



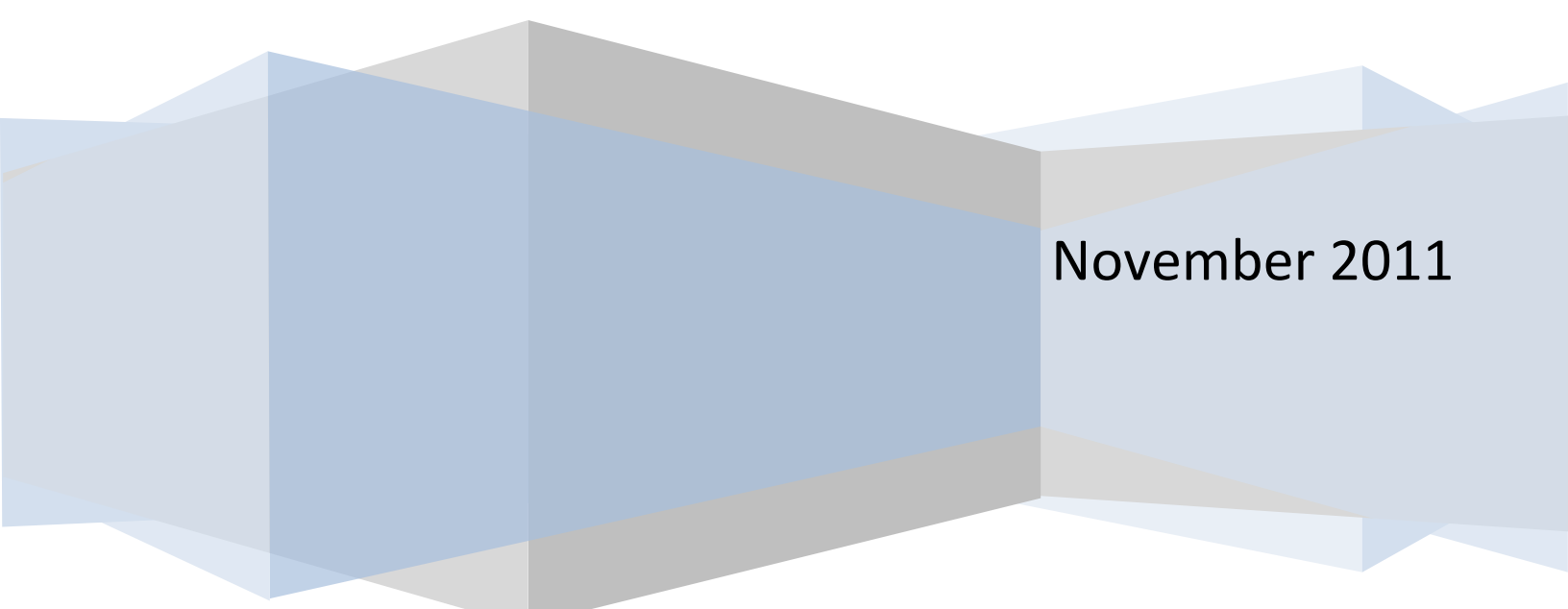
Economic Development Strategy and Jobs Plan

Nov. 2011
SONOMA
COUNTY

Economic Development Strategy and Jobs Plan

County of Sonoma

Prepared by Sonoma County Economic Development Board



November 2011

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Introduction

The unemployment rate in Sonoma County is currently 9.4% and has exceeded 9% for over 35 months. Currently 23,900 people are jobless and many more are underemployed. Those seeking jobs are competing with a global workforce and automation for work, and the businesses that could and want to create those needed jobs face severe challenges, including a sometimes costly and uncertain regulatory process, an inability to secure needed financing, a shortage of appropriately trained workers, and reduced demand for local goods and services. These challenges continue to plague businesses and the county's residents as they seek gainful employment locally.

