

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY PLAN

An Economic Development Strategy
for the APEG Region
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

June 19, 2019



TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introduction	1
	Plan Purpose	1
	Plan Overview	1
II.	Strategic Initiatives	2
	A. Business Voice.....	2
	B. Talent.....	4
	C. Competitive Assets.....	7
	D. Economic Development	10
	Acknowledgements.....	16

I. INTRODUCTION

The Appalachian Partnership, Inc. (API) and the Appalachian Partnership for Economic Growth (APEG) embarked on the first-ever regional economic development strategic planning process for the 25-county APEG service region. The outcome of that very inclusive and highly participatory planning process is this plan, known as the “Economic Prosperity Plan.”

The planning process encompassed three phases of research, employer engagement, analysis, stakeholder input and action planning. Two reports provided analysis to inform and inspire plan development:

1. **Insights of the APEG Region** presented the research completed in Phase I of the planning process. The research and analysis illustrated current conditions of the regional economy, drawing attention to critical weaknesses that are holding back the region from economic growth and prosperity. The purpose of this report was not simply a study of findings; the core purpose for this research was to inspire actionable solutions in subsequent phases of the Economic Prosperity Planning process.
2. **Target Industries for the APEG Region** identified and recommended “best fit” industries based on sound data and alignment to the APEG region’s strengths for supporting industry success.

A critical component of the planning process was the intentional design for a highly participatory effort. Thirty-six (36) work sessions were hosted across the region involving 453 stakeholders and partners. 194 of these participants were business leaders who shared candid comments, and several are stepping up to work on strategy implementation. Why does this participation matter? Ownership of the Economic Prosperity Plan is the result, fostering increased energy to support and act on the plan, and ultimately implementation commitment.

Plan Purpose

The Economic Prosperity Plan maps out our strategic work on common priorities – priorities that grow quality jobs, enhance quality of life to retain and attract talent, and expand economic prosperity across our region.

By working together, we maximize assets to ultimately change the data, the economic indicators that define our region’s economic prosperity. When we focus on moving the economic “needle” upwards, we shape a legacy that fosters prosperity for future generations.

For decades, Appalachian Ohio has simply tried to survive. This plan is about working together to foster *thriving* private and public sectors.

Plan Overview

The Economic Prosperity Plan encompasses 13 strategic initiatives grouped into four categories. This work elevates the voice of business; expands the talent pool; strengthens competitive assets; and boosts our economic development programming to a higher level, all in support of business growth and prosperity.



II. STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

A. Business Voice

Two strategic initiatives focus directly on elevating the voice of business. These strategies encompass formalized listening intently to employers throughout the region and strengthening their message with policymakers.

A.1. Employer Roundtables

GOAL

Organize and support employer roundtables that are employer-driven with the capacity to foster collective improvements to the business climate in their respective geographic areas and industries informing advocacy and feedback for the region. These roundtables also help economic development practitioners demonstrate economic efficacy towards area employers.

Within 3 years, we aim for:

- 75 participating employers.
- Diverse industry participation.

WHY IMPORTANT

Participants in the Employer Focus Groups of this strategic planning process requested ongoing opportunities to dialogue with peer business leaders. By regularly bringing together employers in a valuable manner, common challenges may emerge as well as peer solutions to those challenges. Regular dialogue provides an opportunity to cultivate a collective voice for business which ties into the Organizing for Advocacy strategic initiative. Other benefits may also emerge to address future challenges and potential integrated supply chains.

TEAM LEADS

- ❖ Katy Farber, APEG
- ❖ Taylor Stepp, APEG
- ❖ Melissa Clark, Gallia County Economic Development

ACTION STEPS



A.2 Advocating for our Region

GOAL

By organizing our region – the business community, economic developers, local elected officials and partners - we aim to advocate more effectively for needed resources and policy that will positively impact economic prosperity in our region.

Within 3 years, we aim for:

- Completed policy agenda.
- 10% increase per year of personal interactions with state and local legislators.
- Working on at least 9 issues.
- Expanded newsletter readership, speaking opportunities, and media opportunities.
- \$300,000 funding/investment to the region as a result of this advocacy initiative.

