Collaboration – The Key to Success in Workforce and Economic Development Initiatives

Collaboration was the key to success in recruiting and establishing PCB Piezotronics (PCB) in Halifax County. PCB, headquartered in Buffalo with worldwide operations, is a leader in sensor technologies (i.e. auto, renewable energy, and industrial machinery). After the Halifax County Economic Development Commission made the initial contact with the company during a New York trade show, the partners visited the headquarters in New York. Through the efforts of Halifax Economic Development Commission, Turning Point Workforce Development Board, NCWorks, Golden LEAF Foundation, Halifax Community College (HCC), the North Carolina Community College System – Customized Training Program and incentive funding from local workforce development partners, Halifax County was able to attract a high technology company to the rural region. Dave Hore, Co-President, PCB Piezotronics summed it up best when he said, “The flawless effort by Halifax County, State and other groups led to PCB’s decision to come to the Roanoke Valley.”

DETAILS

The collaboration that led to the establishment of PCB Piezotronics in Halifax County was indeed an example of the motto, “working together works.” The opportunity was identified by representatives from the Northeast Economic Development Commission who were attending a New York trade show. This information was passed along to the Halifax Economic Development Commission, which contacted Halifax Community College. Both groups visited the headquarters of PCB to tour operations and develop training programs. This was the first time that HCC was included on a trip to recruit a business to the region. In a way, it provided a model for the way that we work with our various workforce and economic development entities in the region today. The college is now included early in the process of recruiting of businesses to the region.

One of the innovative factors in this best practice was that HCC provided a start-up production facility for the company on the HCC campus. This allowed customized training to occur before they moved to the industrial site. Moreover, the job training activities continued and the work with NCWorks allowed the company to have job fairs and screen applicants who would be ready to go to work at the new production facilities. HCC also created a customized Human Resource Development (HRD) program specifically geared toward the needs of PCB. We are still very involved with the training of employees at PCB thorough the HRD program.

HCC also partnered with the Halifax County Economic Development Commission to fund the training through the North Carolina Community College System’s Customized Training program. Local entities including the Golden LEAF Foundation provided additional incentive funding to encourage PCB to move to Halifax County.
Strategies/best practices
As noted by the Co-President of PCB, collaboration was the key to success in this workforce and economic development initiative. We found the following strategies to be successful then as well as now:

1. Workforce and economic development entities need to be cognizant of the roles that each can play to ensure success in this arena.
2. The prior experience with PCB has helped prepare our college in developing training plans for our new Geenex Solar Center for Excellence and Klausner Group (Lumber Mill).
3. The Halifax County Economic Development Commission will contact HCC early in the process of recruiting new businesses, and often we are part of the discussion with the companies that might be coming to the area.
4. The need to constantly keep in touch with the incumbent businesses as well as new ones has led to our visiting these business on a regular basis.
5. Training opportunities (i.e. customized training needs) are often identified during these industry visits.
6. With the increased communications between the workforce and economic development entities, our ability to respond as a unified entity has increased dramatically. There are few silos in this arena now.
7. HCC is now represented as either an ex officio or as a full member of the Halifax County Economic Development Commission, Halifax County Business Horizon, and Roanoke Valley Chamber of Commerce. These are the major groups that promote workforce and economic development in the region.

Implementation began in October 2004.

Partner Type(s):
- Business/Industry (direct involvement)
- Economic Development
- Workforce Development Board/One-Stop
- Other: Mayor, Halifax County Business Horizons and the Roanoke Valley Chamber of Commerce

Impact/Outcomes
Impacts have included the following:
1. Proved rural Halifax County could attract a high technology company
2. 160 new jobs ($14.00 per hour with benefits)
3. New tax base for Halifax County
4. Indirect economic impacts to the community
5. Additional impetus for job creation in the future
6. Increased skills in the workforce
7. Community collaboration continues
8. Provided a proven strategy for future marketing endeavors for the region

Outcome:
The company is fully ingrained in the Halifax County business community and currently provides jobs for 160 employees. The future for growth will depend on market conditions but the company expects to add 10 employees per year depending on market growth.
Other positive impacts include:
- Indirect employment to the community (i.e. restaurants, suppliers, contractors)
- Training services provided by Halifax Community College
- Recruitment of students as employees as requested by PCB Piezotronics

**Funding Source(s)**
$1,602,000 – Job Development Investment Grant
287,024 – North Carolina Community College System Customized Training Program
  4,500 – Turning Point Workforce Development Board
250,000 – Golden LEAF Foundation
30,000 – Halifax County Business Horizons and the City of Roanoke Rapids
$2,173,524 - Total Budget

**REFLECTIONS**

**Innovation or Best Practice**
Without a doubt, we found out that the workforce and economic development arena provided the opportunity for all of the partners to play to their strength. We found out that there was new respect and trust for each entity’s specialty that continues until today.

**Lessons Learned**
The primary lesson was that since it takes a village to raise a child, likewise it takes all in the workforce and economic development arena to develop and maintain new and incumbent business for our region. This provides a steady source of employment for our citizens and a quality of life for future generations to prosper even more.

**Scalability**
The collaboration format provides a template for other projects. It does not matter how big or small the project since the primary lesson learned is that each entity must know the role and function each must play for these endeavors to be successful. Stay in your lane!

**RESOURCES**

**Workforce Learning Summit Presenters**
Dr. Ervin Griffin, President, Halifax Community College
Dr. Vera Palmer, Dean of Continuing Education, Community Services and Workforce Development, Halifax Community College
Larry Crisafulli, Business and Industry Coordinator, Halifax Community College
Cathy Scott, Executive Director, Halifax County Economic Development Commission
Tommy McKnight, Manager, NCWorks
Michael Williams, Executive Director, Turning Point Workforce Development Board

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