Economic vitality is key to the sustainability of a community and the County and its residents benefit from a greater quality of life when economic success and sustainability are achieved, resulting in less reliance on community, social and government services and less environmental strain. The Board of Supervisors, recognizing this and the imminent need to take action, identified Economic and Environmental Stewardship as one of the four focus areas in the November 2010 Strategic Plan and as part of the Board of Supervisors' 2011 Workplan, the creation and implementation of an economic development strategy for job creation/business retention, sustainability, and improvement of government perception within the business community, was identified as a main priority. As such, Supervisors Efren Carrillo and Mike McGuire were appointed to serve on an Economic Development Ad Hoc Committee to guide this effort. Through the Board's Ad Hoc Committee the Sonoma County Economic Development Board (EDB) was tasked with developing a comprehensive plan to provide direct assistance and services to the local business community.

Through the Innovation Action Council, executives and owners from the five key economic clusters (Professional Services, Manufacturing, Construction/Green Business, Sonoma Specialties (including wine, dairy, agriculture and tourism), and Health Care) were assembled in focus group sessions to identify their opportunities for economic and employment growth locally, and what would be needed to help achieve those opportunities. Three common themes emerged from the cluster sessions: the need to simplify the permit and regulatory environment; to improve the workforce for a changing economy; and to build more demand for Sonoma County products by coordinating and strengthening our strategic assets and branding efforts. The report from this process is contained in Appendix "A" to this document.

The cluster reports were presented at the EDB's Economic Summit in June 2011. Nearly 400 people from business, government, education and community-based organizations attended the event. The attendees were asked to provide their ideas to improve climate for jobs and the economy. Interestingly, the principal themes that emerged from the attendees at this event were very similar to those resulting from the cluster focus group sessions, including the need to improve regulatory processes, improve education and workforce training, and to encourage collaboration among entities in the county. The report from this conference is attached as Appendix "B" to this document.

With guidance from the Ad Hoc Committee, and based on a data-driven approach incorporating input from multiple community outreach events as well as meetings with business, community, and government leaders, the EDB proposes an enhancement of services and resources within the County organization designed to specifically foster economic development.

This Plan focuses on increasing capacity, building demand and driving innovation. It is not the government's role to create jobs; this is the role of the private sector. However, the EDB is uniquely situated to support our local business community and thus contribute to the creation of jobs in Sonoma County and a sustainable economic environment. The EDB can help create this environment by working with, and providing support services to, those people on the front line of job creation, by helping remove impediments to business growth, and by working to create an economic climate where businesses can prosper and individuals can find and retain jobs.

The Plan laid out here can only be accomplished through a collaborative approach. The proposed initiatives will require partnership among many entities, ranging from business to government to education and other stakeholders, and those already performing related efforts within the county. The Plan, designed as a five-year action plan, also includes metrics for progress and evaluation of program impact, as well as a proposed implementation schedule. Some of the specifics contained within are coordinated with the current efforts of the development of a county-wide Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), to allow for grant applications to the Economic Development Administration. As such, this Plan should be reviewed annually to ensure relevance with current efforts and the near future needs of the County. The Plan should be comprehensively updated every five years to ensure its continued coordination with the CEDS.

Finally, many thanks are due to all who gave generously of their time and expertise, and who collaborated in various ways to produce this plan. These include the appointees to the Innovation Action Council, the Economic Development Board appointees, the 100 or more executives and owners who participated in the cluster focus groups, the 400 attendees at the June Economic Summit, staffs from chambers, cities, the County, and many other entities, as well as the team from the California Association for Local Economic Development (CALED). Additionally, the Morgan Family Foundation provided seed funding to the cluster focus group effort, and the Board of Supervisors provided support for the entire plan development.