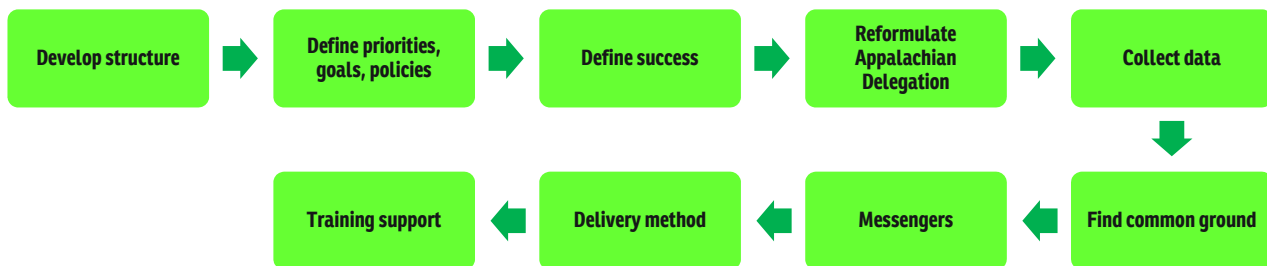
WHY IMPORTANT

There is strength in one clear and concise voice for our region. Coalescing our voices into one consistent voice helps our region garner more attention and clout. Otherwise we suffer from what is done to us; instead of speaking up to shape our future.

TEAM LEADS

- ❖ Mike Jacoby, APEG
- ❖ John Hemmings, Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission

ACTION STEPS



B. Talent

Three strategic initiatives involve concentrated effort to expand a talent pipeline and attract skilled workers throughout the region.

B.1. Incumbent Worker Upskilling

GOAL

Connect employers to underutilized programs that upskill workers and attract additional resources to support expansion of upskilling programs.

Within 3 years, we aim for:

- Upskilled workers with tracked credentials and certifications earned.
- 90% of upskilled workers earn wage increase or promotion.
- 90% of upskilled workers create backfill job opening and are filled.
- 95% retention of upskilled workers by employers.

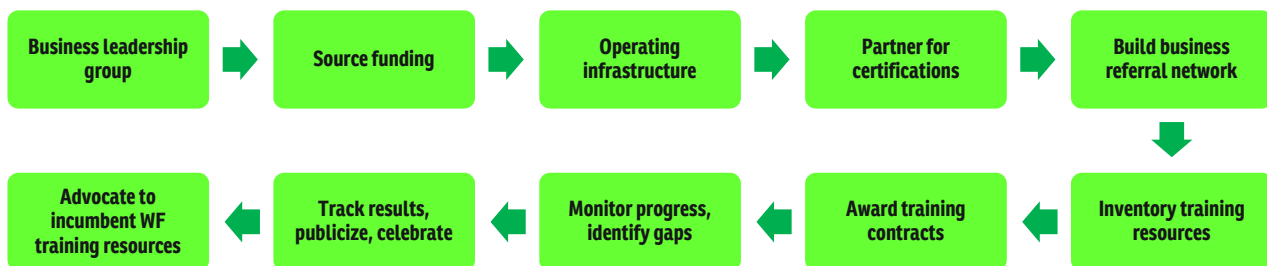
WHY IMPORTANT

The skills and knowledge of a company's workforce is a competitive advantage for business innovation and increased efficiencies. By helping employers upskill current workers, they are more successful with meeting production deadlines, ISO audits, customer audits, sales opportunities – all of which instill confidence for increasing corporate investment in their locations. For every worker upskilled and promoted, another worker finds opportunity to backfill the vacated position. This work positively supports business competitiveness and changes the lives of two people for every person upskilled.

TEAM LEADS

- ❖ Rob Guentter, Workforce Development Board 16
- ❖ Rebecca Safko, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Area 15
- ❖ John Molinaro, Appalachian Partnership, Inc.

ACTION STEPS



B.2. Business Engagement with Career Awareness

GOAL

Strategic engagement of employers to enhance career awareness efforts, and thus, foster growth of effective career awareness programming across the region.

Within 3 years, we aim for:

- 6 collaborative groups formed, and 15 programs established among these groups.
- 15%, 20%, 25% increase annually in the number of employers involved, respectively for 3 years.
- 25%, 30%, 25% increase annually in the number of students involved, respectively for 3 years.
- 25%, 30%, 35% increase annually in the number of students with career plans, respectively for 3 years.
- 25%, 30%, 35% increase annually in the number of students employed in work experience, respectively for 3 years.

