 94% of the participating employers. Comments received include:

- “This was a very good job fair and outcome for us. We definitely will be attending another. We appreciate inmates coming in to meet with us.”
- “Candidates were very professional and eager. Great opportunities for people who need a new look on life. Definitely encourage more events as these.”
- “Really enjoyed this. Hope to help everyone. We had way more success than expected. Thank you!”
- “Everything was excellent. I was surprised at the turnout. Staff was awesome. I will come back.”
- “Definite benefit for the community.”

The second set of beneficiaries is the justice-involved or formerly incarcerated individuals and their families. These individuals often encounter rejection when trying to reenter the workforce, a challenge that the 2nd Chance Job Fair directly addresses. The fair provides them with the assurance that the hiring managers are aware of their backgrounds and are open to considering them for employment. The fair facilitates a pathway to self-sufficiency for formerly incarcerated individuals and the ability to care for their families as they reenter society and become contributors to the community’s economic base.

“I attended 2nd Chance Job Fair in 2022 as part of the Re-entry Program. Everyone was so helpful at the event. It was great that the employers didn’t look at us any differently from other job seekers. I got a job with one of the employers and went straight to work upon

The second set of beneficiaries is the justice-involved or formerly incarcerated individuals and their families. These individuals often encounter rejection when trying to reenter the workforce, a challenge that the 2nd Chance Job Fair directly addresses. The fair provides them with the assurance that the hiring managers are aware of their backgrounds and are open to considering them for employment. The fair facilitates a pathway to self-sufficiency for formerly incarcerated individuals and the ability to care for their families as they reenter society and become contributors to the community’s economic base.



Community partners host job seeker preparation events focused on resume writing and setting expectations for a job fair. Pictured L to R Back Row: Carlos Harvin, Lafayette Consolidated Government; Charles Banks, Fellowship Full Gospel Ministries; Ryan LaGrange, Lafayette Economic Development Authority; Deanna Tolliver, Acadiana Workforce Solutions. Front row: Nadia Ford, Goodwill of Acadiana; Andrea Beer, Goodwill of Acadiana; Gena Register, Acadiana Legal Services; Consuela Gaines, Voice of the Experienced.

my release. It put me in a good place and gave me a good outlook. I couldn’t have asked for anything better and I would recommend the job fair,” said Lee Veals, job fair attendee.

HOW DOES THE 2ND CHANCE JOB FAIR IMPACT THE COMMUNITY?

The impact of the 2nd Chance Job Fair is profound and multifaceted. Local businesses, which are dependent on an available workforce, are benefiting significantly from this initiative. Companies that participate in the job fair understand the importance of providing employment opportunities to a broader talent pool. This not only makes the transition from incarceration to the community smoother, but it also increases the chances of success for individuals they hire.

The results from the April 2023 2nd Chance Job Fair are a testament to its effectiveness. Twelve employers, six resource providers, and 211 job seekers participated in the event. Employers reported making 45 job offers at the event and plans to schedule 109 follow-up interviews. These numbers represent tangible results indicating the success of the event. The employers represented at the job fair come from a diverse industry base including hospitality and food service, non-profit/social service, energy, manufacturing, and healthcare catering to the employment needs of a broad range of job seekers.

Additionally, the 2nd Chance Job Fair has an impact on the broader community. Studies from the Prison to Employment Connection indicate that recidivism rates are nearly halved for returning citizens who secure full-time jobs compared to those who remain unemployed. These statistics underscore the importance of this program in fostering the reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals into society.

A major goal of the 2nd Chance Job Fair is directly reaching the currently incarcerated. Twenty-five Lafayette Parish inmates, who were scheduled for release within eight weeks of the event, were able to meet with employers before the event opened to the public. Leading up to the job fair, the inmates worked with their case managers to develop resumes, job readiness skills, and interview techniques.

2ND CHANCE JOB FAIR'S PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

The success of the 2nd Chance Job Fair is attributed to the concerted efforts of various participants.

Lafayette Economic Development Authority (LEDA) plays a central role as the convener of the community partners and leads the event's planning. LEDA's responsibilities include scouting and securing the event location, securing employer participation by identifying and inviting companies to participate, developing branding and marketing strategies, processing employer registrations, and maintaining communication with exhibitors throughout the event. LEDA also coordinates media outreach with state and local law enforcement partners.

"LEDA's strategic plan includes a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion as these tenets are essential to the growth and prosperity of the entire community. Providing employment opportunities to a broader talent pool in the region is critical to the long-term success of Lafayette's business community and to the formerly incarcerated and justice involved workforce that often face barriers to employment. LEDA is committed to providing equitable access to economic opportunity in Lafayette Parish (County)," says Mandi D. Mitchell, President and CEO of LEDA.

Representatives from the Louisiana Workforce Commission (LWC) and Acadiana Workforce Solutions (AWS) have been on the planning committee

since the event's inception. LWC and AWS staff assist with employer recruiting and with outreach to job seekers. Leading up to the event, they host several job seeker preparation events focused on resume writing and setting expectations for a job fair. LWC also brings its Mobile Workforce Unit to the event. The Unit is a 40-foot vehicle equipped with 13 computer stations and printing/scanning capabilities that job seekers and employers can use throughout the event.

"The Louisiana Workforce Commission stands readily available to partner with our stakeholders to provide services at no cost to our Louisiana residents," said Regine Williams, Public Information Director for LWC. "During the 2nd Chance Job Fair, we were able to help over 200 job seekers with resume assistance, career advice, and more. Not only were we able to provide those services, we were able to extend job offers on-site. We look forward to future events as such to help put our Louisiana residents back to work."

The Lafayette Parish Sheriff's Office serves as the committee's direct connection to currently incarcerated individuals who are approaching release. Their staff also leads outreach to other re-entry job seekers and helps connect with potential employers and resource providers. The sheriff's office also provides equipment for the event, including tables and chairs, and labor for event set up. The Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections (Probation and Parole) leads communications and outreach to justice involved individuals in the Louisiana probation and parole system. Case workers, counselors, and probation and parole officers from both organizations promote the event to their clients throughout their jurisdiction.

"We want to provide every opportunity possible to all formerly incarcerated persons to help them succeed long term. Making these resources available and offering the type of assistance this event provides drastically reduces recidivism rates," says Lafayette Parish Sheriff Mark Garber.

LEDA's faith-based ministry partner, Fellowship Full Gospel Ministries, assists with community outreach to formerly incarcerated and justice involved individuals through the local ministry network. Fellowship Full Gospel Ministries works in coordination with Louisiana Workforce Commission/Acadiana Workforce Solutions to host job seeker preparation events prior to the job fair and they assist with sourcing donated business attire for job seekers in need. The lead pastor also assists with media interviews.

REPLICATING THE SUCCESS OF THE 2ND CHANCE JOB FAIR

The 2nd Chance Job Fair can be adapted for use in other communities. In fact, it has already been replicated across Louisiana. Officials from the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections attended the 2022 job fair and used it as a model for a statewide initiative in 2023. Recognizing the significance of this initiative, the State of Louisiana declared April 2023 as



The 12 employers at the 2023 2nd Chance Job Fair came from a diverse industry base including hospitality and food service, non-profit/social service, energy, manufacturing, and healthcare catering to the employment needs of a broad range of job seekers.

2nd Chance Month. A series of events were hosted to assist justice-involved individuals with their transition into the workforce – including 2nd Chance Job Fairs across the state.

The most important element in hosting a comparable event in another community is convening the appropriate community organizations to spearhead the event. Lafayette’s planning committee consists of economic development, workforce development, state and local corrections organizations, faith ministries, and non-profit organizations. Economic development focuses on employers and event logistics. Correctional system leaders recruit and encourage justice involved individuals exiting their systems to participate in the event. Workforce development and corrections work with job seekers to ensure they are job ready and attend the event. The faith ministry and non-profit partners connect with resource providers to provide employment readiness services to job seekers before and during the event. The division of duties can be adjusted to best fit a partner organization’s scope of work and capabilities.

IMPROVING THE 2ND CHANCE JOB FAIR

The most significant challenge for the Lafayette 2nd Chance Job Fair prior to 2022 was the lack of a dedicated budget. LEDA and its partners found innovative ways to cover the hard costs of the event, including securing a suitable venue. The choice of venue was essential, as it needs to be accessible to all interested job seekers. LEDA successfully secured the use of a centrally located church – Philadelphia Christian Church – to ensure no potential candidates were excluded due to proximity issues from using a recreation center or school facility. No-cost marketing for the event was

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conducted via organic social media posts; direct client outreach from Probation and Parole and the Sheriff’s Office; through our church ministry partners; and local radio, print and TV news outlets.

A BRIGHTER FUTURE WITH SECOND CHANCES

The 2nd Chance Job Fair stands as a beacon of hope for formerly incarcerated individuals. The statistics from the Prison to Employment Connection support the need for such initiatives, as they highlight the correlation between employment and recidivism rates. The positive impact of employment is undeniable, and the job fair is playing a pivotal role in providing this crucial opportunity.

As LEDA and its community partners continue to host the 2nd Chance Job Fair, the organizations offer a brighter future and a second chance to individuals who often feel marginalized. By providing economic opportunities, fostering reintegration, and reducing recidivism, this initiative is not only transforming lives but also strengthening the community and local businesses. It is a communitywide endeavor with an unwavering commitment to creating a more inclusive and compassionate society. 🌍

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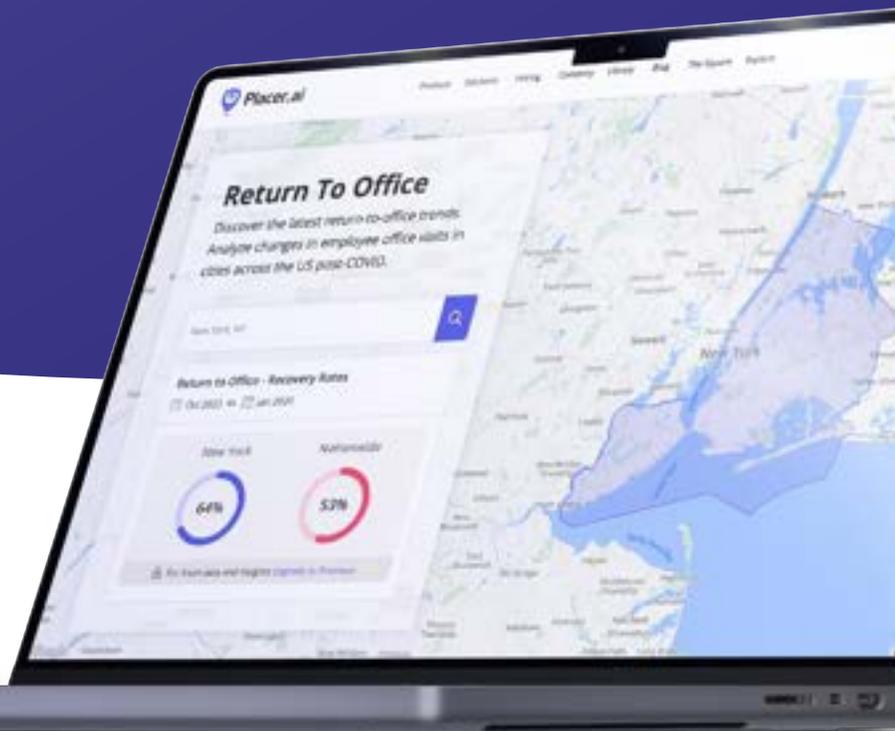


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the wildcat internship

PROGRAM

By Liz Leaming, CEcD

The Wildcat Internship Program, a collaborative initiative between Ponca City Public Schools and Ponca City Development Authority, has emerged as a shining example of talent development, retention, and educational partnerships. Recognized with Gold Awards from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) in both Talent Development & Retention and Partnerships with Educational Institutions, this program has redefined the way junior and senior high school students engage with local businesses. This article delves into the inner workings of the Wildcat Internship Program, tracing its development, challenges, and future plans while emphasizing the practical aspects that make it a valuable model for educators and employers alike.

The Wildcat Internship Program, a pioneering venture, seeks to bridge the gap between traditional classroom education and the practical needs of the workforce. Developed in 2016 with just four students, it has steadily expanded,

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Ponca City, located in north-central Oklahoma, is a city with a rich history and a diverse economic landscape. Positioned at the crossroads of U.S. Route 60 and U.S. Route 177, the city benefits from its strategic location, facilitating transportation and commerce. Historically, Ponca City's economy has been closely tied to the oil industry, with the discovery of oil in the early 20th century playing a pivotal role in its development. Over the years, the city has diversified its economic base, incorporating sectors such as manufacturing, healthcare, and agriculture. The city is home to several industrial facilities, including refineries and manufacturing plants, contributing signifi-

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Ponca City Public Schools Wildcat mascot with the Ponca City Development Authority workforce development logo brings the partnership together in a very visual way.

A GOLD STANDARD IN TALENT DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

The Wildcat Internship Program was a 2023 International Economic Development Council (IEDC) Excellence in Economic Development double Gold Award recipient for the categories of Talent Development & Retention as well as Partnerships with Educational Institutions. It is a partnership program with the local school district and the local EDO in rural Oklahoma which has developed into a successful grow-your-own workforce tool utilized by a growing number of juniors and seniors each year interning at local companies. It has a 30% hiring rate with 10% of those being full-time career jobs post high school.

Each intern earns elective credit, providing a strong incentive for participation. This elective credit also allows the business to hire the intern with no fiscal compensation. Although it is preferable to have the intern paid for their work, sometimes the situation requires the student to only shadow – often this happens in the medical field environment.

cantly to its economic stability, with a population that has remained relatively stable at around 25,000 people.

The Wildcat Internship Program is a strategic collaboration between Ponca City Public Schools (PCPS) and the Ponca City Development Authority (PCDA). At its core, the program offers junior and senior high school students an opportunity to earn elective credit over four semesters while interning at local businesses.

Students choose to participate in the program and must meet the qualifications, which include a GPA requirement, a recommendation from a teacher, and parent approval. Once the application is submitted along with the above requirements, then the student's schedule is arranged to have two consecutive class periods that will allow for the student to leave campus. The special part of the Wildcat Internship Program is that the students fill out their application with three industries or careers that they are interested in. The point of having the collaborative approach is to give the students connections into the career field of their interest and make connections in the business community. Some interns choose to check out several different career fields, and some students intern at the same place for several consecutive semesters. The program can run for four semesters, allowing students to immerse themselves in real-world work settings.

The students are required to do weekly projects or essays to ensure that they can communicate what they are learning. The student is also required to complete a capstone project at the end of each semester that will help prepare them for their future in a career. Students are assigned mentors within their host businesses, ensuring a supportive learning environment. The host business is required to fill out a host form, have a job description, conduct an orientation, and fill out an end of the semester survey about the student, which will count towards the student intern's final grade. The student's grade is made up of their weekly assignment completion, their attendance at the internship, the capstone project, and the final evaluation of the student from the business.

Each intern earns elective credit, providing a strong incentive for participation. This elective credit also allows the business to hire the intern with no fiscal compensation. Although it is preferable to have the intern paid for their work, sometimes the situation requires the student to only shadow – often this happens in

the medical field environment. The unpaid shadow internship opens the field of possibility where there had previously been no options for the student to get an inside view of certain career fields. Thirty percent of the current Wildcat Interns are being paid, which has been a growing number and will continue to grow.

PROGRAM GENESIS

The Wildcat Internship Program was initiated in 2015, stemming from the Ponca City Development Authority's realization that bridging the gap between academic learning and practical skills was essential for the community's growth. An assistant principal with a background in manufacturing was the conduit from the school in the early stages. It began with a modest four-student participation and has grown exponentially. While the school shuffled between online teachers, counselors, principals and special ed teachers to be the school contact for this elective credit program, Ponca City Development Authority continued to stay consistent with the business community and connection to the student body. As each full-time employee for the school district adjusted to their new duty in their already full schedule, PCDA grew the program.

By the fall of 2022, the school district realized that 40 students were too many to keep track of without a dedicated internship staff person. This is when the school district began searching for a part-time employee to run the program. PCDA knew that the role of this position should be full-time, to connect with current students and businesses while continuing to grow the program. This is when PCDA stepped up to fund the other 40% of the cost to employ a dedicated full-time Internship Coordinator, taking the role from a part-time position to a full-time position, a critical step in the program's development.

THE PLAYERS

Ponca City Public Schools (PCPS) role is the program's administration, curriculum development, and student selection. The school system works closely with local businesses to identify internships that align with students' career interests. The school contributes 60% towards the salary. The new Internship Coordinator position increased the internal marketing for student awareness of this program and the accountability of timeliness and consistency at the internship. The coordinator also has weekly projects to complete which help the student to think about the career field, the experience, and future job skills.



Career Fair held at the high school each spring to connect students with future internship placements.

PCDA helps with navigating the future success of the program by promoting awareness of future workforce needs in Ponca City while finding ways to grow the program goals, base of support, and public relations initiatives. A student's choice of career fields of interest plays a huge role in their placement of host businesses, and PCDA helps with the facilitation of new business connections to make these placements. The Development Authority can help with transportation if the student doesn't have their own and has bought transit passes for students who need them. With the school facing bus driver staff shortages, this has been a way to offer the program to all students. Beyond the 40% portion of the employee expense, PCDA also helps with other supplies like magnetic Intern Badges and required clothing (like scrubs), if students can't get those for themselves, making it a program open to all students. Problem-solving on complex issues, like HIPPA regulations, drug testing for certain career fields, and the under-18-year-old liability insurance for manufacturing industries are things that PCDA has worked to solve and will continue to as roadblocks arise.



Employer information flyer to create awareness with local businesses about the internship program.

Employers play a pivotal role in allowing students to shadow, intern, and move into the workforce from these positions. Finding employers to begin this program was difficult. It's a time-consuming process to set up new training programs, especially if the company is a small to medium size company without a dedicated staff for programs of this nature. While workforce is the number one issue of employers in Ponca City, the workforce of the future is harder to make a case for when there is a current staffing need. Slowly the case has been made though, and with a dedicated full time staff person at the school district that can be the contact for the employers and keep the interns accountable. The participation among businesses is growing. The 2023 fall semester has shown 25 new employer hosts.

An ancillary player has been the State of Oklahoma, with their 2019 statewide initiative called Individual Career Academic Plan (ICAP). This has created a holistic way for students to integrate career focus into their academic careers. The requirements have grown and now include many careers-focused activities. The Wildcat Internship fits nicely with these requirements, which is part of why more students are becoming aware of and interested in the internship program.

MAKING THE CASE FOR INTERNSHIPS

Educational institutions are crucial stakeholders in the success of the program. Convincing schools to offer the program involves presenting the benefits of practical, real-world education alongside traditional classroom learning. The elective credit incentivizes student participation, and the focus on career development helps schools align with the workforce needs of the community. The schools have really been brought on board by the success stories of their students.

In one example, Ashley began the program as a junior. She was also a welding student at the local Career Tech and was hosted by a construction company. Ashley was offered a career position upon graduation after two years of interning with the same company. Or Noah, who interned starting his junior year with a real estate company. He worked all summer to obtain his real estate license and in his senior year was a practicing real estate professional in the same company. Some stories only speak of future success, in the way that students realize early on that a career in the field they are interning in will not be a good fit for their future.



Ashley, an intern in 2021 and 2022, at Hurst Construction



Noah at HomeSweetHome Realty, an intern in 2022 and 2023

The primary challenge in convincing employers to host interns lies in addressing their workforce needs and creating awareness about future job opportunities. Employers often struggle to balance daily operations with providing internship opportunities. Therefore, fostering an understanding of the long-term benefits is crucial. Internship programs can be a valuable resource

The primary challenge in convincing employers to host interns lies in addressing their workforce needs and creating awareness about future job opportunities. Employers often struggle to balance daily operations with providing internship opportunities. Therefore, fostering an understanding of the long-term benefits is crucial. Internship programs can be a valuable resource for employers, as they can help in coaching future employees.

for employers, as they can help in coaching future employees. Employers have increased their participation and excitement about this program as more accountability from the school has been in place. Students knowing how to be in a professional internship, with communication and expectations placed on them, has increased employer participation and trust in the program. Employer participation has also continued to rise as employers are finding value in their students. Ten percent of the students within the last school year have been hired as a full-time career position. This also speaks to the growth of the program and the caliber of the student placements. Once a student intern is hired, the process of hosting interns is more valued and embraced by the company.

RESOURCES FOR PROBLEM SOLVING

The Oklahoma Department of Education and the Oklahoma Department of Commerce play a significant role in supporting and guiding the program. The Department of Commerce provides valuable apprenticeship information and resources, while the Department of Education offers guidance on curriculum alignment, standards, and accreditation. Local legislators have also been instrumental in promoting the Wildcat Internship Program. Their advocacy and support have helped to create policy changes that benefit the program and its participants.

One of the largest critical job needs in Oklahoma is the healthcare industry, and the local hospital was not able to have interns under the age of 18. When the students turned 18, they had to undergo rigorous training including a drug test and background check. To prevent this, PCDA offered to reimburse students for those checks, but it became a problem when the test costs were expensive and priced students out of being able to cover the upfront cost. PCDA and the school contacted the hospital multiple times over several years to change this arrangement. Last year, after a community meeting with the local hospital that included the Chamber of Commerce, Main Street, PCPS, and PCDA, a student affiliate agreement was determined as the best course of action for PCPS students to intern at the hospital over the age of 16 years old. This semester is the first time we have had six students rotating through departments and realizing many new and exciting career paths because of it. The school system also determined to use its resources to offer the students free background checks and drug tests through its HR (Human Resources) department.

Manufacturing is another critical job area for Ponca City, Oklahoma where over 30% of our workforce is employed by manufacturing. While some of the smaller manufacturing facilities offer internships for students under the age of 18, there are still barriers to getting more students in these industries.

