



WEST CENTRAL MOUNTAINS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Valley County · Cascade · Donnelly · McCall · Meadows Valley

2017 WCMEDC Strategy & Work Plan

In 2015, a strategic plan was put forth for the then Valley County Economic Development Council (VCEDC). That plan, while valuable, offered many overlapping initiatives with the America's Best Communities (ABC) Economic Development Strategy and utilized a lot of academic language. In 2017, VCEDC rebranded itself as the West Central Mountains Economic Development Council (WCMEDC), which initiated the creation of this document—an updated strategy and metrics-based work plan for the year. Previous economic development thinking (nationally) had been focused on new business development for much of the last century. The 2015 plan reflected this as well, however it acknowledged the challenges that exist with incentivizing start-ups.

“Business recruitment can be a shortcut or “quick fix” towards growth by jump starting value added activities and initiating or supporting a local ecosystem of businesses. The Valley County Economic Development Council recognizes, however, that growing the local economy through an aggressive reliance on business recruitment is challenging given the region’s remote location and limited connectivity.”

Today, business retention and expansion (BRE) is thought to be a more effective method for creating jobs and fortifying industries at the local level. Below, we lay out the data in support of a rural economic development organization, areas we hope to serve in the future, areas we will serve in 2017 and collaborations in place as a result of ABC (these are highlighted in YELLOW).

The primary focus of WCMEDC moving forward will be:

- *Jobs*
- *Education*
- *Infrastructure/Assets*
- *Prosperity*

We acknowledge that there is some overlap in these efforts, and nothing exists in a silo.

Data:

- 6.1% unemployment rate in Valley County
- 3.8% unemployment rate in Idaho
- As of December 2016, there were roughly 270 jobs posted with the Idaho Department of Labor's McCall office

This suggests a skills gap and disincentives for seasonal laborers who can collect unemployment benefits when they are finished with short term positions.

Strategy 1: JOBS (formerly "Sector Development"). The previous thinking behind this strategy was to develop value chains that create ecosystems for skilled labor, innovation, market growth and education through vertical segments in markets. The West Central Mountains being rural in nature means that the opportunities for new value chains are limited, and existing industries have naturally adapted to market conditions in order to survive. Most startups fail within 2 years, so the long term benefits of putting resources to creating whole new industries has an immediate and considerable ceiling. Therefore, we recommend a shift towards supporting existing businesses that can create additional "spin-off" sectors and high value job opportunities. We will continue to evaluate and support new business ventures as they arise, however data and modern practice says we should shift our focus to what we have rather than what we would like to have.

Objective 1.1: Strengthen the existing recreation, hospitality and tourism sectors.

- Recreation underpins much of the current economy. The 2013 Recreation Summit pointed to three issues that undermine long-term competitiveness:
 - A weakness in connecting to a more diverse and younger demographic
 - A corresponding need to facilitate a growing variety of recreational opportunities
 - A perceived lack in diversity of local retail and hospitality amenities.
 - Action: Grow, promote and support the annual Economic Summit
 - Action: Promote regional collaboration and communication among stakeholders in winter/summer recreation.
 - Establish and promote Dept. of Labor apprenticeship resources in hospitality management, healthcare and other key sectors
 - Action: Assist with completion and execution of the Pathways Master Plan, including local efforts, nordic trails, water trails, the Big Loop and others.

Objective 1.2: Strengthen the Natural Resources, Farming and Ranching Sectors.

The region's small-acreage ranch and farm land is largely underutilized. The local food movement may provide an opportunity to redevelop a small farm and ranching sector and network with existing local businesses like meat processing facilities. Additional opportunities exist in the forestry, mining and restoration sectors.

- Action: Promote local food production and the "food economy" through farmers markets and exploration of cultivation technique that take advantage of regional

geothermal resources. Leverage the University of Idaho Master Gardener program and greenhouse technologies that extend the growing season.

- Actively evaluate opportunities associated with gold, silver and antimony extraction, mining support sectors and regional resource distribution
- Actively promote woody biomass opportunities and partnerships for forest restoration and energy production using forest debris.

Objective 1.3: Support & Strengthen Telecommunication Connectivity.