Summary of Strategic Objectives and Action Steps

1	Improve Regulatory Compliance Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint a Business Development and Regulatory Assistance Liaison within the EDB to assist businesses through the regulatory processes and resolve obstacles to business development • Staff a Customer Service Ombudsman position within PRMD dedicated solely to resolving permitting issues for both homeowners and business customers • Form a multi-agency task force to look for opportunities to simplify and streamline regulatory processes across jurisdictions
2	Deliver Business Development & Outreach Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff a Business Retention and Expansion Program • Develop a county-wide working group of public and non-profit agencies to organize county-wide efforts in retaining businesses
3	Create a Workforce Development Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an employer-driven, agency-inclusive workforce development plan focused on the current and future needs of county employers
4	Encourage Business Cluster Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff a Cluster Development Program to facilitate expansion of targeted industry sectors
5	Develop Financial Resources Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a financial resources “toolbox” for local businesses, including development incentives and greater access to capital, and explore new funding options • Identify and apply for state and federal financial incentives in support of the local business community
6	Facilitate Broadband Deployment in Rural Parts of the County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a strategic plan for broadband deployment in rural parts of the county, and encourage new efforts around “middle mile” and “last mile” deployment
7	Engage in Strategic Asset Development and Branding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take inventory of strategic assets and their producers, develop strategies to maximize value and image, and help coordinate marketing activities of the major industries and employers to provide a unified image of Sonoma County
8	Enhance Coordinated Economic Development Resources within the County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form an Inter-Departmental Economic Development Strategy Committee to coordinate services and leverage resources among key departments involved in economic development activities • Partner with and help coordinate county-wide economic development activities including local cities, chambers, BEST, and other organizations, to reduce redundancy and increase efficiency of related services

Current County Government Services to Business

The County currently works to serve the business community in a variety of ways, but with nearly 10% of our residents seeking work, more can, and must, be done. As part of the previously described engagement process, it was identified that a number of other County departments provide services to the business community, in addition to those provided by the EDB, and these current functions are important tools to leverage as we embark on a more aggressive assistance plan. Examples of current programs include the General Services Department, with the Local Preferences Policy and Sonoma County Energy Independence Program, the Transportation and Public Works Department with the Airport expansion project, the Agricultural Commissioner and Farm Advisors with agricultural impacts and food systems programs, just to name a few. A few departments were identified as providing more active and frequent services to the business community and are valuable partners to the EDB and discussed in a number of areas of this Plan. Included here is a summary of a few of the County departments' roles and impacts related to economic development.

Redevelopment/Community Development Commission:

The Sonoma County Community Development Commission's (CDC) mission is to promote decent and affordable housing, revitalize communities, and support services that increase economic stability for County residents. In working towards these goals, the CDC's Community Development Division, Housing Authority, and Redevelopment Agency provide direct financial assistance for a broad range of activities that impact the development of a vibrant local economy, both through direct economic development activities, as well as capital development activities that help to provide a foundation and incentive for private investment.

Direct economic development programs provided by the Redevelopment Agency and Community Development Division include:

- Below-market rate loans to businesses to make improvements to commercial properties in the three Redevelopment Projects Areas of Russian River, Roseland, and Sonoma Valley Springs, with total available funding of over 3 million dollars
- Grant funding for public entities to develop conference and other meeting facilities in most areas of the County
- Tourism and destination branding and marketing initiatives in the Redevelopment Project Areas
- Small business technical assistance in the Russian River and Roseland areas, serving total of 24 business with 65 individual sessions, and providing 7 group business seminars, in this current fiscal year alone
- Funding of a full-time Economic Development Coordinator position in EDB to serve the Russian River Area, and funding similar staffing in the Springs Project Area, where the Sonoma Valley Economic Development Partnership, comprised of the Redevelopment Agency, City of Sonoma, and Sonoma Valley Chamber of Commerce, provides business counseling services for region.

The Redevelopment Agency also directly assists in economic development by acquiring underutilized properties in the three Project Areas and preparing them for commercial or mixed-use development by private entities, thereby partnering with and leveraging private investment from such businesses, by completing needed environmental clean-up work, as well as on-site infrastructure and public improvements.

The CDC also provides below-market rate loans to private entities, and grant funding for public entities, to complete projects that indirectly support development of the local economy by providing the infrastructure upon which businesses can build. Such projects include improvements to roads and construction of sidewalks in commercial corridors, constructing and upgrading water and sewer lines, and affordable housing development and preservation to expand the quantity and quality of the housing stock that is available for the local workforce. Business establishment, development and expansion are dependent on these prerequisites.

Workforce Investment Board:

The Sonoma County Workforce Investment Board (WIB), administered by the Sonoma County Human Services Department, is a group of business and community leaders, appointed by the Board of Supervisors, working to ensure two things: that the residents of Sonoma County have the skills, training, and education to achieve their career goals, and that Sonoma County employers are able to hire, develop, and retain outstanding employees.