Manufacturing is another critical job area for Ponca City, Oklahoma where over 30% of our workforce is employed by manufacturing. While some of the smaller manufacturing facilities offer internships for students under the age of 18, there are still barriers to getting more students in these industries. A local temporary staffing agency offered to hire the student as a temporary employee while under 18 so that the student falls under their liability insurance. However, this creates a cost to the employer for that student, and no one has taken advantage of that yet. The PCPS Internship Coordinator has been creating opportunities for students in the manufacturing industry that are not on the workshop floor, like sales, financial and engineering. This has been beneficial for many students to learn multiple sides of companies like theirs.

EVALUATING SUCCESS AND RESULTS

The success of the Wildcat Internship Program can be measured in several ways. One of the key success indicators is the percentage of interns who secure employment with the host company after the internship concludes. Ten percent of the interns were hired as full-time positions upon completion of the class. This statistic reflects the program's ability to effectively prepare students for the workforce. The steady increase in the number of students participating in the program, from just four in 2015 to 109 in the fall semester of 2023, is a testament to its growing popularity and impact.

The last measurement of success is the percentage of students who are getting paid for their internship experience. Thirty percent of students are getting compensated for their work beyond their class credit, which has grown from none being paid for the first several years. The students' impact on a business, their new ways of thinking, fresh ideas, and eagerness to learn are benefitting employers and the hope that employers have for our future workforce.

FUTURE PLANS

The Wildcat Internship Program has ambitious plans. The program aims to offer registered apprenticeships in many of the internships, providing students with an even more structured and valuable learning experience. Plans are currently being discussed that will expand the employer offerings of curriculum to better prepare students for the career field. The goal would be to expand and offer the much-needed op-



PCPS Internship Coordinator, PCPS Superintendent, and students enrolled in the 2023 Fall Semester Wildcat Internship Program holding the two Gold IEDC awards won in 2023

opportunities for skilled trades apprenticeships, but the offerings of registered apprenticeships have shifted in the State of Oklahoma to be able to accommodate many career fields.

The long-term vision is to achieve 100% student participation. By expanding the program and making it accessible to all, the community can benefit from a well-prepared and work-ready future workforce. This will also impact the boomerang recruitment strategy when students leave the area to get training or life experience elsewhere, the community and business connections made will make it easier to recruit them back to live and work in Ponca City when they are ready to settle down and create a life.

TAKEAWAYS AND LESSONS LEARNED

A key lesson from the Wildcat Internship Program is the importance of early career development planning. During the process of developing the Wildcat Internship program, some of the key elements in the aforementioned ICAP (Individual Career Assessment Plan) came into play. PCDA brought light to what the use of one career assessment tool throughout the student's entire academic career would do for streamlining success. The Wildcat Internship Coordinator has taken on the role of head of these Kudor assessments that now begin in the 6th grade and are repeated periodically. Next school year will begin the introduction of career cluster enrollment for high school students in 9th grade. This shifts the focus from isolated education to forward-thinking career development. This

A key lesson from the Wildcat Internship Program is the importance of early career development planning. During the process of developing the Wildcat Internship program, some of the key elements in the aforementioned ICAP (Individual Career Assessment Plan) came into play. PCDA brought light to what the use of one career assessment tool throughout the student's entire academic career would do for streamlining success.

integrated approach enhances students' readiness for the workforce and ensures that the community's employment needs are met.

CONCLUSION

The Wildcat Internship Program has set a gold standard for talent development, retention, and educational partnerships. It successfully addresses the needs of students, schools, employers, and the community. The program's journey, from modest beginnings to its current recognition by the IEDC, serves as a model for other rural communities seeking to create similar pathways for student success. By understanding the challenges, resources, and solutions, we can apply the lessons learned from Ponca City to shape the future of education and workforce development nationwide. ☎

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spurring investment and

BUILDING COMMUNITY

By Yvette Armendariz

Driving through a once-blighted part of west Mesa, Arizona, dirt moves and new structures take shape. More than \$100 million in current investments are grounded in a vision, with an expectation that consumer spending will continue to strengthen and the thirst for diverse cultural experiences will further grow.

This part of west Mesa known as the Asian District Mesa AZ® is getting back its retail and workforce sparkle and attracting media buzz because of the positive changes in recent years. Uniquely local Asian mom-and-pop shops and restaurants first found opportunities, bringing new retail life to near-empty shopping centers that struggled through the early part of the 2000s. In time, well-known Asian brand names – H Mart, DAISO, Tiger Sugar to name a few – also began to open for business, finding a bustling community.

The catalyst was organic. The City of Mesa Office of Economic Development conducted a Redevelopment Area Plan and as the report unfolded, it became clear the two-mile corridor on Dobson Road was densely populated with Asian-themed retailers, grocers, and dining experiences. Branding that was essential for redevelopment.

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Mekong Plaza attracted dozens of Asian mom-and-pop businesses to an area of West Mesa that would become the Asian District Mesa AZ®.

Photo credit: City of Mesa

FINDING INSPIRATION

The renaissance of the Asian District began with two entrepreneurs making a significant investment in 2005 that ultimately would recharge the area. Peter Quach and Philip Ta purchased a vacant 100,200 square-foot shopping center once anchored by Target and transformed it into what would become Mekong Plaza. The men had a reputation for taking undesirable properties and transforming them into winners in California.

After Ta completed some market research, they decided to try their magic in Mesa. The timing just wasn't ideal.

"We opened on Oct. 18, 2008, right at the bottom of the real estate market crash, so economically it was very bad to attract tenants. Now it's much better," said Ta, who has worked as a developer and general contractor on several Asian plazas in California.

Yvette Armendariz is a project manager for the City of Mesa Office of Economic Development, Mesa, AZ. (yvette.armendariz@mesaaz.gov)

THE BIRTH OF THE ASIAN DISTRICT MESA AZ®

The rebirth of a blighted segment of West Mesa began with two entrepreneurs converting an old shopping center that over time would attract dozens of mom-and-pop Asian businesses. Then, the City's Office of Economic Development recognized an opportunity to showcase this cultural gem, utilizing research and community feedback to create a brand. The Asian District Mesa AZ® rolled out in January 2020, elevating community awareness and attracting more than \$100 million in investments to further build up retail and housing for the area. The project earned an IEDC Gold Award for Neighborhood Development.

This retail endeavor – costing \$11.4 million in construction – took some determination and faith. The plaza struggled the first few years, but then came the small businesses offering a taste of home for the Phoenix metro area’s diverse Asian population. In time, more than 40 businesses were clustered in the area, and Mekong Plaza – anchored by a 45,000-square-foot grocery store – had a wait list of interested shops, restaurants, and service providers.

The next big investment came in 2017, when Quach and Jimmy Lai, owner of Mekong Supermarket, added a 180,000-square-foot property to their portfolio less than a mile away. AZ International Marketplace would include a second large grocery store featuring foods from around the world, along with dozens of smaller shops featuring Asian dining, beauty and entertainment. Karaoke anyone?

At the same time, the City of Mesa Office of Economic Development (OED) began working on its redevelopment plan for west Mesa and recognized the potential – already organically taking shape – to further attract investment by promoting the existing assets and packaging the District to “tell the story.”

“It became clear this is a real point of pride not just for our city but for the region,” said Mesa Mayor John Giles.

Part of OED’s mission is to enhance Mesa’s economy and improve the quality of life for Mesa residents. “Highlighting unique assets that make Mesa the perfect place to locate, operate and conduct business is one way to do that,” said Economic Development Director Jaye O’Donnell. “We determined branding the area could elevate this gem, so that others also would see the value in the area.”

But to make this plan succeed, the City of Mesa needed to earn trust and buy in from the businesses and property owners located in this two-mile stretch of west Mesa needing revitalization. But how?

THE PROCESS

With the West Mesa Redevelopment Plan approved by City Council in 2018, the branding initiative officially began in 2019, with clear goals to revitalize west Mesa by increasing awareness of ethnic shops, growing the sales tax base, and engaging the community.

“This area was starting to gain attention outside of Mesa for the diversity of Asian cuisine and experiences,” said Vice Mayor Francisco Heredia. “This gave the City an opportunity to really shine the light on a

With the West Mesa Redevelopment Plan approved by City Council in 2018, the branding initiative officially began in 2019, with clear goals to revitalize west Mesa by increasing awareness of ethnic shops, growing the sales tax base, and engaging the community.

To repeat this success – in the form of investment and business growth – OED’s team would need to build engagement in a community known to be somewhat insular, trusting in peers but not always the government. The majority of stakeholders were small business owners, many of whom are not fluent in English, making communication a challenge. So, the team needed to find ambassadors who could build support for the project that would ultimately bring more customers to the area.

section of Mesa rich in culture and appealing to people of all ages.”

The City of Mesa Office of Economic Development completed an earlier branding project for Mesa’s Falcon District with positive results. The area is now known as a high-tech hub for aerospace/aviation, defense, advanced manufacturing, and advanced business services. To repeat this success – in the form of investment and business growth – OED’s team would need to build engagement in a community known to be somewhat insular, trusting in peers but not always the government. The majority of stakeholders were small business owners, many of whom are not fluent in English, making communication a challenge. So, the team needed to find ambassadors who could build support for the project that would ultimately bring more customers to the area.

Staff first reached out to Mayor Giles – a huge fan of Asian cuisine and culture – and City Council members to establish a steering committee comprising key private- and public-sector stakeholders. The city also moved forward with a Request for Quote to assist with the branding and creative concept development. The objective was to “help foster and brand an Asian Multicultural District that is a vibrant, inclusive, day-night community that embraces all Asian cultures, attracting businesses, residents, and tourists from across the region and nation.”

During the evaluation process, the Asian District Steering Committee found two firms most impressive – one in particular for the methodology of conducting research, and the second firm for their creative treatment and experience. The City of Mesa approached both firms to pitch the idea of collaborating on the contract – awarding separate contracts for each project phase but enabling the firms to work together. The firms embraced the opportunity.

OED hired marketing firm Moonshot II, owned by Kiem Ho, to conduct community outreach and primary research. Another creative agency, WhyFor, would tackle the development of the brand, including the tangram logo, brand colors and brand pillars (community, commerce and culture).

CREATING A MEANINGFUL LOGO

Mesa's Asian District brand features a tangram in the logo – a nod to history and unity.

The colorful squares that comprise the tangram pieces symbolize the different Asian cultures coming together in a unified community while still maintaining the individuality of each culture.

Tangrams always contain seven polygons that can be rearranged to create various shapes. For the Asian District Mesa AZ® brand, OED created several designs to symbolize the brand's three pillars: Culture (butterfly), Community (person) and Commerce (bowl).

These seven-piece puzzles originating in China date back more than 2,000 years. The logo is now featured on street signage, utility wraps, banners, and window clings promoting the Asian District Mesa AZ®.

Moonshot II performed multiple surveys, focus groups, stakeholder interviews and customer intercepts. This input helped OED learn how often people frequented the area and from where they traveled, what attractions drew people to the area, and what suggestions the community had to unify the area.

The research led to numerous takeaways that informed the marketing concepts. For example, one report showed that more than 70 percent of respondents visit the area at least monthly. Also, these visitors travel from all over the East Valley, Phoenix and the West Valley. People even visit regularly from as far away as Flagstaff and Tucson. Having this insight, OED moved to unlock the area's potential for becoming a large, inclusive gathering place.

DEVELOPING THE RIGHT BRAND

With the research completed, the project's focus shifted to incorporating the takeaways into brand concepts and logos. OED learned this area of west Mesa evolved into a meeting place and cultural hub centered on grocery shopping and restaurants. After several feedback exercises, the Steering Committee selected "Asian District Mesa AZ" for the area for its inclusivity of cultures represented in the area.

Brand values emerged – this place Mesa would promote would bring literal and figurative sustenance for individual lives, the community and health of our patrons and local businesses. The mission for this project focused on paying homage to history and tradition while promoting a diversity of Asian cultures, communities and commerce. The branding also would focus on those three pillars. Next came the challenge of determining how to depict the Asian District brand graphically.

The designers considered how to highlight customs and arts, showcase that feeling of fellowship, and embrace the businesses that breathe life into the area. This brand would need to create a sense of belonging

for a diversity of people and businesses in the area. Creatively, the team embraced a colorful tangram – a geometric puzzle with Chinese roots – to be the symbol for the district.

The Steering Committee embraced the idea of the tangram for the logo, as it would tell a story of the area's diversity of Asian cultures coming together in a unified district, while still celebrating each culture individually.

"It is absolutely amazing to see the unity behind this endeavor," Vic Reid, former CEO of the Asian Chamber of Commerce said during the brand roll out. "The Asian District is a place for our community to truly take pride in – we know the work being done today will have an everlasting impact on future generations."

For those unfamiliar, a tangram is a seven-piece puzzle that can form into a myriad of shapes, such as the district's symbols for culture (butterfly), community (person), and commerce (bowl).

GOING PUBLIC

With branding elements in place, it was time to roll out the campaign to the public at large. But before the unveiling, in late 2019, OED engaged the media to bring awareness to this branding/redevelopment effort.

Telling the community about the vision for the area created more interest and additional support, and OED could begin sharing the area's story in a more meaningful way to attract additional attention and spur investment. These efforts – with support from our partners Visit Mesa, Mesa Chamber of Commerce, and Arizona Asian Chamber of Commerce – continue to transform and revitalize the neighborhood, bringing new jobs, shops and housing.

In January 2020, the brand officially launched, timed near a number of Lunar New Year celebrations and a special Asian District Night Market in February 2020 organized by the Asian Chamber that attracted 7,000+ visitors. Utilizing word of mouth and media mentions, Mesa's Asian District gained positive attention and businesses flourished.



Special events, such as the Asian District Night Market pictured, attract thousands of visitors to the Asian District Mesa AZ®.

Photo credit: City of Mesa

Efforts to grow awareness included launching a website to highlight the businesses and coming events, creating a slew of promotional items to give away at events, and signage to let people know they had arrived. Lots of signage.

In the beginning, the city installed street signs with the Asian District logo. The next year, environmental signage would be added, including utility boxes, street banners, and window clings, to showcase the new brand.

Public relations work ramped up, as the city shared its story with various media outlets. Work also began to register Asian District Mesa AZ®.

PANDEMIC INTERRUPTION

Launching the brand two months before the pandemic could have derailed efforts marketing the small shops and restaurants that made the area special. Instead, success stories prevailed.

A large campaign began to support Mesa businesses, and supporters stepped up. Bigger investments moved forward. The first big win was H Mart's opening in July 2020, and the community came together to support the smaller mom-and-pop businesses.

Sales tax revenues climbed 9 percent for the city in 2020, but the Asian District grew 11 percent. While many struggled during this unexpected health crisis, overall interest for opening and investing in the area remained strong despite economic disruption.

OED also was able to support small businesses – including those in the newly branded Asian District – as new programs to help create resilient small businesses were created, first through Mesa CARES and then through Mesa Business Builder. These programs offered customized business consulting and other support.

“We recognized a need to help our smallest businesses quickly during the pandemic, but that need for marketing and operational support continued even after businesses adjusted to life beyond the pandemic,” said Economic Development Director O'Donnell. “The city continues to invest in these tools to build resiliency because challenges arise and being ready improves chances for success.”

Jason Li of Z&Y Gifts signed his lease prior to the pandemic. “It was very scary,” he said. But having an emergency fund, making shrewd adjustments to his business plan and community support made his business a survivor.

“Things started getting better with all the help from the City of Mesa and new programs like Mesa Business Builder and HUUB. I (also) started contributing back to our Asian communities,” Li said.

Also, continued marketing kept attention on the Asian District Mesa AZ®. OED engaged other city departments to check for potential code/zoning issues for signage plans. City Engineering identified locations for monument signs and traffic banners. Signs would help visitors know they had arrived.

Making it easy for visitors to come also helps keep the economic development momentum moving forward. By February 2022, the City and Valley Metro partnered to create an Asian District light rail stop at Sycamore and Main Street, which was unveiled during the inaugural Asian Festival that attracted 10,000+ visitors.

The branding initiative that began in January 2020 increased awareness of the shops and restaurants in a two-mile area along Dobson Road in Mesa.

Consumers – not just investors – continue to embrace the area, driving as much as 30 minutes or more for the rich, cultural experiences. That support isn't just talk. Sales tax collections increased 74.3% between 2018-2022 – even with a pandemic in the middle of it. This successful redevelopment project is now a point of pride for Mesa.

“The Asian District signage signifies the importance of this unique area as a destination in Mesa,” said Vice Mayor Heredia, immediate past chair of both the Valley Metro Rail Board of Directors and Valley Metro Regional Public Transportation Authority (RPTA) Board.

Additionally, a free commuter bus – the Fiesta Buzz – began making its way through the Asian District in October 2022. The circulator travels north and south through the district between the City's Fiesta District to the south and Mesa Riverview to the north. It stops at Mesa Community College, Mekong Plaza, and Sloan Park.

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“Mesa's Asian District is a significant economic driver for our city and the best place in the southwest to explore Asian food and cultural traditions,” said Mesa Mayor John Giles. “I'm proud of our economic development team's work to brand and elevate our Asian District. We're seeing new construction for more shops and restaurants, new housing developments, and a new commuter bus. All are testaments to the growth and popularity of that part of our city.”



UNITS Moving and Portable Storage offered a blank canvas for a mural. Property owner Ron Davis would invest some of his own funds to extend the mural across his building's façade.

Photo credit: City of Mesa



The completed mural is a striking addition to Mesa's Asian District.

Photo credit: City of Mesa

RE-ENERGIZING EFFORTS VIA MURALS

Murals were recommended as part of extending the brand, so OED formed a taskforce made up of tourism and arts professionals and Asian business leaders to guide the project, avoid potential cultural hazards, and identify respected artists.

OED engaged the city's legal department to develop a three-party contract for installing public art on private buildings and worked to identify local property owners invested in economic development to help the area become a regional destination.

Concurrently, OED connected with arts groups to help get the word out to local artists about an upcoming community arts project. Ultimately, the call for artists resulted in 31 submissions. The taskforce placed 11 of those artists on the Asian District Artist Roster, who after attending an orientation about the project, were offered an honorarium to create a concept for the interested property owners.

Once the concepts were provided, property owners were invited to learn more about the plans. The four building owners selected in the first round agreed the murals would give the Asian District a pop of color and draw new customers curious about the art. Each selected an artist and the concepts evolved over several discussions.

The first murals fittingly came to Mekong Plaza – the heart of the Asian District and the catalyst for it all. Kadhima Tung, a Chinese Muslim artist from Mesa, designed the 13 columns with a zodiac theme because the symbols are recognizable and encourage conversations. The next three would go up at UNITS Moving and Portable Storage, Barcelona Plaza, and AZ International Marketplace – all less than a mile away.

Half of the property owners even invested their own funds to improve their properties prior to installing the murals.

Ron Davis, president of UNITS in Mesa, was one of them. "We loved the idea of bringing murals to the Asian District. It's a positive for the area as it continues to thrive and grow."

The mural on his building, in the heart of the Asian District, was delivered in late 2022. It's the largest of the four – spanning 100+ feet wide and more than 25 feet high at its peak. Initially, the city was looking to install a mural approximately 30 feet by 10 feet to stay within budget, to be able to install several murals in the area. Davis asked if it was possible to cover the entirety of the east facing façade if he was able to have the building painted a yellow matching the sunny rays of the mural top. He also would make scaffolding and storage available to the artist, helping pare down the artist's fixed costs. So she was able to go wider for the same initial installation quote.

"This was a win-win for all parties, and I'm so happy that Mesa officials considered us," said Davis. "The difference to the outside of our facility is like night and day and is drawing the attention of those who pass by. This was an opportunity to enhance and welcome the Asian community we are a part of while beautifying our building. We are thrilled with the outcome!"

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Across the street, at 111 S. Dobson, a collection of birds and flowers representing the most populous Asian countries are featured on 15 square columns. In addition, a stunning wall mural was painted on the north side of the building by Mesa artist Ariana Enriquez. A sidewalk was installed by the owners to make it accessible. The fourth mural at AZ International Marketplace, 1920 W. Broadway, features a panda family by muralist Francisco Garcia.

Murals complemented the culture, adding a sense of place.

“This mural in the Asian District intertwines many Asian cultures, history, and celebrations together to show unity,” said artist Sandra Bosscher, who created Festival of Unity on the UNITS building. “It’s a celebration of diversity through bright colors and movement.”

THE RESULTS

Since 2020, the Asian District Mesa AZ® has been capturing the attention *en masse*.

Visitors are spending money and more time in Mesa’s Asian District. The annual sales tax base increased by \$1.65 million compared with 2018 – that’s significant for a city and its residents because Mesa doesn’t have a primary property tax.

Several dozen small businesses opened in the past three years, and now more than 100 Asian-owned businesses can be found in or near the heart of the Mesa’s Asian District. Claypot Kitchen and Hooked Boil House are new additions this year. Z&Y Gifts took a gamble, opening in July 2020, and myungrung hotdog came in 2022. Some bigger names in Asian culture arrived in 2022 and 2023.

In 2022, several multimillion-dollar investments were announced. Mekong Plaza will add 35,000 square feet of retail, a \$10 million project expected to open in 2024. Additionally, housing is on its way. OVIO, a \$50 million multifamily development, will have 191 units on top of 10,000 square feet of commercial ground floor by 2025. Lotus Point, a four-story \$45 million multifamily complex, will have 245 units also by 2025. The trend continues, as AZ International Marketplace in 2023 embarked on adding a new building to accommodate more retail. And Arizona Corrugated Container, a packaging manufacturer employing 70 people, started a \$3.5 million expansion of their business.

The growth of Asian comforts – in household staples and dining experiences – has been important not just for Mesa but for the region. With many large

Visitors are spending money and more time in Mesa’s Asian District. The annual sales tax base increased by \$1.65 million compared with 2018 – that’s significant for a city and its residents because Mesa doesn’t have a primary property tax.

