



BUILDING REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY

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JOBS FOR THE FUTURE



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Jobs for the Future identifies, develops, and promotes new education and workforce strategies that help communities, states, and the nation compete in a global economy. In nearly 200 communities in 41 states, JFF improves the pathways leading from high school to college to family-sustaining careers.

REGIONAL GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY INITIATIVE

Jobs for the Future, with support from the U.S. Department of Labor, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and The Walmart Foundation, is collaborating with the Council on Competitiveness and FutureWorks to examine what's working in regional growth efforts—and what's getting in the way of them. With our partners, JFF is looking in depth at the kinds of partnership structures regions are putting in place, where leadership is coming from, and how workforce issues are being addressed in the context of regional growth strategies and regional partnerships.

In the course of this initiative, we have done hands-on work in several regions, helping them better align their workforce development efforts with their strategies to grow targeted industries, and conducted in-depth case studies to better understand the dynamics of others. We have also convened roundtables of leading researchers and practitioners, to do a reality check on what we are finding and to capture the lessons being learned by others working in this area. The aim of the initiative is to expand regional leaders' capacity to link growth and opportunity strategies, capitalize on their regions' unique assets, and build the prosperity of their businesses and citizens.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Finally, we thank the many regional leaders who collaborated with us in applying our ideas and the many more leaders and researchers who participated in our roundtables, discussion paper reviews, and case study interviews. Our dialogue with those leaders is the core of our learning.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a growing consensus that for the United States to fully rebound from the recent economic and financial crisis and for new entrants into the workforce to find jobs, we will need economic growth at more than double the current rate. Yet, that rate of growth is going to be doubly difficult to achieve, since the personal consumption and government spending that fueled almost all of the nation's growth over the past decade are now in short supply (Brenner 2010).

With one in four homeowners under water due to the bursting of the housing bubble, the ratio of household debt to personal disposable income is at the highest level ever recorded (Simon & Hagerty 2009; Glick & Lansing 2009). In addition, Baby Boomers are still recovering from losing nearly 20 percent of their retirement savings during the financial crisis (Davis 2009). It's clear that households are in no position to continue spending at pre-recession levels. Nor are federal, state or local governments, which are facing huge budget shortfalls.

That means it is mainly up to private-sector innovations to get our economy growing again. However, it is becoming apparent that individual firms, on their own, cannot do all of the research and development, planning, marketing, and training needed to compete on innovation as we need to in today's increasingly global markets. That is particularly true for small and mid-sized firms, where most of the job creation has been taking place, along with an increasing share of innovation across the United States (Edmiston 2007; Block & Keller 2008). Even large firms are finding that they need to rely more on universities and industry-university collaborations to meet their basic and applied research needs (Atkinson & Wial 2008). Consequently, the ability of firms to create an adequate supply of good jobs increasingly depends on whether they can get the help they need and how well that help is organized. There is growing evidence, both here and abroad, that the best place to organize that help is at the regional level (Mills, Reynolds, & Reamer 2008; OECD 2007, 2009a; 2009b) .

Individual firms on their own, cannot do all of the research and development, planning, marketing and training needed to compete on innovation in global markets.

Although state and national policies can pave the way for innovation, it is at the regional level where firms, economic development organizations, investors, education and training providers, research institutions, and government agencies can collaborate most effectively to help firms develop new products and processes, identify and access new markets, facilitate technology and information transfer, train workers, and gain access to specialized materials, equipment, suppliers, and services.

While OECD countries are actively building this capacity at the regional level, the United States is lagging behind (OECD 2009c; Department of Transport, Local Government and Regions 2002)). Across the nation, regions still rely too heavily on traditional approaches to economic development that emphasize recruiting firms and talent from other areas rather than growing their own talent, even though that zero-sum game is yielding diminishing returns for individual regions and for the nation as a whole (Edmiston 2007; U.S. Economic Development Administration 2009).