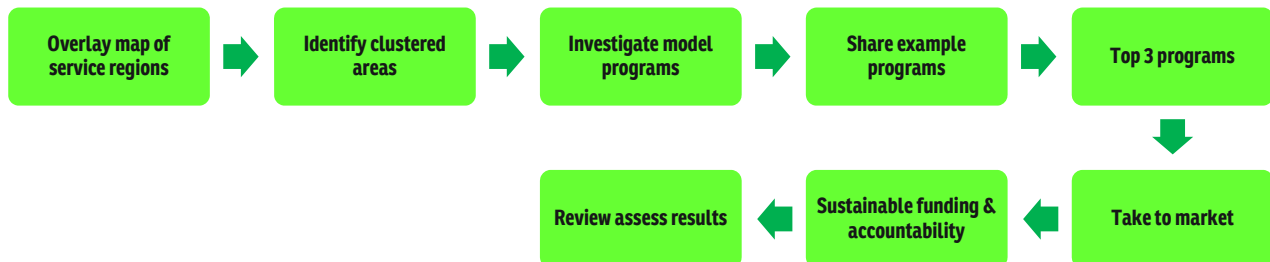
WHY IMPORTANT

A key ingredient to addressing the gap for unfilled jobs is to raise awareness of career opportunities and retain talent to the region. Students leave the region or pursue dead-end jobs with low wages because they lack awareness of opportunities in our region. Sustaining and growing businesses and the next generation of business leaders in our region requires employers to connect with students in meaningful ways that translate to the pursuit of specific skills and corresponding employment.

TEAM LEADS

- ❖ Robert Miller, Focus CFO
- ❖ Tasha Werry, Building Bridges to Careers

ACTION STEPS



B.3. Talent Recruitment to the Region

GOAL

Recruit talent to live in the APEG Region by marketing lifestyle and livability of our region and communities.

Within 3 years, we aim for:

- 1,200 impressions and engagements (social media analytics).
- 1%, 5%, 5% increase annually in the number of high school and college graduates staying in the region, respectively for 3 years.

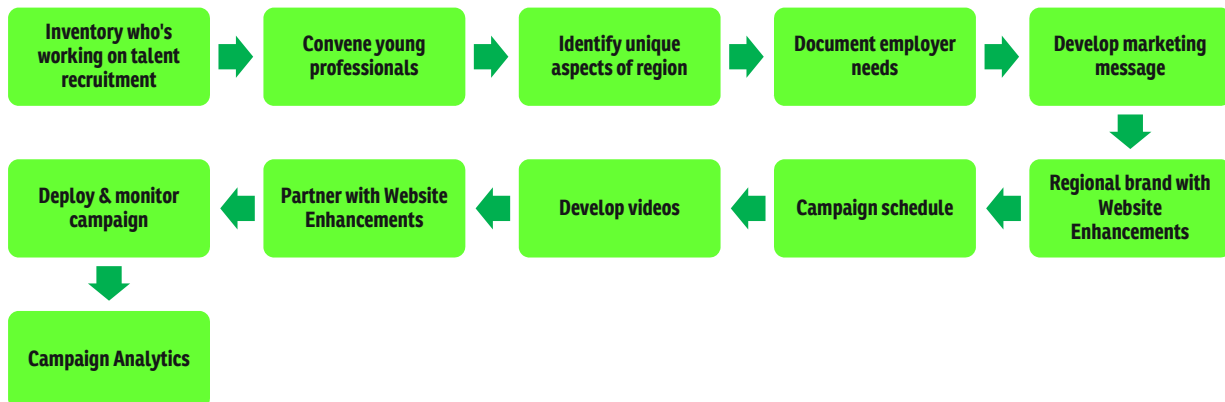
WHY IMPORTANT

Our region's population is declining. Meanwhile, businesses in the region are clamoring for skilled workers in order to sustain business competitiveness and innovation. Complementary to career awareness and upskilling initiatives, it is imperative to positively position lifestyle and employment opportunities in our region in order to stop brain drain and reverse population decline. If we don't speak up for our region, no one else will.

TEAM LEADS

- ❖ Lisa Duvall, Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association
- ❖ Kevin Buettner, Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association

ACTION STEPS



C. Competitive Assets

Three critical factors for business growth, expansion and recruitment are tackled by strategic initiatives for improving the regions competitiveness with ready sites and buildings, business financing, and broadband infrastructure. If not addressed, these weaknesses will continue to restrict economic prosperity and population growth.