In regard to business services and economic development, the WIB oversees Job Link, Sonoma County's one-stop career center, including the following free business services:

- A Business Representative as a direct liaison with the business community, who identifies current job opportunities and matches these openings with active job seekers, makes referrals, and other specific hiring efforts;
- Information and access the Job Link's Virtual One Stop (VOS) system which is an internet-based system for employers to post job openings, search for job candidates, rate candidates for qualifications, and obtain local labor market information;
- Hiring events and job fairs at the Job Link office, including a computer lab for on-line applications and interview space;
- Workforce Reduction Services for employers and their employees during a layoff or business closure. The workforce reduction team provides immediate presentations on-site at impacted businesses to provide information about services at Job Link, in order to transition employees into subsequent employment opportunities;
- Referrals to business services and information, such as the Sonoma County Employer Advisory Council, who provide information on topics such as labor law, personnel issues, payroll tax, unemployment and disability insurance, tax incentives and more.

Permit and Resource Management Department:

Facilitating economic development through superior customer service and one-stop permitting was the main reason that Permit and Resources Management Department (PRMD) was created in 1995. At the time, PRMD's one-stop permit center was relatively unique, especially in the

comparatively fragmented regulatory environment of a California county. While customers clearly believe that today's permit center is a substantial improvement over the pre-PRMD days, the permitting process continues to be challenging for homeowners and business alike.

This comes as no surprise since virtually any discussion of economic development issues (regardless of locale) notes that businesses face real challenges in navigating a complex regulatory and permitting environment. However, the major drivers in the regulatory environment are largely outside of County government's control. These include state and federal requirements (e.g., water and energy conservation, handicap accessibility, environmental review requirements, endangered species protection, storm water management, etc.) and a local community here in Sonoma County that is very engaged with development issues and often expects highly regulated development as a result.

PRMD's role, then, is to simultaneously respond to these regulatory drivers (particularly as expressed through Board policy) while helping guide property owners and businesses to a successful outcome. This is a challenging mission and the department must constantly look for ways to improve services and meet the needs of customers and community more effectively and efficiently.

Department of Health Services:

In recognition of the connection between the health of a community and economic vitality, the Department of Health Services is a strong supporter of local business and economic opportunity. This support is provided through partnerships and programs throughout the county and benefits all sectors of business.

This connection is exemplified in Health Action, the Department convened council with representation from all sectors, including business. Among the council's many successes, Health Action is responsible, through a partnership with the Sonoma County Economic Development Board, for the *iWORKwell Healthy Business Recognition Program*. *iWORKwell* is a voluntary certification program that recognizes employers for developing and implementing exceptional employee wellness programs, and is aimed at helping establish a culture of wellness in the workplace throughout Sonoma County. Employers are awarded Bronze, Silver or Gold classification based on the breadth and depth of their employee wellness initiatives – 11 businesses have been recognized to date. In addition, the Department, through Health Action, has launched a *Food System Alliance*. The *Food System Alliance* is a local coalition working together to create a sustainable local food system where local growers are economically viable and consumers have access to healthy food.

The Department also supports local food facilities through the Recognition of Excellence in Food Safety Seal program that highlights and recognizes restaurants which achieve quality through high safety standards. In addition, the Department works continually with the local dairy industry through the Milk and Dairy program – one of the few counties in the State with a local program – which enables a streamlined process for grading and inspection services.

EDB's Current Role:

The EDB develops programs designed to support local job creation and the local economy in the following ways:

- Promote Sonoma County as an attractive place to do business
- Foster job growth
- Provide local businesses with tools to help them prosper
- Promote sound environmental business practices
- Maintain dialogue with the business community to anticipate and resolve emerging issues
- Identify and support those business clusters that are critical to maintaining a sound economy
- Develop pilot programs in emerging areas, and if successful, spin-off the programs to others for ongoing implementation

Through the website and various EDB-related events, the EDB reaches many people both inside and outside of Sonoma County. Around 50% of visitors to the EDB website are from outside the county, making the website an online resource for investors, companies, and individuals looking to relocate to Sonoma County. More than 5,000 people attend various EDB events throughout the year. A few of these events include State of the County, Spirit of Sonoma County, Economic Briefing Breakfasts, Business Environmental Alliance Best Practice Awards, and Business Hall of Fame.

