
Community Engagement: Successes in Virginia Communities

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Virginians have collaborated with local governments and other agencies to turn their visions into realities. These successful initiatives strengthen the local economy and improve the communities' quality of life.

In a July 2012 questionnaire, 14 Virginia communities shared the stories of successful projects that have transitioned from someone's vision to a reality. These communities worked on issues that affected the quality of life (86%), economic development (71%), and educational outcomes (43%). Included within this publication are summaries of the projects as provided by community representatives.

Practices of leadership team that led to a successful project.

Having a clear vision of the issue, the project, the end product, and the ultimate impact on the community was listed by 100% of the respondents. Eighty-six percent of those responding listed broad-based involvement of stakeholders, identification of financial resources, and strong support from local government offices and elected officials.

Resources

Communities launched high-priority projects and secured the financial and technical assistance from numerous federal, state, and local agencies. Overall, community residents, civic organizations, agencies, foundations, and governing bodies utilized the services, skills, and resources of each stakeholder and developed a robust project collaborative.

Advice

Survey respondents offered advice to other communities that are considering tackling community-based initiative. When forming a leadership team, communities were encouraged to be inclusive of knowledgeable stakeholders who have access to related resources. Team members must be committed to the project, willing to listen, capable of processing the information, eager to communicate with other members, and prepared to make decisions based on fact and not on personal agendas or egos. Respondents suggested that a project's "timing" will impact the project's success and the importance of persistence and patience cannot be underestimated. Gathering the facts and establishing a system to measure the project's success was an obvious thread throughout each community's success summary.

Every community's summary indicated that a project of major significance cannot be accomplished by only one entity. Instead, initiatives require the engagement of multiple local stakeholders who are willing to access resources located in other communities, state agencies, civic organizations, or national groups.

Arlington County

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An organization in Arlington that provides emergency financial assistance to people who cannot pay their rent and/or electric bills found that many people were coming to them with very large electric bills but lived in small apartments. The organization suspected that the cause may lie in the fact that the units were poorly insulated and did not use energy efficiently.

The group engaged Virginia Cooperative Extension to discuss what could be done about the issue. Extension partnered with a local nonprofit environmental organization, applied for grant funding, and started the Energy Efficiency Education program in 2011 with the goal to reduce electric bills by at least 10 percent. To achieve this goal, at least 30 volunteers would be trained who would weatherize 150 units. Electric bills from residents were collected before and 6 months after the weatherization in order to track changes in energy consumption.

Leadership Team's Role

Virginia Cooperative Extension, Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment (ACE), and Arlingtonians Meeting Emergency Needs (AMEN) recruited and trained 34 volunteers in 2011, identified buildings where energy retrofits would be performed, hired a project coordinator, applied for funding to sustain the project, and tracked changes/results in apartment utility bills.

Impact

In January 2012, the volunteers began their work making energy improvements and providing education to residents at low-income apartments. From January to May the volunteers completed work on 100 units at Marbella, Courthouse Crossing and Hunters Park apartments. Volunteers have installed 729 compact fluorescent light bulbs, 1,623 outlet gaskets, 163 faucet aerators, 88 low-flow showerheads, 104 toilet tumblers (flow restrictors). In addition, the team has provided 73 power strips to tenants and conducted outreach events to educate residents about the importance of energy efficiency. Home assessments have been offered to Arlington homeowners as part of a long-term strategy to have these assessments pay for the work done in low-income apartments.

In each apartment, volunteers worked in teams of 3 to 4 people and caulked around leaky areas like vents, windows, and sliding doors; installed gaskets behind outlet covers and switch plates located on external walls; install low-flow showerheads, faucet aerators, and toilet tumblers to decrease water use; replaced incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent ones, and gave each unit a power strip and show them how to use it to decrease phantom power drain when appliances are turned off.

The volunteers, ACE, VCE, and AMEN staff will continue this program, with plans to do energy retrofits in more affordable apartment units, offer workshops for residents on actions they can take to improve energy efficiency and lower their utility bills, and conduct energy assessments for homeowners on how they can increase energy efficiency in their homes. The next group of energy volunteers will be trained in fall 2012 and six work days are already scheduled for 2012-13.

Advice to Communities

It is important to have experts knowledgeable in building sciences to lead the volunteer training. Partner with key organizations who have access to resources including knowledge about energy efficiency, connections to affordable housing owners/developers or property managers, grant writers, and sources for supplies used in the energy retrofits.

Always recruit and train more volunteers than needed because some will not stay committed to the program. Communities may want to establish a requirement that each volunteer commit a minimum of 40 hours to the project. Equip each team with a leader to take charge of each work day in the apartments coordinating tenant registration, gathering supplies, and managing the day's logistics.

Botetourt County

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Issue: Economic development, Quality of life, Other: Preservation, Recreation

The James River finds its source at the confluence of the Jackson and Cowpasture Rivers in Botetourt County. These headwaters commonly known as the Upper James River have played an important role in the economies of the communities. Historically, the river was used as a transportation system with a series of locks and canals used to carry goods downstream towards Lynchburg. Today, the river is a recreational corridor used for fishing, canoeing, kayaking, and water viewing along its 45-mile stretch in Botetourt. The major assets of the Upper James River include its scenery, world-class bass fishing, friendly small town atmosphere, and its rich history and diverse character.

