

**"Recognizing The Priorities Disconnect
Between Economic Development
Organizations And Elected Officials"**

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March 8, 2018

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Tennessee is a very diverse state socio-economically, geographically, and culturally. The state's strengths truly lie within its diversity, making it very attractive to residential, commercial, industrial development, and other factors impacting quality of life within a community.

Tennessee, like all other states, is managed by sets of laws at the federal, state and local levels. Like the federal system, the state works under three branches of government: Legislative, Executive, and Judicial. And these three entities are divided into state, regional and local jurisdictions, all with elected and/or appointed leaders who have a wide range of responsibilities and priorities.

However, with diversity often comes a misunderstanding between economic development professionals and elected officials, who may be working towards similar goals, but have a collective misunderstanding of each other's priorities. But to create an environment where viable, sustainable community growth and quality of life are top priorities, all parties in the state's diverse social, political, and business structure must make an effort to work together for the betterment of all communities. The result of this effort should be the creation of strategic planning and budget objectives designed to achieve the top priorities.

But how does a community do that? How does a community get inherently different people, most often from different backgrounds, with different roles in government and business development, to want to understand each other's priorities and find a way to work together towards common goals? How does leadership get past the empty platitudes of "working together for the betterment of the community", and establish a true line of communication between the entities to better understand each other?

Background – Economic Development on Local Level

This project will focus on the relationships between county/city mayors and commissions, and the economic development organizations (EDO's) that are charged with creating viable, sustainable economic development within their respective communities.

This paper will explore effective approaches to developing a collaborative process for sharing information and coming to agreement on economic development priorities. The deliverable of this process will be an internal briefing tool that will assist in bringing the knowledge and availability of resources that are available to a community, and that will be detailed in depth later in the paper.

To begin, the role of the stakeholders within the community will need to be described so that there is an understanding that, although certain roles are prescribed in TCA, there still could be conflicting responsibilities because of the language in the law.

The County Mayor/Executive of each county, as was established by Tennessee Code Annotated TCA § 5-6-101 in 1978, functions as the CEO/CFO/COO of the county in charge of the daily

operations of county government. The position is a salaried, full-time position, with full benefits offered. The County Commission (TCA § 5-5-101) was established to offer representation from regions within the county on one county board of government. The commission's main function is to set policy for county government function and to set a budget annually that follows state guidelines and is approved by the state. All 95 counties follow the guidelines set by TCA under either General Law or Charter Government.

The City Mayor position varies from city to city. Some cities elect their mayors separately from the city commission, and some city commissions choose the position of mayor amongst themselves. In either case, the mayor is the figurehead, the public face as it were, for the commission. As with most cities, the position of mayor is part-time. Only larger cities in the state have established the city mayor position as full-time. Any benefits for the mayor are decided by each city commission. The city commission's function, not unlike the county commission, is to set policy for city government operations, and to set a budget annually.

Until the 1990's, most economic development, whether it be industrial, commercial, tourism, etc., was coordinated through either the city mayor or the county executive, depending upon size of the county and the location of the development within the county. The 1980's through the 1990's saw a period of awareness from state leaders that if the state was to be competitive within the Southeast Region of the United States in economic development, then the state needed to prepare for an ever changing economic market.

In response, the state legislature saw a need to create legislation that would focus attention on progressive economic development in all communities. On May 1, 1998, Public Chapter 1101 was created to do just that. One of the main focuses of the law was the mandatory creation of a Joint Economic & Community Development Board (JECDB) for each of the 95 counties in the state that was under general law and not metro government. In part, Public Chapter 1101 states,

"It shall be the duty of the coordinating committee to develop a recommended growth plan not later than January 1, 2000, and to submit such plan for ratification by the county legislative body and the governing body of each municipality. The recommended growth plan shall identify urban growth boundaries for each municipality within the county and shall identify planned growth areas and rural areas within the county, all in conformance with the provisions of Section 7. In developing a recommended growth plan, the coordinating committee shall give due consideration to such urban growth boundaries as may be timely proposed and submitted to the coordinating committee by each municipal governing body. The coordinating committee shall also give due consideration to such planned growth areas and rural areas as may be timely-proposed and submitted to the coordinating committee by the county legislative body. The coordinating committee is encouraged to utilize planning resources that are available within the county, including municipal or county planning commissions. The coordinating committee is further encouraged to utilize the services of the local planning office of the Department of