For the United States to get its economy growing again and to sustain that growth, regional economic development efforts will need to put greater emphasis on identifying the region's competitive assets and on more strategically investing public and private resources in ways that fully exploit those assets. To

better organize that process, there need to be structures at the regional level to bring together key leaders from across public, private, and nonprofit sectors to formulate growth strategies that make the best use of regions' competitive assets.

As part of that process, regional leaders will need to address a deep structural problem in the economy that has been exacerbated by the recent downturn. Currently, the United States has the highest levels of poverty and income inequality of any developed country in the world, and both levels have been increasing rapidly over the past decade (OECD 2008; Saez 2009; Kneebone & Berube 2008). The recent financial and economic crises have accelerated those trends; experts predict that if unemployment remains high, as many expect, poverty and inequality will continue to increase over the next several years (Sawhill 2009).

Ignoring this problem could stifle innovation and slow economic growth: regions cannot rely solely on attracting all the talent they need, just as they cannot rely solely on attracting all the *jobs* they need. The only way regions can hope to reach their full economic potential and compete with other regions here and abroad is to develop their own talent—help advance their own workers' skills. A second reason has to do with costs. Regions with higher levels of inequality and poverty also have higher associated economic and social costs, which make them less attractive to outside investors and tie up public resources that could otherwise be invested in activities that promote innovation and growth (Cortright 2009).

JFF has been exploring what regions are doing to grow the economy and expand opportunity. We have taken an in-depth look at how four regions are developing and implementing regional economic growth strategies. We have done hands-on work in five additional regions, helping them better align their workforce development efforts with their strategies to grow targeted industries. And we have convened three roundtables of leading researchers and practitioners, together with the Council on Competitiveness, the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, and FutureWorks, to do a reality check on what we are finding and to capture the lessons being learned by others working in this area.

This report summarizes the key lessons learned so far about what kind of partnership structures regions are putting in place to promote economic growth and opportunity, where the leadership is coming from for those efforts, and in particular, how workforce issues are being addressed in the context of regional growth strategies and regional partnerships.

PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURES

We began our exploration with the question: *How are regions getting organized to develop and implement a growth strategy in the absence of any single, overarching government authority?*

Doing so requires bringing many different public, private, and nonprofit actors together despite conflicting missions, institutional interests, administrative structures, funding streams, performance measures, and geographical boundaries. And if those diverse actors manage to make joint decisions, they run the risk of displacing other decision-making bodies or impacting policies set by them, creating conditions for further conflict.

Consequently, taking action at the regional level requires finding ways to overcome deeply rooted jurisdictional and programmatic fragmentation. Two regions where this can be especially challenging are the Pittsburgh metropolitan region (encompassing 455 different municipal governments, 110 school districts, and 333 special district governments with limited mandates) (Briem 2009) and Greater Cincinnati (encompassing 3 states, 15 counties, 242 municipalities and townships, and 84 school districts) (Gallis and Associates 1999). Each political jurisdiction has its own budget, priorities, and elected officials, whose allegiances lie mainly with their own localities, rather than with the region as a whole.

The same kind of fragmentation exists among programs *within* regions, even if they have the same objective. For example, funds to meet the employment and training needs of the workforce in Wisconsin flow through six federal agencies, eight state administrative departments, and thirty-six separate federal and state programs. When those funds reach Milwaukee, they flow through over one hundred different local programs, each restricted to serving certain populations within certain jurisdictions, and each with its own administrative and reporting requirements (Public Policy Forum 2008).

Economic development programs are plagued by fragmentation. There are an estimated 180 federal economic development programs residing in virtually every corner of the federal government, many of them engaged in very similar activities, with no one single agency or department coordinating their efforts (Drabenstott 2005). This complexity is replicated at state and local levels, exacerbating program fragmentation. For example, Wisconsin has an estimated 800 to 900 local economic development organizations, with an average budget of \$235,000 and an average of 2.8 staff members (Anderson & Nacker 2003).