C.1. Site and Speculative Building Development

GOAL

Increase our region's real estate inventory with active development of sites and buildings.

Within 3 years, we aim for:

- 2 new shovel-ready sites.
- 3 new speculative buildings built.

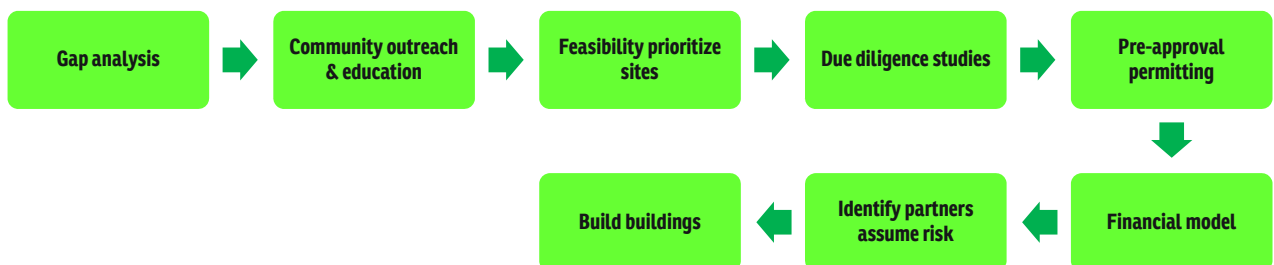
WHY IMPORTANT

Our work to attract and support existing business expansions are futile without ready-to-go sites and buildings. This work will enable our region to get into the game for more projects – projects for which we are currently limited to pursue competitively. Businesses seeking a new or expanding location are not willing to wait for us to get product ready; they go where product is ready to meet their needs. Regions who proactively invest in sites and buildings earn more “looks” and outright wins because they have invested in themselves. We need to invest time and resources into this hard work as opportunities will continue to pass us by and we will fall further behind the competition.

TEAM LEADS

- ❖ Donna Hrezo, APEG
- ❖ Brodie Lepi, JobsOhio

ACTION STEPS



C.2. Business Financing Gaps

GOAL

Increase flexible and affordable resources for business financing gaps, without creating unacceptable levels of risk for private, nonprofit and public sector investors.

Within 3 years, we aim for:

- 140 companies financed.
- 1,600 jobs created.
- \$258MM total financing and investment of which \$25MM of new business investment was leveraged.
- \$46MM loan capital administered by Appalachian Growth Capital.
- 17 new start-up companies.
- 190 additional companies mentored.

WHY IMPORTANT

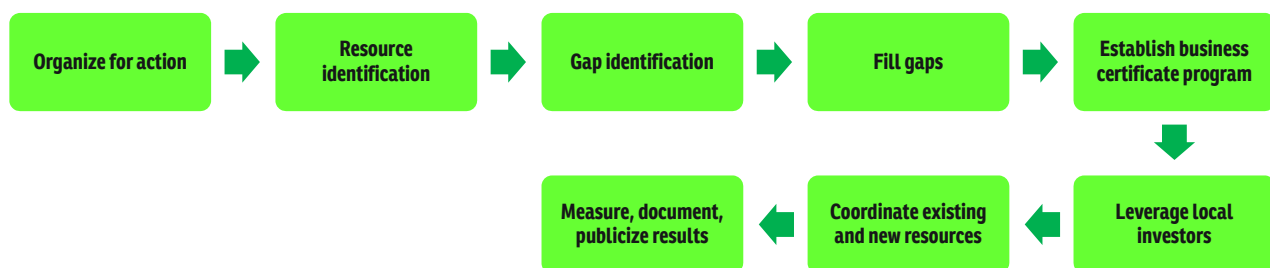
Over 90% of businesses are small businesses. Financing is a fundamental tool for business growth and can serve as the root of our region's economic prosperity to grow from within, however consolidations in the banking industry have severely reduced credit available for rural Appalachian businesses. If organized businesses who need financing cannot access it readily, they may leave our region to pursue financing resources elsewhere or even shut down the business. This means that our region could miss out on their business growth and experience an economic decline if we do not address these gaps.

In addition, businesses lack sufficient access to technical assistance, financial education and mentoring in order to help them organize and present their financial information in ways that will allow banks and others to lend them the capital they need to grow. Businesses also need assistance connecting to lenders interested in lending to companies in their industry or with their specific credit needs. Without this assistance, many companies that could qualify for available credit will be frozen out of financial markets or simply be unable to connect with the right lender to meet their needs.