Specific programs the EDB staffs include:

- Innovation Action Council, which takes a long-range view of ways to improve the climate for business and jobs
- Business Appreciation Week, which will launch in the Spring of 2012 and is designed to bring business, government, and education together
- Visitor Centers Contracts
- Film Program
- Green Business Program
- Restaurant Week
- Educational Events to Bring the Business Community Together

Objective 1 – Provide Regulatory Compliance & Sustainability Assistance

Introduction:

Compliance with environmental regulations and the overall cost and uncertainty of the permitting process have been identified as a major obstacle to economic vitality. The multiplicity of jurisdictions adds to the difficulty of determining where streamlining can take place to avoid costly delays in the approval process.

Action Steps:

- Establish a Business Development and Regulatory Assistance Liaison position as a pilot project in the EDB, to provide services to new and existing business customers related to navigating the multi-agency regulatory environment, identifying needs and trouble-shooting obstacles to business establishment and growth.
- Enhance guidance and education to businesses regarding permits and regulatory compliance, possibly employing “permit process workshops” to help community groups and businesses understand the role of permitting and regulatory processes.
- Provide education and information on various government and utility incentives and programs related to “green” business construction, retrofit and related sustainable efforts prior to the initiation of building. For instance, the Sonoma County Energy Independence Program (SCEIP) reports they have served 41 local commercial properties, with a total disbursement of \$7.3 million, which has had the effect of helping create/retain jobs locally while helping companies be more “green”. Similarly, the Water Agency’s sanitation districts have provided \$40,767 in rebates and \$641,645 in installations through the High Efficiency Direct Install Program (HEFDIP) to commercial properties and these and similar programs could be marketed and expanded.
- Explore the feasibility and usefulness of developing a building site inventory with “shovel-ready” status and pending needs, potentially county-wide.
- Staff a Customer Service Ombudsman position within PRMD to provide service to both residential and business customers, with the sole purpose of aiding customers through the permit process, answering questions, and resolving issues. 2,215 customers are serviced, on average, each month at PRMD’s front counter. Providing a dedicated customer service trouble-shooting utility will provide a great benefit to a large number of customers who may seek enhanced assistance.
- The Innovation Action Council, along with the new Business Development and Regulatory Assistance Liaison, will form a short-term, multi-agency task force during the first six months of 2012 to examine current cross-jurisdictional regulatory processes, identify problems, inventory best practices, and develop an action plan to improve processes and reduce duplication where possible.
- The task force will be comprised of the local cities as well as business group leaders. The group will also be asked to develop a recommended action plan to simplify and enhance coordination of “green” incentive programs and services provided by utilities and public agencies to encourage increased utilization of these programs.

- Explore the benefit and cost of an updated permit tracking and workload management software to improve accuracy, use of county resources, and customer expectations and experience.
- Develop metrics to measure the successful of the increased staffing, including the number of customer concerns resolved, process improvements resulting from troubleshooting obstacles, and other outcomes of increased business and regulatory assistance services.

Objective 2 – Deliver Business Development & Outreach Services

Introduction:

Helping local companies stay and grow in Sonoma County is of paramount importance in this challenging economic climate. Many businesses do not know who to turn to for help in maintaining their operations, ways to work with local governments to address problems, ways to upgrade their skills, and other issues hindering growth and development. The EDB proposes to embark on an active outreach program, in partnership with other groups, to engage major employers, commercial real estate firms, business park owners, small businesses, ag and artisanal food firms, and others in an effort to determine what obstacles exist to business' ability to remain and grow in Sonoma County, and what may be within the powers of local government to assist in retention and expansion. The EDB will focus its efforts in the unincorporated areas, and perform business outreach and retention services by employing a Business Retention and Development Specialist. By pursuing this new active role and program, the EDB hopes to identify hindrances in growth and development to then be addressed where possible, with the result of improving the business climate, retaining current businesses, and helping these businesses to grow and making the county more attractive for outside businesses, resulting in job creation and a sustainable economy.