It is important to note that the degree of fragmentation varies across regions. In general, regions with fewer local jurisdictions, although still “fragmented,” may find it easier to make timely and effective decisions on a regional basis (Jun Park 2005). Regions also seem to have an easier time overcoming fragmentation when responding to crises. We found numerous examples of different actors coming together across previously inflexible program and jurisdictional boundaries during a perceived crisis. However, we also noticed that it was not easy for regions to sustain their collaborations in the aftermath of their respective crises.

One obvious way to overcome this fragmentation, and the silos it creates, would be to consolidate authority in a single, centralized formal structure at the regional level. However, regional governance structures with broad scope and authority are very rare in the United States, a situation that is unlikely to change any time soon. With the exception of a few highly publicized cases (e.g., Louisville, Kentucky; Portland, Oregon; and the Twin Cities in Minnesota), U.S. voters have consistently resisted proposals to consolidate local jurisdictions (Fosler 1998).

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U.S. voters are not alone in that regard. Voters in England overwhelmingly rejected a concerted effort to form regional governance structures. After several years of experimenting with Regional Development Agencies (similar to our regional economic development corporations) and Regional Chambers (similar to our councils of governments) as the first step toward a regional governance structure, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister decided to go a step further, proposing the direct election of Regional Assemblies. However, a 2004 referendum held in what was expected to be the most receptive region was soundly defeated by a vote of 78 to 22 percent. Voters were unconvinced that a regional governmental structure would make much difference, and they were wary of having one imposed on them by the central government in London (Giovannini 2009).

Voters here and abroad may be on to something. Based on what we have observed and heard from participants in the roundtables we have conducted, creating a single, centralized governance structure at the regional level may actually impede progress by restricting the flexibility needed to address regional issues. Different issues require the involvement of different jurisdictions and different actors at different points in time. Consequently, how the region and the partnership are defined needs to vary depending on the particular issue being addressed. Therefore, it can actually be counterproductive to mandate how regional boundaries should be drawn, which specific issues regions should focus on, or which institutions should lead the partnerships.

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As a result, most regions have multiple partnership structures to address regional issues. Those usually include a coalition of local governments to address common, multi-jurisdictional challenges. These are mostly referred to as regional councils, councils of governments, regional planning and development agencies, or metropolitan planning organizations. A board of elected officials and other community leaders typically governs each of these entities. However, despite their regional scope, these entities lack the authority to make and enforce strategic decisions across whole regions.

Most regions also have coalitions of local businesses that address issues that cut across jurisdictional and programmatic boundaries. The most common coalitions are regional chambers of commerce, trade associations, CEO leadership groups, and regional economic development corporations; each has its own membership, board, and agenda. However, even when paired with publicly funded entities like economic development agencies, these groups often cannot implement the decisions they make on their own without the active cooperation of public officials and government agencies.

Many regions also have coalitions of labor, community, or religious organizations that promote expanding opportunity so that everyone can share in their regions' economic activity. However, these coalitions tend to operate outside of—and often in opposition to—efforts led by the public or the private sector.

Given the fragmentation among these different regional coalitions, it would be logical to try bringing them together under some kind of overarching, general-purpose regional partnership. Not surprisingly, there have been numerous attempts to put that kind of partnership structure in place over the past two decades. However, those efforts have proven difficult to sustain. One reason is because they end up competing with other established business, government, and civic organizations for financial support. Another reason is

because the scope of their efforts and the key stakeholders vary depending on the issue being addressed. As a result, most regions have come to rely more on ad hoc coalitions to work on specific issues.

Regions are taking a networked approach to keeping these ad hoc coalitions moving in the same direction. This approach links different efforts together with common, objective information about what's happening in regions, a common understanding of what the key issues are, and a common plan for how to address them. That provides a structure to support collective action, while allowing each organization to take initiative within its own sphere of influence, stay connected to other organizations through a network of collaborative relationships, and stay on course by tracking whether or not their collective efforts are making a difference.