TEAM LEADS

- ❖ John Molinaro, Appalachian Partnership, Inc.
- ❖ Brad Blair, Appalachian Growth Capital
- ❖ Jay Bennett, City of Zanesville

ACTION STEPS



C.3. Broadband Infrastructure

GOAL

Expand quality high-speed broadband infrastructure across the region, focusing particularly on areas that remain unserved.

Within 3 years, we aim for:

- Overarching Broadband architecture and related pro-formas completed.
- Drive State of Ohio Broadband plan, streamlining of easements processes in existing corridors, and cap "make ready" costs for attaching fiber to existing utility poles.
- Mapping improvements.
- Successfully awarded FCC Funding from FCC Reverse Auction.

WHY IMPORTANT

As technology has transformed the economy and society, access to high-speed broadband has become an essential utility, no longer just a nice-to-have amenity. The Internet has become the foundation on which businesses operate and learners of all ages depend. The quality of broadband access has become a crucial factor in economic development, driving business competitiveness and strongly influencing the ability to attract and retain talent. As the boundary between personal and professional lives have blurred, Internet access must be ubiquitous, available in homes and businesses alike.

Due to the lack of concentrated housing and businesses, rural regions fall far behind urban counterparts for access to quality high-speed broadband infrastructure. Regions with installed broadband infrastructure have a significant and categorical economic advantage.

Most of our unserved and underserved locations in the APEG region fall within what we call the "rural expanse." These are areas with population densities too low to support profitable deployment of broadband infrastructure.

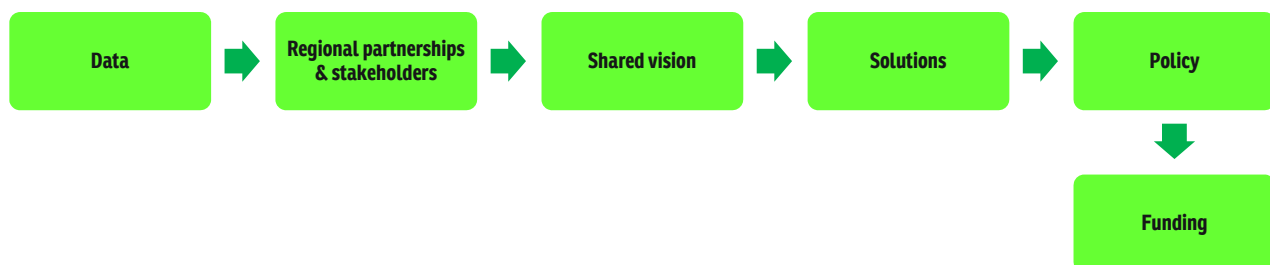
Broadband deployment costs tie closely to the square miles to be covered irrespective of population density. For this reason, the low population density areas of the region do not offer a sustainable business model for carriers to invest in the necessary infrastructure. Even if the initial construction costs are covered by 100% grant funds, the projected revenues would be unlikely to cover even the operations and maintenance costs. In the APEG region, our beautiful and rugged terrain further increase costs, e.g. signals from a tower cover a fraction of the area compared to flat terrain.

Thus, we must focus on funding opportunities that offer multi-year support for implementation, operations and maintenance. Acting now is crucial to be prepared for a variety of existing and emerging funding opportunities and to inform policy makers regarding the level of funding required.

TEAM LEADS

- ❖ Tom Reid, Reid Consulting Group
- ❖ Gwynn Stewart, OSU Extension Noble County
- ❖ Bret Allphin, Buckeye Hills Regional Council

ACTION STEPS



D. Economic Development

Five strategic initiatives boost our economic development programming to a higher level, all in support of business growth and prosperity.

D.1. Focused Existing Business Growth

GOAL

Take business retention and expansion programming to the next level of effectiveness.

Within 3 years, we aim for:

- 41 existing companies expanded in the region.
- 1,150 jobs retained.
- 825 new jobs from expansion.
- \$54MM capital investment from expansions.
- 670 company visits.