In 2008, the county began a discussion on how to capitalize on the river's many assets and make the Upper James River a premier outdoor recreation asset. The goal was to create a water-based trail system linking the different assets found along the James River to form the Upper James Water Trail (UJRWT). A "Water Trail" is a small boat and/or paddling route (or series of routes) along a waterway that combines recreation and environmental awareness while linking communities and land-based attractions such as recreational trails, historic sites, and parks. The "Upper James River Water Trail" included the development of a brand image, website, brochure, and informational kiosks installed at each public access point located in Botetourt County. To achieve this goal, issues had to be addressed on how to develop a viable outdoor recreation and tourism attraction 1) using existing river access points that are owned and operated by two different State agencies, 2) creating additional traditional access points on private property by working with local land and business owners, and 3) encouraging new local business development.

Leadership Team's Role

Through a strong committee representing various key stakeholders groups, the project came together seamlessly and exceeded all original expectations. Botetourt County Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Department developed and used a strategic analysis tool to improve, enhance, and preserve the environmental, historic, economical and recreational opportunities on the river for both residents and

visitors alike to enjoy by creating a water trail. The momentum and successes realized to date has led to discussions with neighboring counties for possible project expansion into their communities. Partners on the project included Botetourt County Departments of Parks, Recreation & Tourism, Developmental Services, and Public Works; Virginia Department of Transportation; Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries; Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation; Virginia Tourism Corporation; The National Park Service (Chesapeake Gateways Network); Town of Buchanan; Boy Scouts; James River Association; and local business owners, land owners, river enthusiasts and educators.

Impact

The brand image, website and brochure for the Upper James River Water Trail has resulted in steady increases in visitors to Botetourt County as the marketing efforts have appeared in countless state and regional publications, visitor centers and other outdoor resource locations. A local canoe livery operating in the Town of Buchanan has reported a 15 percent increase in business each year since the UJRWT Marketing Campaign was initiated in 2010. A private landowner successfully opened a primitive campground along the river banks in 2010 and is now in the second full year of operation. One new restaurant and one new indoor miniature golf course has opened within the Town of Buchanan in 2011, directly adjacent to one of the seven public access points. The Upper James River Water Trail has been the recipient of numerous awards including, The Virginia Association of Counties "2011 Achievement Award for Model Program- Parks & Recreation," Virginia Parks and Recreation Society's "2011 Best Promotional Effort- Electronic Media" and "2011 Best Promotional Effort-Basic Promotional Piece," and The Valley Conservation Council's "2011 Model for Development Award"

The Upper James River Water Trail has been warmly embraced by the Botetourt Community, as well as the various state agencies involved. Three river clean up days have been held since 2009, and Botetourt County has received over \$60,000 in cash and in-kind donations to make improvements to existing river

access sites as well as for development of two new river access points on private property.

Advice to Communities

The most critical aspect of this project was the careful selection of the leadership team to include an engaged and representative group.

Culpeper County & The Town of Culpeper

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Issue: Economic development, Quality of life

The Town of Culpeper is located in the geographical center of Culpeper County, Virginia. It is the focal point of the County and the seat of local Government. The Town owns and operates its own water and sewer system, while the unincorporated areas of the County rely primarily on wells and septic systems. The Town and its environs are the primary growth area of the County, but the Town is approaching build-out. As such, the area around the Town, the “Town environs,” have long been an area planned for development, especially commercial and light industrial uses which improve the tax base.

Based upon this development pattern, the need for public water and sewer service in the Town environs has been an issue for decades. The Town, also in need of expanding its tax base, has contemplated boundary expansion for many years as well. The Voluntary Settlement Agreement which the County and the Town came up with to solve these issues is highly innovative, adaptive, and could be a model for others to follow.

As part of the major tenets of the Agreement, The County agrees

- to a voluntary boundary adjustment of three areas of primarily retail commercial development which will substantially increase the Town tax base. This initial boundary adjustment occurred July 1, 2012.
- that once every ten years for the next 30 years the Town can expand through boundary adjustment by Ordinance. Such expansion will be limited to areas adjacent to the Town within the County designated water and sewer service area that meet certain development density criteria. In this manner, the County decides how it develops, but once developed in an urban manner at urban densities, it is eligible for boundary adjustment, but no more frequently than every ten years.
- the Town can grow on the general principal that “if it looks like a town and acts like a town” it should be part of the Town. It allows the County to plan and manage the development and to be assured that utilities are available to serve such development.

The financial impact on the County from boundary adjustment is minimal, as the County still retains the ability to collect real estate taxes on land within the Town. To reinforce this, the Town agreed not to seek city status for 30 years.

Engagement of Stakeholders

Local government offices/elected leadership from both communities collaborated on the plan and engaged the Commission on Local Government for further guidance.

Leadership Team’s Role

The Town and County staffs worked as a team with the Board of Supervisors of Culpeper County and the Town Council.

Impact

The Voluntary Settlement Agreement is innovative in many ways, but most importantly, it provides full flexibility for whatever development patterns lay ahead. The Agreement resolved 20 or more years of dispute over two major issues with a single, adaptive solution that epitomizes cooperation between jurisdictions. The Agreement was fully vetted by the Commission On Local Government and they made no substantive changes or recommendations.