That kind of governance “structure” is very different from the kind of regional “authority” that we thought we would find when we started our research. We were thinking in terms of regional *government*, rather than regional *governance*. The main difference between the two is that a networked governance structure allows for more horizontal power sharing, while a government authority structure relies more on top-down command and control.

We found that a more horizontal, networked approach makes it easier to achieve collaboration among existing organizations and to build on their efforts that are already under way. Sometimes, all that's needed to get the desired result in a region is to put the pieces together in a different way, or to nurture the development of ongoing efforts.

It is worth noting that this networked approach appears to be more effective for making plans rather than implementing them. We noticed that a lot of the collaborative plans that regions developed were never implemented and therefore never had much impact. Without a structure in which to hold people accountable, a networked approach must rely on partnering organizations to voluntarily carry out the common plan. However, the implementation of the common plan tends to be hit-or-miss because each of the partnering organizations has its own priorities, agendas, and institutional interests.

Business leaders are proven assets in these situations because they tend to be more results-oriented. They have also provided cover for local elected officials who want to act regionally but are constrained by the narrow interests of their constituents. In addition, they can often be found working behind the scenes to help move individuals and organizations in the same direction.

Another way regions are addressing the need to coordinate implementation is by promoting cross-representation on the boards of organizations working together at the regional level. In some regions, the same individuals sit on the boards of several participating organizations, providing the glue that holds those organizations together and keeps them moving forward in a common direction.

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LEADERSHIP

That leads us to the second question we set out to explore: *Where is the leadership coming from for these efforts?*

In an organic, networked process, somebody has to perform the core functions of a regional partnership: bringing people together; developing a common plan; and overseeing its implementation. We are finding that the individuals best equipped to play that leadership role are unique to each region, having earned the respect and trust of key stakeholders through their ability to collaborate and make things happen.

In the past, these leaders were most often the CEOs of large corporations, banks, utilities, newspapers, or department stores who had a longstanding presence in, and identification with, their respective regions. They would usually come together out of the public view to decide what was in their regions' best interests, then carry out their plans through governing coalitions that included mayors and city managers. But that model is changing in some fundamental ways.

Most regions still have a core group of individuals committed to their best long-term interests, but these groups are likely to be much more inclusive and to operate much more in the open than in the past. In this emerging model, core groups of regional leaders tend to be much more transparent about their goals, plans, and decisions and to operate much more by consensus than by fiat.

The composition of these core groups is also changing. Globalization has shifted CEOs' focus outside their home regions. Mergers and acquisitions have thinned the ranks of CEOs and shortened their tenure. In addition, the increasing demands of their jobs have reduced the amount of time and energy they have available to devote to their communities. As a result, the pool of CEOs available to provide leadership to regional partnerships is shallower, more transient, and less influential than in the past (Hanson et al. 2006).

Instead, as CEOs have become less available and the issues facing their regions have become more complex, the business leadership role has been shifting to paid professional staff in organizations like chambers of commerce and economic development corporations (Moret, Fleming, & Hovey 2008). Increasingly, paid professional staff develop policies and strategies, manage projects, provide a public point of contact, and represent the organization in coalitions and on the boards of other organizations. Because of the frequent turnover among their CEO board members and chairs, paid professional staff are proving to be better positioned to provide the stable, consistent, full-time leadership needed to launch and sustain collaborative regional initiatives.

Heads of universities and medical centers are playing an increasingly prominent leadership role in regional partnerships; these institutions are often the largest and most stable source of new jobs in many regions (Bartik & Erickcek 2008). In addition, universities are sometimes incubators for new businesses and often supply much of the talent needed to grow their regions' economies.

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Many community foundations are also providing leadership to regional growth efforts because they, too, are recognizing the importance of a growing economy to achieving their goals. Because they are approached for funding by many different groups for many different types of projects, they know a lot about the needs of their regions and what different groups are doing to address those needs. That information, which is often in short supply or missing altogether, can be very valuable in shaping regional strategies. In addition, charitable community foundations can directly support regional strategies through their funding decisions.