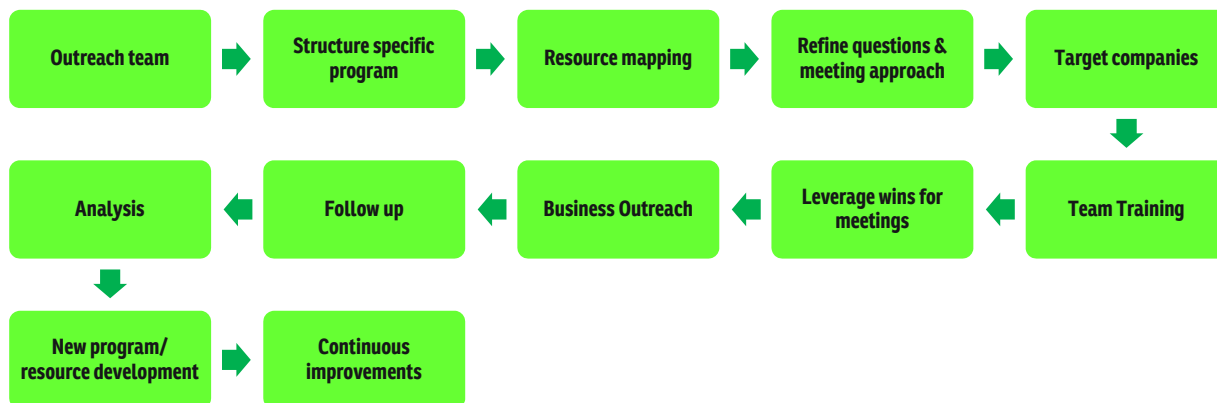
WHY IMPORTANT

Supporting existing business growth delivers the most effective return on investment of our economic development resources. Plus, if we don't take care of our businesses, another economic development group may be targeting them to relocate to their region or community. Happy and growing regional employers are our best proof points to support business attraction. And, if we build trust by serving our existing businesses better, we gather more fruitful intelligence for planning and devising solutions to common challenges. By expanding our efforts with existing businesses, we can accomplish parallel tracks of basic industry growth and expanded retail and service sectors to enhance quality of place throughout our region.

TEAM LEAD

- ❖ Katy Farber, APEG

ACTION STEPS



D.2. Cluster Development

Appalachian Ohio is home to specific assets, including technological innovations that provide for unique distinction. By focusing on three niche industries for cluster development we can draw attention to our region as a global leader for wood furniture craftsmanship, energy and chemical resources related to the Shale Crescent, and the Stirling cycle machine. Cluster development for the shale industry links directly to the strategic initiative for Targeted Business Attraction. Cluster development initiatives specific to Forest-to-Furniture and the Stirling Cycle Machine are outlined in this section.

D.2.A. Forest-to-Furniture Cluster Development

GOAL

Define a clear path forward to sustain the Forest-to-Furniture (F2F) Program after 2020.

Within 3 years, we aim for:

- 300 companies featured on the Ohio Wood Products website marketplace.
- Increase website traffic.
- 32 technical support projects.
- 6 marketing events.
- 6 training events.

WHY IMPORTANT

The Ohio forest products industry is a \$25+ Billion business. This Small Business Administration Cluster Initiative Program was awarded to Appalachian Partnership, Inc. in September 2015. Since start-up, the program has assisted various companies with 30 new product lines, provided over 975 hours of technical consulting, facilitated 17 training programs involving 188 employees. Participant companies have invested over \$1.5 million in expansion resulting in 105+ new jobs. The ohiowoodproducts.com directory has been created and currently contains over 1,600 vetted companies. This site now provides supply chain/marketing resources to over 150 users per day. The program continues to build confidence and trust of cluster participants. The technical services offered, along with supply chain assistance, often provides just what is needed with new company start-ups or new product lines. Simply said the Forest-to-Furniture (F2F) program/ ohiowoodproducts.com is having a positive impact in this cluster and funding to continue the program and "Ohio Wood Products" brand beyond 2020 is needed.

TEAM LEADS

- ❖ Frank Roberts, APEG Wood Products Team
- ❖ Patrick Bolton, APEG Wood Products Team

ACTION STEPS



D.2.B. Stirling Cycle Machine Cluster Development

GOAL

Build a more robust regional cluster for the region's globally recognized free-piston Stirling cycle machine technology.

Within 3 years, we aim for:

- 5 company visits.