The County sought to have certainty and stability in knowing that service would be available and to ensure that water and sewer service rate payers in the County would be treated exactly the same as those in Town. The Town sought to retain control of its water and sewer system and to expand its customer base without putting businesses in the Town of Culpeper at a competitive disadvantage. Both jurisdictions are satisfied that the Voluntary Settlement Agreement is the best outcome for the community as a whole. Further, the Agreement is good for the Commonwealth in that it avoids duplication of services requiring additional wastewater discharges.

Advice to Communities

The solution in this instance solved two very significant distinctly different problems: orderly and regular expansion of the Town’s boundaries and utility services for the County. Although complex, in some ways, the beauty of the Agreement is in its simplicity of concept. The details are extensive, but

the concept is clear and concise. The three judge panel that signed the Final Order called it a model for other local governments and complimented the jurisdictions for their good work. Of additional note is the fact that while the Agreement was crafted through intensive discussions between the Town and County staffs, the details were hammered out by many face-to-face meetings of the full Town Council and County Board of Supervisors. Both governing bodies recognized that they had to work out conflicts at the highest level.

Grayson County

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Issue: Education, Other: Renewable Energy

The Grayson County Board of Supervisors recognized some of its public buildings were not energy efficient and were wasting valuable taxpayer assets. The Board embarked on an initiative to upgrade the courthouse with green technologies and energy efficient equipment. As part of its energy initiative, energy audits were conducted for the public school system and several existing industries. As a result, the updated, energy efficient building has been offered to the Grayson County School System and Wytheville Community College as a functional classroom.

Leadership Team's Role

In June 2010, Grayson County administrative staff, Allen & Shariff Engineering, and Highlands Mechanical led the visioning, planning, and implementation phases of the project. The group collaborated with the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy, The Virginia Tobacco Commission, and Wytheville Community College.

The goal was to provide a comprehensive system to
1) generate renewable photovoltaic

solar energy, 2) replace water source heat pumps with higher efficiency SEER units, 3) replace the cooling tower with a high efficiency unit, 4) add an automated thermostat system and facility management software to further reduce energy and building operational cost, and 5) implement a public education process on energy efficiency.

Impact

As of April 2012, the new HVAC equipment and automated thermostat systems has increased efficiency, lowered electrical use, and operates the HVAC system at full capacity only when the zone or building is occupied. The solar photovoltaic panels produce 200 watts per panel and produces a total of 15 kws at full capacity. The Learning Lab also serves as the fully functional Emergency Operations Center.

Advice to Communities

Once a good plan is in place, it is paramount to form a strong partnership with the engineering group and contractor and have periodical meetings to ensure objectives are being met.

Greensville County

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Issue: Education, Economic development, Quality of life

In 2000 the US Census Bureau reported only 62 percent of Greensville County residents age 25 and older had obtained a high school diploma, compared to 82 percent statewide. This low educational attainment was reflected in the County's low household median income of \$32,002 compared to the statewide median of \$46,677. Strategies were needed to design a plan for increasing the number of residents with a high school diploma and for equipping the residents with necessary workforce skills.

Engagement of Stakeholders

In 2003, Greensville County held two public forums to solicit comments on area workforce development issues. The forums were advertised in the Independent Messenger, a newspaper of general circulation in the area. Notices were also posted at the Greensville County Government Center, Social Services Office, Virginia Employment Commission, and the Richardson Memorial Library. A total of 32 stakeholders attended the two forums ready to discuss the community's workforce issues. The industry representatives identified the need for applicants to have:

- interview and presentation skills;
- measurement skills from 12-inch rulers to hydraulic gauges;
- a higher level of education with at least a GED,
- basic life skills,
- more career exploration opportunities, and
- certifications/programs in fields such as electronics and hydraulics.

A survey was developed through the efforts of the staff of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, local county staff, a representative of Southside Programs for Adult Continuing Education (SPACE), and a representative of the Virginia Workforce Center located in Emporia. The surveys were distributed through the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC), SPACE, and Southside Virginia Community College. VEC also mailed over 200 copies to active claimants in the Greensville/Emporia area and those registered in the SPACE programs who were pursuing their high school

diploma or GED through the Workforce Investment Program.

The participants were asked what made it difficult to find the job they want. The largest percentage (38%) of VEC respondents stated they needed more education and 26 percent felt they lacked the skills necessary. The SVCC responses were higher with 65 percent and 27 percent respectively. When both participating groups were asked if a job-training facility were located in Greensville County would they be interested in taking classes, 91 percent replied "yes".

Leadership Team's Role

A management team was formed to review the demographics, public forum discussions, the VEC/SVCC survey results, and the current workforce training programs. The management team consisted of representatives from the local industries, existing educators, workforce program providers, local government, unemployed, underemployed, and the VEC.

The group decided to construct a place in which to conduct a workforce development program. Utilizing federal and state resources including USDA Rural Development and the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, the group set a goal to develop and implement a program which would unify existing efforts such as courses offered by Southside Virginia Community College and recognized programs such as Work Keys.

The Southside Virginia Education Center (SVEC) was conceived through the partnering of local industry and businesses, local government, Southside Virginia Community College, workforce service providers including the Workforce Investment Board, and the Southside Programs for Adult Continuing Education. Each partner has a seat on the Board of Directors for the facility ensuring their voice in the development process. The Board meets monthly to continue developing the programs needed by current and future industry. Additional members to the Board have been appointed by Longwood University and the local public school board. These appointments will continue to bridge the gap between high school programs and workforce training programs at SVEC.