Economic and Community Development, the county technical assistance service, and the municipal technical advisory service.”¹

The coordinating committee referenced above means the local government planning advisory committee established by TCA §4-3-727. The Public Chapter 1101 goes on to state in part,

“Prior to finalization of the recommended growth plan, the coordinating committee shall conduct at least two (2) public hearings. The county shall give at least fifteen (15) days advance notice of the time, place and purpose of each public hearing by notice published in a newspaper of general circulation throughout the county.

Not later than January 1, 2000, the coordinating committee shall submit its recommended growth plan for ratification by the county legislative body and by the governing body of each municipality within the county. Provided, however, and notwithstanding any provision of this act to the contrary, if a municipality is completely contiguous to and surrounded by one or more municipalities, then the corporate limits of the surrounded municipality shall constitute the municipality's urban growth boundaries and such municipality shall not be eligible to ratify or reject the recommended growth plan. Not later than one hundred twenty (120) days after receiving the recommended growth plan, the county legislative body or municipal governing body, as the case may be, shall act to either ratify or reject the recommended growth plan of the coordinating committee. Failure by such county legislative body or any such municipal governing body to act within such one hundred twenty (120) day period shall be deemed to constitute ratification by such county or municipality of the recommended growth plan.”²

To further clarify the purpose and intent of Public Chapter 1101, a document entitled “Joint Economic and Community Development Boards: A Guide for Future Action” was jointly published by: Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations; UT – Institute for Public Service; UT – County Technical Assistance Service; UT – Municipal Technical Advisory Service; UT – Center for Government Training; The Tennessee Development District Association. Under the section entitled “Purpose and Intent”, it states in part,

“Section 15 of PC 1101, as codified in T.C.A. §6-58-114, directed the establishment of Joint Economic and Community Development Boards (JECDBs) as entities for broadening the base for economic and community development planning. The intent of Section 15 is “that local governments engage in long-term planning and that such planning be accomplished through regular communication and cooperation among local governments, the agencies attached to them, and the agencies that serve them.” The purpose of each board is to “foster communication relative to economic and community development between and among governmental entities, industry, and private citizens.”³

The stage was set. Local government agencies were charged with working together, **in collaboration**, to insure that a thoughtful process was put into place to develop a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) through “long-term planning”, and was to incorporate “regular communication and cooperation among local governments, the agencies attached to them, and the agencies that serve them.” This was a directive from the state to encourage local

governments, through their Joint Economic and Community Development Boards, to develop an economic development strategy, and to engage local, regional, state, and eventually federal partners in developing such a strategy.

But cooperation among partners does not always prove to be the case. In his Buxton.com blog entitled “Economic Development Strategy: Collaboration is the Key to Success”, Bill R. Shelton, CEcD states in part “*All communities have economic strengths and weaknesses, but successful ones share an organizational characteristic that alludes the unsuccessful: they are able to manage the two primary economic development functions, leadership and execution, and present them as a single face. Leadership is key in that they establish the framework and plan for successful economic development. The staff also plays an important role by executing that plan...Successful communities have boosted cross-functional collaboration and team spirit between leadership and staff, while unsuccessful communities have allowed the two functions to build independent silos that are sluggish, lack communication, and create zealously guarded roles that hinder collaboration.*”⁴

Some of the partners with which cities and counties can engage in their planning are: UT – County Technical Assistance Service; UT – Municipal Technical Advisory Service; UT – Center for Government Training; The Tennessee Development District Association; TN Department of Economic and Community Development as well as other state departments. The three entities most used by local governments in strategic planning as well as daily operational guidance are UT – CTAS, UT – MTAS, and the Development District for their region.

All of these entities, without exception, strongly encourage, and in most instances require, a **collaborative process** between community stakeholders. A University of Kansas - Community Tool Box website discusses their research on the need for **collaboration within communities** in a blog entitled, “A Framework for Collaboration Among Community Partnerships, Support Organizations, and Funders”. In the publication, the authors find, in part, that “Our research and experience -- and that of many others -- suggests that there are seven essential ingredients that contribute to community change.

