Positioning the Region for Economic Growth

Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs was first established as an U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA) University Center in 1996. It has maintained this position for 18 years. The Voinovich School University Center is a joint project with Bowling Green State University which collectively serves 59 rural Ohio counties: 32 Appalachian counties and 27 counties in northwestern Ohio. The ongoing support received through the EDA assists the Voinovich School in providing direct business assistance services, applied research initiatives and an annual State of the Region Conference. The overall result is the positioning of the region for economic growth.

BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

The Voinovich School has fostered an environment of collaboration between regional economic development centers and agencies. These collaborations aid the provision of direct business assistance services to businesses and entrepreneurs. Some of these agencies or groups include the following:

- Appalachian Partnership for Economic Growth (APEG)
- TechGROWTH Ohio, an Ohio Entrepreneurial Signature Program that offers sources of funding to early-stage, technologically-innovative companies
- Muskingum County Business Incubator (MCBI), a regional incubator serving nine counties
- Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC)
- Small Business Development Center (SBDC)
- The Enterprise Center, a regional entrepreneur and small business support center
- Ohio University's Innovation Center, a technology-focused incubator

Entrepreneurial Assistance

The University Center program at Ohio University implements the business assistance model that the Voinovich School has developed over the last ten years. Professional staff members work directly with business owners and entrepreneurs to assess their businesses and help transform their ideas into commercializable products in the marketplace.

A range of business services are available to clients such as business planning, marketing and industry studies, competitor analyses, marketing and sales plans, financial pro forma and modeling, cost-benefit analyses, technology assessments and manufacturing shop floor redesigns all focused on making the business more competitive and enabling growth and expansion. Featured businesses:

**QuickLoadz, LLC** is a startup company that has developed technology for loading and unloading container cars from transport vehicles without damage to goods or landing surfaces. The founder recently won the Ohio University Innovation Awards’ 2013 Innovator of the Year Award. Services to the company began at the inception of the idea for the company: by helping the founder see that the solution he developed for his own problem of moving container cars was generalizable to others. Services continued to assist in the development of a business plan and the acquisition of resources to launch prototype products at an industry trade show. ([http://quickloadz.com/](http://quickloadz.com/))

**Global Cooling, Inc.** was an existing R&D firm developing a rich intellectual property portfolio, but without its own commercialization capacity. The company's value proposition is the enormous savings in energy costs that its unique technology delivers while increasing accuracy and reliability in ultra-low temperature freezer environments. In 2013, Global Cooling received the International Society of Biological and Environmental Biorepositories (ISBER) Outstanding New Product of the Year Award for their SU780U freezer. We assisted the company in identifying potential markets for commercial deployment of its core technologies. We also assisted in the recruitment of a CEO who could lead a
technical team of innovators to commercialization and manufacturing. Global Cooling won a contract for 300 freezers that yielded a multi-million dollar pre-payment and have other contracts in the pipeline. Their employment in 2013 grew from 32 to 44, and is expected to grow to 68 by the end of 2014. ([http://www.stirlingultracold.com/](http://www.stirlingultracold.com/))

**Ecolibrium** is a startup company that has developed a high quality, low cost, fast install, low part count solar panel mounting system. It is also the first 100% recycled polymer system for flat roof commercial installations. Sales for their first two products significantly accelerated in 2013, with the second six months yielding sales 4.8x the first six months. Ecolibrium’s success and increased reputation for low cost, high quality innovations is winning them larger jobs (Walmart and Target). The company released their third product in 2013, an innovation that branches into the sloped roof residential market that has the same appeal as their commercial roof product. A supply contract with the nation’s #2 residential installer is currently underway. Ecolibrium received assistance in acquiring a new CEO to allow the founder to focus on R&D, syndicating and closing out a Series B capital round of $1M in investment from three different angel funds, and assistance in raising debt financing to fund increased production capacity and inventory as sales for 2014 are projected to increase by a factor of four. ([http://www.ecolibriumsolar.com/](http://www.ecolibriumsolar.com/))

In addition to business assistance, we work closely with other local economic development agencies to make seminars, lunch and learn opportunities and workshops available to businesses. These included both Profit Mastery courses and a state of the region conference.

**Business Training**

Profit Mastery workshop series is a nationally-known 16-hour training focused on creating financial awareness and subsequent management in small businesses. This course is designed to walk business owners through financial statements to help them understand and maximize financial performance. Facilitated by a trained business professional, and held in conjunction with one of our regional partners, this two day hands-on course allows business owners to evaluate their business from an informed perspective. In the words of one workshop participant, "This is a very good tool for understanding the financial aspects of your business. Not only what profit is, but what it takes to be profitable.”