Impact

The Southside Virginia Education Center located in Greensville County, opened its doors in August 2008 with the first 18,000 square foot phase completed. Since that time enrollment in workforce training education has more than tripled. The public focus on educational attainment and the construction of the Southside Virginia Education Center has already had a measurable positive effect on the population. The 2010 Census shows a 7 percent rise in the number of residents 25 years or older who have obtained a high school degree or equivalent. In the last two years SVEC has coordinated with staff from Mary Baldwin College and Longwood University to bring four year degree programs to the site. Currently students can receive a degree in elementary education, business, marketing, health care administration, or criminal justice. Additional programs such as social work and nursing are anticipated with the construction of the third phase of SVEC.

In addition to classrooms and office space for Southside Virginia Community College, the facility houses:

- a resource center for public use,
- a large computer classroom,
- a health science lab, two distance learning classrooms,
- an industrial training lab,
- a conference room, bookstore, and
- student lounge.

All classrooms are equipped with SmartBoards, projectors, VCR/DVD combos and instructor computer and printers to enhance the learning process.

Greensville County completed construction of Phase II of SVEC in March 2010. The Golden Leaf Commons is a 9,000 square foot open conference center designed to enhance the workforce training abilities. The room is used for a variety of functions including business and industry events as well as civic and individual ceremonies. Training sessions have been held at the Golden Leaf Commons by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, the US Army, The Virginia Department of Health, as well as private local and regional businesses and industries.

Phase III, scheduled to open in fall of 2013, will be a 21,900 square foot addition that will include 5 classrooms, 4,000 square feet of Virginia Employment Commission office space, and a large technology based instruction lab. The lab will include vital technical education courses. Southside Virginia Community College will implement programs in electronic technology, high performance manufacturing, technical studies and industrial service technology in Phase III. The Board of Directors designed phase III with the goal of better educating our citizens for advanced technology based jobs.

Advice to Communities

Neglecting to bring the service providers to the table with employers and workforce representatives creates a gap in what a community needs and what is being offered. You must have all parties work together from the beginning to be successful.

Highland County

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Issue: Education, Economic development, Quality of life

In 2004 the Highland County farming community began a discussion on how to address consistently low prices for agricultural stock and products, a lack of marketing opportunities for its livestock and farm products, and a lack of skills for implementing marketing strategies.

Engagement of Stakeholders

Virginia Cooperative Extension partnered with The Highland Center to provide leadership for a steering committee composed of representatives from West Virginia Cooperative Extension, The Highland Sheep and Wool Producers Association, The Highland/Bath Cattle Association, and individuals and farmers from the counties of Highland and Bath in Virginia and from the counties of Pendleton and Pocohontus in West Virginia.

Leadership Team's Role

The partnership provided the means for the steering committee to investigate the feasibility and realization of a multi-county/state agricultural center that would provide the needed infrastructure to the local agricultural community for live animal marketing and slaughter and further processing of farm livestock products.

State and federal partners included USDA, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Virginia Tech, West Virginia University, and Virginia Cooperative Extension. In addition to numerous local businesses, the Highland Telephone Cooperative invested its resources along with multiple financial institutions including First and Citizens Bank, Blue Grass Valley Bank, Farm Credit, and the Rural Electrification Development Loan program.

Impact

The Allegheny Highlands Agricultural Center in Highland County has provided pens and scales for live animal marketing for the past five years. The state-of-the-art slaughter and processing facility was completed in early 2012 and is operating under the Allegheny Meats name. By mid fall of 2012, the processing smoker will be completed to provide additional options for users.

The Center has the potential for over 5000 head of live animals to be marketed through the facility which will increase revenue from the animal sales. The USDA slaughter facility has enable producers to sell locally grown and processed meat to new customers. An extended processing facility will enable producers to market unique meat products from their animals which will again provide a source for increasing farm revenue. Farmers will also experience a decrease in transportation costs because of the local facility. Overall the new facility will provide sustainable marketing options for local products to increase farm revenue.

Advice to Communities

Be persistent and patient. Involve as many potential users as possible. Find solutions to roadblocks and be willing to change to make the project go forward. Use any and all resources that will help move the project forward. Leave egos at home and concentrate on the end product and the reason for helping to make it happen.

James City County

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Issue: Quality of life

The James City County Extension Leadership Council (ELC) needed to tell the Extension story and confirm that the programming was being offered that met the needs of the James City County residents. As a result, the “Extension Showcase” was launched in 2001. Community residents participated in multiple sessions over seven (7) years where they gathered information on Extension programs, shared their suggestions for programming ideas, and offered their perspective on community issues

Engagement of Stakeholders

The Extension Leadership Council and local Extension agents did not act alone. The leadership team actively invited participation from all stakeholders including the planning, service authority, local Social Services representatives, human resource organizations, the Salvation Army, community action agency, churches, the health department, food banks, community association presidents, and other community groups.

Leadership Team’s Role

The leadership team planned the event, facilitated the listening sessions, summarized and assessed the information gathered at each session.

Impact

Extension was able to ensure that programs offered were meeting the needs of the citizens, a better understanding of Extension programming and services was developed by the participants, and new network of stakeholders was developed.

Advice to Communities

Engaging local stakeholders is successful if the timing is right and support is secured from key individuals.