- **Clear vision and mission** -- those initiatives with a clear and specific focus
- **Action planning** -- Identifying specific community changes...
- **Leadership** -- A change in leadership can dramatically affect the rate of change brought about by a community group. The loss of strong leadership can be particularly difficult for an organization...
- **Resources for community mobilizers** -- Hiring community mobilizers or organizers can aid in following up on action plans...
- **Documentation and feedback on the changes brought about by the organization** -- It's also very important that people keep a record of what they have done and how they have done it...
- **Technical assistance** -- Outside help with specific actions, such as action planning or securing resources, is also a way to support a group's efforts to transform its community...

- **Making outcome matter** -- Finally, grant makers also have the ability to increase rates of community and systems change through offering incentives or disincentives to their grantees...”⁵

A closer look at regional/federal/state partner organizations is in order to understand how they collaborate with local economic development organizations and city/county governments.

The University of Tennessee – County Technical Assistance Service (CTAS) “*was created by the Tennessee General Assembly in 1973 at the urging of county officials and their organization, the Tennessee County Services Association (TCSA). County officials wanted an agency to provide prompt, accurate technical assistance on a daily basis to Tennessee's 95 counties. The authorizing legislation creating CTAS, a part of The University of Tennessee Institute for Public Service, directs CTAS to ... 'provide studies and research in county government, publications, educational conferences and attendance thereto, and to furnish technical, consultative and field services to counties of the state in problems relating to fiscal administration, accounting, tax assessment and collection, law enforcement, and public works, and in any and all matters relating to county government'.*” (T.C.A. § 49-9-402)⁶.

The University of Tennessee – Municipal Technical Advisory Service (MTAS) “*is the technical resource for cities, towns and state agencies on municipal services and issues within the state of Tennessee. It is an agency of the Institute for Public Service (IPS) of the University of Tennessee. IPS is a statewide, system- wide organization that fulfills the University’s public service mandate by applying university expertise to community and workplace needs. Through MTAS the towns and cities of Tennessee are supported by and have available experts dedicated solely to research, consulting and training on Tennessee municipal issues. MTAS was established on April 15, 1949 by Tennessee Code Annotated 67- 6- 103 (E) to... provide for studies and research in municipal government, publications, educational conferences and attendance at such conferences and in furnishing technical, consultative and field services to municipalities in problems relating to fiscal administration, accounting, tax assessment and collection, law enforcement, improvements and public works and in any and all matters relating to municipal government.*”⁷

What are Development Districts in Tennessee and what do they do for the regions they serve? According to the TN Development Districts Association website, “*The Tennessee Development District Association or TDDA is an association of the nine state-wide development districts, which were established by the General Assembly under the Tennessee Development District Act of 1965. The Act established a statewide system of nine regional planning and economic development organizations to promote intergovernmental cooperation on growth and development issues, including regional and statewide concerns. The organizations also promote more effective utilization of available resources in dealing with these needs.*”

The Board Membership for each Development District is made up of the chief elected officials from member counties and cities, a designated economic development professional from each county, and one Senator and one State Representative from within each region.

The Tennessee Development District Association was established to serve as a statewide forum for the diverse problems the Districts must solve in their mission to serve 95 counties and some 350 municipalities....

The nine Development Districts located throughout the state worked collectively during the 2015 program year on issues ranging from economic development to housing. In total, during 2015, \$21 million dollars were secured on behalf of local governments in Housing & Urban Development Community Development Block Grant or CDBG funding for critical infrastructure serving 786,901 Tennesseans.

In total, 2015 saw Tennessee's Development Districts obtain \$33 million dollars in economic development grants that leveraged over \$1 billion dollars in new capital investment creating 5,000 new jobs. Districts across the state also loaned \$20 million dollars to small businesses which created or retained 2,040 jobs.”⁸

The scope of services provided by the TN Development Districts can have a huge positive impact on the efforts to attract economic development within a particular county or community. A few municipalities are large enough in population, and subsequently in resources, to afford their own economic development organizations, planning departments, legal and grant writing services, just to name a few. But for the vast majority of counties in Tennessee (88 out of 95), they are mostly rural, have much smaller operating budgets, lack significant broadband coverage, and have fewer professional assets on which to draw when, for example, they want to develop a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) or simply apply for a grant. And they don't often know how to collaborate with their partners to achieve their goals. That's where the regional development district can partner with the county by providing grant writing services or help navigate the steps to creating a CEDS document for the community or county. This is just an example of how the regional development districts, working in a collaborative effort, have proven to be invaluable to the counties that they serve.