Except in a few regions (e.g., Louisville, Denver), local elected officials need to deliver short-term results to their local constituents, making it difficult for them to provide the long-term, region-wide perspective necessary to lead these partnerships. Also, the frequent turnover among local elected officials sometimes makes it difficult for them to provide the *sustained* leadership necessary to see a regional effort through to its conclusion. In addition, competing agendas and priorities among local jurisdictions make it difficult for any one local elected official to command the trust and respect of his or her peers. Mayors of large cities in particular must overcome the wariness that surrounding jurisdictions have of their influence and of the lingering resentment from old battles between these cities and their suburbs.

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In response, some regions are organizing mayors' caucuses to address issues that cut across local jurisdictions, such as the funding and construction of mass transit systems. These caucuses provide a forum for local elected officials to think and act regionally.

WORKFORCE ISSUES

The third question we set out to explore is: *How are workforce issues being addressed in the context of regional growth strategies and regional partnerships?*

Often, the most important factor in whether firms choose to locate or expand their operations in a particular region is whether the workforce has sufficient skills and flexibility to support the growth of the region's economy. Developing and deploying a skilled workforce requires capacity at the regional level to both identify and address the human capital needs of the region as a whole; this will be particularly important as regions work to get their economies growing again.

A common element in almost every regional growth strategy we have looked at is the targeting of particular industries, which is getting a big boost from the federal government through its support of regional innovation clusters (Muro & Katz 2010; Council on Competitiveness 2010; Mills, Reynolds, & Reamer 2008; OECD 2007) The particular industries targeted vary across regions, based on the competitive advantages of each particular region, but they are generally high technology, high wage, and high growth. To support growth, regional leaders are identifying or developing structures within each

targeted industry to provide opportunities for networking among firms within the same industry to share best practices, learn about industry trends, and identify opportunities for collaboration. Those structures are also being used to gather information from firms in the industry about their needs, challenges, and plans for expansion—and to organize collective action to address common concerns.

One of the most common industry concerns is whether there are enough skills, talent, and experience in the available workforce. Because different regions have different industries with different needs at different points in time, it would be helpful to have a system in place in each region that can flexibly respond to shifts in labor demand.

Currently, that kind of system exists only in a rudimentary form in most regions we have looked at or read about. For the most part, regions rely instead on a fragmented collection of programs run by many different public, private, and nonprofit organizations with conflicting missions, institutional interests, organizational cultures, funding streams, and geographical boundaries. Those programs are only loosely connected to each other, to targeted industry clusters, or to regional growth strategies and partnerships.

A growing number of regions have been turning to “sector strategies” as a way to overcome this fragmentation among their workforce development programs, and to more closely align those programs with industry needs. This sector-based approach builds on earlier efforts to be more industry or demand driven. But rather than focusing on meeting the needs of individual employers, the focus is on meeting the needs of a whole sector of the local labor market, using that focus and the support of businesses in that sector to drive greater alignment among the various actors in the workforce development system (Kazis & Seltzer 2008).

A growing number of states are actively promoting sector strategies through financial incentives, state-funded regional skills alliances, and industry partnerships (NGA Center for Best Practices 2008). In addition, foundations are funding a variety of sector-based projects and workforce intermediary organizations, including a growing number supported by the *National Fund for Workforce Solutions*. In addition, Congress is considering promoting sector strategies in federal legislation, possibly as part of reauthorizing the Workforce Investment Act.

However, despite the obvious potential for alignment between sector-based workforce development efforts and cluster-based economic development efforts, sector strategies have had little impact on regional job growth and average incomes. One reason is because the primary focus of most sector strategy initiatives has been on improving job prospects for low-income and low-skilled workers, moving them into entry-level jobs or from entry-level jobs to the next rung on a career ladder. That process is very resource intensive, limiting the scope of individual programs, and making it difficult to replicate them on a large enough scale to have a significant impact on the industry or on the overall economy.