Prince George County

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Issue: Quality of life

The Woman's Club of Prince George County has worked for the last 40 years to petition and encourage the county government to build a facility and obtain library service in the county. The initial push began with a Woman's Club member seeking Story Hour and library programs for her children. The club quickly took up the project to obtain a county library and related services for all county residents. Initial strong efforts encouraged the county to join in formation of the Appomattox Regional Library System (ARLS). In cooperation with the City of Hopewell and Dinwiddie County, this successful cooperative regional effort was endorsed by The Virginia State Library. This endorsement brought the benefits of increased funding and efficient use of library resources for each area, mainly through a bookmobile system which took books and services to the counties. However, the objective of a permanent library building and related services within Prince George remained active.

Engagement of Stakeholders

From the beginning of the long process to obtain a library for our community, Club members have quietly attended meetings, written letters, and made calls and visits in the attempt to get the local government to act. Finally, in 2006, plans seemed to come together for funding for the new library, including a time-limited matching grant from the Base Realignment And Closing (BRAC) initiative activity at Fort Lee. Then an article indicating an obstacle appeared in March 2008 in *The Prince George Journal* which changed our focus and goals for this project.

At the March 17, 2008 regular club meeting, The Woman's Club of Prince George County voted to contact each member of the Board of Supervisors to express the club's concern and encourage the Board to move forward on this project. The Board did decide to have the Planning and Zoning staff move forward on the project, focusing on the Request for Proposals for the recommendation of an architect. The library project was scheduled for vote as part of the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) at the April 22, 2008, meeting.

During this time, Club members again spoke to the Prince George County Board of Supervisors in

support of the library and continued to work on the process of educating county leaders and the public on what benefits the community would achieve with an adequately-sized library. The Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the CIP (including the library) for Fiscal Years 2009-2013. The Board formed the Library Site Selection Committee comprised of two Supervisors, the county administrator, two members of the county staff, a citizen (our club spokesperson was selected), and four members from the Appomattox Regional Library System Board of Trustees. This committee was formed to begin the process of selecting the appropriate location for the construction of the new library and making the recommendation to the Board for further action.

Leadership Team's Role

The Woman's Club of Prince George County set out to refocus the public debate on the importance of the county library and encourage county government leaders to move forward with the approved Capital Improvement Plan to construct a new main library at or near the Prince George County Courthouse Complex that meets or exceeds the Virginia State Library Guidelines for our population.

With a Site Selection Committee in place, the Club continued to demonstrate its support and researched ideas for raising additional funds for the library project. The Club believed that raising funds to invest in a library building and services would positively demonstrate our commitment. Club representative spoke at the July 14, 2009 meeting urging the Board of Supervisors to construct a 12,000 sq. ft. library building and announced the creation of a separate dedicated fund established by the Club to support this effort. The Board unanimously approved the issuance of funding for the new branch library.

Construction began in March 2010, and was completed in the summer of 2011. The grand opening of the new Prince George County Library was held July 23, 2011.

Impact

Prince George County needed a significant main library facility located in the center of the community as part of the regional library system. The county was poised to attract and welcome a major increase

of personnel because of the Military's Base Realignment and Closing Initiative and planned expansion of Fort Lee. Furthermore, the county wanted to attract suitable business and industry to provide employment and increase the tax base to support a growing community – and even more importantly, wanted to equip its youth to remain in the county as part of a vibrant, growing community.

A community with an adequate, full-service library facility is part of the “shopping list” for any business or industry seeking a new location and is part of a balanced, healthy community with a population educated and prepared for employment. A significant branch library at or near the Courthouse Complex offering a full range of services and programs would serve the educational and community needs of a growing population.

In the first six months of operation, the Prince George County Library issued 1,000 new library cards to citizens of Prince George and Fort Lee. The facility is constantly used as a meeting place by the county administration, local groups and civic organizations. Citizens utilize the technology

resources for research, to apply for jobs, and to gather educational resources. Children and youth heavily use both traditional and advanced technology resources daily.

Advice to Communities

Refocus the public debate on the importance of the project and encourage the local Government Leaders to move forward on proposed projects in their communities. The Project should be started with one Goal/Objective, often called the Project Statement which is publicized and explained to residents to encourage and gather community support. If there is resistance to the project, additional goals/objectives should be added to resolve obstacles that are encountered. All Goals/Objectives should be inter-related to achieve the scope of the Project Statement. . The best advice to a group/organization is keep a constant, steady, and organized approach to the project. Galvanize your community to support your project through the local media, by attending meetings, raising funds, distributing literature in support of your project, and NEVER GIVE UP!

Rockingham County Poultry Region

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In 2004 Shenandoah Valley poultry farmers were in jeopardy of losing their livelihood when Pilgrim's Pride announced that it would close its Shenandoah Valley turkey division. The closure would result in 1800 people losing their jobs and approximately 170 contract turkey growers required to close their production contracts. This devastating event would be another layer of challenges for those just beginning to rebound from a major avian influenza outbreak a few years before.

A group of affected turkey growers banded together to form a turkey production and processing cooperative that eventually purchased the Pilgrim's Pride Turkey Division. The Virginia Poultry Grower's Cooperative (VPGC) began operations in November 2004, succeeded in saving most of the jobs, and most affected growers were offered production contracts by the cooperative. VPGC continues to be very successful.