Action Steps:

- Staff a Business Retention and Development Specialist position, to perform an estimated 200 business visits a year in the unincorporated area as well as coordinating related functions with other local partners.
- Collaborate with the CDC in their efforts targeted at the specific Redevelopment Areas within the unincorporated county, which includes business growth and retention and development services, to ensure consistency and identify ways to work together to provide even greater services with pooled resources. The CDC currently performs similar functions in the Russian River and Roseland areas, serving a total of 24 businesses with 65 individual sessions, and providing 7 group business seminars, in this current fiscal year alone. The CDC has spent approximately \$136,000 in a variety of services to small businesses, including assessments, workshops and consultations.
- Help coordinate efforts among the local cities, chambers, Redevelopment Agency, and the BEST program, currently performing similar functions, to create a business development and retention strategy and monitoring capabilities, including scheduling and tracking visits to reduce duplication and ensure businesses are receiving outreach efforts.
- Develop metrics to measure trends and issues for businesses, including visit reporting requirements and business surveys, to identify obstacles and common themes, and explore how to address these issues in a consistent manner county-wide.

Objective 3 – Develop an Employer-Driven, Coordinated Workforce Development Strategy

Introduction:

The competition for work has gone global, with 400 million new workers entering the workforce around the world in the last five years. These workers are increasingly able to compete with Sonoma County workers, yet the county currently has no unified, employer-driven, agency-inclusive strategy to align workforce development programs with emerging employer needs and opportunities. The EDB will facilitate the development of such a strategy with the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) and the BEST program, in partnership with other major allies and stakeholders including the Sonoma County Office of Education, Santa Rosa Junior College, Sonoma State University, Empire College, other community-based organizations, as well as representatives from the five key business clusters.

Action Steps:

- Coordinate inclusion of the business cluster groups into a coordinating committee (of the WIB) on workforce development to identify employer needs, match identified needs with current programs and determine gaps, and identify best practices and new programs for implementation.
- Develop an employer-driven, agency-inclusive workforce development plan focused on the current and future needs of Sonoma County businesses, by bringing all stakeholders and providers together to share current efforts and future plans, to create a cohesive, efficient plan, including developing roles and responsibilities for each partner involved in the plan.
- Develop metrics for ongoing measurement and assessment of the plan outcomes, including hiring success of local job seekers to local businesses, and business feedback on workforce availability.
- Investigate the development of a county-wide “Business Education Roundtable” with pods in each city/chamber, to encourage communication and collaboration between local businesses and educators.
- Deliver the workforce and development plan strategy at the EDB’s June 2012 Economic Summit.

Objective 4 – Encourage Business Cluster Development

Introduction:

While this Plan embraces implementation of the top three recommendations of the five clusters – workforce development, regulatory assistance, and coordinated marketing and branding – the EDB also proposes to further investigate opportunities to develop programs designed to strengthen the individual clusters, as these clusters have the greatest identified potential to continue and advance the county’s economy and create job and economic growth. These clusters are: Professional Services, Manufacturing, Construction/Green Business, Sonoma Specialties (including wine, dairy, food, agriculture and tourism), and Health Care.

Action Steps:

- Staff a Cluster Development Program with an Economic Development Specialist position to perform these Action Steps.
- Explore endeavors to increase awareness and benefit of purchasing locally produced foods and other products, and forge cooperative relationships with Go Local, the Regional Food Systems Network, and others promoting import substitution programs.
- Work in partnership with local educational institutions, the WIB, trade groups, and the BEST program to provide educational programs and workforce development specific to the needs in each of the clusters.
- Explore development of a business networking group for small technology-based firms, and for other clusters where deemed effective.
- Continue promotion of the local tourism industry with support of the Sonoma County Tourism Bureau, local visitor centers and community events, and target promotion and marketing of the clusters.
- Provide clusters with key information on emerging trends, best practices pursued by similar clusters in other areas, identify emerging market opportunities and provide information and assistance on developing these new markets.
- Facilitate the acquisition of federal funding for local infrastructure projects and improvements through the US Economic Development Administration’s CEDS program in relation to the clusters.
- Coordinate the CEDS effort with the CDC, which has spent \$12,625,956 on infrastructure projects in the Redevelopment Areas.
- Develop metrics to measure success in cluster development, including increased consumerism in each cluster area, new markets entered, increased tourism, better developed workforce, and increased local markets.