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Another reason is because workforce development and economic development are still mainly being pursued as separate objectives in most regions across the nation. And workforce development entities and regional partnerships for economic growth remain only loosely connected.

However, dramatic changes in the economy over the past couple years have forced regional leaders to reexamine where they are focusing their workforce development efforts and how they are aligning workforce and economic development. For example, low-income and low-skilled workers are no longer the only ones at risk of being left behind. A much broader swath of the workforce is now facing long-term unemployment and declining living standards, possibly for a decade or more (Reddy 2009). A recent survey by the Pew Research Center found that nearly half of the nation's working adults are in worse financial shape as a result of the downturn (Fletcher 2010).

In addition, the resources to support not only sector strategies but workforce development in general are shrinking. State and local governments are reeling from the effects of the recession and the collapse of the housing market, which have resulted in declining personal income, sales, and property-tax revenues. They are aggressively cutting budgets and programs and laying off or furloughing public employees (Pierce 2010; Hoene 2010). Foundation giving has also been affected, declining a record 8 percent in 2009 (Foundation Center 2010). And federal spending for workforce development is likely to be sharply curtailed as pressure mounts to reduce federal budget deficits.

These dramatic changes require regional leaders to be much more strategic and efficient in their approach to workforce development, investing scarce public and private resources where they can make the biggest difference for the workforce as a whole. In the current environment, that means focusing on getting the economy growing again.

Our work suggests that for workforce development efforts to contribute directly to economic growth, they need to be guided by regional economic growth strategies and be more closely linked to the regional partnerships that are developing and implementing those strategies. As part of that process, workforce development entities will need to focus on developing, attracting, and retaining the professional talent needed to foster innovation.

These efforts will also need to go beyond a narrow focus on training. Leaders of the efforts must join forces with others in expanding opportunity within regions in other ways, such as creating more jobs that pay family-supporting wages, helping firms tap the full innovative and productive potential of their employees, balancing economic growth across the entire region, redesigning transportation systems to help people to get to work more easily, and providing affordable "workforce" housing close to where the jobs are. In short, regional leaders need to take a much more strategic and comprehensive approach to workforce issues than they have in the past, investing available resources where they can make the biggest difference, and directly supporting the creation of new jobs in ways that expand economic opportunity for

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all of the region's residents. To maximize their effectiveness, their efforts will need to be guided by the overall economic growth strategy for the region, and closely linked to a business-led regional partnership.

There has been some promising movement in the form of joint planning among workforce, economic development, and education actors at the regional level. Those efforts have been supported by federal and state grant programs, such as the U.S. Department of Labor's Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) initiative and Regional Innovation Grants, the Economic Development Administration's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) program, and similar state-level programs. The lessons from these innovative efforts need to be more closely studied and more broadly applied.

In a number of regions, local workforce boards have formed regional alliances to plan these efforts. In some cases, the formation of those alliances has been stimulated by WIRED or a similar state initiative. Local foundations are also banding together to identify and address human capital needs at the regional level, with support from the *National Fund for Workforce Solutions*.

These efforts provide a glimpse of the possibilities for collaborative planning to address workforce issues at the regional level. But much more work needs to be done to strengthen and expand them.

Regional leaders need to take a strategic and comprehensive approach to workforce issues, investing available resources where they can make the biggest difference.

CONCLUSIONS

Taken together, our findings suggest that there is increasing activity at the regional level to grow the economy and expand opportunity. Although no single region has yet put all of the pieces of a regional partnership together, the outline of a model is beginning to emerge from their efforts. This model contains the following key elements:

AN INCLUSIVE, ORGANIC, HOMEGROWN PROCESS THAT BRINGS TOGETHER KEY STAKEHOLDERS FROM ACROSS THE REGION TO PLAN TOGETHER

Although this process takes different forms in different regions, there is a common focus on bringing together key leaders from across the region to think and act regionally. That requires cutting across existing jurisdictional and programmatic boundaries, and expanding beyond existing “old boy” networks. It also requires bringing advocates for economic *growth* together with advocates for economic *opportunity*: growing the economy and expanding opportunity are inextricably linked. And the only way regions are going to do either is by pursuing both as part of a unified strategy.