CREATING A BRAND IN YOUR COMMUNITY

The branding of a business hub/neighborhood can be easily adapted to other cities with their own unique brand proposition.

The Asian District made sense for Mesa, as Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai, Filipino and other Asian communities began opening businesses in a section of west Mesa needing redevelopment. The effort may look different for other communities, but all efforts can benefit from being open to ideas, seeking a diversity of input, investing in solid research, and continuing engagement long after the brand rollout.

Tips for helping you build your brand story:

1. **Find something special** – unlike anything in your city or state – and make a plan for telling that story to increase awareness.
2. **Don’t be afraid to ask for help** from experts to assist with market research and branding principles.
3. **Get out in the community.** Research is key, and input is essential from people living and working in the area, but also outsiders. “Feedback is a gift,” says Economic Development Director Jaye O’Donnell.
4. **Meet with key stakeholders** to capture insights. Hold public meetings or create a steering committee.
5. **Evaluate the data.** Don’t let this sit on a shelf. Research will show the product’s unique sales proposition and guide the message. In the case of the Asian District, it clarified why people visit and how they feel when they visit.
6. **Develop 2-3 concepts** based on research and test them out. When presented to your key stakeholders, the winning brand message will rise.
7. **Create a marketing plan** to build awareness with your key audience via social media, earned media, paid advertising and word of mouth. Timing and messaging are essential for rolling out your brand story.
8. **Unveil your brand.** Utilize your assets and work with media and stakeholders to get the word out.

Any neighborhood branding initiative needs stakeholder participation to be thoughtful and authentically capture the soul of a community, but the Asian District Mesa AZ® required addressing cultural sensitives as the team worked to identify and articulate brand principles and differentiators from other neighborhoods.

Asian employers – including Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. (which is making a \$40 billion investment and planning to employ 2,000) – expanding into Arizona, amenities are essential. Having grocery, restaurant and service options nearby helps ease their workforce concerns of losing cultural amenities when moving across the Pacific. The alternative for many has been driving to LA or online shopping.

Mesa’s Asian District now receives regular media attention. Since the branding efforts began in 2020, news crews have covered new businesses, expansions, events, and branding efforts, such as the mural installations, coming to the area. The result is more than 100 million media impressions.



More than 100 Asian-owned restaurants, boba shops, grocers and specialty gift retailers are located in or near the heart of Mesa's Asian District.

Photo credit: City of Mesa

LOOKING FORWARD

Having the City of Mesa recognize and celebrate this area as a uniquely diverse neighborhood created a catalyst for community development and building the Asian District Mesa AZ® brand. Research shaped the city's positioning.

Business development continues to look strong for the Asian District Mesa AZ®, and many attribute the branding for speeding up the area's growth and reducing retail vacancies. The community at-large has benefitted from sales tax growth supporting community services, job creation via new and expanding business-

es and construction, and expanded cultural offerings promoting quality of life.

The area is often promoted as a point of pride to a growing Asian population in Greater Phoenix, as the City of Mesa strongly values diversity. Event organizers are choosing to bring more activity to the area, too, helping connect and engage a community that needed activation.

The branding effort opened the door to more collaboration between business and government. And the big winner is the Greater Phoenix area.

Note: The Asian District Mesa AZ® received a Gold Award from the International Economic Development Council in the Neighborhood Development Category in 2023. It was one of 14 submissions nominated for "Best in Show." 🌐

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welcoming workplaces

By Alex Beck, Jennifer Stromsten, and Rachel Shields Ebersole

INTRODUCTION

In late 2021, Alex Beck was laying the groundwork with local employers to welcome much-needed newcomers to the labor force. Brattleboro, in southeastern Vermont, was preparing to welcome refugee resettlement. As the site of the country's newest and most rural refugee resettlement office, this mostly white and rapidly aging community would soon receive a steady flow of immigrants.

Beck had begun outreach to employers months earlier, in the heart of the pandemic, using webinars and personal phone calls to get the word out. "We don't know exactly who is coming," he would say, "but we'll be welcoming a new, eager, capable, and diverse workforce. As an employer who needs workers, here are some things you can do to be ready for them."

Beck, Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation's (BDCC) Welcoming Communities Manager, knew Vermont's lack of diversity meant employers faced a steep learning curve: Vermont is 93% white with very low rates of foreign-born residents, aside from college students and faculty. He also knew that employers were motivated by a long-term decline in labor availability, worsened by the pandemic. With only 645,000 residents, Vermont has 25,000 open jobs.

Another key ingredient BDCC hoped would contribute to success was Brattleboro's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. BDCC co-leads a local "Diverse Workforce" partnership, comprised of town leaders and employers. "Change is hard," relates Beck. "We had to be willing to support employers every step of the way."

With a grant from the Vermont Community Foundation, BDCC launched Welcoming Workplaces, a program which won IEDC gold in 2023. The core of the program consists of recurring, high quality, high-intensity DEI trainings available at no cost to local employers.

With a grant from the Vermont Community Foundation, BDCC launched Welcoming Workplaces, a program which won IEDC gold in 2023. The core of the program consists of recurring, high quality, high-intensity DEI trainings available at no cost to local employers. Most local employers are small, in fact very small. Many lack capacity to update hiring, employment, supervision, and other functions, much less to invest in organizational culture change. Welcoming Workplaces reduces the barrier to entry for companies looking to build diversity, equity and inclusion.

But Welcoming Workplaces is more than trainings. It represents BDCC's programmatic commitment to helping employers attract and retain a more diverse workforce over the long term. Welcoming Workplaces provides free technical assistance, organizing webinars with lawyers to help hiring managers gain confidence with a new range of legal documents and statuses. Welcoming Workplaces is a relationship-based approach, building understanding and knowledge among local employers. Even when performing the simple task of helping a refugee apply for a job, Beck and his colleagues take time to build understanding and dialogue.

Since January of 2021, southern Vermont has welcomed around 200 people from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Central Africa, Congo, Uganda, Yemen,

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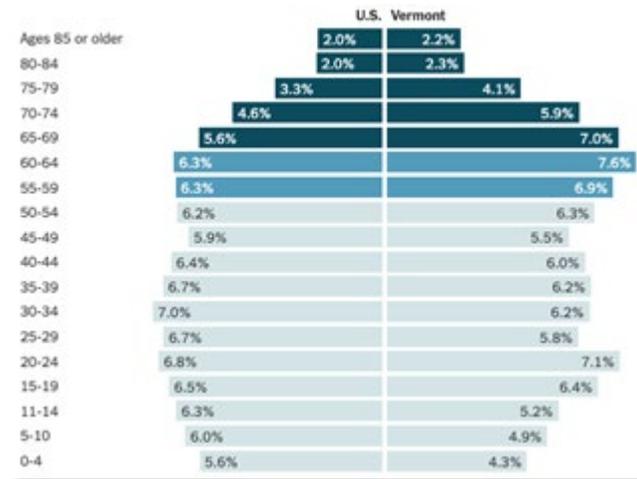
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HELPING EMPLOYERS FOSTER A DIVERSE RURAL WORKFORCE

Welcoming Workplaces is an IEDC gold winning program designed to create a stronger and more diverse workforce in rural southern Vermont. Due to the region's workforce shortage and aging population, increased immigration is a key workforce strategy which led to Brattleboro becoming the most rural site for a U.S. refugee resettlement office. Welcoming Workplaces was launched to help employers learn to welcome an increasingly diverse workforce. Welcoming Workplaces deploys high intensity trainings and a relationship-based approach so employers can adapt recruitment, hiring, training and promotion protocols. Welcoming Workplaces is helping employers compete for talent to fill jobs. It's connecting newcomers with opportunities to attract and retain the people who power the economy.

PERCENTAGE OF 2022 POPULATION BY AGE GROUP



Source: Census Bureau – By The New York Times

Syria, and Guatemala. Today, 91 people work for 48 different employers, from local banks and schools to manufacturers and mechanic shops. Thirty-seven refugees are pursuing (or have) credentials in areas such as phlebotomy, early childhood education, construction, nursing, and commercial driving.

EARLY ADOPTERS

In early 2022, after the fall of Kabul, 75 Afghan refugees arrived in Brattleboro. They wanted desperately to earn and send money home to family members in Afghanistan. Vermont was slowly reopening after the pandemic, and employers were desperate for workers. However, ironically, short staffing meant many employers felt too overwhelmed to face the challenges of a new workforce.

The first employer to say yes to hiring refugees was a family-owned sawmill. They were eager to welcome people who were accustomed to hard work, and highly motivated. With the help of a new BDCC employee, Amir Samar, the sawmill quickly onboarded two Afghan employees. Before long six more Afghans were being trained. Most had been soldiers fighting the Taliban alongside American soldiers. Samar provided translation and interpretation for training and supervisory meetings. Samar, also from Afghanistan, had worked in refugee resettlement for an international NGO. He brought much-needed expertise to the BDCC team.

Sawmills open before the buses run in Brattleboro, so BDCC provided rides using Vermont's commuter van program. In the afternoon, the sawmill organized rides to meet the bus. Routines fell into place. At the same time, we helped people obtain driver's licenses to create long-term self-sufficiency.

Despite consistent and open dialogue, things came up that Welcoming Workplaces hadn't covered. One day no Afghans showed up to work. The sawmill called Samar who said, "Oh! It's Eid!". Eid is the most impor-

tant day of celebration for people of the Muslim faith. This wasn't five no-call-no-shows, it was a moment to increase cultural understanding – Eid is as important as Christmas and understood in much of the world as a day when businesses close. Fortunately, the relationships were in place to allow for mutual learning. "That was when we knew it was working," Beck recalls. "From communication about holidays, to providing a little space and time for prayer, this employer was just *welcoming*."

AN AGING STATE AND A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

A recent New York Times article highlighted Vermont's aging and workforce shortage, and the interplay of those factors: Healthcare personnel shortages are undermining Vermont's ability to care for aging residents. In the article, Ron Hetrick, a senior labor economist at Lightcast, cited immigration as part of a solution.

Southeastern Vermont's labor force has dropped 19% since 2010. In Brattleboro, a town of about 12,000 people, adding nearly 100 refugee workers has made a visible impact. Brattleboro is part of a tri-state economic region: Massachusetts and New Hampshire are right next door and local workers come from all three states. The local economy is relatively diverse with major employers in manufacturing, wholesale, tourism, and healthcare along with what you'd expect to see in education, government, and retail.

The region's first Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS, 2014) told us to increase the size and quality of the workforce. This was affirmed in the 2019 CEDS. BDCC and Southeastern Vermont Economic Development Strategies (SeVEDS), our affiliate non-profit grassroots organization, lead the CEDS and development of workforce strategies. "Based on this research and planning, we've launched successful initiatives to retain and retrain Vermonters," said Laura Sibilia, BDCC's Director of Regional Strategies. "But our programmatic focus on in-migration and immigration is really taking off now. We need it all."



Photo taken on a job site visit to C & S Wholesale

Southern Vermont is now home to a growing cadre of new Vermonters from around the world who love it here and want to stay. While BDCC's goals are based in economic development and strategic planning, the community-based welcome is rooted in compassion. The region's cultural openness, progressive attitudes, and civic engagement are as important as Welcoming Workplaces programmatic activities.

BUILDING IMMIGRATION PATHWAYS

BDCC initiatives embody an important mindset: We believe in our region's ability to shape a vibrant economic future for itself by working together. This is our starting point.

To build immigration systems and support an increasingly diverse workforce, BDCC conceived of the Welcoming Communities umbrella of programs, of which Welcoming Workplaces would be part. BDCC identified becoming a refugee resettlement community as a key step towards increased immigration. To succeed, we knew we had to plan carefully, and tackle our thorniest challenges head-on. We believed that employers would eagerly welcome this new workforce, given the unemployment rate of 2%, if properly prepared and supported. That's where Welcoming Workplaces came in.

Having laid the groundwork building workforce programs and regional workforce partnerships, BDCC took a bold step in 2021 and partnered with a national refugee resettlement organization to establish a field office in Brattleboro with professional staff. This would establish an official conduit for refugees and enable us to build a critical mass of services, expertise, and resources for those newcomers to stay and thrive. Brattleboro would become the country's smallest and most rural site for a refugee resettlement agency.

Southern Vermont began receiving refugees in 2022. That year we welcomed refugees from Afghanistan, Guatemala, and Eritrea, along with asylum-seekers from Latin America and East Africa. Since that time, 91 adults have found full-time employment in high-demand occupations – all who have sought employment and are not otherwise engaged as full-time caregivers or students. They work in sectors like manufacturing, construction, social services, banking, distribution, and logistics. The average wage is \$18.23/hour. We expect this to move upwards as some of the folks who have been in the region longer achieve promotion or make moves into more lucrative fields like healthcare and CDL.

To build immigration systems and support an increasingly diverse workforce, BDCC conceived of the Welcoming Communities umbrella of programs, of which Welcoming Workplaces would be part. BDCC identified becoming a refugee resettlement community as a key step towards increased immigration.

Welcoming Workplaces organizes, facilitates, and promotes a series of free employer training workshops to familiarize employers with key concepts, techniques, and resources to build an inclusive workplace culture. The series starts employers on a path towards meaningful, long-term organizational investments in diversity, equity, and inclusion. Hiring managers and supervisors from more than 30 local companies have been through workshops so far.

SAME EMPLOYERS, NEW COMPETENCIES

In 2019, a successful local company closed without notice and 100 people were laid off. Most workers found jobs immediately. However, four asylum-seekers were left hanging. They had been successful employees, well-liked by management, working legally in the U.S. At that moment, BDCC staff learned an important lesson about barriers for new Vermonters, and the need to change employer perceptions. The urgent need for talent was not enough to change ingrained practices and overcome knowledge deficits. These lessons planted the seeds for Welcoming Workplaces.

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Much of the DEI training work has been done in partnership with Emiliano Void of NuWave Equity Corporation. NuWave has worked with many of Vermont's larger firms on DEI initiatives. With BDCC, their training was adapted to include issues specific to immigrants. NuWave focuses on culture, and ways in which culture is encoded in process. The Welcoming Workplaces trainings help partners look at how hiring and payroll systems can encode bias in language or procedures. For instance, work-eligible immigrants are often navigating systems that favor certain documentation, which is discriminatory. Refugees may wait 90 days for a Social Security number but are typically eligible to work upon entry in the US and possess legal documents necessary to complete an I9.

BDCC staff also provide concierge-level support to employers preparing to hire immigrants. This might be advice around specific facilities adjustments (space for prayer or hygiene accommodations), cultural orientation for managers and supervisors, plans for cohort onboarding to maximize interpretation resources, or whatever is needed.

Some simple, but effective, practices have become standard. When refugees began to arrive in 2022, BDCC asked employers to allow us to bring in cohorts of refu-

gees for facility tours. Employers meet some newcomers and get a little more excited about being able to fill jobs. This moves the proposition from abstract to real and increases employer motivation. At the same time, newcomers get more information about the job and facility. It builds trust, and creates better understanding on all sides, improving success once people start work. Job site tours also help employers see the role that BDCC and our partners play, increasing their engagement with Welcoming Workplaces.

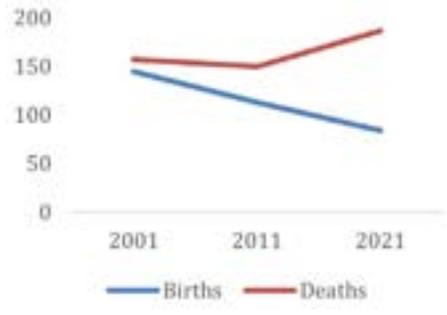
Employers are stretched thin. Most are small, all are under-staffed. They need help moving from concept to execution. BDCC works to keep communication strong through hiring, interviews, and onboarding. We facilitate interpretation. We provide simple webinars for HR staff on how to deal with unfamiliar I9 documentation. BDCC staff also take calls and texts, sit with HR staff and managers, and do regular check-ins. We like to ensure small cultural differences don't turn into major misunderstandings and to ensure employers know they are supported.

WELCOMING WORKPLACES: DATA DEEP DIVE

BDCC is a regional economic development non-profit, part of a statewide network, and state partner. BDCC began decades ago as an industrial corporation. Real estate is still at the heart of our organization.

We've built industrial parks and infrastructure. We've helped employers grow with New Market Tax Credit projects. We operate over 500,000 sf of commercial and industrial space. Today, the pain point for employers isn't a sewer line. It's the talent pipeline.

BRATTLEBORO VITAL STATISTICS



Vermont Department of Health Vital Records Annual Reports www.healthvermont.gov

As with all of BDCC programs and initiatives, Welcoming Workplaces is guided by data, dropping labor force, deaths outstripping births, and school populations trending downwards.

“When we talk about the workforce problem,” said Jen Stromsten, BDCC’s Director of Programs, “people want us to retain the youth. We agree. We launched an award-winning high-school career education program six years ago. But even if we kept high schooler grads from leaving, we’d be thousands of workers shy of what’s needed. We’ve run the numbers.”

Adam Grinold, BDCC’s Executive Director, had his eye on increasing immigration for years, looking for the opportunity for BDCC to change the rural dynamics in southern Vermont since 2016. “When U.S. immigration revived in 2021, we saw in those numbers the

ANNUAL AVERAGE WAGE



Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development Projects, image from VT Department of Labor 2022 Annual Profile Report at vtlmi.info

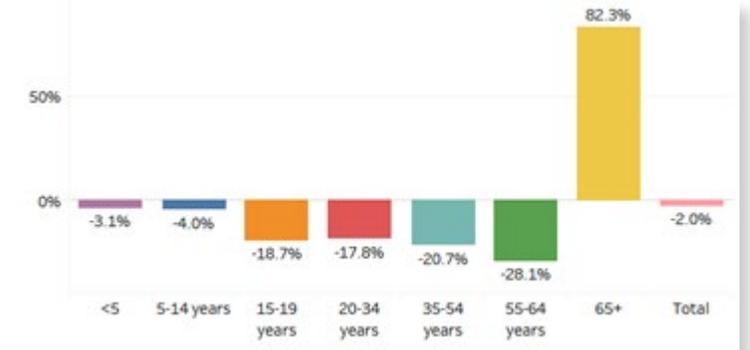
potential to change our numbers,” said Grinold. “Comparable regions with a better demographic and labor force outlook than ours tend to have immigration as a key ingredient.” To defy trends, reset forecasts, and change our economic future BDCC analyzed the region’s assets and saw wages and job openings represented assets as something to leverage. (See sidebar “Hiring Needs Assessments”)

BDCC also knew they had to figure out how immigration could be properly designed and supported in the rural Vermont region. Employment is not just a numbers game. Sure, entry level jobs need workers. But the region needs workers who possess or can acquire specific skills; carpenters, healthcare practitioners, industrial mechanics, teachers. The region needs thousands of new workers over the coming decade, the state of Vermont tens of thousands.

The data also provided clues about the changes to come. Going back to the healthcare sector, southern Vermont is looking at a massive wave of retirements with implications for hiring, but also loss of expertise, and care for an aging population. With 5,287 healthcare workers in the commutable tri-state region, 1,526 are nearing retirement. Based on national averages this should be 1,199 (still terrible).

The region’s healthcare workforce is 91% white vs 62% nationwide (2021 EMSI, now Lightcast). That’s a reflection of the overall population in southern Ver-

PROJECTED POPULATION CHANGE BY AGE COHORT, 2010 – 2030



VT Department of Labor 2022 Annual Profile Report at vtlmi.info

Vermont Department of Labor –Economic and Data Profile Series 2023 Windham Labor Force

mont. In some occupations, like CDL drivers, there is even less diversity (and an older workforce).

If we fail to fill jobs, we face dire consequences to key institutions and people's lives. Conversely, if we achieve our goals and increase immigration and diversity in the region, we will see a major shift in the makeup of our workforce. If we fill our jobs, southern Vermont is going to have a more diverse and younger labor force than we have today. We aren't ready, yet.

Welcoming Workplaces is more than a first job strategy for new immigrant workers. Economic mobility is key to keeping people in the region. We are laying the groundwork for profound change in our workplaces so our new neighbors can stay and thrive – gain skills, be promoted, buy homes, raise families, and give back to the communities that have welcomed them.

WINDHAM COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL ENROLLMENT



Vermont Agency of Education Enrollment Report at education.vermont.gov/data-and-reporting

A DEEPER TALENT POOL DEMANDS DEEPER CHANGE

Many of the forecasted job openings involved supervisors, skilled workers, and senior positions. We must improve the workforce development systems upon which employers rely. As with employers, there is a learning curve for providers. Vermont's agencies are geared to unemployment, and those with serious barriers – opioids, incarceration, homelessness, literacy and disability. With such low immigration, language barriers or cultural differences are not as well considered.

Sometimes a top-down solution is needed when it comes to refugee employment. Vermont's State Refugee Coordinator, Tracy Dolan, has been an exceptional advocate to ensure vocational credentials and licensing processes support the aspirations of our new neighbors. Vermont's department of transportation has been another terrific partner, helping smooth pathways to CDL training. Now.

Much of the workforce development change has to occur within the regional system where people access training and education. To accelerate vocational learning for immigrants, we are coordinating with partners to blend English Language Learning (ELL) with training for high-demand career pathways. SIT World Learning and Vermont Adult Learning helped create curriculum and deliver a bootcamp for 16 refugee women, on early childhood education (ECE). Then we

HIRING NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

Regional economic planning suffers from a lack of detailed data regarding workforce demand, particularly in rural areas. For the purpose of regional economic planning, assumptions embedded in workforce projections aren't always sensitive to current vacancies, subregional trends and specialty sector dynamics.

Uncomfortable with state and federal labor data showing a lack of jobs in the region, despite anecdotal evidence to the contrary, in 2014, BDCC published a SeVEDS Workforce Report. Sixty-seven of the region's largest employers reported a projected gap of 3,345 workers – 27% new jobs, the rest replacement from turnover and retirements. The report disproved the misperception of a lack of jobs in the region and provided granular understanding of the looming talent supply problem. BDCC also participated in Vermont Talent Pipeline Management partnerships.