**Applied Research**

G. Jason Jolley, Ph.D. was added as principal investigator (PI) on Ohio University’s portion of the EDA University Center grant in 2014. Dr. Jolley is an Assistant Professor of Rural Economic Development and Director of the Master of Public Administration program. He also serves as a Research Fellow with Ohio University’s Center for Entrepreneurship. Dr. Jolley previously served as an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Kenan-Flagler Business School and as Senior Research Director for the Center for Competitive Economies, an applied economic development research center, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

**Regional Capacity Building**

The Mayors’ Partnership for Progress, formed in 1995, is a non-profit consortium of mayors and city managers. The purpose of the group is to provide a platform to share information and resources via open forums and invited presenters to better address common issues. Current focus areas include building capacity around infrastructure improvement, grantsmanship, energy efficiency, advanced technology and economic development. The Voinovich School provides coordination and technical assistance to the Mayors’ Partnership for Progress. The EDA University Center has provided access to resources for ongoing conversations. The Mayors Partnership represents Athens, Gallia, Hocking, Jackson, Lawrence, Meigs, Pike, Ross, Scioto, Vinton and Washington counties (over 60 communities represented). Members of Congress, as well as representatives from state offices, also participate. ([http://www.mayorspartnership.org/](http://www.mayorspartnership.org/))
Emerging Industry Initiative: Energy

Biofuels/Biomass Feasibility Study
Voinovich School is completing a short feasibility study for Jackson County, Ohio to determine the feasibility of the county continuing to pursue woody and energy grass related biomass and biofuels companies as part of the County’s economic development strategy.

Community Consultations – Carroll County
Voinovich School in partnership with the Carroll County Commissioners Office provided a consult session with President/CEO of the International Economic Development Council, Jeff Finkle; Carroll County Commissioners; Village representatives, Carroll Co. Economic Development Office; Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association; Governor’s Office of Appalachia; and Appalachian Partnership for Economic Growth. The discussion focused on leveraging economic development to sustainably capitalize on the shale industry.

Ohio Shale Development Community Impact Survey
During the summer of 2013, the Voinovich School distributed more than 500 surveys to local elected officials across 17 counties experiencing the majority of shale activity and development in Ohio. Report findings include:

- Which shale development activities are being reported across the 17 counties surveyed.
- The influence that shale development has had on population and how that has impacted local housing and public safety.
- How shale development activities have impacted local infrastructure and environment.
- Some of the ways that shale development has altered employment of area residents.
- The influence of shale development on the local economy.

Results of the Ohio Shale Development Community Impact Survey were shared with the public via an informational webinar held in February 2014. The webinar is accessible on YouTube. (http://www.ohio.edu/ce3/research/shale/shaleimpactsurvey.cfm)

Emerging Industry Initiative: Manufacturing

Regional Dashboard Maps
The employment dashboard allows individuals to examine employment by industry and establishment. Users can further search by county, by local development district, and by JobsOhio region. It is a regional deliverable that connects to the state of the region because it enables regional and local leaders to access critical industry information that can be used to attract new industries, link to the shale supply chain (small scale manufacturing in the region), and better position the region to plan for economic growth. (http://voinovichschool.ohio.edu/employment/index.html)
**Employment Dashboard Webinar**

As a result of the development of the Employment Dashboard, Ohio University was able to utilize additional EDA funds and provide a free data webinar on August 15, 2013. The webinar was attended by state, regional and local economic development principals. The hands on, how-to session allowed participants the opportunity to:

- Access industry and employment data by county, local development district, or JobsOhio region
- Find data on specific sectors
- Learn how industries have grown or declined since 2006
- Customize the user-friendly data for their county or region’s needs

**State of the Region Study**

The Voinovich School will present data on manufacturing growth and change in the region and the contribution of manufacturing to the regional economy.

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**STATE OF THE REGION CONFERENCE**

The Voinovich School has hosted two annual State of the Region Conferences in 2012 and 2013. The one day conferences focused on the boom and bust business cycles of extractive industries. With the much heralded boom of the shale gas industry in our area, at a time when the region is still recovering from the bust of the coal mining industry, it was an important issue to examine from economic, ecological, social and historical perspectives. ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjaB36jKL1c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjaB36jKL1c))

Plans are currently underway for the 3rd Annual Appalachian Ohio State of the Region Conference, **MANUFACTURING IN APPALACHIA: OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND**, slated for May 20, 2014. This event will address the region’s current status and opportunities in the manufacturing sector by bringing together national leaders and industry experts to discuss recent trends and developments. Participants in the conference will include directors or representatives of all four local development districts (LDD) within our service area as well as the Director of the Chicago Regional Office of the U.S. EDA.

In conjunction with the State of the Region Conferences, the Voinovich School hosts a regional showcase reception the evening prior. This is an opportunity for representatives of the School and the Local Development Districts to highlight recent initiatives and discuss timely issues with state and national EDA leaders.

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