Other partners available to assist communities in economic development are the various state departments, such as the Department of Economic and Community Development, Department of Environment and Conservation, Department of Transportation, and the Department of Tourist Development. I will cover some of the state programs available later in the project.

There is economic development assistance available for communities from certain federal programs as well. The Appalachian Regional Commission is a federal program that covers half of our state. Its mission is “*to innovate, partner, and invest to build community capacity and strengthen economic growth in Appalachia.*”⁹ In the role as a federal entity, it functions as “*a regional economic development agency that represents a partnership of federal, state, and local government. Established by an act of Congress in 1965, ARC is composed of the governors of the 13 Appalachian states and a federal co-chair, who is appointed by the president. Local participation is provided through multi-county local development districts. ARC invests in activities that address the five goals identified in the Commission's strategic plan:*

Goal 1: Economic Opportunities

Invest in entrepreneurial and business development strategies that strengthen Appalachia's economy.

Goal 2: Ready Workforce

Increase the education, knowledge, skills, and health of residents to work and succeed in Appalachia.

Goal 3: Critical Infrastructure

Invest in critical infrastructure—especially broadband; transportation, including the Appalachian Development Highway System; and water/wastewater systems.

Goal 4: Natural and Cultural Assets

Strengthen Appalachia's community and economic development potential by leveraging the Region's natural and cultural heritage assets.

Goal 5: Leadership and Community Capacity

Build the capacity and skills of current and next-generation leaders and organizations to innovate, collaborate, and advance community and economic development.

Each year ARC provides funding for several hundred investments in the Appalachian Region, in areas such as business development, education and job training, telecommunications, infrastructure, community development, housing, and transportation. These projects create thousands of new jobs; improve local water and sewer systems; increase school readiness; expand access to health care; assist local communities with strategic planning; and provide technical and managerial assistance to emerging businesses.”¹⁰

As you can see, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) provides multiple levels of assistance to communities, and in most very rural communities, their assistance is especially needed in basic infrastructure to prepare the communities and counties for marketing their assets for economic development opportunities.

Another federal entity that is often called on for their assistance is the U.S. Department of Agriculture – Rural Development division. On their website, the department sites as their mission, “*USDA Rural Development is committed to future of rural communities. Through our programs, we help to improve the economy and quality of life for rural Americans... We are committed to helping improve the economy and quality of life in rural America. Through our programs, we help rural Americans in many ways. We offer loans, grants and loan guarantees to help create jobs and support economic development and essential services such as housing, health care, first responder services and equipment, and water, electric and communications infrastructure.*

We promote economic development by supporting loans to businesses through banks, credit unions and community-managed lending pools. We offer technical assistance and information to help agricultural producers and cooperatives get started and improve the effectiveness of their operations.

We provide technical assistance to help communities undertake community empowerment programs. We help rural residents buy or rent safe, affordable housing and make health and safety repairs to their homes.”¹¹ As you can see, the department provides many services counties

can find helpful, including rural community development initiatives, and various loans and grants opportunities.

Another federal entity that often assists communities in Tennessee is the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). The department states as its purpose: *“The Economic Development Administration's (EDA's) mission is to lead the Federal economic development agenda by promoting innovation and competitiveness, preparing American regions for economic growth and success in the worldwide economy. EDA fulfills this mission through strategic investments and partnerships that create the regional economic ecosystems required to foster globally competitive regions throughout the United States. EDA supports development in economically distressed areas of the United States by fostering job creation and attracting private investment.”*¹² The EDA is often called upon to assist rural communities as a partner with other federal and state agencies.