BDCC conducts periodic hiring needs assessments of high-wage, high-growth occupations. Based on manufacturer surveys in 2019, we projected 600 manufacturing jobs in Windham County over the next five years, over entry-level. The assessments also analyze workforce. For instance, the region's CDL drivers are older than the workforce overall, which impacts everything from major wholesalers to town DPWs. This data is used to guide action: We're accelerating refugees through CDL credentials with intensive English language learning to fill these jobs.

offered the state certified ECE course, with a licensed instructor plus two ELL instructors. Six successful completers obtained the ECE professional credential.

The ELL-vocational innovation accelerated credential acquisition by a year or more for each person. The default option would have been to wait for newcomers to attain general language proficiency before entering a career pathway. This is a waste of time for us all. Immigrants need opportunities, and we need their talent. In 2024, BDCC will launch programs in construction and healthcare. Again, these do not replace existing credential programs. They provide intensive preparation for these programs, accelerating language learning in the occupational field.



Students at the Early Childhood Education English as a Second Language class. Photo taken by Kris Radder

The risk of failure is too great, the opportunity too compelling, to stand back. To overcome rural deficits, we are intentional about investing in partnerships and relationships, cohorts and innovative solutions. Collaboration and community commitment are rural superpowers that we leverage. BDCC has staff who wake up every day and focus on the systems. It's paid off, but needs to keep happening for years to come. Capacity is key.

EQUITY MEANS MANY THINGS

BDCC is concerned with the entire workforce, not just newcomers. During the pandemic, we convened regional leaders to revisit the CEDS in light of COVID-19, and Black Lives Matter. While support for programs to retain and attract people remained strong, there were serious concerns about locals feeling left behind. BDCC heard that concern loud and clear.

Whenever possible, we are intentional in addressing barriers for the entire labor force. Our work in supporting refugee access to regional workforce and the training necessary has provided valuable insights for helping strengthen Vermont's nascent workforce development system. Economic mobility is limited by many factors in Vermont. The state takes extraordinary care of the most vulnerable, but has a steep benefits cliff. The high cost of living is driven by high housing and transportation costs. Most county residents without a car live in Brattleboro. Most of the well-paid jobs aren't connected by sidewalk or bike lane. With the regional transit agency, BDCC is working on a pilot to add evening rides connecting thousands of people with second and third shift jobs. In trying to become a more welcoming community, we are finding ways to help everyone. This is basic rural equity.

In September, BDCC won a Northern Borders Regional Commission "WORC" grant. This will enable BDCC to wrap together youth career readiness, immigration employment support along with new programs targeted to adults who have been left behind – underemployed but underserved by needs-based programs. This has long been a dream of BDCC's Executive Director, who grew up in the region and has seen friends and family struggle. WORC will also continue and expand upon Welcoming Workplaces, and enable BDCC to build a more coherent regional workforce system, as southern Vermont lacks a WIB.

THE RURAL TWIST

Welcoming Workplaces allows BDCC to assume functions a major employer often does for itself. Prior to welcoming refugees, Alex Beck visited Burlington, Vermont, to learn from employers with years of experience hiring immigrants. Their HR teams were adept with interpretation tools, navigating employment documentation, and onboarding tuned to English language learners. Those organizations also routinely invest in DEI and workplace culture.

In addition to internal capacity and commitment, Burlington employers have external programs offering wraparound support, like United Way Working Bridges, the Association of Africans Living in Vermont, and the Society for Human Resources Professionals chapter.

In Southern Vermont, two thirds of employers have fewer than 20 employees and no dedicated HR person. The biggest employers with larger HR teams tend to be in sectors that require some of the most hard-to-obtain credentials – healthcare and education.

To welcome newcomers, we have to develop competencies and assets that other regions have developed over time. However, the region can't wait for that to happen organically. Despite the desperate need for talent, responsiveness is not a given, because of that capacity shortage. We've seen too many employers turn away from the opportunity. We've seen other rural regions that welcomed newcomers, only to see them leave because the regional systems did not create "stickiness."

The risk of failure is too great, the opportunity too compelling, to stand back. To overcome rural deficits, we are intentional about investing in partnerships and relationships, cohorts and innovative solutions. Collaboration and community commitment are rural superpowers that we leverage. BDCC has staff who wake up every day and focus on the systems. It's paid off, but needs to keep happening for years to come. Capacity is key.

SUCCESS TODAY AND A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

In southern Vermont, employers have a new, upwardly mobile pool of talent. The region's markets, labor force, population, and tax-base are growing. While job creation is often the policy focus, having jobs without people to work is the functional equivalent of not having jobs in the first place. In the first year of welcoming refugees, over \$3 million in wages were earned by refugees doing jobs that had previously been empty. This seems like a small number, but it represents nearly .2% of regional GDP.

Two years into welcoming refugees, 48 companies have hired refugees and asylum-seekers. A slow but steady increase in buy-in from employers is based on demonstrated successes. Two manufacturers have been able to fully staff production lines. Building commitment and expertise among workforce partners will expand our collective ability to foster the labor force this region needs.

There were fears the goal was to import cheap labor and undermine the local workforce. In fact, an influx of newcomers has pushed up wages, as employers experience more productivity and find themselves competing for talent. Improving conditions for all working Vermonters is at the heart of BDCC's mission. Long term, Welcoming Workplaces will succeed by improving the region's labor market and economy, while ensuring economic mobility. Otherwise, newcomers

won't stick around and those "native Vermonters" who can leave, will continue to do so.

The vision for Welcoming Workplaces is for employers to have the tools, resources, and guidance to foster actively welcoming and equitable workplaces. We envision a future where employers invest in a diverse workforce and welcoming workplace in order to be an employer of choice. Long term, we hope BDCC's role becomes obsolete as employers make a lasting commitment to this work internally, with support from external resources supporting positive change. The role of the local NAACP and Diverse Workforce committee remain central to achieving this vision, as will external experts like NuWave. More is needed, like a revival of the local SHRM chapter, to sustain collaborative learning and growth.

Years ago, the CEDS process guided a search for solutions to southern Vermont's demographic downturn. We looked to rural regions where immigration and in-migration were part of a growth strategy. Now, we hope southern Vermont will serve as a model for other rural communities who share the vision of being welcoming, inclusive, and supportive of newcomers. Rural communities can build economic vibrancy and write a new story for the future. Our employers and communities have provided a robust welcome, offering stability, safety, and economic opportunity to individuals fleeing humanitarian crises throughout the world. In return, our communities are enlivened by young families, artists, new foods, and people with a wide range of experience and background.

We launched immigration systems building with the hope of jobs filled and communities enlivened. But the vision needs to keep expanding to encompass a

FUNDING WELCOMING WORKPLACES

Welcoming Workplaces is part of a suite of initiatives that, together, comprise Welcoming Communities. The funding took shape as follows:

- **BDCC** and other partners self funded to build partnerships and secure resources for two years.
- The Boston Fed and Vermont partners awarded **Working Communities** core funding for immigration systems building to the Southern Vermont team.
- The **Vermont Community Foundation** welcomed a BDCC proposal for Welcoming Workplaces to fund two years of DEI training and support for employers as part of Welcoming Communities.
- BDCC and partners also fund capacity to support employers and employees through state refugee (**Federal Office of Refugee Resettlement**) funds and the **Vermont Department of Labor**.
- Welcoming Workplaces will now live on as part of the new **WORC** program funded through the Northern Borders Regional Commission.

generational change in our labor force. Long term, we need to re-establish a regional economic advantage in the form of a robust and sought-after workforce. We will do this by fostering a diverse workforce.

In the future, newcomers who stay will become more than members of the labor force. They will become community leaders, entrepreneurs, doctors, teachers. They will take their place alongside a small but extraordinary, and growing, cohort of immigrants and BIPOC Vermonters who have been leading the way towards the future. 🌐

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job training albuquerque

By Sarah Wheeler with contributions from Monica Mitchell and Justin D. Hilliard

Joseph Wojcik is the owner-operator of Powerhouse Electric in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and has successfully grown his expertise as an electrician for over 20 years. But he felt he was missing skills that could take his client base, safety practices, and the services Powerhouse offered to the next level. Wojcik, searching for educational opportunities, discovered the Electric Lineworker Pre-Apprentice Program through CNM Ingenuity, the workforce training division of Central New Mexico Community College (CNM).

There was just one problem – the tuition for the program was a barrier for Wojcik, so he decided to wait until the right moment came for him as a business owner to commit the resources and additional workload it would take to complete the program. That was when Wojcik heard about Job Training Albuquerque (JTA), a workforce training and job creation program that offers upskilling, professional certifications, and even college credits for small business owners and their employees at zero cost to the employer or employee.

FILLING THE GAP

Job Training Albuquerque developed as the result of recognizing this need and subsequent brainstorming sessions between the City of Albuquerque's Economic Development Department (EDD) and city leadership including Mayor Timothy M. Keller. Mayor Keller launched an "Increment of One" vision for economic development within the city, which focuses on investing in local entrepreneurship and supporting established small businesses by creating one job at a time.

A VISION FOR EQUITABLE, ACCESSIBLE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Since early 2020, Job Training Albuquerque (JTA) has helped create opportunities and better career outcomes for Albuquerque's workforce, surpassing 1,176 employee participants in 2024. JTA-participating businesses have reported adding over 797 jobs, as well as a 23.9% increase in wages, positively affecting the city's businesses, workforce, and families. The wildly successful program offers in-demand, transferable skills that meet the needs of local small businesses, and is a partnership between the City of Albuquerque and Central New Mexico Community College (CNM). For its work supporting job skills and bolstering small business growth, JTA received two gold "Excellence in Economic Development" awards from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) in the "Partnerships with Educational Institutions" and "Talent Development & Retention" categories.



Electrician and business owner, Joseph Wojcik, was able to increase the services his business offers, and its customer base, by utilizing JTA to build his skills.

Courtesy CNM.

This team analyzed the gaps in job training programs available in New Mexico at the time and ventured to build a program that would be available to small businesses in Albuquerque that did not qualify otherwise for existing programs, such as New Mexico's Job Training Incentive Program (JTIP) or TechHire. The idea was to remove financial and industry-based barriers that excluded many businesses, while at the same time focusing solely on Albuquerque and its unique workforce and training needs. The program has enrolled businesses from typical economic base industries such as technology and aerospace but

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“From those early meetings, several areas began to trend among those surveyed,” said Monica Mitchell, deputy director of the EDD for the City of Albuquerque, and one of JTA’s developers. “We saw that training was needed in different web-based paths, like digital marketing and cyber security, as well as programs with broader applications, such as project management, leadership skills, and accounting.”

has also actively recruited and enrolled organizations in the arts, childcare, and retail.

As a well-established educational and training institution focused on economic development and job creation, CNM Ingenuity and CNM were approached to serve as the Albuquerque-based educational partner and the city’s core partner for the burgeoning endeavor in 2019. The EDD would provide the funding, marketing, and strategy for the program, and CNM would provide the administration and training courses through CNM Ingenuity, the college’s workforce training arm. Upon entering an Intergovernmental Agreement with the City of Albuquerque, CNM Ingenuity commenced initial research, conducting focus groups, and surveying small business support organizations such as the Small Business Development Center and New Mexico Workforce Solutions, as well as local businesses, to determine the most in-demand skills the program should be most focused on.

“From those early meetings, several areas began to trend among those surveyed,” said Monica Mitchell, deputy director of the EDD for the City of Albuquerque, and one of JTA’s developers. “We saw that training was needed in different web-based paths, like digital marketing and cyber security, as well as programs with broader applications, such as project management, leadership skills, and accounting.”

To track the success of the program and ensure its benefit to the workforce and the economic ecosystem in Albuquerque, requirements were set for participation in the program. Potential qualifying participants must be:

- A for- or non-profit entity within the State of New Mexico;
- Headquartered within Albuquerque’s city limits;
- A small business with 500 or fewer employees;
- Willing to send employees to training at scheduled class times; and
- Full time (32 hours per week).

The program’s requirements also took into consideration Mayor Keller’s initiatives, like “Increment of One” when establishing requirements. JTA achieves the job creation goal by requiring participants to be

willing and able to add at least one job no more than two years after completing a training program. Mayor Keller and the city are dedicated to supporting local businesses through Buy Local initiatives, and as such, JTA-participating businesses are required to have been located in Albuquerque for at least one year. For startups, the owner must have been a resident of Albuquerque for one year.

PREPARING TO LAUNCH

JTA’s funding was encumbered through the Albuquerque City Council’s approval of the city’s 2020 fiscal year budget. To date, the city has provided almost \$2.4 million to JTA and as of the publication of this article, the program will be funded through at least June 30, 2024, with options to fund for the 2025 fiscal year.

Program metrics are central to funding for JTA, and CNM Ingenuity submits detailed reports to the EDD monthly. Reporting includes the number of businesses and employees who participated, various demographics, as well as incremental benchmarks for participants, like jobs added and wage increases attributed to JTA training. The primary metric the program tracks, however, is job creation, and to date JTA has added almost 800 jobs to Albuquerque’s workforce.

JTA launched in January of 2020, mere months before the COVID-19 pandemic changed how people worked, and how they completed course content at every level of education. The JTA team viewed this as both a challenge and an opportunity, as many people were exploring alternative career paths due to layoffs, or furloughs that afforded extra time to upskill in their fields. CNM seamlessly pivoted to offer courses online without pausing the program, which allowed the JTA team to continue to build momentum and awareness of the program’s offerings.

In the first year of operation, the JTA lineup featured continuous and rotating courses across a wide variety of industries. Some of the most popular courses were, and continue to be, digital marketing, project management, commercial driver’s license fast track, Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator, and sales and branding programs.

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In January 2024, JTA was awarded the Workforce Champion of the Year Award from AGC NM for advancing Albuquerque's construction industry workforce.

SUCSESSES AND GROWTH

In JTA's first two years, it experienced exponential growth, showing a 567% increase in participation. The value of the program remains evident, and the latest metrics show that since 2020, nearly 1,200 workers have participated in trainings, and across respondents a 23.9% wage increase was reported, building better career outcomes for Albuquerque residents. Continuing to focus on an "Increment of One," 216 JTA-participating businesses have reported adding 797 jobs to the local workforce, and the numbers continue to grow as more participants reach their two-year measure reports.

In addition to participation growth, JTA has also expanded its educational partners and course offerings to meet trending workforce needs in the city. As with many growing mid-sized cities across the country, Albuquerque has experienced a housing shortage. As more housing development projects sprung up around the city, JTA has adapted to mayoral initiatives such as Housing Forward ABQ. It has also proactively sought out construction-focused educational partners, adding the Associated Contractors of New Mexico (ACNM) and Associated General Contractors of New Mexico (AGC NM) to its provider list. ACNM and AGC NM now offer courses including Construction Supervision Fundamentals, Construction Quality Management for Contractors, Supervisory Training Program, and others.

"We believe it's crucial to remain flexible and receptive to the ever-changing needs of our local workforce," said EDD Director Max Gruner. "This program has seen incredible successes in job and wage growth because we are continually evaluating and stepping up to meet employers and their teams with the skills that are in the highest demand."

JTA has added courses through The University of New Mexico's (UNM) Continuing Education Program, as well as the UNM Anderson School of Management, which is one of the six percent of business schools worldwide to be certified by the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (AACSB).

Additional partners cover early childhood education training and certifications through the New Mexico Child Care & Education Association (NMCCEA), which offers the 45-Hour Course, a certification program that provides opportunities for students to build knowledge about children, families, communities, and support systems through discussion, reflection, and skill practice. Businesses like Cuidando Los Niños, which provides supportive housing, education, and advocacy for families experiencing homelessness, have utilized JTA to offer different training opportunities that support their business missions and staff goals.

"Job Training Albuquerque has been an invaluable resource to our staff at Cuidando Los Niños. From Women in Leadership to the 45-Hour Course, our employees have greatly benefited from the course offerings," said senior director of program operations at Cuidando Los Niños, Natasha Gacinski. "They have honed new skill sets and found new passions. We are so grateful for the opportunity to participate in the program."

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Over the first four years of offering JTA, several challenges were met and overcome through innovative problem solving and a solid dedication to the program's mission and outcomes. CNM Ingenuity and the EDD met on a regular basis to discuss the progression of the program, including course demand related to available funding, trending workforce needs, program marketing, and ensuring trainings are available and equitable to everyone in Albuquerque.

During the planning for JTA, one of the greatest challenges was ensuring it accurately and adequately bridged training gaps and complemented similar existing programs, as opposed to duplicating efforts. This was achieved through detailed research surrounding current state and federal offerings, and continually as-

ACRONYMS:

AACSB: Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs

ACNM: Associated Contractors of New Mexico

AGC NM: Associated General Contractors of New Mexico

CNM: Central New Mexico Community College

CNMI: CNM Ingenuity

EDD: City of Albuquerque's Economic Development Department

JTA: Job Training Albuquerque

JTIP: Job Training Incentive Program

NMCCEA: New Mexico Child Care & Education Association

NM MBDA: New Mexico Minority Business Development Agency Business Center

UNM: The University of New Mexico

WESST: Women's Self-Sufficiency Team



The City of Albuquerque Economic Development team increases awareness about JTA and other services they offer by engaging in community outreach events.

sessing local employer training needs. Additionally, the EDD structured the Intergovernmental Agreement to empower CNM to easily partner with different training providers that would enhance JTA's course catalog. The EDD and CNM regularly assess course offerings and pursue new training partnerships to strategically add new industry credentials.

At the time the EDD launched JTA, the department lacked a full-time workforce development program manager to oversee the program. Over the course of 2020, EDD was able to leverage grant funding to onboard a full-time Workforce Development Liaison in October to focus on JTA. Given its success, the role is now a permanent city-funded position within the EDD and also covers a variety of workforce development initiatives. Having a full-time position has proven invaluable in the growth and evolution of JTA.

One limitation the EDD and CNM recognized within the partnership and courses offered was that CNM only provided trainings in English at the time. As a majority-minority city, Albuquerque has a significant Spanish-speaking population, which limited JTA's reach. JTA addressed this by partnering with organizations that had previously established small business training in Spanish, including the Women's Self-Sufficiency Team (WESST) and the NMCCEA. Additionally, JTA has collaborated with existing partners, like AGC NM, to begin offering popular trainings in both Spanish and English. Taking this step made JTA accessible and available to new audiences and brought essential free job training to indispensable workforce sectors.

Other challenges faced frequently are balancing program demand with budgetary guidelines and ensuring that JTA is being used by as many businesses and employees as possible, instead of a small population of businesses and individuals. The EDD has placed a \$15,000 limit per small business per fiscal year to allow residents fair access to trainings and certifications. The courses offered by JTA range in price from \$79 for an Adobe Illustrator course, to \$9,995 for deep dive coding. Due to the broad range of course prices, predicting monthly course spending can also vary widely

from month to month. Therefore, the EDD and CNM teams remain vigilant in monitoring projections and making adjustments when necessary.

JTA IN YOUR COMMUNITY

The JTA program model can be adapted to other communities that face similar gaps in workforce training opportunities for small businesses. At its core, the JTA model is a partnership between a municipality and workforce training organizations that seeks to lower barriers for small businesses and their employees so they are more readily able to access training resources. Proximity to a community college with workforce training experience and industry groups that can provide industry-recognized credentials are important factors to consider in order for the JTA model to be most successful. Having a collaborative educational and training partner that can assist in problem solving and creative thinking is essential.

"Job Training Albuquerque has already been a remarkable success for Albuquerque businesses and their employees, while adding momentum to the city's overall workforce and economic development efforts," said CNM President Tracy Hartzler. "We're proud to be continuing our partnership with the City of Albuquerque to expand this well-established tool that empowers both small businesses and employees with education and training resources. We're looking forward to JTA creating even more prosperity for businesses, employees, and our community in the years ahead."

THE FUTURE OF JTA

JTA will continue its mission to provide Albuquerque small businesses with opportunities to skill up their employees by offering free training courses in high-demand skills. By showing the positive effects of the program through extensive reporting and metrics, the EDD remains optimistic that the program will continue to receive funding annually. JTA has shown that community partners can work together to elevate small businesses and help residents achieve upward career trajectories, while simultaneously creating new jobs in the city. Workforce development is an essential component of the City of Albuquerque's comprehensive economic development strategy, understanding that an investment in the success of working families and local businesses is an investment in the economic success of the city as a whole for generations to come.

As the city's first business-focused workforce development initiative, JTA has enabled the EDD to build new relationships and spin-off initiatives with the industry groups providing JTA trainings. For example, The NMCCEA provides industry credentials for the essential early childhood sector. Through a W.K. Kellogg Foundation workforce grant, the EDD connected and funded partnerships between the NMCCEA and local community groups such as Catholic Charities to provide free workforce training to low-income job seekers.

The partnership between the EDD and CNM opened a key economic incentive to small businesses and workers that have been traditionally left behind by economic development organizations. JTA's track record of success over the past four years has demonstrated it can be a model for how municipalities can partner with community colleges to provide workforce development services to small businesses.

JTA has also strengthened the relationship between CNM and the EDD. In 2022, CNM, the EDD, and three other partners were awarded \$500,000 from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Build Back Better Regional Challenge and formed the New Mexico Space Valley Coalition, a regional convener for the nation's commercial space industry. One of Space Valley's goals is to provide workforce training for individuals entering the aerospace sector, and JTA will be able to support the growing space workforce in Albuquerque.

The EDD also operates the New Mexico Minority Business Development Agency Business Center (NM MBDA), which is a division of the U.S. Department of Commerce, and is strategically focused on filling equity gaps within the state's small business community, with an emphasis on taking minority business enterprises to the next level of success. The NM MBDA serves the entire state of New Mexico and is currently in the process of securing office space in the northern and southern regions of the state to better serve minority-owned and Spanish-speaking businesses in those geographic areas. The EDD is exploring the opportunity to expand the JTA model to other communities in New Mexico through the NM MBDA, thereby increasing reach, job creation, and upward career mobility for residents across the state.

