



Region 8

Cities of: Buena Vista, Harrisonburg, Lexington, Staunton, Waynesboro, & Winchester
Counties of: Augusta, Bath, Clarke, Frederick, Highland, Page, Rockbridge, Rockingham, Shenandoah, & Warren

Meeting summary for Growth & Diversification Committee Meeting (02/07/2025)

Quick recap

The meeting began with team members discussing their personal experiences and concerns, followed by introductions of the new Go Virginia Region 8 Executive Director and other committee members. The team then focused on updating the Economic Growth and Diversification Plan, which involved designing surveys, identifying targeted industries, and planning stakeholder engagement processes. Finally, the group discussed survey revisions, scheduled future meetings, and outlined upcoming deliverables for the project.

Next steps

- Ann and Jeremy to revise the survey based on feedback received and send out an updated version to the committee.
- Committee members to review the revised survey and send comments directly to Ann and Jeremy.
- Ann and Jeremy to create a shared document with a running log of committee comments on the survey.
- Ann and Jeremy to prepare an analysis of the Jobs EQ data for the next meeting.
- Ann and Jeremy to develop a list of potential focus groups for March and April.
- Alison to schedule the next committee meeting for March 7th at 10 AM.
- Alison to send AI-generated meeting briefs to all committee members after each meeting.

Summary

Team's Experiences and Weather Concerns

The team discussed their experiences and concerns about the upcoming week. Alison mentioned she was still recovering from a busy January and was playing catch-up on her projects. She also expressed her concern about bad weather potentially causing her court

appearances to be postponed. Jeremy and Dave shared their thoughts on the weather, with Dave mentioning his past experiences with making snow calls and the challenges that come with it. Ann expressed her sympathy for those who have to make such calls. The team also shared their anticipation for the weekend, with Ann looking forward to skiing at Snowshoe and Dave reminiscing about his time at Blue Ridge.

New Leadership and Regional Development

In the meeting, Alison Varner-Denbigh introduced herself as the new Go Virginia Region 8 Executive Director, expressing her excitement for the upcoming projects and her pleasure in working with Ann. Ann Cundy, the Executive Director of the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission, also introduced herself, mentioning her 12-year tenure with the commission and her recent promotion to executive director. Jeremy Crute, the Director of Planning with the Central Shenandoah Plan District Commission, shared his excitement about expanding the region's economic development strategy. Greg Hitchin, Director of Economic Development and Tourism for the city of Waynesboro, and Dave Urso, Vice President of Academic Affairs at Blue Ridge Community College, also introduced themselves. Ed Daley, interim county administrator in Warren County, Randy Doyle, chair of the Shenandoah Valley Workforce Development Board, and John Graves from Lou Ray Caverns Corporation, completed the introductions. The committee members agreed to have Ed Daley as the chair and Dave Urso as the vice chair for the upcoming year. Ann and Jeremy then took over the meeting to discuss the agenda and the review of the previous discussions with the full council.

Go Virginia Region 8 Economic Plan Update

Ann and Jeremy discussed the upcoming update to the Economic Growth and Diversification Plan for the Go Virginia Region 8. The plan, updated every two years, identifies issues affecting the region's economic competitiveness and focuses on targeted industry sectors. The update process will involve stakeholder interviews, analysis of jobs data, and a gap analysis. The final draft will be presented to the full Region 8 Council by September or October. Jeremy also outlined the five major requirements for the plan, including evaluating the region's economic performance, conducting a situational analysis of each targeted industry, reviewing skills gaps in the workforce, refining the plan's priority goals and strategies, and outlining opportunities for collaboration. The stakeholder engagement process will involve a survey, targeted focus groups, and additional interviews if necessary.

Survey Design for Targeted Industries

The team discussed the design of a survey targeted at Region 8 council members to identify changes in targeted industries and goals. The discussion revolved around the need to compare the survey to the previous one, the possibility of reworking the survey to include all possible industries and having respondents prioritize them, and the use of ranking questions in the survey. The consensus was to include all industries and have respondents rank them based on importance. The team also discussed the need for data to support the inclusion of new industries. The conversation ended with the decision to use a ranking question format in the survey.

Survey Planning and Stakeholder Engagement

The team discussed the need for a survey to gather data from various stakeholders in the region. They considered whether the survey should be directed to the regional council members or expanded to include other industry leaders, college presidents, and support organizations. The idea of conducting two separate surveys, one for the regional council members and another for a broader group, was proposed. The team also discussed the potential for using the survey results to identify gaps and prioritize industries. The objective of the first survey was to gather a snapshot of perceptions and not to make firm decisions about focus areas. The team agreed to use the existing stakeholder list for the survey and to market the focus groups as confidential access to raw data.

Reworking Question List for Broader Audience

Jeremy led a discussion on reworking the question list to be relevant to a broader audience, focusing on the previous iteration of the growth and diversification plan. The team debated the need for a question that ranks top priorities for the Virginia region 8, with suggestions to rephrase it to identify areas of improvement or achievement. The team also discussed the need for a broader economic development perspective, beyond the previous plan's focus. Edaley suggested a question about performance in specific areas, while Alison proposed a question about improvement opportunities for the region. The team agreed to consider adding a fourth question to identify specific needs that Go Virginia can address.

Revising Survey and Upcoming Deliverables

The team discussed the need to revise a survey based on feedback received. They agreed to send their comments directly to Ann and Jeremy, who would then compile and send a revised survey. The team also decided to schedule their next committee meeting for March 7th at 10 AM. Alison mentioned that she would send out meeting briefs after each meeting. The team also discussed the upcoming deliverables, including a finalized survey, analysis of job data, and identification of focus groups for March and April.