Exploring Approaches for Collaboration on Economic Development

All the federal and regional economic development organizations or entities referenced above offer certain programs to assist communities in preparing and competing for various forms of economic development. And while their goals or objectives may vary in their scope of services offered their missions are very similar: to assist municipalities/counties in reaching their full potential of creating opportunities for viable, sustainable economic growth designed to improve quality of life and create lasting opportunities in the workforce.

The one dynamic that is shared by all the entities referenced above, is one that is part of the foundation of the Public Chapter 1101. In the Public Chapter, all the leadership entities, both elected and appointed within the municipalities and county, are mandated to create a Joint Economic and Community Development Board (JECDB), **work in collaboration** on a recommended growth plan, submit the growth plan for approval to the County Legislative Body and the governing body of each municipality, and to conduct public hearings to assure input from citizens.

Scott London is a consultant who has worked with organizations committed to social innovation, civic engagement, community development, and dialogue and deliberation. In an article entitled “Building Collaborative Communities”, Mr. London reflected on the **power of collaboration**. In part, he stated, *“I found that collaboration can be a powerful alternative to conventional mechanisms for effecting change, such as coalitions, task forces, and commissions. Traditional groups and organizations tend to be structured vertically. Decisions are made at the top and people derive their influence and authority from their positions within the hierarchy... Collaborative groups, by contrast, are structured horizontally. Leadership... is broadly*

*distributed. Job titles and professional affiliations fade into the background and people derive their influence from having their ears to the ground, from being well-connected in the community, and from being engaged in a multiplicity of projects. For this reason, collaborative efforts tend to be loosely structured, highly adaptive, and inherently creative.”*¹³

The truth is that at times a friction can develop between the economic development entities charged with creating growth opportunities, and the elected officials (city/county mayors and legislative bodies) whose job it is to approve/disapprove funding for the community wide growth plans.

Why, sometimes, is there friction between the developers and elected officials? The quick answer is that there could be *many* reasons! When examining this matter, the question was asked of several elected city/county mayors and economic developers. To a person, each one gave excellent reasons why there might be friction. The reasons ran the gambit from personal feuds, to family ties and history, to political considerations; just to name a few that were most mentioned. But one reason that was mentioned by all was that there was a real *misunderstanding of each other's roles* within the framework of the JECDB and the elected offices.

While not one of the mayors or economic developers wanted to be directly quoted in this project (for good reason), all interviewed knew of instances, or had personally experienced this misunderstanding, this disconnect between their responsibilities. For the sake of this project, there is no quick fix for personal feuds or family history or political considerations, but there may be a way to bridge the divide between elected officials and economic development officials. To do this, community leadership must try to understand the role, the responsibility, of each office.

Recognizing common ground is essential in creating a way to bridge any divide that may exist. The most common aspect shared by mayors and economic developers is that they are both in the executive branch of their respective offices. They both are in charge of the daily operations of their respective services within their community. They both have boards they report to, and these boards have provided goals, objectives and budgets with which to do their work. The JECDB is made up of stakeholders within the community and most often includes the county mayor, as well as city mayors, as part of its membership. The county commission, as well as a city commission, is made of duly elected citizens within the boundaries of their jurisdiction. In smaller, more rural communities, it is quite rare to have a county/city commission member that is familiar with the workings of an economic development organization (EDO). All this considered, there is no guaranty of a full understanding of each other's roles in the process of creating opportunities for viable, sustainable economic development.

What can be done to foster better understanding between mayors and economic developers? One of the first things that can easily be done is for the JECDB to recognize regional assets/partners

to assist in consensus building within their board and city/county government. The partners mentioned above, CTAS, MTAS, TVA, UT-CIS and others, are willing to assist in this matter if they are asked to do so. Each one of these organizations requires that collaboration among stakeholders (elected or appointed) be formed, and a consensus be established in order to benefit from the programs offered. The state programs require this as well.