The EDD plans to seek additional funding for JTA so it may continue to grow the number of workers it reaches in Albuquerque and will continue the practice of monitoring the local workforce, employer needs, and citywide initiatives and goals that JTA can complement through offering different trainings. The partnership between the EDD and CNM opened a key economic incentive to small businesses and workers that have been traditionally left behind by economic development organizations. JTA's track record of success over the past four years has demonstrated it can be a model for how municipalities can partner with community colleges to provide workforce development services to small businesses.

Ultimately this program is about the people it can positively impact through education and opportunity. By targeting one business and one worker at a time, giving them the option to better themselves without the burden of cost, individuals like Joseph Wojcik are taking their skills, careers, and businesses to the next level.

"This is such an awesome program. You have to do the hard work, but it's all worth it," Wojcik said. "I know the skills I gained will help me make my business better, and I'm really looking forward to providing my customers with the best and safest services possible."



INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

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NEWS FROM IEDC

AEDO PROGRAM ACCREDITES THREE ORGANIZATIONS

The Accredited Economic Development Organization (AEDO) program announces three newly accredited



organizations. St. Tammany Corporation in Mandeville, Louisiana, becomes the sixth accredited organization in the state. Lee County Economic Development Group in Montrose, Iowa, became the second Iowa EDO accredited. The Economic Development Alliance of Skagit County in Mount Vernon, Washington, became the first accredited organization in the state and the Pacific Northwest. Cedar Hill (TX) Economic Development Corporation and Ponca City (OK) Development Authority recently achieved reaccreditation. Learn how your organization can become an Accredited Economic Development Organization at www.iedconline.org/AEDO.

IEDC LAUNCHED, ANNOUNCED THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY CORPS (ERC) INAUGURAL COHORT OF 65 FELLOWS & HOST COMMUNITIES

After thousands of applications and interviews, the ERC partner coalition reached a milestone by finalizing the first-ever cohort of 65 fellows and host communities. Fully funded for 2.5 years, ERC Fellows act as field catalysts to advance a dedicated project alongside their host community that spans 44 states and territories and 62% are rural areas. Fellows are 69% women and 54% identify as people of color.

Alongside special guests and ERC partners, the entire cohort of hosts and fellows gathered in Portland, Oregon, for a four-day training and networking event as a formal kickoff to the program. By investing in capacity building and leadership development, facilitating knowledge sharing and partnerships, the ERC program will set the stage for the future of economic development and a new age of collaboration in our field. Read the press release here iedconline.org/ERC-cohort and meet the cohort www.economicrecoverycorps.org/fellows/

IEDC HIRES NEW RESEARCH DIRECTOR YESI PEÑA

IEDC announces the hiring of its new research director, Yesi Peña, who has over 20 years of experience as a market research director, university research consultant, and therapist and researcher. She obtained her PhD in Social Psychology from UCLA and has worked on projects in Europe, the US, and Latin America with major companies like Coca-Cola and IKEA. She has secured funding from organizations like World Vision,

the World Bank, and USAID to lead the execution of numerous research projects. Her background includes designing experiments, analyzing data, publishing papers, advising students, and counseling vulnerable populations. She has strong research, analytics, project management and communication skills.

NEW EDRP PAPER SERIES

The landscape in which economic development organizations (EDOs) operate today is different than that of a decade ago. These changes, which have become especially salient on the heels of the Covid-19 Pandemic, bring challenges and opportunities for EDOs. This series, "Leading and Managing Next-Level EDOs," offers guidance for EDOs as they navigate these emerging trends along four key topics:

1. Leveraging Technology
2. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA)
3. Talent Attraction and Retention
4. Organizational Strategy.

To download the first paper, Leveraging Technology, visit <https://www.iedconline.org/edrp-reports/>

FIRST COHORT OF EQUITY IMPACT INVESTMENTS

In January 2024 IEDC, in partnership with New Growth Innovation Network and Local Initiatives Support Corporation, kicked off the technical assistance work with a first cohort of 12 regional partnerships under EDA's Equity Impact Investments. During the one-year long technical assistance phase, paired economic development organizations and community-based organizations will receive training to forge stronger and sustainable partnerships. A second cohort will start in summer 2024.

Equity Impact Investments set out to deliver a transformative, three-year, capacity-building program in 60 community-based organizations and 60 economic development organizations that serve underrepresented populations in the US.



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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
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CALENDAR OF EVENTS



IEDC sponsors an annual conference and a series of technical conferences each year to bring economic development professionals together to network with their peers and learn about the latest tools and trends from public and private experts. IEDC also provides training courses and webinars throughout the year for professional development, a core value of the IEDC. It is essential for enhancing your leadership skills, advancing your career, and, most importantly, plays an invaluable role in furthering your efforts in your community. **For more information** please visit our website at www.iedconline.org.

2024 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WEEK

May 6-10

2024 CONFERENCES

2024 Economic Future Forum

June 16-18

Spokane, WA

2024 Annual Conference

September 15-18

Denver, CO

2024 TRAINING COURSES

Courses are online unless noted otherwise.

Technology-Led Economic Development

March 26-27

Neighborhood Development Strategies

March 28-29

Economic Development Finance Programs

April 17-19

Economic Development Marketing & Attraction

April 29-30

Real Estate Development & Reuse

May 16-17

Introduction to Entrepreneurship-Led Economic Development

May 30-31

Accelerating Growth through Entrepreneurship-Led Economic Development

June 13-14

Economic Development Credit Analysis

June 26-28

Business Retention & Expansion

July 11-12

Economic Development Marketing & Attraction

July 23-24

Economic Development Strategic Planning

July 25-26

Entrepreneurial & Small Business Development Strategies

August 15-16

Managing Economic Development Organizations

October 1-2

Workforce Development Strategies

October 3-4

Business Retention & Expansion

November 14-15

Real Estate Development & Reuse

December 5-6

101 CLASSES

Workforce Development Communications

May 3, 2024

Early bird registration by 4/17/24

Standard registration by 5/1/24

Artificial Intelligence

August 2, 2024

Early bird registration by 7/17/24

Standard registration by 7/31/24

Economic Development Fundamentals

November 1, 2024

Early bird registration by 10/16/24

Standard registration by 10/30/24

2024 CERTIFIED ECONOMIC DEVELOPER EXAMS

August 9 & August 19-23

(App. Deadline: July 12)

2024 ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL (EDP) EXAMS

October 18 & October 22-25

(App. Deadline: September 20)



INTERNATIONAL
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
COUNCIL

IEDC would like to thank the sponsors and exhibitors of the 2024 Leadership Summit for demonstrating their commitment to the important work of economic developers. It is through their generous support that IEDC has brought leaders of the profession together for this forum of professional development, peer networking, and discussions of the most imperative issues facing economic developers today. We proudly recognize the following sponsors and exhibitors as partners in helping economic developers to build strong, more vibrant communities.

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the spark of a resilient

ECONOMY

By Kristina Hudson

For years, economic development professionals have measured success in terms of the number of jobs and the amount of money that our projects bring to our communities. We all have limited time and resources, and as always, we need to be accountable to our funders whether they be our taxpayers or our organizational investors. These annually reported numbers of jobs and dollars were a way to show a return on investment (ROI) and to justify why the work we do is valuable to the community. Using ROI in this way is still valuable but it is not the complete story. When we view these strict metrics through an equity lens, we quickly see that our gauges of success need to be expanded and to include the stories of our impact.

One of the realizations that came from the pandemic was that many of our business owners with English as a second language were not aware that

One of the realizations that came from the pandemic was that many of our business owners with English as a second language were not aware that resources were available to help their businesses. The message simply did not reach their communities. These culturally diverse businesses were in jeopardy of being lost and the kaleidoscope of our community was at risk. Economic Equity and Inclusion is critical to the fabric of our communities and necessary for a resilient economy.



OneEastside
SPARK

*Center for Business
Resilience and Innovation*

OneEastside SPARK is a specialized economic development program that works to coordinate regional partners to provide responsive programming and tools to address key areas of need amongst organizations in Washington State's East King County.

resources were available to help their businesses. The message simply did not reach their communities. These culturally diverse businesses were in jeopardy of being lost and the kaleidoscope of our community was at risk. Economic Equity and Inclusion is critical to the fabric of our communities and necessary for a resilient economy.

When this realization came to light for OneRedmond, a public/private economic development enterprise in Redmond, Washington, our team began to forge new territory in equity and economic development through the nurturing of partnerships and collaborations throughout our region – East King County, or as we like to call it, the Eastside.

IT ALL BEGINS WITH TEAMWORK AND TRUST

A silver lining of COVID-19 was the willingness of people from all different types of organizations to work together. Thanks to a U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration one-year grant in 2021, our team had the opportunity to become the backbone of

Kristina Hudson is the CEO of OneRedmond, Redmond, WA. (kristinah@oneredmond.org)

ECONOMIC EQUITY AND INCLUSION

This article examines the impact of OneRedmond's specialized economic development program OneEastside SPARK which forged new territory in equity in economic development by piloting new projects in collaboration with community-based organizations. This program works to coordinate regional partners to provide responsive programming and tools to address key areas of need amongst organizations in Washington State's East King County.

The article outlines the program development and reflects on the challenges and opportunities that were seen. The OneEastside SPARK program provides in-language, culturally appropriate assistance to business owners from historically underserved communities. As a result, OneRedmond received the 2023 Excellence in Economic Development Gold Award for Equity and Economic Development.

a collective impact organization. We had the ability to synchronize pandemic relief measures across the Eastside by bringing together 23 cities and towns, 16 chambers, and numerous community-based organizations.

With this new focus, there needed to be a new name for this program. A name and a mission that was inclusive to all in our region where everyone could participate and claim success. A new name that could belong to everyone. This is how the OneEastside SPARK: Center for Business Resilience and Innovation brand was created. This program with its dedicated staff developed the mission to bring together regional partners in a united voice for collective impact. By focusing on sustainable economic development and by working together, we could truly build toward an equitable economy with access for all the members of our community.

Trust is vital when collecting business-related information and delivering programs. Some communities are coming from countries with different forms of government and may distrust or fear the public sector. Other communities have little experience with positive community advocacy. Over the course of that first year, we learned that each community has its preferred communication tools and social media apps in addition to email or phone, compounding the difficulty of exchanging information with the community. Trust can take months to build.

This is not easy work, and it requires large amounts of time and resources. Time to build trust with our partners, and then time to work with small business owners who are furthest from opportunity. The level of engagement and support required in our efforts to serve these small business owners is staggering. Not only is there a language barrier, but more often than not there is a technology barrier as well. Applying for grants or a loan is very difficult if you don't have an email address you can easily verify, or if you are using your smartphone as your personal computer. In the age of digital marketing, no or limited access to technology means it may be near impossible to draw future customers, and to be competitive.

Many East King County community-based organizations (CBOs) have their finger on the pulse of their respective business communities. The established trust with these CBOs was critical to connecting with minority-owned small business owners, particularly those who spoke English as a second language. Translating materials and making them available online was

Trust is vital when collecting business-related information and delivering programs. Some communities are coming from countries with different forms of government and may distrust or fear the public sector. Other communities have little experience with positive community advocacy.

Together with our partners, OneEastside SPARK delivered responsive programming that strengthened the regional small business support eco-system and allowed business owners across all communities to access critical funding and resources.

helpful but insufficient in terms of ensuring program uptake in many communities. By partnering with entities like BigHug / Korean-American Resource Center, Centro Cultural Mexicano, Indian American Community Services, the Muslim Association of Puget Sound (MAPS), as well as individual trusted community partners, together we were able to connect Korean-, Spanish-, Chinese-, Hindi-, Russian-, Arabic-, Punjabi-, Telugu-, and Pashto-speaking business communities to resources and support.

Together with our partners, OneEastside SPARK delivered responsive programming that strengthened the regional small business support eco-system and allowed business owners across all communities to access critical funding and resources. Core programs included extensive community engagement; train-the-trainer type programming for our partners; public webinars; in-language webinars; one-on-one advising in accounting and marketing; in-language tax support; and OneEastside SPARK's virtual portal that includes a dedicated website with online funding directory and a small business knowledge base; a toolkit comprised of assets for use by our partners, and regional marketing efforts. To address the technology needs, our team worked with the public library system to provide laptops to participants in our on-site workshops as well as making them available on loan to partners for their in-person programs.

AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: TRAIN-THE-TRAINER

One-on-one support for micro business owners, while essential, is not sustainable for one organization. This work needed to scale across all our partners. An example of this type of effort was our work with the COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loan program (EIDL). Upon learning that the application for EIDL was initially only available in English, OneEastside SPARK in partnership with our local Small Business Administration (SBA) office hosted two webinars to train the multiple chambers and CBOs on the program, and to provide a line-by-line walk through of the EIDL application. These webinars were simulcast in seven languages deemed most in need of interpretation according to King County government sources. These in-language recordings were posted to our YouTube channel. A subsequent OneEastside SPARK EIDL update webinar went viral on YouTube, reaching 17,657 views in one month. Businesses from California to Atlanta contacted our staff for support with the EIDL program.

During our meetings, it was learned that in-language tax and accounting advising was desperately needed. The SPARK team quickly built an in-language tax and accounting advising program. This pilot project helped to connect Korean-, Arabic-, and Hispanic- owned small businesses to financial advising and training, while at the same time supporting and helping to strengthen our CBO partners.

BEING RESPONSIVE TO COMMUNITY'S SELF-IDENTIFIED NEEDS

OneEastside SPARK is known for being a trusted provider of vital information, technical assistance, and resources to small and microenterprise businesses. Trust was earned by putting the time into building relationships, and to listening and responding to the needs of the different community partners and business owners. These relationships helped us understand where to implement or pivot programming.

As we built upon our successful program, our OneEastside SPARK team ran an additional pilot project that year partnering with CBOs and trusted community partners to provide in-language advising and guidance. All OneEastside SPARK projects start with initial meetings with the stakeholders in that community to truly understand their needs and the solutions that can work for their unique community. During our meetings, it was learned that in-language tax and accounting advising was desperately needed. The SPARK team quickly built an in-language tax and accounting advising program. This pilot project helped to connect Korean-, Arabic-, and Hispanic- owned small businesses to financial advising and training, while at the same time supporting and helping to strengthen our CBO partners.

Being flexible to pivot to meet existing and new challenges in our community is always important. But it is also important to be able to activate this collective impact model for opportunities and to ensure equitable access. A great example of this type of work was Washington State's \$70M Working Washington 5 grant program.

EQUITABLE ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

When the fifth round of Working Washington Grants was announced, our staff activated its relationships with community-based organizations (CBOs) that serve the diverse community that is East King County to ensure that this grant reached those most in need. Partners included six CBOs that serve the Indian, Chinese, Korean, Hispanic, Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and Muslim communities on the Eastside. SPARK partnered with the grant administrators at ArtsWA and Washington State Department of Commerce to simulcast two webinars in six languages

which attracted in total over 1,000 participants from over 125 municipalities in Washington State.

To expand the local network of experts on this topic, staff convened weekly calls with the leaders of our community-based organizations to troubleshoot challenges and to share best practices in assisting with applying for the grant, bringing in representatives from Washington State's Department of Commerce to help address questions.

What seemed like an easy grant application for many, proved to be challenging for those who have English as a second language. As a result, in-person, group help sessions were convened, working one-on-one with minority-owned businesses and nonprofits on the grant application. In the end, our collective efforts were a success with 430 organizations across East King County's 23 cities and towns receiving over \$7.5M in grant funding.

TIME. TRUST. TECHNOLOGY.

At the end of 2022, Washington State Department of Commerce released their technical assistance report: Time, Trust, and Technology. This report validated the work we had done to date and gave us the framework to apply for additional grant funding to pilot another program – a digital marketing training program that was an application of culturally relevant technical assistance for small businesses.

Funding from the Washington State Microenterprise Association allowed us to establish a pilot technical assistance program to strengthen small, Korean-owned businesses in Washington State. The program partners included our OneEastside SPARK team; BigHug-Korean American Resource Center, a strong community-based small business support organization; and Restart Partners, a non-profit collaborative dedicated to providing policy and technical assistance to Washington state small businesses and other communities to achieve a more equitable and inclusive economy. The University of Washington Communication Leadership Program was also a key contributor through its partnership with Restart Partners.

Time. Trust. Technology report co-authored by Dr. Sandra Archibald Restart Partners founding board member and Dean Emeritus of the UW Evans School of Public Policy & Governance, reinforced the lack of digital literacy amongst Washington State's small businesses and highlighted that for technical assistance to be effective it must:

- Be delivered by trusted partners and native speakers in their language,
- Respect the time and technology constraints of small business owners,
- Rely on materials that are culturally relevant in terms of language and approach, and
- Utilize a variety of delivery methods including one-on-one training, video, and online.



내 비즈니스, 온라인으로 확장하기

Boost Your Business Online

“Boost Your Business Online” is an in-person and in-language program developed to increase digital literacy and help Korean business owners get online by claiming their free Google Business Profile, as a first step to attracting new customers through Google Search and Maps.

After initial stakeholder convenings and outreach, our team designed and delivered a Korean in-language, in-person program to increase digital literacy and help Korean business owners get online by claiming their free Google Business Profile, as a first step to attracting new customers through Google Search and Maps. At the time of this program in May 2023, 93.12% of all search queries conducted across all search engine providers were done through Google. BigHug had previously hosted a Grow with Google workshop in 2022 for a handful of Korean-owned businesses.

The recruitment and outreach effort for the program began with the development of the “Boost Your Business Online” campaign brand by interns from the UW Communications Leadership Program who have expertise in Korean language and culture. The nexus for the campaign was the concept that the program would serve a “booster shot for businesses to yield resiliency and fast recovery from the impacts of the pandemic.” The campaign was disseminated through BigHug’s marketing channels including their newsletter and email outreach, social media, and KakaoTalk. A press release was distributed to the broader mainstream Korean media to reach those business owners who may not have access to digital communications.

Multiple in-person information sessions were hosted by BigHug with support from the OneEastside SPARK team, the UW interns, and volunteers. These were scheduled on Sunday afternoons, respecting the long six-day work week of many of these businesses. The information sessions utilized resource materials co-developed with native speakers and were delivered solely in Korean.

Participants were first provided with an overview on why businesses should get online with an introduction to Google Business Profiles along with training and hands-on technical assistance to create and verify their Google Business Profiles. Three short step-by-step, in-language resource videos were developed and shared on BigHug’s YouTube channel:

- 구글 이메일 계정 만드는 법 – Create a Google Email Account
- 구글 비즈니스 프로필을 만드세요 – Create a Google Business Profile!

- 구글 비즈니스 프로필 인증하는 법 – Verify your Google Business Profile

The information sessions were followed by two training sessions, again hosted on Sunday afternoons, that provided instruction on how to update profile information (days and hours of operations, photos, offerings, etc.), respond to reviews, and create posts. All content was again delivered in Korean with the opportunity for one-on-one technical assistance utilizing laptops on loan from the King County Library System (KCLS). Three more videos were created as a resource for these sessions.

- 비즈니스 프로필 업데이트 하는 방법 – Editing Your Google Business Profile
- 고객 리뷰 답변시 알아두면 좋은 기본 사항 – Responding to Reviews
- 비즈니스 프로필에서 게시물 기능 활용하는 방법 – How to Use the Post Feature in Your Google Business Profile

GET YOUR BUSINESS ONLINE PILOT PROGRAM SUCCESSES:

When surveyed on what motivated participants in the Boost Your Business Online Program:

- 67% of the respondents stated that they recognized the importance of being online in the digital age,
- 80% indicating the practical support and hands-on learning was most important to them,
- 87% rated their overall satisfaction with the program as very satisfied or satisfied,
- 100% stating they would like to participate in additional training in the future, and
- 80% responded that they would recommend the program to other business owners and acquaintances.

In combination with the training sessions, a KakaoTalk group was created for program participants to receive updates. A series of heuristic rules of thumb messages were distributed to participants via KakaoTalk in hopes of encouraging continued use of their Google Business Profiles. A survey of the KakaoTalk partici-



Local Korean business owners at a local library learning about why businesses should get online followed by training and hands-on technical assistance.

REAL STORIES FROM BUSINESS OWNERS

Hearing their voice helped us assess their challenges and needs



Building trust through meeting business owners in-person is needed, using their native language to understand their “pain points.”

pants found that 71% logged into their Google Business Profiles after receiving the heuristic messages. The long-term goal is that BigHug will have the ability to provide participants with a mechanism for supporting each other with their Google Business Profiles in the future.

What we accomplished with this pilot project is a good example of how technical assistance can be successfully delivered to small minority owned businesses, in addition to providing insights for future program offerings.

LESSONS LEARNED

Initially, our team did not anticipate the volume of microbusinesses (those with five or fewer employees) that needed support, nor the time required to support them, sometimes without fully resolving the challenge at hand. Of the organizations that participated in the first year of OneEastside SPARK programs and provided employment information, 61.4% of these businesses reported 0 to 5 employees. Staff found that it could take multiple phone calls, many hours, and sometimes in-person visits to troubleshoot a problem with one single business. Helping these businesses understand new public health requirements or permit requirements, how to handle an excise tax audit, or how to set up a page on a crowdfunding platform could generally not be done in one hour-long phone call or be accomplished by participating in one webinar.

Staff also learned that East King County nonprofits faced an absence of resources and support at the local and federal level. There is no Small Business Development Center that provides no-cost, confidential, one-on-one advising for the nonprofit sector. When nonprofits contacted OneEastside SPARK looking for advising and guidance, staff could refer them to one

local nonprofit that could provide ½ hour of advising to nonprofits at no cost. Beyond that, staff had to navigate a patchwork of resources for our Community Based Organizations – none of which offer ongoing, no-cost advising.