Objective 5 – Develop a Financial Resources Program

Introduction:

Access to capital is essential for business growth and job creation. Currently, many businesses report poor access to loans and a lack of other possible financing as an obstacle to success and expansion. The EDB will assemble information from existing programs and sources, while searching for innovative new tools to improve funding resources and work with various financial services providers to better communicate available options to businesses. Programs to encourage microloans will be explored, in partnership with other community-based organizations. Business incentives that facilitate job creation and business relocation will also be explored, in partnership with commercial real estate brokers, the BEST program, cities, chambers and other stakeholders.

Action Steps:

- Review current programs and resources, identify gaps and obstacles in resources to local businesses, and explore ways to expand financial opportunities and develop new programs and resources.
- Review local, state, and federal financial incentives in support of the local business community and explore potential for additional incentives and resources.
- Coordinate with the CDC regarding available development funding, including façade improvement and low interest commercial rehabilitation loan programs in which the CDC has provided a total of \$3,087,500 in loan funds.
- Research additional funding opportunities available through CDC-specific programs, including increased use of the CDC’s Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program for microenterprise assistance and development.
- Investigate the feasibility and, if appropriate, of establishing Sonoma County as an Enterprise Zone.
- Develop and maintain a database of local, state and federal financial incentives and funding options via an upgrade to the EDB website, and maintain communications with local business development/assistance partners regarding current and emerging funding and incentive opportunities.

Objective 6 – Facilitate Broadband Development in Rural Parts of the County

Introduction:

Access to broadband is becoming increasingly important to rural areas of the county, particularly for businesses such as hospitality, wine, agriculture, food processing and professional services. State funding has become available for consortia to participate in consortiums to develop three-year plans for broadband deployment (training, promotion, and adoption) and there soon may be funds available for “middle mile” and “last mile” deployment. The County has joined with the Upstate California Connect Consortium (UCCC) in their planning efforts, and should position itself to seek funds for a three-year plan for last mile broadband deployment locally, as well as be prepared for funds that may arise for further service. Extending broadband services into underserved areas would greatly benefit the current population of tourist destination wineries, creative professionals, and others, and provide opportunities as infrastructure needed for economic development is made available.

Action Steps:

- Create a countywide broadband planning and deployment committee to help with grant application development and project review, outreach, and preparedness regardless if funds are awarded to the UCCC.
- Support and facilitate the preparation of data and partnerships for grant application and success, as further partnerships and funding opportunities are made available.

Objective 7 – Facilitate Strategic Asset and Branding Coordination

Introduction:

One of the strongest recommendations arising from the Innovation Action Council's investigations was the need for building demand for local products and services by better coordinating the various branding and identity programs throughout the county and various industry groups. Cluster members from all five clusters felt the need to enhance the collective image and branding for Sonoma County. Building increased awareness and demand for Sonoma County products and services will require identification of our key strategic assets, new coordination among sectors and clusters, the provision of information and education to businesses on current tools and outlets, and enhancing the ability to introduce products and services to new markets. The Innovation Action Council will form an action group in a collaborative effort to develop an effective identity for the County, while maintaining and further developing the "sub" brands specific to niche regions and industries in the county which have already been established.

Action Steps:

- Form an action group to inventory of the county's strategic assets, current branding, marketing and outreach efforts and tools, study model programs/best practices in other locations, and examine current success, and areas for improvement. The action group should include public relations managers and marketing and communications professionals from Sonoma County's leading firms and outreach organizations, representatives from each of the major business clusters, and other partners.
- Coordinate with the County Redevelopment Areas, tourism programs, cities, and trade groups to build upon current "sub" and "niche" branding and marketing efforts. For example, the CDC has spent \$463,305 in marketing assessment and various tourism marketing efforts in the three County Redevelopment Areas to date.
- Explore the feasibility and interest in "conjunctive labeling" and other ways to communicate "Sonoma County" to larger audiences and new markets.
- Facilitate more focused direction in marketing and branding of the clusters and current "sub" brands and niches within the county, including coordinating effected groups, and providing information on current resources, established partners and tools, such as the Sonoma County Tourism Bureau, the chambers, the Sonoma County Connections website, and others.
- Develop metrics to measure effectiveness of current processes and new endeavors including statistical analysis of advertising effectiveness, demographic changes, market changes, and tourism trends.
- If need and interest is determined, form an ongoing group of interested stakeholders to continually monitor, review and improve upon marketing and coordination efforts.