For example, the Governor's Three Star Program, as administered by the TN Department of Economic and Community Development (TNECD), in part states as its purpose, "*... is designed to help communities build a healthy and educated workforce supported by a strong and stable local government that provides security and safety and promotes county progress in the areas of economic development, responsible fiscal management, public safety, health and education.*"¹⁴ As part of its program design, "*The county's ThreeStar program will be administered by the County Mayor, the Joint Economic and Community Development Board (JECDB) or designated administration organization. Letter designating administrator must be submitted by Activity Plan by the County Mayor/Executive.*"¹⁵

Also within the purview of TNECD, the Select Tennessee Site Development Program "*assists communities in preparing sites for investment and job creation offering reduced risk and shortened timelines for development. Through the certification program, the Property Evaluation Program (PEP) and the Site Development Grant program, communities have several opportunities to receive feedback on their sites and funding for site improvements.*"¹⁶ In the Select Tennessee Property Evaluation Program, with the assistance of Austin Consulting, there are 5 steps that need to be completed. In step 4, the requirement states in part, "*Austin Consulting will visit each community to evaluate candidate properties, assess community attributes, and meet with local officials, staff and stakeholders.*"¹⁷

As we can see in the above two examples, collaboration, by the JECDB, the County Mayor and other stakeholders, is required in order to meet the criteria of the programs. This tells us that working in partnership, collaborating on economic development partnerships, is not foreign to elected officials or economic developers. The importance of working in collaboration, in partnership, on common goals was thoroughly discussed in the TCED coursework.

In his article entitled, "Generating and Sustaining Commitment in Community Collaboration", Darrin Hicks, of the University of Denver, writes extensively about his years of research on collaboration to "*understand how the quality of the collaborative process impacts the outcomes of collaborative partnerships*"¹⁸. Mr. Hicks finds that, "*collaboration can be defined as a problem-solving process and a structure through which programs are implemented. It is first and foremost a communicative process of bringing together diverse agents with different interests, backgrounds, and types of expertise to work together to invent new ways of understanding the root causes of social problems and to design novel solutions to address those problems...* Collaboration is also a means of forming new partnerships to implement programs designed to

increase the scope of services, eliminate waste and duplication, and to ensure that the necessary resources are in place to deliver those programs with fidelity.”¹⁹

In the Managing Economic Development Organizations Course, Dr. Dave Kolzow highlights this thought process in the “Creating Effective Organizational Leadership Through Teamwork”. In this section of the course, Dr. Kolzow presents an outline of “TEAMWORK, Groups vs. Teams”²⁰ where he explains the difference between the perspective of groups as opposed to teams. In part, Dr. Kolzow states that *“members recognize their interdependence and understand that both personal and team goals are best accomplished with mutual support. Time is not wasted struggling over ‘turf’ or attempting personal gain at the expense of others...members feel a sense of ownership...are committed to goals they helped establish...members work in a climate of trust and are encouraged to openly express ideas, opinions, disagreements and feelings...members recognize that conflict is a normal aspect of human interaction, but they view such situations as an opportunity for new ideas and creativity. They work to resolve conflict...”*²¹

In every program highlighted in this project, local stakeholders, elected officials and economic development organizations are required to be at the table, to **work in collaboration**, in order to participate successfully in the programs. As University of Denver’s Darrin Hicks stated in his article, *“There are three elements of that definition that we think are crucial to understanding the nature of collaboration... 1. Collaboration, in essence, is a communicative process. Hence the types and quality of that communicative process need to be identified and measured. 2. Collaboration... is all about relationships. What we call collaborative structures are really relationships that have been institutionalized... 3. Collaborative relationships are built on commitment. It takes a great deal of commitment to collaborate, but if it is done right collaboration also generates mutual commitment.”*²²

The question now is how can communities offer an opportunity for everyone at the table, every member of the team, to understand each other’s roles in the collaborative process, putting into perspective the differences and highlighting the importance of each member’s purpose in the process?

The reality is that not all local economic developers, not all county or city mayors, not all county legislative bodies or city commissions have an opportunity to be exposed to the programs offered by UT-CTAS, UT-MTAS, ARC, USDA-RD, EDA, the State of Tennessee’s programs, or Dr. Kolzow’s, and others’, expertise in the TCED Program courses. The reality is that some local elected officials have a cursory understanding of Public Chapter 1101, its requirements for city/county governments, but not a real understanding of everyone’s role in the process. The reality is that some economic developers don’t have a working understanding of the responsibilities of local elected officials, the responsibility of assisting in the funding of local economic development through the EDO’s or Industrial Development Boards (IDB’s), or the responsibility to its citizens to account for all public monies invested in development activities.