OBJECTIVE AND TIMELY INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT’S HAPPENING IN THE REGION TO USE AS THE BASIS FOR PLANNING

Objective information provides a common platform for people to work from, as well as a reality check on the outmoded, unfounded, or self-serving assumptions that people often cling to. Although there is a lot of variation across regions in the kind and level of detail of information being collected, there is increasing reliance across the board on high-quality information to drive the decision-making process and break down silos.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE REGION’S UNIQUE COMPETITIVE ASSETS AND CHALLENGES, AND WHERE THE LEAST AMOUNT OF EFFORT COULD MAKE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE

Different regions face different challenges, and each has its own unique assets to build on. Thus, no one-size-fits-all strategy can be employed everywhere with the same result. That is why hopping on the latest bandwagon and surfing the latest fad yield such poor results. Regions are developing the capacity to identify strategic leverage points where their scarce resources can make the biggest difference. Those leverage points are different in different regions, and at different points in time within the same region, based on their unique circumstances and dynamics.

AN OPERATIONAL PLAN THAT RESEMBLES A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN AND IDENTIFIES WHO IS ACCOUNTABLE FOR CARRYING OUT WHICH PIECES OF THE PLAN

One of the biggest weaknesses we found was a lack of follow-through in implementing a plan once it was developed. The key to success appears to be maintaining a clear focus, leveraging the unique contributions of a wide range of partners, maintaining discipline and accountability in execution, and sustaining the

effort long enough to make a breakthrough. The most successful implementation efforts tend to look like political campaigns because they often require building coalitions, shaping public opinion, and changing public policies.

METRICS TO TRACK THE IMPLEMENTATION AND OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF THE REGION'S PLAN, AND TO DETERMINE WHETHER CHANGES ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

All regions need to be able to track progress against their goals to determine if they are on course, update their analysis, make necessary adjustments to their plan, and sustain their efforts. An annual review of overall performance in the region also helps key stakeholders continue to think broadly and strategically while carrying out their operational plan, which often requires focusing narrowly on just one or two issues.

A CORE GROUP OF LEADERS TO MAINTAIN A LONG-TERM VISION, HOLD THE PIECES TOGETHER, AND KEEP THE PROCESS MOVING FORWARD

These leaders are the glue that holds everything together despite the fragmentation, the inevitable ups and downs, and the churning in organizational and governmental priorities and leadership. They come from many different kinds of organizations and are frequently involved in the work of several different organizations at once as they work across boundaries to build coalitions. Since they do not have any formal authority, they tend to come together informally to coordinate their efforts, using structures similar to the old-boy networks of the past, although with much more transparency and inclusiveness.

In short, the emerging model links different streams of work together with common, objective information about what is happening in the region, a common understanding of what the key issues are, and a common plan for how to address them. That provides a structure to support collective action, while allowing each organization to take initiative within its own sphere of influence. They are each connected to other organizations through a network of collaborative relationships—tended by a core group of leaders—and stay on course by tracking whether or not their collective efforts are making a difference.

As this model suggests, building regional partnerships for economic growth and opportunity is an enormously complex task, requiring considerable skill and energy. The individuals currently leading these collaborative efforts have mainly figured out how to do this on their own. However, given the urgency of our economic situation, we need many more of these leaders, and we cannot afford to wait for them to get there on their own. Because there is no clear or established path to regional leadership, leadership development structures must be in place to develop more and better leaders for these efforts, as well as networks connecting them so they can continue to learn from and with each other.

Our work with regions suggests that investing in the development and expansion of the ranks of these regional leaders is the critical next step in building regional partnerships for economic growth and opportunity. This would pay big dividends both for regions and for our nation as a whole.

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