Objective 8 – Enhance Coordinated Economic Development Resources within the County

Introduction:

Almost every County department serves the business community in some capacity. The following are among the most active and frequently engaged with business: PRMD, WIB, Environmental Health, Redevelopment, Agricultural Commissioner, University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE), and the EDB. Presently, there is no coordinating mechanism among these departments to share expertise, efforts, address common issues, and coordinate efforts efficiently. It would be beneficial to bring these departments together to enhance services provided to businesses, share information, and disseminate information to the business community as well. Additionally, these efforts should be actively coordinated with other leaders in economic development, such as the local cities, chambers, and the BEST program. For example, the CDC has spent approximately \$207,560 in economic development coordination services in the Redevelopment Areas.

Action Steps:

- Form an Inter-Departmental Economic Development Strategy Committee of departments with a frequent and active relationship with the business community and arrange regular committee meetings to review issues, understand trends, anticipate problems, coordinate similar efforts, and build upon cross-agency impact efforts.
- Develop a communications program newsletter to the business community to update on County services as well as pertinent trend data, such as hiring and demographics data from the WIB. Space will also be provided for local cities and key utilities to provide updates as well.
- The EDB will also help coordinate regular meetings among the local city economic development leaders, educational institutions, workforce development agencies, and the BEST program to encourage engagement, coordination, alignment of goals, roles and responsibilities, and efficient processes.

Measuring Performance

There are a number of indicators that can be used to measure the County's progress in achieving its economic development objectives. Tracking these indicators quarterly or annually would provide insight into the efficacy of programs and identify areas for concentration of efforts. The following are a few of the indicators that will be used to measure success of the County's efforts:

- Employment by cluster and major sector
- Number of lodging rooms, lodging occupancy rates and transient occupancy tax revenue
- Number of fictitious business name certificates filed and associated revenue as an indicator of new businesses formed
- Number and value of commercial and industrial building permits
- Office, retail and industrial vacancy and lease rates
- Overall County revenues to include property tax
- Business Report Card – An annual business survey that provides feedback on how County operations and other factors are affecting the business climate
- Distribution of Income

Using these and other indicators, the County will re-evaluate its priorities in light of changing conditions and opportunities. Over the next three to five years, economic conditions will change and new opportunities may and will arise. While the overall objectives of the economic development strategy may not change substantially in the coming years, the priorities probably will.

Implementation Schedule

1. Immediate/Short Term—January 2012 through June 2012

- Finalize plan and obtain Board approval
- Begin recruitment of the pilot program Business Development and Regulatory Assistance Liaison
- Recruit/hire Business Retention and Development Specialist and Economic Development Specialist (Cluster Development Program)
- Finalize CEDS strategy and gain approval from the US Dept of Commerce
- Launch three task forces (permits, workforces strategy, and strategic asset branding coordination through Innovation Action Council)
- Continue support of local preference programs
- Coordinate/engage County government services to business; launch communications program to business community
- Prepare and hold economic summit in June 2012 with updates and action plans from the Innovation Action Council task forces, as well as other programs mentioned herein (the business financing program, the business retention program, cluster development program, broadband strategic plan development, and regulatory assistance).

2. July 2012-June 2013

- Implement task force action plans with partners
- Review/ update CEDS document
- Progress reports and new approaches related to:
 - business retention program
 - local preference
 - County services outreach to business
 - Cluster development program
 - Local financing resources/options
 - Business retention program and efforts
 - Broadband development
- Hold June 2013 Economic Summit with progress reports/new directions/community feedback.

3. Years 3-5

- Continue with progress reports/course corrections/continuous improvement
- Develop new programs to meet emerging needs in response to various feedback mechanisms
- Begin major review/update of CEDS economic strategy, during year four, for completion and adoption during year five.