Engagement of Stakeholders

The stakeholders were engaged in the discussion and planning stages. Participants included Southern States Foundation's Cooperative Development Center, USDA Rural Development, Congressman Goodlatte, Senators Allen and J. Warner, Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative, Farm Credit, Virginia Farm Bureau Federation, Virginia Poultry Federation, Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, local governments, and numerous others.

Leadership Team's Role

The leadership team 1) designed plans to form a new company and acquire the complex, 2) raised money to complete a feasibility study, 3) performed due diligence and incorporated, 4) engaged affected growers and other stakeholders to identify needs, 5) secured qualified individuals to address the needs, 6) enlisted the membership, and 7) secured equity and financing to purchase complex.

In addition, they sought advice from a variety of mentors including dairy coop leaders and the Iowa West Liberty turkey cooperative which formed under similar circumstances previously. The group used the media effectively to tell their story and keep the community informed while maintaining confidential business information.

Impact

Most processing and production support jobs slated to end were saved. Nearly 80 percent of the affected growers joined the VPGC. The loss of millions of dollars among residents and the localities, not to mention the untold personal losses, was averted. To this day the VPGC continues to be a thriving agribusiness that supports the community in Rockingham and surrounding counties. Many turkey growers will tell you in hindsight that formation of the VPCG was one of the best things that ever happened for them.

Advice to Communities

The turkey growers and others who formed the VPGC did so with their backs against the wall, under an extremely short time frame and public scrutiny, and at considerable financial risk. They had no choice but to believe in their faith and believe they could succeed. If it were not for their faith and sense of community, it is possible that the effort would have succeeded.

It is vital to identify leaders committed to the project that are capable of listening to a variety of input and to the experts. Information must be assessed and decisions must be made without significant emotional influence. Leaders are needed who can effectively express themselves to potential co-op members, business partners, and other stakeholders. Turf issues must be set aside and people must work together as a team keeping affected parties and the public informed with deliberate and measured messages when and where appropriate via a single spokesperson or office.

Southern Virginia: Mecklenburg, Brunswick, Halifax, Charlotte, Victoria, Chase City, South Hill, La Crosse, Clarksville, Drakes Branch, Halifax, South Boston, Lawrenceville

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Issue: Education, Economic development, Quality of life

Railroad tracks were abandoned throughout Southern Virginia and communities struggled with how to utilize the land that had once served as an economic tool for rural communities. In 2006, local organizations worked with Virginia Tourism Corporation to design a plan that would revive the railroad track area and created The Tobacco Heritage Trail. The goal of the trail system was to 1) preserve the historic railroad corridor, 2) offer an avenue for historic and science education, 3) provide the opportunity for small business development to support the trail and outdoor recreation, and 4) create a safe place for citizens to ride, walk, exercise, in a safe and natural environment.

Leadership Team’s Role

A leadership team collaborated and worked to acquire the property, construct the trail, and maintain the trail corridor. Stakeholders included the Roanoke River Rails to Trails, Southside Planning District Commission, town and county governments, Virginia Department of Transportation, The National Park Service, Virginia Tourism Corporation, Department of Conservation and Recreation, Land Planning and Design, and Anderson and Associates landscape designers.

Impact

In 2006, Chmura Economics & Analytics completed the Economic Impact Study for the Tobacco Heritage Trail. The analysis offered a conservative estimate the trail could attract over 197,000 visits a year, with direct spending of \$3.5 million in the region. Adding the indirect and induced effect, trail visitor spending can generate \$4.6 million in sales in the region and create 61 jobs. Most of those jobs are in industries providing services for visitors such as restaurants, lodging, and retail.

The Tobacco Heritage Trail is a system of long distance recreational non-motorized trails. The trail will be an important community asset by preserving a greenway, offering an attractive venue for exercise and enjoying nature, as well as, providing economic benefits. As the route winds through the Southern Virginia countryside, users will be exposed to the area’s farming heritage and current agrarian and forestry practices. The trail will be a key economic development component as both a community amenity—which is attractive to businesses—and through the dollars trail users will generate.

Advice to Communities

Develop a clear vision of the project. Gain support from the local governments and work with all resources available.

Southwest Virginia

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Issue: Economic development

In 2006, representatives from 19 counties and a 4 city region began to establish its vision to link local artisans, farmers, and craft venues into a branded and well publicized tourist destination. The long-range objectives included 1) create a network of artisan driving trails that included at least one loop in each of 19 counties and 4 city region covered by the project, 2) increase sales revenues of artisans, farmers, and craft venues in the region, 3) increase visitation to the region's communities and craft-related venues, 4) enhance existing venues as a result of increased sales and visitation, 5) provide Round the Mountain members and communities a collaborative and unified marketing effort exceeding what they may have been able to do on their own, and 6) develop the reputation of Southwest Virginia as a nationally recognized craft region.

Leadership Team's Role

Round the Mountain: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Network spearheaded the project. Partners included Virginia Tourism Corporation and a group of volunteers from each of the 19 counties and 4 cities served by the project. These representatives composed the Trail Development Committee. Composition of the committees varied by community but included the localities tourism representative, artisans, agritourism business owners, craft venue representatives, Virginia Cooperative Extension agents, craft school and museum representatives, Chamber of Commerce representatives, local restaurant and lodging owners, and other stakeholders as identified by the community. A partnership was also established with the Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission.