- Valley County is a potentially attractive location for small businesses or entrepreneurs because of the lifestyle and recreational amenities of the region. Increased telecommunication connectivity will support the development of this emerging sector.
 - Action: Work with the private and public sectors, and local telecommunication companies to understand existing infrastructure and enhance local internet connectivity.

Objective 1.4: Business and telecommuter professional attraction.

- Valley County presents an attractive alternative location for businesses within a variety of sectors, or telecommuting professionals who may enjoy the recreational lifestyle readily available in the region.
 - Action: Identify and engage opportunities to promote Valley County as a desirable location for businesses within selected sectors to locate/relocate.
 - Action: Create a sell-in kit for individuals and companies interested in possibly moving to Valley County. Continue to evaluate opportunistic sectors and promote the region according to market advantages.

Strategy 2: EDUCATION (formerly “Local Entrepreneurship”) All entrepreneurial roads lead to/from education, whether through building skills for local entrepreneurs or making already educated professionals aware of resources to help them grow and expand their business. Broadening sector ecosystems, an increase in local ownership and an increase in value-added activities are all powerful mechanisms in local wealth generation and all require entrepreneurship, that is: initiative, innovation, risk-taking and financing from local residents and businesses.

Objective 2.1: Business acceleration through educational and mentoring support

- Action: Create an ecosystem of attorneys, CPA’s, marketers, and other support sectors to help businesses grow through mentorship programs and business incubation
- Action: Establish small business workshops in cooperation with SCORE, the SBA, SBDC and local partners.

Objective 2.2: Promoting local entrepreneurship in value added activities involving local resources, as identified in ASAP analysis and by known market conditions.

- Action: Fund/build an online learning and business resource adviser/portal on WCMEDC website.

Strategy 3: INFRASTRUCTURE & ASSETS (formerly “Asset Development”) Every economic sector ultimately falls back on the natural, physical and cultural assets of its region. Recreational amenities, downtown walking corridors, visitor attractions, water/air quality, wildlife, trails, roads,

bridges, energy, education, housing and natural resources all support economic diversity and prosperity. It therefore makes sense to steward this base and make sure that we coordinate policies and incentives among the communities of the West Central Mountains.

Objective 3.1: Promote vibrant communities.

- Livable communities are closely associated with vibrant downtowns and cultural diversity. Even though we are doing better than most communities, this is not an easy feat to accomplish in a rural county with 10,000 residents.
 - Action: Promote, encourage and grow the West Central Mountains Housing Trust to create more and better affordable housing options for all residents.
 - Action: Support and promote the ABC competition after April 19th, 2017.
 - Action: Encourage cities to adopt ordinances and procedures to promote infill and contiguous development of residential, retail, hospitality and public spaces.
 - Action: Keep or make entry barriers for new businesses low.
 - Action: Seek opportunities for business financing resources, incubators and maker spaces
 - Action: Promote forward thinking policies and funding strategies for pathways, roads, fiber, and other infrastructure critical to creating vibrant economic activity and innovation.

Objective 3.2: Define desirable future land use to accommodate resilient economic growth.

- A regional land-use vision can facilitate a discussion among land-owners, developers and communities and make comprehensive plans of cities and the county compatible. Using a watershed approach may provide a useful structure in this discussion and connect regional economic and resource constraints.
 - Action: Explore regulatory and economic incentives and instruments to create a land-use vision-derived guide for development that includes responsible growth and transportation planning.
 - Action: Establish a watershed team that fairly represents the stakeholders in the region.
 - Action: Partner with the public and private sectors to foster a dialogue on land-use planning.

Strategy 4: PROSPERITY (formerly “Import Substitution”) The West Central Mountain’s trade balance heavily favors import of goods and services, which has impaired local wealth generation. Shifting the trade balance through import substitution (switching the source of economic inputs to businesses and households from outside of the region to within the region), is a recognized and powerful tool in economic development. Not only does it create local jobs by transferring the input related jobs to the region, it can also support local value chain expansion. The end goal: create economic opportunities for local entrepreneurs to drive regional prosperity.

Objective 4.1: Local & alternative energy development.

- Energy is a vital input to every economic and household activity of the community, and is a key factor in added-value activities; this is specifically relevant to the West Central

Mountains economy with its harsh winters and related energy needs. Self-reliance will therefore not only make our local economy more resilient, it provides more options for economic diversity. The West Central Mountains has an abundance of hydro, biomass, geothermal and other renewable resources to produce energy in a distributed and multi-modal manner. The use of these region-specific resources provides a competitive edge to the local economy.