Flexibility is one of the most important aspects to this work. Our staff learned the importance of maintaining flexibility in a very fluid situation for which there was no playbook. Staff had to pivot fast to meet urgent needs, such as in-language loan and grant application information for an opportunity that would close in a few short months.

Over the course of the last two years and through our pilot programs, we have learned a few things, and recognize some challenges as we move forward to improve the program.

- Building trust through meeting business owners in-person is needed, using their native language to understand their “pain points.”
- Instructors and volunteers with an average ratio of one volunteer supporting two business owners at a session is needed to effectively communicate and provide hands-on support to participants.
- It is valuable to provide participants with a mechanism for helping each other. For example the KakaoTalk group channel was used in our pilot program supporting Korean-owned businesses.
- Meetings hosted at public libraries provide ease of access.
- Laptops provided onsite through partnerships with the public library system’s digital access program are extremely helpful.
- Participants are often willing and responsive to program offerings, but require time and assistance

to cement digital literacy. Primitive approaches may be needed for those with low digital literacy skills.

- Culturally relevant, in-language, in-person training and technical assistance is essential to building trust and overcoming barriers.
- The behavioral change business owners need to adopt, especially for digital and marketing skills, requires a long commitment and consistent attention and nurturing of participants.

LOOKING AHEAD

The biggest disruption to our business world is Artificial Intelligence. Here in Redmond, Washington we are at the center of it all. And it truly is amazing to see how this will be transformative for our small business owners. At the same time, it is clear that if we aren't mindful this will turn our technology gap into a technology chasm for those in our communities with little to no digital literacy.

As we continue to work with our community-based partners that provide small business support, we found ourselves at the precipice of a unique opportunity to create a regional shared multicultural small business support hub. This would be a physical space where our network of community based partners can provide a variety of services including: technical assistance, training, and resources to help individuals in our communities launch, sustain, and grow their businesses. It would be a place to provide true economic mobility within our communities, and potentially address the systemic challenges that exist through partnerships and the development of innovative, collaborative solutions. Currently this project envisions a Food Business Resource Center,

an incubator and shared-use commercial kitchen that will provide space and support, including affordable access to a licensed commercial kitchen and professional equipment. Our immigrant population often enters our workforce through the food industry, showcasing their culture through their own food business. We see this 360-degree support of these types of new businesses essential to our economy.

As the climate of small business changes, our barometer of success must be calibrated to include those businesses that define the culture of our communities. This type of economic development is still new and an important evolution of the industry. The metrics for success are quite different from what our usual investors and funders expect to see, and we need to continue to tell our collective tale and share our stories of success. Government, economic development centers like OneEastside SPARK, and community-based organizations need to work together to support our small businesses.

To truly do this work effectively in the future, the resources are significant. The need to fund and support expenditures that allow for train-the-trainer programs, and maximum one-on-one, in-person services is critical to economic equity and inclusion efforts. No, you won't make the big job and dollars numbers of pre-COVID economic development. But you can share your stories and show the number of hours spent working with those handful of businesses that are an important part of the fabric of your community. Today we are hopeful that funding will continue to be provided for these types of programs that leverage the economies of scale and strengthen the capacity of our community leaders and organizations. 🌐



eco-industrial parks

By James C. Collard, Ph.D., CITP, FM

LET'S BEGIN BY RETHINKING

In an interesting book titled “Industrialization Before Industrialization: Rural Industry in the Genesis of Capitalism” (Cambridge University Press, 1981) Peter Kriedte, Hans Medick, and Jurgen Schlumbohm trace human development from subsistence to self-sufficiency to surplus. Improved farming practices, that included creation of family economies and the division of labor, led to surpluses which led to regional trading networks, the creation of towns, and eventually the development of exchange markets. And as history has taught us, this process of moving from agrarian societies to industrialized population centers was jumped started by wave after wave of scientific discoveries and major inventions. The march of human civilization would continue, forever.

But wait a minute, isn't there a limit to how many resources we can acquire and use up? What about Robert Malthus, the dismal economist who predicted that the growth of population is exponential while the growth of the supply of food and other resources is linear? I read recently that Malthus' theories are not accepted at the present time. Humm, I wonder about this. At the very least, it *seems* to *make sense* that we should

Historically, our development model has been Linear in that we acquire the resources to make the products, we use the products, and then we dispose of the worn-out products in landfills or through incineration. Simply put we **Acquire – Use – Dispose or Take – Make – Waste**.



Circular Innovation Council (<https://circularinnovation.ca/circular-economy/>)

try to listen to what the environmental scientific community is telling us about climate change and then make our own reasonable judgements concerning the validity of the research.

I submit that one of the most important economic policy questions is this: How can we design an economic development strategy that encourages and rewards individual economic initiative while simultaneously protecting our natural environment?

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Is this the best approach?

ENTER THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, the Circular Economy is defined as “An economy that is restorative and regenerative by design.” It is based on three principles.

- Eliminate Waste and Pollution – Design out the negative impacts of economic activity.
- Circulate Products and Materials
- Regenerate – Avoid the use of non-renewable resources and preserve and enhance renewable resources.

APPLYING THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND THE UNITED NATIONS' SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS TO RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The starting point is fairly straightforward. ***There should be no conflict between economic development and environmental sustainability.*** But of course, as we all know, there is conflict. Throughout history, humans have competed for land, water, precious metals, and natural resources in our quest to improve our lives and the lives of our loved ones. For centuries our acquisition, use, and disposal of natural resources was not much of a concern because there was always more land and there were always more resources to acquire and use. But then the Industrial Revolution began.

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Restorative Development Partnership

(<https://restorativedevelopmentpartnership.org/restorative-development/>)

The Circular Economy can be thought of as having two elements. The first is production. The idea is conceived and designed, the raw materials are gathered, the invention is readied for the market, the product is manufactured, the customer uses the product and afterward it is recycled or repurposed. But the key is the product is “designed” from the beginning to be easily recycled. In other words, the materials used in the production process are reused for as long as possible. They “circulate” through the production process over and over again.

The second element is the power used to fuel the manufacturing processes. This of course gets us to the use of renewable energy. Among the most common choices are solar, wind, geothermal, and hydroelectric. But there is a distinction between renewable energy and “clean” as in non or low polluting energy. The scientific community has come up with the following list of colors for different types of energy.

Color	Fuel	Process
Brown/Black	Coal	Steam reforming or gasification
White	Hydro	Naturally occurring
Grey	Natural Gas	Steam reforming (CO2 Released)
Blue	Natural Gas	Steam reforming (CO2 Captured)
Turquoise	Natural Gas	Pyrolysis
Red	Nuclear Power	Catalytic splitting
Purple/Pink	Nuclear Power	Electrolysis
Yellow	Solar Power	Electrolysis
Green	Renewable	Electrolysis*

*Renewable energy includes wind, solar, geothermal, tidal.

Obviously, coal and natural gas use fossil fuels which while still in abundance, at some point in the future will no longer be available. They are of course also the primary sources of air pollution.

Which do we choose? I believe the answer, at least for the time being, is both. We are in an energy transition. But we are constantly looking for better solutions. Two that have promise are Fusion and Hydrogen. The application of these resources can be explored further in a future article.

At this point and to avoid some confusion, I should point out there are other similar Circular Economy concepts, systems, and proposals that have received some attention. Among these are: Cradle-to-Cradle (Michael Braungart, Bill McDonough, Katja Hansen); Performance Economy (Walter Stahel); Biomimicry (Janine Benyus); Industrial Ecology (Robert Frosch, Nicholas Gallopoulos); Natural Capitalism (Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins); Blue Economy (Gunter Pauli); and Regenerative Design (John T. Lyle). The main underlying theme is the application of environmental sustainability to the manufacturing process.

SO WHY BOTHER?

In a wonderfully simple and beautifully illustrated book titled “The Science Collection” Third Edition (2023), the article *How to Save the World*, starts with this unnerving quote.

“Humans only make up about one ten thousandth of the biomass on Earth, but our impact on the planet is drastically out of proportion to our numbers. In the last 250 years we have added over 400 billion tons of carbon into the atmosphere and approximately half of that has happened since the mid - 1980s. No other organism in earth’s history has altered the environment so much so quickly.”

The author goes on to point out that in addition to the amounts of pollution, we humans have invented entirely new kinds of pollution such as polythene, chlorofluorocarbons, organophosphates, and synthetic hormones. We have also, of course, released other toxins, heavy metals, and radioactive isotopes.

So, with this as a baseline, as in “saving the planet leads to saving ourselves”, let’s look at some other positives of adopting a circular economy.

Economic Benefits

Returning to the Ellen Macarthur Foundation, there are several very real macroeconomic benefits that accrue from shifting to a Circular Economy Model. The first is economic expansion due to the more productive utilization of inputs. Related to this are the cost savings realized by reusing the existing materials. As this new production model begins to take hold, new, higher skilled and higher paying jobs will also emerge. Finally, the circular economy is a creative endeavor that entails technological innovation that can be applied across manufacturing processes.

As we alluded to earlier, carbon emissions reduction is crucial for human, animal, and plant life. The circular economy will lead to cleaner air through a reduction in material consumption such as construction, real estate land, fertilizers, pesticides, water use, and non-renewable electricity.

Environmental Benefits

As we alluded to earlier, carbon emissions reduction is crucial for human, animal, and plant life. The circular economy will lead to cleaner air through a reduction in material consumption such as construction, real estate land, fertilizers, pesticides, water use, and non-renewable electricity. Finally, higher land productivity and soil health will improve water quality and serve to improve the quality of our oceans and in turn the atmosphere.

Business Specific Benefits

Among the business benefits, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation lists increased profits, new demand for business services such as the creation of reverse logistics companies, and improved customer interactions and loyalty. However, I believe the most important business benefit is a reduction in raw material acquisition volatility and greater security in the supply chain.

The Circular Economy and Industrial Parks

There are many definitions for Eco-Industrial Parks. One provided by the World Bank states that an EIP is "...a geographically dedicated area for industrial use that supports sustainability through the integration of social, economic, and environmental quality aspects into its siting, planning, management, and operations." (An International Framework for Eco-Industrial Parks, Version 2.0 January 2021)

While designing our Iron Horse Industrial Park <https://www.ironhorsecpn.com/>, I used this definition as a baseline and began following three very helpful documents from the World Bank.

- A Practitioner's Handbook for Eco-Industrial Parks...Toolbox (2019)
- An International Framework for Eco-Industrial Parks V. 2.0. (2021)

The following discussion is taken from the third World Bank Document "Circular Economy in Industrial Parks: Technologies for Competitiveness (2021)."

The Circular Economy begins with extraction, moves to design, to manufacturing, to distribution and service, to the consumer, to disposal and repurposing. The process then starts over with the materials that are available put back into the production process.

The Circular Economy Principles as envisioned by the World Bank Group include,

1. Design out waste and pollution.
2. Keep materials and resources in use.
3. Regenerate natural systems.

These Principles are realized in the following ways:

Economy Wide – Energy Management contracts and business models; urban/industrial symbiosis; policies and standards; and circular financing initiatives.

Industrial Parks – Captive Renewables (solar, wind, biogas, etc.), Energy management systems; water supply from renewable water resources; wastewater treatment and reuse; industrial symbiosis and waste and material recovery.

Firms – Resource efficiency contracts; Circular product design; policies and standards; and green industrial buildings.

I will discuss the application of these guidelines and principles to our Iron Horse Industrial Park later in this article.

THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

As we all know, throughout history the world's nations have gathered to discuss issues of mutual concern. Created following the end of World War II in 1945, the United Nations now serves as arguably the most recognized international forum. In 2015 the UN member states developed a blueprint for sustainable development called the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In the adopting resolution it states

"We are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations."

Looking closely at this statement, it mentions supporting the needs of the present and future generations. It does not talk about something that may happen way out in the future; it's about what is happening now, right this minute.

Now, I realize by writing this article I am running the risk of rising emotions along the entire political spectrum. Some people think we are not doing enough while others think the climate change discussion is at best a waste of time and at worst will lead to economic decline, especially for the world's most wealthy nations. But I believe this misses the point. Refusing

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

17 GOALS TO TRANSFORM OUR WORLD



United Nations (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2015/12/sustainable-development-goals>)

to acknowledge the challenge will inevitably lead to negative outcomes. I hope we can at least all agree that environmental events have enormous economic consequences from floods, tornadoes, droughts, the list goes on. How we respond is the key. Interestingly, a few years ago, IEDC created a document titled “Green Metrics: Common Measures of Sustainable Economic Development.” This is a very useful resource that I highly recommend.

So, let’s look at the SDGs. (My primary source of information for the following discussion is the United Nations website.) <http://www.un.org/>.

The first obvious observation is that there are 17 SDGs. Pretty lofty aspirations aren’t they. From ending poverty and hunger to ensuring everyone can have good health, a quality education, access to clean water, and affordable energy to addressing the pressing issues of inequality, climate change, and peace and justice this list can at times be a little unwieldy.

It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss all these goals even though an argument can be made that every goal can apply to economic development. However, I am going to concentrate on just four: Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth); Goal 9 (Industry, innovation, and Infrastructure); Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities); and Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). At the outset, it should be noted that each goal has a list of desired targeted outcomes.

Goal 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth

This emphasizes the importance of promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth through employment that concentrates on decent working conditions. The UN definition of “decent work” includes work that is productive, provides a fair income, job security, and social protection for the workers’ families. Among the 12 targets are actions that speak to forced and child labor, equal pay, and increasing access to banking, insurance, and financial institutions for everyone. Task 8.4 also talks about decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation.

This emphasizes the importance of promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth through employment that concentrates on decent working conditions.

Goal 9 – Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

This goal notes the importance of building resilient infrastructure and promoting sustainable industrialization while fostering innovation. In addition, significant investments need to be made in broadband communication deployment and technological improvements aimed at environmentally focused manufacturing processes.

Goal 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities

Given that as of 2022 over half of the world’s population is now living in urban areas, this goal is focused on developing and implementing policies that assist cities in addressing urban sprawl, air pollution, and the

proliferation of slum-like conditions. If cities are left to develop organically, the result will be massive traffic entanglements, increased greenhouse gas emissions and increasing social instability.

Goal 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production

This goal, without specifically citing Robert Malthus, states very clearly “Our planet is running out of resources, but populations are continuing to grow.” Therefore, we need to change our consumption habits and move our energy supplies to those that are more sustainable, e.g., renewables. This effort includes an emphasis on waste generation and reduction through prevention, recycling, and reuse (Target 12.5).

All these goals sound a lot like the Circular Economy don't they.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER – THE IRON HORSE ECO-INDUSTRIAL PARK

From the very beginning, Iron Horse was designed and is being developed in an environmentally responsible manner. Indeed, environmental sustainability has been a guiding principle for Indigenous People from time immemorial. The Citizen Potawatomi Nation's Integrated Resource Management Plan states “Sustainability is not just a passing gesture for our Nation; rather it is the guiding principle of our development strategy.” The question then is “how” do we implement this strategy at the dirt, e.g., industrial park, level?

Challenges

Iron Horse began as a corn field with an out of use railroad running through it. The northern boundary of Iron Horse is the North Canadian River, which incidentally is also the northern boundary of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. The problem was that the railroad bridge was not connected on the opposite side of the river due to a flood in the early 1980s. Therefore, the first challenge was getting the funding to rebuild the bridge. (We are strong supporters of rail service as a major component of our supply chain. This is because rail is one of the most environmentally efficient means

From the very beginning, Iron Horse was designed and is being developed in an environmentally responsible manner. Indeed, environmental sustainability has been a guiding principle for Indigenous People from time immemorial. The Citizen Potawatomi Nation's Integrated Resource Management Plan states “Sustainability is not just a passing gesture for our Nation; rather it is the guiding principle of our development strategy.” The question then is “how” do we implement this strategy at the dirt, e.g., industrial park, level?

Finally, in terms of business recruitment, we are focusing on companies whose production processes adhere to the principles of the Circular Economy and to the four SDGs targets we noted earlier. We have politely, but firmly, rejected several inquiries from companies that do not meet these standards.

of moving inbound raw materials and outbound products.) Fortunately, the Arkansas Oklahoma Railroad, the short line railroad company that operated the line on the north side of the river, was willing to rebuild the bridge using their own money. This involved getting the approvals from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and addressing the floodplain issues.

We ensured the portion of the industrial park area that is being developed is well outside of the floodplain and floodway. Tied to this, the Nation conducted an Environmental Impact Assessment and multiple soils analyses before any major expenditures.

The next challenge was access. The main road servicing the park had a light, 23-ton bridge over a small creek. After meeting the environmental regulatory requirements, we built a 104-ton road bridge.

We then began the development of the electrical supply system within the boundaries of the park. We had two major utilities that expressed an interest. Our decision criteria for the selection were based on the reliability and ownership structure of the utility but importantly also on the renewable energy portfolio. We also have sections of the park that are reserved for solar panels, and we are designing and developing a geothermal wellfield that will assist in meeting the energy needs of the resident companies. We cannot use wind energy because our park is within an eagle habitat and is very near a tribal eagle aviary.

The water and wastewater systems are supplied by the Citizen Potawatomi Nation Water Utility and exceed the regulatory requirements.

Finally, in terms of business recruitment, we are focusing on companies whose production processes adhere to the principles of the Circular Economy and to the four SDGs targets we noted earlier. We have politely, but firmly, rejected several inquiries from companies that do not meet these standards. Our ideal business recruitment deal would be to land two or more companies simultaneously that use each other's waste streams as inputs into their production processes....classic circularity. This is easy to say but so far, we have been unsuccessful in landing more than one company at a time. The quest continues.

LESSONS LEARNED

Our emphasis on circularity has led us to do deeper research into the production process of the targeted companies. Simply having a statement in the devel-

As is evident, this article just scratched the surface of the Circular Economy and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Along with many others, we are engaged in a journey toward a new economic development model. We are doing this not because it is trendy, but because we believe we have an obligation to provide a healthy environment to the generations that follow us.

opment contract that says the company will meet all regulatory requirements is not enough. Meeting the legal requirements oftentimes does not give us an understanding of the company's intentions concerning environmental sustainability, especially long-term.

Turning down companies is not an easy thing to do when trying to develop an industrial park. Therefore, we have engaged in countless discussions with multiple stakeholders that focus on the long-term, big picture issues such as the total impact associated with environmental degradation not only within the park but also the surrounding areas. Being a good neighbor is essential.

Regarding the long-term, I am not certain we have a thorough enough understanding of the *opportunity costs* of our approach. I am looking at different economic models but so far have not settled on a particular analysis. Right now, our stance is that our global environment is deteriorating, and we have a responsibility to do something about it. The economic development decisions we make now "will" have long lasting consequences.

As is evident, this article just scratched the surface of the Circular Economy and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Along with many others, we are engaged in a journey toward a new economic development model. We are doing this not because it is trendy, but because we believe we have an obligation to provide a healthy environment to the generations that follow us.

FINAL SUGGESTIONS

Be patient.

Be well-prepared to respond to those who question environmental sustainability as the most important economic development consideration.

Be stubborn, not rude, but be willing to stay the course. 🌐

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a workforce housing

SHORTAGE

By Rob Cleveland, CEcD and Christina Frank, CEcD

INTRODUCTION

The American Dream combines the ideas of equal opportunity, uncapped prosperity, and the individual pursuit of happiness. For generations of Americans, the heart of the American Dream has been the ability to secure safe, affordable housing that provides a stable foundation upon which families and individuals can build their lives. Yet, as our society evolves, the ability to achieve this dream is under threat.

In the post-World War II era, the dream of owning a home with a white picket fence became a symbol of success and stability, fueling the suburban boom. Government initiatives such as the GI Bill and widespread economic growth made homeownership more attainable for a burgeoning middle class. However, in recent decades we have witnessed a shift in the landscape of home ownership.

Rising inequality and the financial aftermath of the 2008 recession have further complicated the American Dream of home ownership. According to Fannie Mae, fewer new homes were built from 2009 to 2018, than in any decade since the 1960s. The rise of real estate speculation, coupled with limited housing supply in urban centers, has inflated property values, making it increasingly difficult for the average American to secure a place to call home.

The changing landscape of work, with the gig economy and remote work becoming more prevel-

ant, has also altered the traditional trajectory toward homeownership. The soaring cost of real estate, coupled with stagnant wage growth, have created a formidable barrier for many aspiring homeowners, particularly younger generations.

When you combine the decade-long slide of new housing starts with the significant increase in interest rates, coupled with a Millennial population that is currently at home-buying age, and add in the significant absorption of single-family homes from institutional buyers, you are presented with a massive problem, with no short-term solution.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

The workforce housing shortage encompasses a plethora of interconnected challenges. It is led by surging housing costs, an inadequate supply of affordable homes, interest rates at levels not seen in generations, and growing economic disparities. These factors have combined to create a housing landscape in which many families and individuals struggle to secure suitable accommodations, leading to cascading social and economic consequences.

The workforce housing shortage impacts almost each and every one of us. Nearly every community – large and small, rural and urban, rich and poor – is battling it out for new housing. From Bangor, Maine, to Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania, to Yuma, Arizona, communities are finding themselves at all positions in the spectrum of the housing puzzle.



From 1908 to 1940, you could choose from over 400 styles of homes to purchase through Sears, Roebuck and Co. mail-order catalog.

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According to Bankrate, many potential single-family home buyers moved aside once rates went above 6%. Those buyers either suspended their search, staying in their homes, or moved into an already crowded multi-family market.

AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPER'S PERSPECTIVE

In the ever-evolving landscape of economic development, addressing the critical issue of the workforce housing shortage has emerged as a paramount challenge for communities worldwide. As we navigate the complexities of a global economy, the need for sustainable solutions that ensure accessible and affordable housing for the workforce has become increasingly apparent. This article explores the ripple effects of inadequate workforce housing on talent retention, recruitment, and overall community well-being. Drawing on first-hand experience in regional and local economic development in Michigan, the authors delve into real-world examples of successful initiatives and shed light on the pivotal role economic development plays in shaping the housing landscape.