Round the Mountain developed the criteria and guidelines for the Artisan Trail network. RTM also developed a "toolkit" for each community to use in developing their individual community trail. Using a RTM facilitated process, each community identified

trail sites to participate in the project and printed a brochure that includes a map, community narratives, photographs, and listings that include artisan studios, galleries, agritourism sites and supporting businesses. In addition to the printed brochure, all trail sites are also featured on the RTM website (www.roundthemountain.org) and its trip planning feature.

From these efforts, The Artisan Trails of Southwest Virginia was created. It is a network of driving trails that connects the visitor to artisan studios, craft shops, galleries, agritourism businesses, such as, wineries, farmers markets, and working farms, as well as unique restaurants, lodging and related points of interest. A total of 15 artisan trails have been established throughout its 19 county, 4 city service area of Southwest Virginia.

Impact

The artisan trails project created a total of 15 individual trails that make up the Artisan Trails of Southwest Virginia network. The project recruited 364 artisan studios, craft venues and agritourism businesses, along with 48 restaurants and 51 lodging sites to create a robust driving trail for Southwest Virginia. Over 560 entrepreneurs are ready for business and are now part of this new creative economy initiated by Round the Mountain. The impact of the artisan trail network is just beginning to be measured. Coupled with The Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail (RTM's sister organization), Heartwood: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Gateway, and the work of the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation, the impact to the Southwest Virginia region is expected to be over \$23 million per year.

Advice to Communities

Getting buy-in and involvement from stakeholders is imperative.

Southwest Virginia - Tazewell, Buchanan, Russell, Wise, Lee, and Scott Counties, and the City of Norton

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Issue: Economic development, Quality of life

The coalfields region of Southwest Virginia faces a variety of economic and quality of life challenges, with many being a result of the once secluded mountainous terrain of the region which has delayed many infrastructure improvements that impact economic development progress. The ebb and flow of coal and other leading industries in the region continue to be a factor as well. However, the mountainous terrain is now emerging as a primary opportunity for economic growth through tourism and outdoor recreation opportunities. Residents and visitors are increasingly recognizing such opportunities, and local leaders are developing and implementing plans to enhance the region. Such efforts are not only intended to enhance the area as a great place to live, but also to visit and enjoy through outdoor recreation, as well as experiencing the Appalachian culture that is so prominent and preserved throughout the region.

With all these factors considered, especially with such abundant beautiful views and terrain, as well as potential interest by coal, lumber, and other large private landowners, the leadership of the “coalfield” counties (Heart of Appalachia tourism region of Virginia) expressed an interest in developing a region-wide, multi-use trail system for ATV/OHVs, equestrian, biking, and other uses. The Virginia Tourism Corporation was engaged to assist and the Spearhead Trails initiative spawned as a result.

Leadership Team’s Role

In 2007, the Spearhead Trails initiative was born with ongoing stakeholder meetings and discussions facilitated by the Virginia Tourism Corporation, but with involvement by a number of citizens, organizations, and agencies. As goals and objectives formalized, and local and state leadership became involved, the supporters of the Spearhead Trails initiative later evolved from a grassroots steering committee to the formalized Southwest Regional Recreation Authority (SRRA) of Virginia, with a board representatives from the eight Heart of Appalachia localities, as well as representatives from the Virginia Tourism Corporation, the private business and large landowner company sectors. Partners and supporters include but are not limited to: Virginia Tourism Corporation, U.S. Forest Service,

Lee County, Wise County, Scott County, Buchanan County, Russell County, Tazewell County, Dickenson County (and many towns within), as well as the City of Norton, Planning District Commissions in the region, Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission, Motorcycle Industry Council, and the Appalachia Regional Commission/DHCD.

With a formalized leadership and Authority in place, the energetic steering committee members formed a separate supporting “friends of” group called the Spearhead Trailblazers to continue supporting, assisting, and being engaged in the effort, which is anticipated to become a non-profit organization. With assistance of agencies and organizations, the SRRA board worked to secure funds for and completed a feasibility study, as well as an implementation plan for Spearhead Trails. The active and aggressive board continues to establish partnerships, set policies, develop and implement components of the implementation plan, and most recently hired a full-time executive director. The first of several planned multi-use permit-required trails are scheduled to open in 2013, with others anticipated in following years, most of which will be on private lands through partnerships and agreements with those landowners.

Impact

According to the comprehensive plan completed by WMTH Inc. for the Southwest Regional Recreation Authority, when fully operational, the Spearhead Trails system is anticipated to 1) help create 300-500 full-time jobs 2) bring 200,000 visitors to the region annually, 3) bring an additional \$30 million to local economies annually. Businesses and amenities created as a result of the trails system will include restaurants, shops, and various others intended to serve visitors and enhance the quality of life of current residents.

Advice to Communities

When there is interest and support for what seems to be feasible ideas, efforts, and initiatives in communities, consider engaging a neutral facilitator and resources from the appropriate local, state or other partner such as Virginia Cooperative Extension

or Virginia Tourism Corporation. Such resources can assist with beginning consideration discussions, help with learning other models, and serve as a liaison to other resources. Holding a “Do we really want to do this?” stakeholder meeting early to present models, potential, challenges, costs, and other issues and determine “who is really in?” could provide beneficial. Closely reviewing other models and establishing relationships with other similar organizations/efforts is recommended. Developing a strategic plan and milestones timeline early on is important if there is confirmed interest and considerable support for the effort. Celebrating

successes both among stakeholders and publicly is key to avoid burn-out, keep enthusiasm growing, and to assure everyone of the progress. Determine what studies and other plans are needed early on, as well as the resources and costs of such plans. Consider keeping the initiative “low-key” and discussions internal (among stakeholders only) until such studies are done. Emphasize the local stakeholder and grassroots aspect of the project to avoid “top down” concerns and to emphasize that success relies on local leadership and involvement. Plan for sustainability of the project or initiative throughout process.