- Action: Engage alternative energy partners to prove concepts throughout the region (like Woody Biomass with Firewise and the Idaho National Lab).
- Action: Promote alternative uses for geothermal resources, such as agricultural through greenhouse business development and electricity generation, and celebrate existing wins like the Recreation and Aquatics Center in Cascade.

Objective 4.2: Area Sector Analysis Process (ASAP) strategy.

- ASAP will be completed in 2017. It will provide some much needed data regarding which sectors are both compatible and desirable in our region.
 - Action: The sectors identified should be selected as priority areas where new business development opportunities and possible value chains might be created under specific business climates and market circumstances.

2017 Work Plan:

Q1: Education/Business Resources Portal, Grants, Housing Trust, Rebranding, Energy (Woody Biomass/Geothermal), Economic Summit Planning, Pathways, Forest Restoration Summit, Workforce Development, Small Business Workshops, ASAP, Leadership Academy, Incubator Spaces

In Q1 we focus on getting the education/business resources portal completed and flesh out partnerships with government agencies and businesses (like INL/Woody Biomass). Doing so will fortify our alliances and help us secure a long term funding structure. We should also focus on completing the rebrand effort, website update and collateral creation, and see the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Culture of Health prize to completion. Last but not least, we should complete all overlapping ABC projects prior to the March 29th deadline (including marketing/branding and pathways).

KEY DELIVERABLES: Significant progress on funding structure and online portal, rebrand completed, and ABC phase I completed (\$3mm).

Q2: Education/Business Resources Portal, Apprenticeships, Grants, Energy (Woody Biomass/Geothermal), Economic Summit Planning, Pathways, Workforce Development, Small Business Workshops, Leadership Academy, Incubator Spaces

In Q2 we redirect our focus to business engagement. This will present superior value-added opportunities to align with businesses and help them learn about resources that are available. With the portal up and running, we will have a marketable win to leverage. We should also allocate time to finalizing the agenda, venue and save the date

elements for the Economic Summit and continue to seek business workshop opportunities with SCORE and the SBA. Additional resources may be beneficial in the regional incubator effort--working with coffee shops, libraries etc. to create a cohort of support for innovative ideas.

KEY DELIVERABLES: Funding structure and online portal finished, business alliances fortified, outreach plan and incubator plan execution begins.

Q3: Education/Business Resources Portal, Grants, Energy (Woody Biomass/Geothermal), Economic Summit Planning, Pathways, Workforce Development, Small Business Workshops, Leadership Academy, Incubator Spaces

In Q3 we focus on hospitality sector engagement and finalizing details for the Economic Summit. We will need to have a game plan in place for the next class of the Leadership Academy and will want to put some efforts into getting better traction on the business incubator and possible makerspace opportunities. This is where full press kicks in for business engagement and we should target 10 hospitality/retail businesses to engage during this quarter: Brundage, Shore Lodge, Tamarack, Ashley Inn, Hotel McCall, Subway franchise (regional), Little Ski Hill, Rustic Inn, Best Western, Boulder Creek Inn, Pancake House, D9, Albertsons, etc.

KEY DELIVERABLES: Finalize Economic Summit, get one or two wins in the hospitality sector (Commerce tax incentive or otherwise), and see Leadership Academy 3.0 through to inception.

Q4: 2018 planning, Leadership Academy, Grants, Energy, Economic Summit (execution), Pathways, Workforce Development, Small Business Workshops, Incubator Spaces

Q4 will be a time for planning and reevaluation. Provided we secure adequate funding for 2018, we will want to continue efforts already underway and seek additional funding sources for programs that are of high value in the region. Following the Economic Summit, we will want to fortify feedback loops and see where to move ahead strategically.

KEY DELIVERABLES: Strategic/funding plan for 2018 and continued business engagement.

ABC items NOT specifically accounted for in this plan:

- Forest Restoration Services Directory
- Forest Restoration Summit
- Recreation District
- Trail Kiosks

- Operation Facelift
- Youth Activities
- Food Coalition
- Bus Kiosks
- Expanded TVT Service
- Veterans Needs