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The Southern Tier Central Regional Planning and Development Board (STC) serves Chemung, Schuyler, and Steuben Counties, which are located in the southern portion of New York State's Finger Lakes Area. The STC Region is bounded on the south by the New York - Pennsylvania border and encompasses approximately 2,136 square miles with a 1990 population of 212,945. The region is rural with three small cities, the largest of which has a population of 33,724. Economically and geographically, the region has been included in the Appalachian area of the United States.

Although the region has benefited from a significant manufacturing base, employing approximately twenty-five percent of the non-agricultural workforce, portions of the region continue to experience economic distress and other portions struggle to remain economically competitive. Consistent with national trends, the region's employment growth has occurred in the service sector, and the region's agricultural sector is under continuing stress, due to low commodity prices. The region has significant tourism sites including the Corning Museum of Glass, the Watkins Glen International Speedway, wineries, and access to two of the Finger Lakes.

STC has successfully refined a regional economic development planning process based on: (1) public/private sector input; (2) pre-identification of projects and activities to implement goals and objectives; and (3) monitoring of implementation. Through this process, the region's economic development plan has become a timely, creditable, and substantive tool to establish regional priorities, focus agency/organizational efforts, and leverage funding. Far from being a static document, the regional economic development plan has become a continuously updated outline for attainment of regional objectives.

The Plan's creditability is first established by broad-based public and private sector input. STC utilizes the Regional Jobs Development Committee as the primary source of input for development of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. Extensive private sector involvement is obtained through this committee sponsored by Corning Enterprises, the economic development arm of Corning, Inc. The Jobs Committee meets monthly; its membership includes the directors of the region's private economic development corporations, industrial development agencies, educational institutions, and utilities. The development corporations provide extensive private sector representation that would not

otherwise be available for the planning process. STC also utilizes its Board of Directors to obtain both public and private sector input. The twenty-one member Board includes the chief elected official from each county within STC's region with a majority of members being elected officials. The Board also includes private sector members representing the region's agricultural, labor, and industrial sectors. One member of the Board is a minority representative and a seat is also provided for a representative of environmental interests. The Board reviews the draft Plan developed through the input of the Regional Jobs Committee.

The Plan's utility is based on the pre-identification of projects and activities to attain regional goals and objectives. Instead of recognizing change and taking credit, the region's economic development network and local governments annually identify specific projects and activities that are cataloged in the Plan. Approximately 50 projects/activities are identified each year through submission of project work sheets. Two key sections of the worksheet solicit information on the proposed project's state of readiness and potential sources of funding. The readiness section presents the following check list of options:

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| ▶ Facts collected to document need | ▶ Engineering feasibility completed |
| ▶ Source of funds identified | ▶ Grant application in hand |
| ▶ Project ready to start in the next 12 months | ▶ Project ready to start beyond the next 12 months |

In addition, the sources of funding section provides a profile of the project's financial package including estimated total project cost, local investment, and potential state and/or federal funding sources. Based on the information provided on the worksheets, projects are cataloged as either short-term or long-term, and are further subdivided into physical projects, programs, or processes. The latter grouping is reserved for feasibility studies, planning activities, and similar processes in support of economic development. The resulting catalog is a project/activity specific summary of regional needs. No other agency or organization develops such a catalog, which is a recognized asset to the region. Frequently, state and federal agencies contact STC requesting insight on regional needs and priority projects. Through both the overall planning process, and, most importantly, the cataloging of projects, STC can provide a regional economic development work plan.

Pre-identification of projects/activities creates local accountability and transforms goal/objectives into tangible, measurable outcomes with local impacts. The project-based approach has the following advantages:

The Economic Development District has advance notification of funding needs for specific projects and can use this information to position projects with funding sources. Also, the District can inform funding sources of the current backlog of potential projects and the corresponding need for state/federal appropriations.

- Through monitoring of the implementation of pre-identified projects and activities, STC and the regional economic development network have a measurable means to evaluate the implementation of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.
- Planning consistency within the region is improved since pre-identified projects and

activities can be evaluated in terms of their consistency with regional goals and objectives. Also, obvious duplication of effort can be identified and corrective action initiated before projects are further developed.

- Where the District has input into the evaluation and rating of projects, appropriate credit and priority can be given to sponsors who have developed need-based projects as opposed to impromptu projects structured primarily to access funding.

While the projects based approach has numerous advantages, it can sometimes raise unrealistic expectations from sponsors. Sponsors need to be made fully cognizant that having their project included in the Plan does not in any way assure funding and that they should use the Plan as a tool to help position the project for future funding.

The Plan's continuity is established through STC's and the economic development network's commitment to monitor implementation. Twice yearly the Regional Jobs Development Committee holds workshop sessions to review implementation of projects and activities. To further accountability, this review is structured according to the project specific strategy section of the Plan. Organizations/agencies report on current project/activity status and identify any problems encountered. In addition to providing a means to share information and eliminate duplication of effort, the monitoring process supports the on-going implementation of the Plan.

Through the above process, STC, with only the "power to persuade," has been able to work cooperatively with the local economic development network and the public sector to maintain a highly creditable and innovative regional planning process for the former Overall Economic Development Plan and for the current Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

While STC continues to have an effective economic development process, lessons have been learned that can benefit others engaging in a planning process. The lessons learned include:

- The process needs to be finite with definite time lines for completion, review, and revision. Organizations and individuals want to be associated more with the product of the process than the process itself. The process must be utilitarian in nature and must ultimately yield tangible results.
- While the process is best supported by the active involvement of executive level leadership of the participating organizations and agencies, executives and directors tend to delegate this responsibility to supporting management staff. STC has attempted to reverse this tendency by presenting the Plan as a policy document and by having this message reinforced by elected officials who often either provide funding for or have board seats on these organizations.
- The economic and demographic data analysis incorporated in the Plan may not always be supportive of local and regional marketing efforts. Local officials and economic development organizations must be made aware that the Plan is not primarily designed to be a traditional marketing tool. STC informs everyone impacted by the Plan that the economic and social data included in the analytical section is public information and is freely available to any competent researcher or economic development professional. In addition, STC encourages active use of the Plan not as a

direct marketing piece but rather as a value-added resource to demonstrate local commitment and capacity to attain regional goals and objectives.

- The real value of the economic development planning process is in the results obtained. While the process can identify local needs and establish priorities, the best results can be obtained when state and federal resources are linked either by statute or practice to the Plan. To continue to be effective, local planning efforts need stronger statutory and practical support from both policy and funding sources.