State of Virginia

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Issue: Education, Economic development, Quality of life

The Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) established the Tourism Development Division in July 2005 as part of Governor Mark Warner's "Virginia Works" initiative that focused on rural areas and economic development, and is part of the VTC Partnership Marketing (PM) Division. The mission of Virginia Tourism Corporation Partnership Marketing Development is to maximize the potential of economic development and job creation through tourism within the Commonwealth of Virginia. The vision is to make sure every community has realized their potential as a tourism destination.

Beginning with two staff members, VTC has expanded its team to five highly experienced individuals with each averaging approximately twenty years of experience. The VTC Tourism Development Team focuses on entrepreneurial development, new product development, assistance with developing and marketing destinations, and strategic planning.

Leadership Team's Role

The goal of the VTC Tourism Development Team is to establish programs that, after the initial support of the leadership team, can stand on their own and grow. The VTC Tourism Development Team works to establish collaborative partnerships within their coverage areas utilizing the resources from federal agencies including USDA Rural Development, Appalachian Regional Commission. Virginia agencies are actively involved in the work of VTC and include the Department of Housing and Community Development, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Department of Business Assistance, Department of Conservation and Recreation, Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and Virginia Tobacco Commission. As it serves local communities, VTC also works with Virginia Tech, UVA Wise, Virginia Community College System, and Virginia Cooperative Extension along with financial institutions including People, Inc, Virginia Community Capital.

The VTC Tourism Development division's programs are made possible through a variety of partnerships. The Entrepreneur Express series of workshops were an initial partnership among VTC, the Virginia Department of Business Assistance, and Virginia

Cooperative Extension. These workshops have grown from Southwest Virginia to a statewide series of workshops that focus on new and existing business development. The VTC Tourism Development Team also partners with other state, local, and federal agencies for projects that range from trail development, such as the Wilderness Road Trail, Coal Heritage Trail, etc., to community development projects such as the Clinch River Valley Initiative. The VTC Tourism Development Team also works with existing DMO offices, and other organizations to market Virginia as a travel destination.

Impact

The Virginia Tourism Corporation commissioned a study in 2009 to measure the impact of VTC Partnership Marketing (PM) Division programs and the VTC Tourism Development efforts. Findings from the survey indicated that program participants are more likely to:

- have a more positive view of their business,
- say their business was better today than it was in the previous year,
- report improvements in employees' skills,
- increase partnerships with other industries, increase marketing dollar reach, and
- show an increase in staff morale.

In addition, 80 percent of participants say they actually did something or made changes as a result of the PM programs they participated in or services they used. Participants who participated in three or more PM programs were significantly more likely than other participants to report an increase in:

- web traffic,
- employees' skills or knowledge,
- industry partnerships,
- reach of marketing dollars,
- inquiries and visitation/attendance.

Advice to Communities

Always make sure you have a measurement mechanism in place to gauge impacts. Establish definitive baselines early on, and use those baselines. Establish partnerships, and do not become discouraged! There will be bumps in the road, but success will come through deliberative actions, partnerships, and patience.

Winchester City

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Issue: Economic development, Quality of life

The Taylor Hotel and theatre is the second most endangered historic building in Virginia according to the Virginia Society for Historic Preservation. Located in the heart of Winchester's Oldtown pedestrian mall, the hotel was declared blighted and was set for demolition. In 2011, the City and the Economic Development Authority decided to acquire the building and enter into a public/private partnership to renovate it, thereby preserving this valued historic property and maintain the historic integrity of our Downtown.

Leadership Team's Role

Multiple organizations came together to establish the public/private partnership. The partnership included The City of Winchester, The Economic Development Authority, United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, the United States Department of the Interior, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, The Wishneff Group, and Preservation of Historic Winchester.

The Winchester City Council made the commitment to save the building and provided a \$650,000 investment and obtained a \$1 million in loan guarantee from HUD for Phase 1 of the project which includes the removal of portions of the property that collapsed, convert that area into a public park, and stabilize the main portion of the original hotel. Once that work is completed the property will be conveyed to the EDA, a partnership will be established with the private development group, and \$250,000 in private equity along with \$750,000 in State and Federal Historic tax credits will be secured. This partnership will secure a private bank loan in the amount of \$1 million. This will result in a total of \$2 million that will be used to complete Phase II. Phase II will involve the creation of 10,000 sq ft. of leasable commercial space, 5 upscale apartments, an outdoor entertainment area that will seat 500 attendees, and a 6,500 sq ft farmers' market building.

Impact

By 2013, an adaptive reuse of a historic building in Old Town Winchester will be achieved thereby creating an entertainment/farmers' market center with retail and housing options, while remaining true to the historic uses of the property.

This project will generate approximately \$300,000 a year in new meals and sales taxes to the City, provide a venue for 12,000 attendees a year to enjoy live entertainment, and make available 6,500 sq ft of covered Farmers Market space that will enable the sale of local produce.

Advice to Communities

Reach out to the community for support of the vision and be prepared to explore as many funding options as possible.