So, how do communities address this lack of understanding of purpose, or misinterpretation of actions?

Developing a Collaborative Effort in EDO Function and Process

An answer, if not the answer, lies in the processes outlined in this project. In each state and federal program and TCED course work cited here, there is a resounding theme of working together, in collaboration, in partnership, deciding for the common good. In this theme, there is acknowledgement of the need to respect each team members' roles and come to an understanding of those roles.

There is also a method that each program employs to assure exposure, if not a total understanding, of team members' function within the organization. And that method is a requirement that all stakeholders, elected and appointed, must collaborate with each other to make decisions. How do community leaders do that within the workings of city/county government so they can be assured of full participation from all stakeholders involved? How do community leaders accomplish this task of getting everyone together without insulting any group of stakeholders, but accomplishing their goal of an understanding of roles between all stakeholders? What do they do, what do they say, when they get everyone together?

First, the local EDO, which includes elected officials, needs to be the catalyst in this process. The need to achieve consensus must originate from the governing body that has the most at stake. The forum for such a gathering should include the state, regional and federal partners that offer assistance to the communities, as well as the local EDO. The presentation could be facilitated, or moderated, by someone from an outside agency, i.e. TVA, USDA, the Development District, or the State of Tennessee. This should assure the officials gathered that the presentation has credibility outside the local region. The process should be created in a manner that insures all stakeholders (regional, statewide, federal and local) are included and are important to the process. It should be offered as an opportunity to learn, and not a reason to lecture, those in attendance.

In creating the presentation, certain guidelines need to be observed to assure that the goals and objectives are addressed in an informational nature, and are meant to be inclusive for all involved, including, but not limited to:

- Building consensus through collaboration with all partners
- Creating a realistic vision and timeline for all EDO activities
- Defining the roles within the EDO and local partners, stakeholders
- Creating and sharing a document to record all objectives between partners
- Agreeing to regular updates on all activities from EDO and partners
- Overview of scopes of services from each of the regional, state, federal partners
- At the end of the presentation, there should be time allotted for discussion

The question is, in what forum should this presentation be made? It is imperative that this presentation be made in public view with the assurance that as many city/county commissioners as possible have an opportunity to be present. The perfect, or nearly perfect if that's possible, venue for such a presentation is a regularly scheduled County Legislative Body meeting and followed up by another presentation to a regularly scheduled meeting of the City(ies) Commission(s). This is the one time per month that commission members will be readily available. It is a public meeting so the media will be there to cover the event. Citizens in the audience will hear first-hand what is discussed and others not attending can gather information from media reports.

The timing for this is opportune for this year, being it is an election year. Most city/county elections happen this year. After the elections and the new officials have been sworn into office, they can have an opportunity to engage in this forum with their local officials and outside partners.

Results & Lessons Learned

At the outset of this project, the purpose was to explore what could be done about a situation that is common in communities throughout the state of Tennessee: the priorities disconnect between economic development organizations and local elected officials.

The best way to address this matter was to look at what the state did right, and to search for a solution to how community leaders bridge the gap and pave a way of understanding between all partners in the collective efforts to prepare communities for viable, sustainable economic development in the global marketplace.

This matter has been long in the making and this solution is by no means the definitive answer. But, it's a start.

While community leaders face challenges in politics, personalities and power struggles every day, there is no reason that, working together in partnership, they can't fix this challenge: a lack of understanding and communication.

In the "Managing Economic Development Organizations" course, Dr. Kolzow cited a very appropriate quote for this matter from Henry Ford:

"Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success."²³

That's a common goal for all communities, collaboratively speaking.

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¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ https://www.researchconnections.org/files/childcare/pdf/HicksCollaborativeCommitment_presentation.pdf

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²⁰ “Managing Economic Development Organizations Course” by Dr. Dave Kolzow, page 111

²¹ Ibid.

²²https://www.researchconnections.org/files/childcare/pdf/HicksCollaborativeCommitment_presentation.pdf

²³“Managing Economic Development Organizations Course” by Dr. Dave Kolzow, page 110