The housing crisis has negative repercussions for underserved communities that extend beyond the housing market. The severity of the lack of housing stock has a direct impact on the main focus of the economic development mission; which is to attract and retain businesses. Economic developers are hearing it every day from companies – the company can't find people, because the people can't find housing. Employees who cannot find affordable housing near their workplace are opting to seek job opportunities elsewhere, leaving companies in a bind. The urgency of the issue is evident: a robust, local workforce depends on accessible housing options.

There is no shortage of global trends that have gotten us where we are today. The COVID-19 pandemic may have exacerbated the problem, but it was not the source. The problem started many years ago during the Great Recession. The problems of more than a decade ago, are finally hitting us in full force.

The problem, though, is clear. We have a housing supply problem. Lowering interest rates and freeing up financing will not allow people to purchase homes that don't exist.

The Problem of Defining the Problem

How can we find a solution when it's impossible to define the very problem we're trying to solve? The terms, "affordable," "attainable," and "workforce," are thrown about haphazardly, interchangeably and without clear definition, which creates confusion and, often times, amplifies the community discourse. Affordable for one is certainly not affordable for another.

"Citizens against virtually everything" (better known as CAVES) will come out in full-force to oppose "low-income" housing without an understanding of just how high the earnings are for those who qualify for housing assistance. For example, in Portland, Oregon, a family of four earning \$90,240 is at 80% of area median income (AMI). In Atlanta, Georgia, a family of four earning \$77,120 is at 80% of AMI.

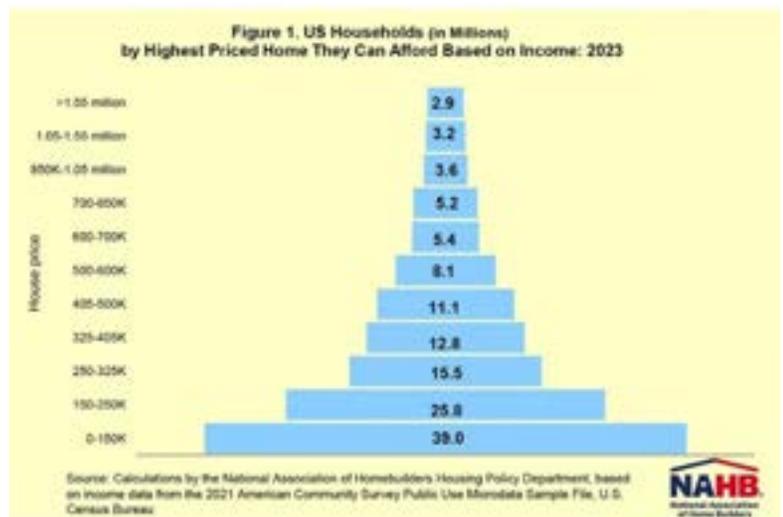
If you are wondering what it costs to attain a home in today's market, according to Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies, the estimated housing payments – including mortgage, insurance and property tax – needed to purchase a median-priced home in the U.S. reached \$3,000 per month in March

Workforce housing is generally defined as housing that is affordable for those earning between 80% and 120% of area median income, or AMI. Among the individuals who make up this population are those often employed in critical sectors like teachers, police officers, first responders, and hospital support staff. Individuals that are absolutely vital to each and every community, no matter its size, amenities or economic vibrancy.

2023, pricing out 2.4 million more renters from home-buying than last year. This includes a disproportionate share of Black and Hispanic homebuyers. **The estimated annual income needed to afford median homeownership costs rose 20% to \$117,000 – well above the national median income of renters.**

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The bottom line is each individual person has their own definition of "affordable" housing.



ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF WORKFORCE HOUSING CRISIS

The economic implications of the workforce housing crisis are profound and multifaceted. It directly affects our local economies, businesses, and the livelihoods of residents.

The housing crisis undermines the ability of businesses to attract and retain a qualified workforce. Employers in regions with exorbitant housing costs find it increasingly challenging to hire and keep talented employees. For many workers, housing represents the most significant portion of their expenses. When housing costs become burdensome, employees may seek job opportunities in more affordable areas, potentially leading to a workforce shortage in specific industries.

A thriving workforce is essential for the growth and stability of local economies. In areas affected by the workforce housing crisis, economic development can be thwarted, and the potential for business expansion and job creation can be constrained. This, in turn, impacts the overall prosperity of a community.

Businesses are not the only entities affected. The workforce housing crisis takes a toll on the everyday

lives of residents. Individuals and families who grapple with the challenge of finding affordable housing often face financial stress and insecurity. The burden of high housing costs can lead to trade-offs in other areas, such as healthcare, education, and retirement planning.

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, “Research shows that the shortage of affordable housing costs the American economy about \$2 trillion a year in lower wages and productivity. Without affordable housing, families have constrained opportunities to increase earnings, causing slower GDP growth. In fact, researchers estimate that the growth in GDP between 1964 and 2009 would have been 13.5% higher if families had better access to affordable housing. This would have led to a \$1.7 trillion increase in income or \$8,775 in additional wages per worker.”

In essence, the housing crisis has far-reaching economic consequences, underscoring the necessity of addressing it comprehensively.

THE ROLE OF LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

At the International Economic Development Council Annual Conference in September, experts shed light on a series of strategies and recommendations aimed at resolving the crisis and laying the foundation for a more equitable and accessible housing landscape.

Nearly every community, of every size, in every state is facing a housing supply issue. This is a nationwide problem, with a local solution. More local economic developers are involved in housing now, than at any other time in our careers. We are being called upon to solve local housing issues. Of all the stakeholders engaged in addressing the workforce housing crisis, economic development organizations can play a pivotal role.

Here are a few ways you can change your community's housing trajectory.

I. Advocacy and Policy Reform

Economic development organizations can act as powerful advocates for policy reforms at various levels of government. This includes promoting positive changes in zoning regulations, tax incentives, and other legislative measures that can promote affordable housing initiatives. By using their influence and exper-

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Access to capital is a common challenge when it comes to affordable housing initiatives. Economic development organizations can explore and promote innovative financing models to address this challenge.

They can help communities access grants, subsidies, and low-interest loans, while also encouraging private sector investment in affordable housing projects. By doing so, EDOs ensure that financial resources are channeled efficiently and effectively to support the development of workforce housing.

tise, economic development organizations can help pave the way for systemic changes that encourage the development of affordable housing.

2. Collaboration and Public-Private Partnerships

Economic development organizations often serve as a nexus for collaboration between public and private stakeholders. They can facilitate partnerships between local governments, developers, financial institutions, and nonprofit organizations, creating a comprehensive approach to workforce housing solutions. Such partnerships are critical for pooling resources, knowledge, and expertise, leading to more effective and sustainable initiatives.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

Informed decision-making is crucial in the battle against the workforce housing crisis. Economic development organizations can take the lead in collecting and analyzing data related to housing affordability, demand, and supply within their regions. By providing comprehensive data and research, EDOs offer valuable insights to policymakers and investors, aiding them in making informed decisions that align with the local needs and realities.

4. Funding and Financing Solutions

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5. Education and Awareness

Economic development organizations can play a crucial role in educating the public about the importance of addressing the workforce housing crisis. Public awareness campaigns, workshops, and seminars can be organized to disseminate information about

If you find yourself in charge of “fixing” the housing problem in your community, the first thing you should do is find an expert to conduct a housing study. The recruitment for housing builders/developers, is no different than recruiting companies and people. No company locates in a community based on the word of the mayor, and no housing developer is building homes or apartments because the Mayor says there is a housing demand. There is not a more accurate tool for understanding housing supply and housing demand than an independent housing study.

the crisis, its implications, and the available solutions. This education can empower communities to demand change and engage with housing issues proactively.

6. Best Practice Sharing

Economic development organizations can serve as repositories of best practices and success stories from other regions. They can connect with counterparts in different communities and share experiences, strategies, and lessons learned. By disseminating proven strategies, EDOs can help communities avoid common pitfalls and accelerate progress.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation

Once initiatives are underway, EDOs can take responsibility for monitoring and evaluating their effectiveness. This involves assessing the impact of housing policies and projects, tracking key performance indicators, and making necessary adjustments based on the outcomes. This iterative approach ensures that resources are used efficiently and that the workforce housing crisis remains a top priority on the community development agenda.

Your Best, First Step

If you find yourself in charge of “fixing” the housing problem in your community, the first thing you should do is find an expert to conduct a housing study. The recruitment for housing builders/developers, is no different than recruiting companies and people. No company locates in a community based on the word of the mayor, and no housing developer is building homes or apartments because the Mayor says there is a housing demand. There is not a more accurate tool for understanding housing supply and housing demand than an independent housing study.

There are many firms around the country that specialize in housing supply and demand. One of those firms, Tracy Cross & Associates, has been conducting housing studies for more than 30 years. “There are two main reasons we get asked to do housing studies,” said Erik Doersching, President & CEO of Tracy Cross & Associates. “First, municipalities are fielding inquiries from a variety of different developers, and it really comes through piece meal, without them having a full understanding of demand, and the direction their municipality should be taking. In many cases, a municipality is being asked to approve a housing plan, but they may not know where it fits into the overall housing scheme, nor what the demand of housing opportunities is within their municipality.”

“The other main reason for a housing study is when a municipality feels there is a need for housing, but they are not getting the developer activity to meet the demand,” continued Doersching. “A housing study is a great tool to be used to solicit developer interest, based on third-party data, in that municipality. A housing study is unbiased and objective and opens the door to new opportunities and the types of properties that could exist. Municipal leaders feel better equipped when they have a document they can then point to when a developer or builder comes in to see where their proposal falls within the scheme of where demand is, where price and absorption are. Housing studies have grown significantly because of how a study can really guide a community, and be a playbook as they make long term decisions.”

Maintaining a current understanding of state and national housing trends is critical to keeping pace locally with housing changes. According to HollyAnn Eageny, Executive Vice President and COO at Tracy Cross, this is another key area where local EDOs can influence housing growth. “A large barrier to new housing can occur when the municipality has a Comprehensive Plan, or Zoning regulations, that have not kept pace with how housing has matured and transitioned over the last couple of decades. In addition to a housing study, we will review those parameters to make sure that they are at a level that will not prohibit builders from coming into a market. This is a critical step in recruiting new developers. A good housing study provides unbiased analytics that is translated into a very understandable picture of what is possible on a retail level, so community leaders can make the best decision for their community.”

All of us are familiar with the many obstacles to housing growth. Construction costs, labor costs, transportation shortages, and supply chain delays are just a few of the many challenges we all know exist. While a local economic development organization has little influence on national policy to change these trends, a long-term housing study will mitigate some of those factors outside of our control.

“Some of our clients have acknowledged that it is more difficult to get projects out of the ground,” said Eageny. “Most states have recognized that in order to maintain to attract and retain generational workforce, there needs to be tools that can help municipalities and builders collaborate. Construction costs are high, and they likely are not going to come down any time soon, if at all. The biggest cost right now is labor,

and there is nothing that can be done about that in the short term. However, long-term planning is really what a housing study is all about. You have to think beyond today's obstacles and focus on what you need going forward and to sustain your marketability over the long term."

There are various levels of depth and costs of housing studies. If you have no existing housing study, a small investment in a study will be a great start. If you have available resources, a more costly, advanced study will provide more precise information. Much like strategic planning, when it comes to a housing study, having *any* study is better than having *no* study at all. If you're unable to afford a study from a national source, finding a local university, local planning authority or other local data source is the next-best option when conducting a housing study.

CONCLUSION: EMBRACING THE PATH TO PROSPERITY

The role of economic development organizations in addressing the workforce housing crisis cannot be overstated. These entities serve as catalysts for change, driving forward advocacy, collaboration, and data-driven decision-making. By engaging with public and private partners, providing vital funding solutions, raising awareness, and sharing best practices, EDOs help create a conducive environment for the development of affordable workforce housing. Their active involvement is essential in transforming the dream of accessible and affordable housing into a reality for countless Americans.

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resources are used efficiently and that the workforce housing crisis remains a top priority on the community development agenda.

The workforce housing crisis is a challenge that transcends geographic boundaries, affecting communities from coast to coast. It is a multifaceted issue that jeopardizes the very essence of the American Dream. As daunting as this crisis may seem, the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) has taken action in finding solutions. At the Annual Conference in Dallas, IEDC hosted various speakers that presented actual projects, with specific details. Additionally, IEDC hosted a recent webinar focused on housing solutions for economic developers.

The insights, recommendations, and policy solutions shared at these events provide a framework for addressing the housing needs of very different communities.

Local EDOs are the tip of the spear for advocacy related to local zoning and permitting changes, as well as state-level policies. Creating public-private partnerships can lead to securing sites and investing in infrastructure. Overcoming NIMBYism, navigating complex zoning regulations, securing sufficient funding, and addressing issues of gentrification are challenges that require coordinated efforts and community engagement. These activities expedite the development process.

As we conclude, it is essential to emphasize that the workforce housing crisis is not an insurmountable challenge. It is a problem that communities can tackle through comprehensive strategies, innovation, and a commitment to ensuring housing remains accessible to all, regardless of their income. Solving the workforce housing crisis is a mission we must wholeheartedly embrace together, ensuring that every individual and family can find their place in the prosperous narrative of the American Dream. 🌐



the next chapter in ED

By Savannah Jermance, CEcD, CCIP

HOW TO EFFECTIVELY LEVERAGE AI AS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS

ai is here to stay, and it's only getting faster and more intelligent. As such, it's critical that economic development professionals understand its capabilities and limitations as tools are increasingly adopted. Let's start with the positives – how can AI maximize efficiency for economic developers? Intensified by labor pressures nationwide, practitioners often find themselves filling multiple roles in a community – from planning and development to legal, accounting, and marketing/public relations. This may be the single greatest benefit to adopting AI tools: That it can effectively replicate one person's time into the hours associated with many job roles. AI is particularly well-suited to support the *Science* portion of economic development, if less so the *Art*. Where AI particularly excels is in data related research, which studies have shown centers on five main facets (Qin, 2023):

- Intelligent Decision-Making / Predictive Modeling
 - o AI tools quickly and objectively digest current inputs and make predictions based on historical inputs. Economic development applications may include:

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¹WSY: Commonly accepted acronym for "What Say You".

AI, ESG...WSY?

Technological advances and widespread availability of Artificial Intelligence (AI), coupled with increasing emphasis on and scrutiny of non-financial markers of success are two factors disrupting nearly every industry, and thus the field of economic development as it seeks to support industry growth. This article explores the capabilities and limitations of AI as well as the impact of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) factors specific to economic development and the interplay between the two.

Let's start with the positives – how can AI maximize efficiency for economic developers? Intensified by labor pressures nationwide, practitioners often find themselves filling multiple roles in a community – from planning and development to legal, accounting, and marketing/public relations. This may be the single greatest benefit to adopting AI tools: That it can effectively replicate one person's time into the hours associated with many job roles.

- Highest and best use of sites
- Future population needs – services, utilities, et cetera
- Assessing public support of a proposed change
- Social Governance
 - o As cities adopt technologies to embed the Internet of Things (IoT) into transportation networks, public safety and more, AI tools may aid in:
 - Alleviating traffic bottlenecks in real time
 - Alerting Police/Fire/EMS more quickly of accidents, to save lives and keep transportation running smoothly
 - Proactively recognizing potential threats in public areas
- Labor and Capital
 - o AI continues and accelerates the trend of greater investment in tangible assets/technology than human capital
 - Virtual labor force, capable of more than rote repetition of singular tasks
 - Improved quality of life
 - Allows human capital to focus on its highest and best use, leveraging

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Even as tools like ChatGPT evolve and are able to access up to date information, the databases which they may be accessing aren't necessarily up to date. Decennial census data, for example, is often outdated and what is posted online is not necessarily the actual data leveraged to determine eligibility for certain economic development programs (in favor of more recent data much less likely to be published on economic development websites, based on past experience).

inputs from AI to focus on creative solutions – a true manifestation of the “knowledge economy” concept (Powell, 2004).

- New job opportunities
- Industry 4.0
 - o Characterized as the emergence of cyber-physical systems involving entirely new capabilities for people and machines (Mhlanga, 2020)
 - Humankind doesn't yet know what it needs in the next industrial revolution, but there is a good chance that AI will define and solve it.
 - Customization and the IoT is likely to influence how humans interact with technology – imagine technology that adapts to each unique user's abilities and limitations and keeps supplies filled just-in-time for greatest space and worker efficiency
 - More precise, human-like robotics
- Innovation
 - o As AI takes on more basic tasks, human capital is freed to imagine new uses and solve ever more complex problems – economical, social, human
 - Which may be causally linked to the increasing impetus on ESG

Despite its well-documented potential, AI does have limitations and even creates some new challenges. OpenAI's ChatGPT, for example, at this writing is current only to September 2021 for base users; however, OpenAI reports that the tool *can* research and provide real time data – a feature expected to become available to all users “soon” (Radford & Kleinman, 2023). Even as tools like ChatGPT evolve and are able to access up to date information, the databases which they may be accessing aren't necessarily up to date. Decennial census data, for example, is often outdated and what is posted online is not necessarily the actual data leveraged to determine eligibility for certain economic development programs (in favor of more recent data much less

likely to be published on economic development websites, based on past experience).

Also of concern is the accuracy and data integrity of AI tools, which may form answers based on any data it finds – whether the source is accurate/true or not. Even the FTC has gotten involved in mitigating risk of misinformation and defamation via ChatGPT, which is especially critical as the tool searches current information and effectively removes a fail-safe resulting from only leveraging data up to September 2021. Imagine the legal implications evolving here and entire careers that stand to be made of specializing in litigating these cases.

Data confidentiality also remains a key concern of many firms as they consider the adoption of various AI tools. How can companies ensure that client data is appropriately used and protected, and not used to train these AI tools? By nature, in order to improve and grow breadth of application, AI must be trained – but, at what expense? Many employers, Samsung notably, have banned the use of generative AI to avoid leaking proprietary data (Gurman, 2023). Leakage of a company's own data is bad enough, but for site selection consultants and economic developers, there is even greater risk in accidentally disclosing client data. A new realm of training will surely emerge here, where all public staff and consulting employees, regardless of level of position will have required generative AI training.

There is substantial risk of any single employee inadvertently searching or inputting sensitive data, which could jeopardize the entire client relationship and potentially have huge legal repercussions with respect to trade secrets, data confidentiality clauses, and misrepresentation. In response to these threats, many firms – Samsung reportedly included – are working to leverage generative AI tools to create custom, proprietary databases for internal use only.

But custom AI tools are expensive, so it's hard to imagine cities and counties developing such tools for economic development purposes – at least for the short term until/unless costs drop significantly with greater adoption. Perhaps there is another career/business opportunity here for economic development service providers to offer a subscription-based tool oriented toward economic developers – where one solution could be created for multiple users to access. Still, the client data challenge exists. How can a jurisdiction both benefit from the learnings and inputs of other

Data confidentiality also remains a key concern of many firms as they consider the adoption of various AI tools. How can companies ensure that client data is appropriately used and protected, and not used to train these AI tools? By nature, in order to improve and grow breadth of application, AI must be trained – but, at what expense?

jurisdictions while keeping its own data discreet and confidential?

In addition to current limitations/concerns with AI, there are a slew of new concerns with the adoption of AI as well, from liability where AI holds some responsibility to the question of whether AI can account for adoption of itself in its algorithms: How self-aware is AI, and (how quickly and accurately) can it adjust its calculations accordingly to factor its own impact to systems and culture for accurate forecasting? Particularly important for economic developers and jurisdictions as they plan for future generations -- Can education systems keep up with demand for ever-higher quality human capital?

As AI takes on more and more rote tasks and frees up humanity for more complex and creative problem-solving, are we working toward a system where third graders are learning calculus (or, for that matter, mastering an artistic pursuit), and is that even feasible? There are surely holes in AI's scope that will leave roles at many educational levels for humankind, but it remains to be seen exactly what those are. As has been a trend for many years, it seems likely that most positions will require some form of "higher education" – the definition of which is in flux itself these days as traditional institutions grapple with online offerings and shorter-term certifications and credentials that later generations seem to favor versus traditional post-secondary education models.

Having surveyed some opportunities and limitations of AI related to economic development, this article will now explore another trend that is greatly impacting industry, and thereby site selection and economic development: ESG. ESG may be defined as:

It may seem like an odd pairing – AI and ESG, but they are inextricably linked. As humanity as a whole evolves under Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), AI will be capable of resolving much of our "basic" strife – to ensure greater access and a higher degree of security with respect to Physiological Needs and Safety and Security, freeing us culturally and economically to pursue "higher" level interests including Love and Belonging, Self-Esteem, and Self-Actualization.

"Environmental, social and governance (ESG) refers to a collection of corporate performance evaluation criteria that assess the robustness of a company's governance mechanisms and its ability to effectively manage its environmental and social impacts. Examples of ESG data include the quantification of a company's carbon emissions, water consumption or customer privacy breaches. Institutional investors, stock exchanges and boards increasingly use sustainability and social responsibility disclosure information to explore the relationship between a company's management of ESG risk factors and its business performance." (Gartner, 2023)

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Next, this article explores some of the drivers of the movement toward an ESG emphasis in industry, cultural and economic, and then discusses implications for economic development.

CULTURAL

Research suggests "19% of Generation Z (Born: 1995-2010) and 33% of Millennials (Born: 1981-1994) often or exclusively use investment products that take ESG factors into account" (Versace, 2022). Thirty-four percent of Generation Z and 39% of Millennials would be willing to take a pay cut *if a firm's ESG strategies lined up with their values and beliefs* and ESG initiatives are considered important to more than 40% of U.S. workers overall (Gurchiek, 2023). Considering that Generation Z and Millennials combined are expected to comprise 72% of the total workforce by 2029, this is a powerful cultural driver forcing companies to consider and account for ESG to attract and maintain

FIGURE 1



(Image Credit: SimplyPsychology, www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html)

workforce and maintain positive public perception (Montenegro, 2023).