WHY IMPORTANT

The free-piston Stirling engine (FPSE) technology was invented at Ohio University in 1964. In the last 50 years, the region has been fostering the growth and development of world class talent and resources surrounding the specialized design and exacting manufacturing of Stirling cycle machines. Through the strategic alignment of goals, the region can leverage its resources to bolster the support of current Stirling companies in the region, attract existing Stirling companies from outside of the region, and foster the growth of potential new Stirling companies in the region.

TEAM LEADS

- ❖ Stacy Strauss, Ohio University Innovation Center
- ❖ Erin Rennich, Ohio University Innovation Center
- ❖ Aaron Kirby, TechGROWTH Ohio

ACTION STEPS



D.3. Targeted Business Attraction

GOAL

Recruit businesses to the APEG Region with proactive, targeted marketing and sales.

Within 3 years, we aim for:

- 225 interfaces with business decision-makers.
- 12 site visits.
- 4 company locations.
- 100 news jobs from business attraction wins.
- \$8MM capital investment from business attraction wins.
- \$4MM payroll from business attraction wins.

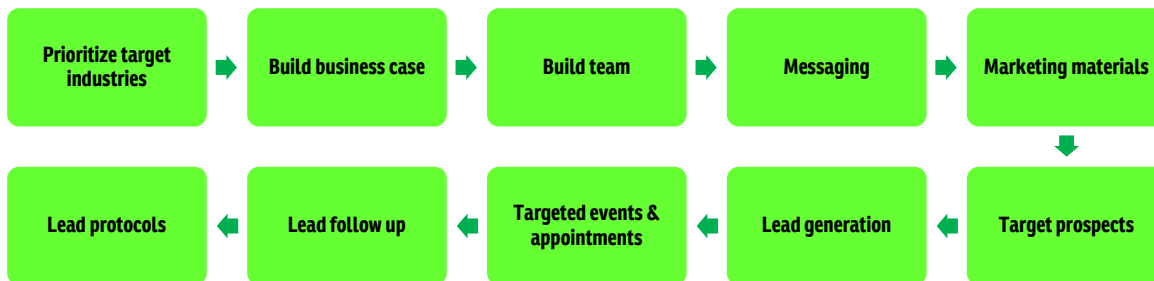
WHY IMPORTANT

Pursuing companies to select our region for their location is a crowded field – thousands of economic development organizations worldwide – so it is important to establish strategic differentiation for our region by targeting industries that align to our strengths. Proactively targeting sets our region up for the best opportunities for successful business recruitment. Companies will feel wanted because they see we are honing solutions to match their specific needs with a compelling business case that translates directly to their board discussions.

TEAM LEAD

- ❖ Mike Jacoby, APEG

ACTION STEPS



D.4. Website Enhancements

Marketing is woven throughout the Economic Prosperity Plan. This strategic initiative is called out specifically to raise the profile of a regional website as the foundational marketing tool for all other marketing to leverage.

GOAL

To enhance website content at regional and local levels and to organize and maintain updates of robust economic development information to competitively present the assets and services of the APEG region of southern and eastern Ohio.

Essentially this initiative falls under APEG's current marketing protocol, but APEG Marketing Director will proactively work with the Website Enhancements Team to create better cohesion among all county economic development sites as well as ensuring all necessary items are represented on the APEG website.

Within 3 years, we aim for:

- New regional brand developed and implemented.
- 100% APEG counties represented online at region and local levels.

WHY IMPORTANT

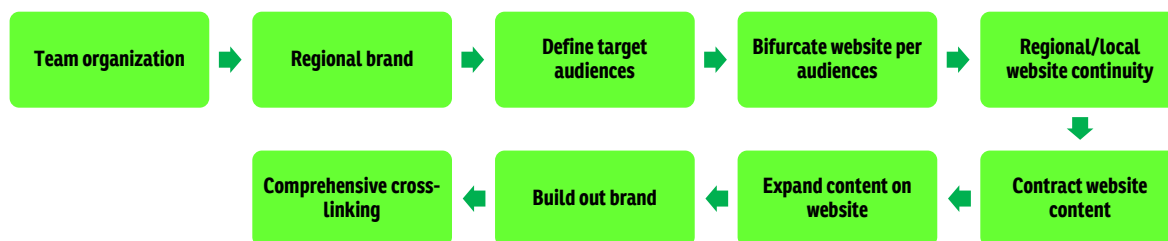
Economic development websites are typically the first door that a business enters to learn about a region. It is often the first impression of your community or region. Expectations for current, in-depth information on websites are a mandate to demonstrate readiness and capabilities to serve businesses in real time. Web visitors expect to find what they are seeking online and find it quickly.

