



Meeting summary for Growth & Diversification Committee Meeting (03/07/2025)

In Attendance: Ed Daley, Randy Doyle, Bruce Simms, Greg Hitchin, Ann Cundy, Jeremy Crute, and Alison Varner-Denbigh

Absent: John Graves and Dave Urso

The meeting focused on preparing a survey for the GO Virginia Region 8 Growth & Diversification plan, discussing the survey format, and presenting data on the region's targeted industry clusters. The committee also discussed the importance of infrastructure in economic growth, the need for stakeholder involvement in focus groups, and the need for a more representative list of participants for future discussions. Lastly, they agreed to continue analyzing quantitative data, conduct brainstorming sessions, and set up focus groups to gather input for the economic plan.

Next steps

- Alison to send calendar invites for monthly meetings from April to October on the first Friday at 10 AM.
- Jeremy and Ann to send out the survey on Monday with a 10-day response window.
- Jeremy and Ann to distribute the survey to regional council members, economic developers in localities, and identified support organizations.
- Jeremy to continue analyzing quantitative data and begin writing the economic performance section of the plan.
- Jeremy and Ann to prepare recommendations for targeted industries based on survey data and industry analysis for the next meeting.
- Jeremy and Ann to refine the stakeholder list with specific contacts and start planning focus group invitations.
- Ann and Jeremy to consider a question for Alison to ask during the project pipeline brainstorming sessions and email it to her.

- Committee members to be prepared to help lead at least one focus group interview later in the spring.
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Summary

Go Virginia Region 8 Survey Update

The group discusses the upcoming survey for the Go Virginia Region 8 economic development plan. Jeremy presents the updated survey, which now includes ranking questions for targeted industries, investment priorities, and goals from the previous plan. The survey will be sent out on Monday with a 10-day response period. Alison mentions plans to collect more comprehensive contact information for council members at the April meeting, which will be held at the new Winchester Regional Airport terminal.

Survey Feedback and Targeted Industries Discussion

Jeremy discusses the feedback on the survey format and the need for a quick turnaround. The committee debates extending the survey period from 10 days to 2 weeks, considering the broader audience including industry stakeholders. They agree to keep the 10-day timeframe but emphasize in the communication that it's a short survey. Alison recommends including economic developers and support organizations in addition to regional council members to get a more diverse set of responses. The group also discusses the importance of balancing survey data with market trends when determining targeted industries, considering recent shifts in federal employment and the impact of events like COVID-19. Jeremy then begins to present an overview of the data provided by DHCD for previously identified targeted industries.

Go Virginia Region 8 Targeted Industry Overview

Jeremy presents an overview of the Go Virginia Region 8 targeted industry clusters and their performance. He explains that these targeted industries represent 31% of total employment but account for 46% of employment growth over the last 5 years and are expected to account for 40% of job growth in the next couple of years. Jeremy shows data on the region's fastest-growing industries, industries with the largest location quotients, and largest industries by employment, demonstrating that the previously identified target industries capture most of these key sectors. He also presents a graph showing the relationship between wages and expected growth for various industries. Alison and Ann ask questions about specific industries like chemical manufacturing, animal production, and textile mills, and their inclusion in the targeted industry clusters.

Infrastructure Readiness and Economic Growth

Jeremy presented data on energy consumption and infrastructure readiness for economic growth, including utilities and transportation. Ann recommended a Vaco podcast series on solar and data centers in Virginia. Randy asked about the inclusion of infrastructure data in the analysis, to which Jeremy responded that it's included in the sites characterization provided by DHCD. Alison thanked Jeremy for his presentation and introduced the stakeholder gap analysis, which identified key stakeholders in the region's targeted industry sectors. Ann highlighted the need for additional focus groups in life sciences, transportation, and logistics, and the possibility of adding or removing industry clusters based on regional council decisions.

Focus Groups and Plan Development

In the meeting, the committee discussed the need for focus groups to gather input from regional stakeholders about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis that will inform the Go Virginia economic plan. They agreed that these groups should be facilitated by committee members based on their areas of expertise. The committee also agreed to continue analyzing quantitative data and writing up the economic performance section of the plan. A survey will be sent out on Monday and the results, along with industry data, will be used to determine the targeted industries for the plan. The next meeting was scheduled for April 4th.