ECONOMIC

In a survey released by Stanford Graduate School of Business, the Rock Center for Corporate Governance, and the Hoover Institution, the average investor in their 20s/30s was willing to lose up to 10% of their investments to see companies improve their environmental practices, while the average investor in their 60s/70s was unwilling to lose anything for the company to achieve greater environmental outcomes. While there are other factors at play such as time horizon, this is important as the article adds that “if you really tilt your investment strategy toward ESG, you’re going to incur a loss,” albeit potentially short-term as a broad NYU Stern Center for Sustainable Business survey concluded that “Improved financial performance due to ESG becomes more marked over longer time horizons.” (Tensie Whelan, 2021)

With respect to consumption, studies suggest that Generation Z shoppers prefer to buy sustainable brands, with most willing to spend 10% more on such products versus mainstream alternatives while 75% of Millennials indicate they’d change their buying habits to favor environmentally friendly products. Furthermore, Nasdaq reports just over 200 ESG funds available to U.S. investors in 2017 which more than *doubled* in the next five years (2022). Additionally, nearly 100 mutual funds and ETFs have been “revamped” to incorporate/strengthen ESG goals (Versace, 2022). The aforementioned NYU Study additionally concluded, among other things, that “ESG investing appears to provide downside protection, especially during a social or economic crisis” and that “sustainability initiatives at corporations appear to drive better financial performance due to mediating factors such as improved risk management and more innovation.” Clearly, companies cannot *afford* not to integrate ESG.

“The growing importance of a company’s ESG performance, driven by investors, consumers, the workforce, and regulators, has heightened the focus of senior executives and put ESG at the top of the Corporate agenda.”

– Maria Montenegro, Wolters Kluwer (2023)

IMPLICATIONS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Certainly in the United States as it catches up to ESG regulation in other major countries, increased emphasis on ESG is having an impact on location decisions, leading to some novel factors for consideration for site selection. Here are some examples:

– Environmental:

- o Megaprojects/datacenters have big power needs and are increasingly searching for ever larger (not necessarily contiguous) parcels of land to

offset power use with green energy as well as ways to offset the costs of installing/offsetting power needs with utilities and jurisdictions.

- o Proximity to quality, safe public transit, and the amount of population accessible via this transportation method is of increasing importance.
- Social:
 - o Jurisdictions are increasing their minimum thresholds for employer coverage of employee benefits such as healthcare, flexible work options, childcare offerings/offsets, and Health Flexible Spending Accounts. For example: New in October 2023, Nevada now requires incentive recipients to offer paid FMLA leave to its employees.
 - o Increased emphasis on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) efforts has resulted in a greater number of jurisdictions having mandatory Minority, or Women-owned Business Enterprises (MWBE) supply chain and/or hiring requirements. While well-intended, these arbitrary restrictions on businesses are sometimes not realistic and thus negate other benefits of being in a certain community versus a neighboring jurisdiction with more flexible policies. That is not to say that businesses should not aspire to increased utilization of MWBE suppliers and more diverse workforces – rather, making it a *requirement* to hire from a certain zip code, for example, versus a target or a collaborative effort often proves to be too stringent at the ultimate economic loss of the community.
 - o Educational assets have long been important in site selection, but there is a renewed emphasis on the ability of lower wage employees to be able to obtain training and education to propel them to higher earnings (supported partially by the employer). Recall AI is a driving force of the need for better educated workforce as simpler, more rote tasks are performed by machines. Community colleges and certification programs aimed at blue collar workers are equally, if not more important than traditional 4-year universities aimed at educating white collar workers.
 - o Companies value sites with a population reflective of their workforce higher than those that are less well-matched.
 - o Economic development is no longer siloed from community development. Employers are increasingly aware of housing pressures in key markets, and this can even cause a company to seek relocation. Workforce *must* have access to reasonably priced housing in order to have a sustained and successful operation. Consider that what is incentivized comes to be, and it’s easy to see why jurisdictions are increasingly

Neither AI or ESG are going anywhere, and it's helpful to understand the interaction between the two and how AI is very likely driving the cultural and economic shift toward ESG. It's more than a trendy buzz-word, it's literally human evolution unfolding. Future success hinges on recognizing both the opportunities and threats posed by AI and ESG, and those that embrace and strategize how to make these concepts work for their operation (business or jurisdiction) rather than wait for the concepts to dictate that path will emerge as market leaders.

adopting policies to provide financial considerations for housing developments and increased density.

- *Governance*: While these aren't new, they are experiencing a renaissance as critically important factors.
 - o Following the stark decrease in sales and use tax revenues that decimated some city budgets precipitated by the pandemic, the financial stability of jurisdictions is more scrutinized. Locating in a solvent community means that infrastructure and public safety as well as incentive packages can be counted on long-term.
 - o Related to the social aspects listed above, companies value a location with similar political leanings more highly than one with drastically opposing views. Historic voting patterns and minutes from prior meetings are used as indicators of future voting expectations.
 - o Related to the environmental aspects listed above, there is increasing examination of a company's true ESG actions to avoid "green-washing" and ensure a jurisdiction, and thereby its citizens (in ways, a form of investor) are getting what has been promised. Green-washing is defined as when "a company purports

to be environmentally conscious for marketing purposes but actually isn't making any notable sustainability efforts." (Versace, 2022).

Companies are well aware of this and generally proactively working toward higher levels of compliance and third-party review of their actions and progress ahead of tighter formal regulations in the United States.

As economic developers seek to support industry growth in their communities, it's critical to have working knowledge of AI and ESG and how they are impacting companies' strategies and decision-making. Jurisdictions too will evolve and adapt to the post-AI world, which economic developers are well-suited to support and usher in. Neither AI or ESG are going anywhere, and it's helpful to understand the interaction between the two and how AI is very likely driving the cultural and economic shift toward ESG. It's more than a trendy buzz-word, it's literally human evolution unfolding. Future success hinges on recognizing both the opportunities and threats posed by AI and ESG, and those that embrace and strategize how to make these concepts work for their operation (business or jurisdiction) rather than wait for the concepts to dictate that path will emerge as market leaders. 🌐



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sister city relationships

BETWEEN THE US AND INTERNATIONAL CITIES

By *Kathy Risko*

In an increasingly economically integrated world, local leaders are recognizing that regional economic development strategies must create environments in which firms and industries can compete internationally to generate sustained growth and quality jobs. To succeed in this goal, the Pittsburgh region engages international partner cities in mutually beneficial economic, cultural, and educational transactions. The mutual need to work cooperatively with each other to benefit our citizens was underscored by the COVID-19 pandemic and has provided opportunities for the Sister Cities programs around the United States to become global cities.

Finding the perfect partner in this endeavor is more of an art than a science, both in finding a city to partner with as well as diverse funders to support the work of a sister cities program. To do this we look for imaginative, forward-looking ideas that drive change and have the potential to make significant contributions in our communities. Through our program we seek to enhance Pittsburgh's international reputation by engaging partner cities to create economic opportunities that will benefit the citizens of our region.

Specifically, Sister Cities Association of Pittsburgh's work focuses on four opportunities for our region:

- Economic – economic resilience can be achieved through trade, foreign investment (outbound and inbound), and innovative metro-to-metro partnerships.
- Cultural – opportunities to share our world-class cultural institutions, food culture, and

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shared ethnic background enhance understanding across international boundaries.

- Educational – opportunities for our youth to not just learn about, but experience other cities, cultures, religions, and traditions creates empathy, understanding and leads to more resilient, global-minded citizens.
- Exchange of knowledge, expertise, best practices, and public policy – our region's involvement on a world stage and engagement in international organizations as well as one-on-one exchanges of ideas leads to collective problem solving for global issues like a response to COVID-19, climate change, food security, poverty, and housing.

Kathy Risko is the former executive director of the Sister Cities Association of Pittsburgh. (kjrisko@gmail.com)

SISTER CITIES ASSOCIATION OF PITTSBURGH AS A CASE STUDY

Like many US cities, the city of Pittsburgh has had a sister city program since the 1960s. The program started with several local groups who came together to strengthen ties with their for-

SISTER CITIES ASSOCIATION OF PITTSBURGH AS A CASE STUDY

Sister City organizations exist in just about every US city and in many smaller towns, suburbs, and even ex-urbs. They support the desire to have international connections to help support local economic development, business attraction and exchanges. These relationships add value to these communities and raise their profiles in international circles. If you are considering starting a new program or invigorating a dormant one, extensive planning and benchmarking of successful programs will be key to the success of your program. This article will provide some guiding principles to consider as you embark on your sister city program.

mer homelands. Throughout the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, agreements were signed with eight international cities. In 1992, the Greater Pittsburgh Sister Cities Association was formed to establish sports exchanges. Sister city activities during this iteration were robust and cumulated in adding several new sister cities and hosting delegations to and from Pittsburgh. The program at the time was housed at the Urban Redevelopment Authority and former Mayor Tom Murphy was very engaged in the program. At various times during the Pittsburgh sister city program, the University of Pittsburgh (and notably the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs) has been a strong partner. The focus on sister cities activities waxes and wanes usually based on the interest of the sitting administration, and this is a challenge for many programs across the United States and one that should be addressed if considering developing a sister city program.

For many years the program was dormant and in 2017, former Mayor Bill Peduto sought to revitalize Pittsburgh's Sister City program. A small group of internationally connected volunteers spent two years reconstituting the program by benchmarking Sister City programs in other US cities, raising funds to support a small staff, and hosting small delegations from Pittsburgh to Da Nang, Vietnam; Saitama City, Japan; Bilbao, Spain; and Wuhan, China.

In December 2018, Sister Cities Association of Pittsburgh (SCAP) received its 501c3 status, engaged in short-term strategic planning to revitalize the mission and vision and reestablish the organization as an independent entity from the city to ensure its long-term sustainability, lessening its vulnerability to the disinterest of any future administrations and ensuring sister city relationships grow and benefit our region. At that time, Pittsburgh had 20 Sister Cities but only seven were considered active, including Wuhan, China; Saitama City, Japan; Bilbao, Spain; Da Nang, Vietnam; Glasgow, Scotland; Dortmund, Germany; and Pohang, Korea.

In May 2020, SCAP hired its first executive director who works in concert with the mayor's office and with economic, educational, and cultural partners to assist our region in identifying and securing new sister city relationships and reinvigorating past relationships that will benefit our region.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

As any nonprofit, sister city organizations work to identify funding to support their work in leading their region's efforts to develop, maintain, and expand current and future sister city relationships to benefit the region's economic, educational, and cultural sectors. Cities need to have strong global partners, and this was

recognized on a federal level in October 2022 when the US State Department appointed Ambassador Nina Hachigian as the Special Representative for City and State Diplomacy.¹ The mission of this program is to "coordinate the State Department's engagement with mayors, governors and other local officials in the United States and around the world." Recognition of the importance of subnational diplomacy is an important step in strengthening the work of sister city programs across the US.

In the Pittsburgh region commitment to a strong sister cities program was given a boost by former Mayor Bill Peduto in a white paper entitled *Welcoming Pittsburgh: A Roadmap for Change*.² The paper outlined the need to strengthen our region's sister cities network by revitalizing relationships with current sister cities that have gone dormant, as well as adding new, strategic sister cities.

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The goal was to enhance our region's global competitiveness, increasing international attention, and developing sustainable, long-term metro-to-metro relationships that are creating opportunities for capacity-building among existing local organizations that are driving regional and economic growth. Generally, this approach to economic development is outside the normal functions of the city and county, which was recognized by the mayor in the *Welcoming Pittsburgh* report. Through partnerships established by the sister city program, SCAP

was established to enhance our region's ability to capitalize on and attract new international relationships.

To achieve this, SCAP works with city and county leaders to engage global partners to share best practices and exchange experience and expertise around a variety of policy and economic issues. Key to addressing policy challenges as well as economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, these international exchanges based on strong and trusted relationships will provide opportunities to develop solutions that might not otherwise have been identified and shared. It is also important to note that in response to past physical restrictions on travel, we utilized virtual technology to develop new avenues for our region to expand our global relationships and strengthen our region's ability to grow in sustainable, equitable, and strategic ways. The use of virtual technology to maintain these relationships has enhanced our activities with sister cities and has created new and on-going collaborations that might not have otherwise occurred. An example includes a virtual exchange between the August Wilson Center for African American Culture in Pittsburgh and Glasgow Life to celebrate Black History month in Scotland on October 16, 2023. This exchange will likely lead to an in-person artists exchange between the two entities in 2024.



The delegation from Saitama City, Japan to Pittsburgh (2018).

SISTER CITY ACTIVITIES

Economic, educational, and cultural partnerships have and will continue to grow from these relationships and will benefit both cities. Hosting delegations to and from sister cities across the US remains one of the most important activities for sister organizations. Since travel restrictions were ended in 2021, Pittsburgh has hosted eight delegations to Pittsburgh through the sister cities program and other economic development entities have hosted a few more. We took a delegation to Glasgow for COP26, the UN Climate Conference in November 2021 and went to Cape Town, South Africa in 2023 for the Sister City International conference in search of our first African sister city.

In general, when cities come to our region they are seeking to meet with several Pittsburgh-based technology firms including Philips Respironics, Conoco Services, and the Pittsburgh Technology Council. Also of interest are Pittsburgh's efforts to redevelop former industrial sites and an educational exchange hosting high school children to engage in two-week-long educational programming with a variety of local universities focusing on sports management, STEM, humanities, fieldwork and language, and cultural exchanges. Future goals for this student exchange will be an in-person exchange that will introduce the students to the American university system to encourage them to come to Pittsburgh for their university education.

It is important to note that in identifying a new sister city or revitalizing a dormant sister city it is helpful to use a lens that addresses the historical nature of the relationship and look at commitments that cities have to their future including sustainable practices, cutting edge technologies that help economic sectors grow, and opportunities for new synergies. Built into this framework is the ability to ensure that all efforts are measurable, reciprocal, and beneficial.

COVID-19 created opportunities for us to rethink how we create opportunities for international ex-



Deputy Mayor Jake Pawlak and Saitama Mayor Hayato Shimizu resigning our sister agreement on the 25th anniversary of becoming sisters (July 2023).

changes. Now more than ever, due to people's comfort level with technology like Zoom, Marco Polo, Microsoft Teams, and other technologies, we are working to capitalize on remote learning through building international relationships that will teach children cross-cultural competencies and build long-term sustainable relationships that will benefit our youth as they mature into globally minded citizens.

Through cultural programming and partnerships, sister city programs seek to create exchanges between regional cultural institutions to create unique programming, enhance current programming with international exchanges and explore new strategies that will create exchanges between artists along with multiple platforms.

EXAMPLES OF SISTER CITY EXCHANGES

SCAP hosted an 18-member delegation in October 2019 which included members from the Japan External Trade Organization and the Saitama University Advanced Institute of Innovation Technology, Kaneko Solution and Imagination, Ohmura, Harves Co., Ltd., and Marelli to establish a formal MOU for future economic cooperation between Pittsburgh and Saitama City (similar to an MOU signed between Bavaria, Germany, and Saitama City).

Our Saitama City-Pittsburgh relationship also has an educational exchange focus. Before COVID, Pittsburgh was planning to host high school children from Saitama City to come to Pittsburgh in 2020 to engage in two-week-long educational programming with a variety of local universities (Robert Morris, University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon University, Duquesne, Point Park) focusing on sports management, STEM, humanities, fieldwork and language, and cultural exchanges. This was rescheduled as an online exchange in July 2021 wherein 20 students from Pittsburgh and 20 from Saitama were engaged in a program around UN Sustainable Development Goals. Future goals for

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this student exchange will be an in-person exchange that will introduce the students to the American university system to encourage them to come to Pittsburgh for their university education. This program has expanded the number of students from an initial group of 20 in 2021 to 160-200 students in 2023.

In 2019, SCAP Board Chair Wolf and former Mayor Peduto visited Da Nang, Vietnam. Outcomes of this trip included a desire to establish an educational exchange between Le Quy Don High School for the Gifted and Mt. Lebanon High School. Letters of Intent have been exchanged and we are working with both schools to facilitate exchanges between students. During this visit, Mayor Peduto met with the Chairman of The People's Committee of Da Nang City, Chairman Huynh Duc Tho, and city department heads wherein they exchanged learnings and reestablished the important Sister City relationship. Chairman Tho invited Mayor Peduto to attend the Da Nang's Mayors Forum and we are currently planning for a student and teacher exchange in 2025.

In August 2019, SCAP hosted a delegation of ten city representatives from Da Nang to Pittsburgh. During this visit, members of the delegation met with the URA, CityParks, the Pittsburgh Technology Council, the Allegheny County Airport Authority, and Riverlife (there is a strong interest on behalf of the Da Nang delegation to learn how Pittsburgh is working to redevelop our riverfronts). A reception was held at the Benter Foundation with active participation from representatives from the mayor's office, County Executive's office, Argo AI, Allegheny Conference on Community Development/Pittsburgh Regional Alliance, Buhl Foundation, and other organizations that the delegation met with earlier in the day. To broaden the opportunities for exchanges, Bill Fuller of Big Burrito Group had the opportunity to begin a discussion about a chef/food exchange between Pittsburgh and Da Nang.

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An example of this is our renewed relationship with long-term Sister City Sofia, Bulgaria, which was established in 1993. Upon being reconnected through the US Ambassador to Bulgaria in June 2020, we have established a relationship with Sofia that will focus on partnerships to be developed around Smart City technologies, e-government, transportation/traffic solutions, healthcare, and energy policy. SCAP is helping to facilitate these partnerships and exchanges with the assistance of organizations like the Pittsburgh Technology Council. We are developing a workplan to guide the Pittsburgh-Sofia sister partnership.

Glasgow, Scotland became a sister city of Pittsburgh in November 2020. Pittsburgh and Glasgow have enjoyed a long-term relationship, focusing on the people, place, planet, and performance framework. Issues that we are addressing together and learning from each other include guaranteed income, climate action (including energy, transport, food, open space, buildings, and waste), and need for equitable resources; health resources, and capacity building. Glasgow hosted the 2021 United Nations Climate Conference (COP26) in November 2021, and a delegation from Pittsburgh were active participants in many COP26 activities during the conference. Sister Cities Association of Pittsburgh received an award from Sister Cities International in youth and education programming for our participation in the Girls@ COP26 programming focusing on how young women can be engaged in climate related professional fields, as well as international exchanges. The Pittsburgh-Glasgow Sister City partnership is a strong example of international relationship building, bilateral problem solving, and metro-to-metro idea exchanges.

In the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sister Cities Association of Pittsburgh partnered with Brother's Brother Foundation and the Pittsburgh Chinese Cultural Center to send PPE to Wuhan, China, as a gesture of international cooperation. Wuhan and Pittsburgh have been sister cities since 1980 and in the

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mid-1980s, a delegation from Wuhan spent a summer in Pittsburgh to shadow City of Pittsburgh economic development professionals to learn how Pittsburgh attracts new businesses to the Pittsburgh region.

Bilbao, Spain established a program called City of Values and Smart Cities that would lead to policy exchanges between Bilbao and Pittsburgh, as well as other international cities, some of which are already sisters of Pittsburgh, but also other cities that we have not worked with before. This provided an opportunity for Pittsburgh to potentially find new valuable international relationships.

Two delegations from Pohang, South Korea came to Pittsburgh in 2023 and we signed an MOU in July. SCAP helped plan the delegation's visit in July wherein the delegation provided \$75k in upgrades and ongoing maintenance of the Korean Way memorial located on the North Side of Pittsburgh. The investment in Pittsburgh on behalf of the Pohang delegation was timed to honor the 75th anniversary of the Korean Armistice. We are now working to develop the work plan that will guide our exchanges and the mayor of Pohang invited a Pittsburgh delegation to visit Pohang in 2024.

We signed the MOU with Dortmund, Germany in 2022 and they have come to Pittsburgh multiple times since then. Two delegates from Pittsburgh attended a policy exchange with Dortmund sponsored by the German government in October of 2022 in Washington DC. We developed a work plan based on the topics we explored during these exchanges. The focus has been food policy, energy/hydrogen, healthcare and economic development. A delegation came October 8-11, 2023, and SCAP developed the agenda for the delegation focusing on repurposed buildings using green technologies, housing and the potential of cultural exchanges with the Warhol Museum.

CONCLUSION

As our region works to address its many challenges and capitalize on its many opportunities, we continue to seek out international opportunities that will focus on sustainable solutions that are equitable to all our residents no matter income or zip code. The opportunity today is summed up clearly in *Network Effects – The innovation multipliers of international collaboration for cities and subnational governments* (nesta, September 2020)³ “COVID-19 has added urgency to the agenda to transform the innovation and deliver capacity to cities, regions, and local governments around the world. In a global system that encounters simultaneous shocks and shared challenges, the innovation imperative at subnational levels needs to be served by agile collaboration internationally.” Sister city programs across the US are working to achieve this goal which allows their communities to become global collaborators, partners, and leaders.

More information about Sister Cities Association of Pittsburgh can be found at www.sistercitiespgh.org. 

ENDNOTES

- ¹ <https://www.state.gov/bureaus-offices/under-secretary-for-economic-growth-energy-and-the-environment/the-secretarys-office-of-global-partnerships/the-special-representative-for-subnational-diplomacy/>
- ² https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/mayorpeduto/Welcoming-Pittsburgh_RoadMap_FullReport_FINAL2.pdf
- ³ Dr. Tim Moonen, Dr. Ellie Cosgrave, Jake Nunley, and Dr. Oliver Zanetti “Network Effects – The innovation multipliers of international collaboration for cities and subnational governments: (nesta: September 2020) https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/Network_Effects_-_final_draft_2020.09.22.pdf



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