Ultimately, it is up to us - no one is going to tell our region's story. Meanwhile our competitors are presenting more robust data and information, including case studies of the work they do.

TEAM LEADS

- ❖ Heather Church, APEG
- ❖ Tiffany Swigert, Coshocton Port Authority
- ❖ Brenda Stamper, Coshocton Port Authority

ACTION STEPS



D.5. Community Technical Assistance

GOAL

Create a structure for planning and resource acquisition that makes it easier for local communities to tackle important projects that may not fall within traditional economic development programs. Areas of focus could be support for entrepreneurial development, downtown revitalization, or “place making” activities to make our communities more attractive to in-demand skilled workers.

Within 3 years, we aim for:

- 17 projects funded.
- \$675K leveraged for new funding.
- 12 impact stories collected and prepared.

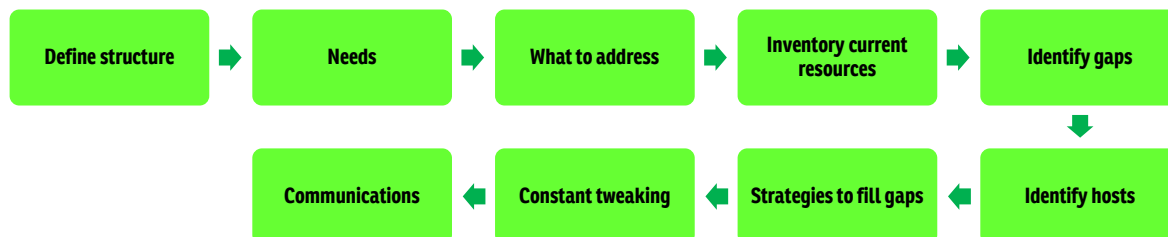
WHY IMPORTANT

Across our region, there is a wide range of expertise in economic development and community development programming, along with varied experience with grant writing and resource acquisition. This initiative intentionally leverages resources and expertise to save time and resources as communities across our region tackle important projects.

TEAM LEADS

- ❖ Jennifer Simon, Ohio University
- ❖ Ryan Mapes, The Ohio State University, South Center
- ❖ Katy Farber, APEG
- ❖ MarJean Kennedy, Holzer Health System

ACTION STEPS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

453 stakeholders and partners, of which 194 of these participants were business leaders, participated in research, input and shaping the Economic Prosperity Plan for the APEG Region.

Core Working Group

Mike Jacoby, APEG	John Molinaro, Appalachian Partnership Inc.	Katy Farber, APEG
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Larry Merry, Belmont County Port Authority	Misty Crosby, Buckeye Hills Regional Council	Tommy Young, Columbia Gas of Ohio
Cara Dingus Brook, Foundation for Appalachian Ohio	Melissa Clark, Gallia County Econ. Dev. Office	MarJean Kennedy, Holzer Health System (APEG Board)
Stuart Moynihan, JobsOhio	Matt Cybulski, JobsOhio	John Hemmings, Ohio Valley Reg. Dev. Council
Melissa Taylor, Ohio Dept. of Transportation	Matt Dietrich, Ohio Rail Development Commission	Steven Golding, Ohio University
Stacy Strauss, Ohio University Innovation Center	Jeannette Wierzbicki, OMEGA	

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Kevin King, Ohio University	MarJean Kennedy, Holzer Health System	David Ledonne, MarkWest Energy
Gordon Litt, Baker Hostetler	Sara Marrs-Maxfield, Athens County Economic Development Council (APEG board only)	

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Paul Prater, American Electric Power	Tom Centa, AMG Vanadium LLC	Colleen Heacock, AMG Vanadium LLC
Stacy Carr, AMG Vanadium LLC	Jerry James, Artex Oil Company/Shale Crescent USA	B.J. Smith, AT&T
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Employers

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Employers

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Larry Kidd, Reliable Staffing Services	Randall Gabriel, Resilient Power Solutions	Charles Hemrick, Results Radio
Ryan Hagen, Riffle Machine Works	Jon Wisecup, Rockhold Bank	Jason Brooks, Rocky Brands
Richard Simms, Rocky Brands	Mike Brooks, Rocky Brands	Larry Kidd, RSS Staffing
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