



To: Eric Voyles and Scott Norton, TexAmericas Center
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From: Susan Blansett, McCarthy/Blansett Group, LLC

Date: December 2, 2016

Subject: **Report on TAC Alignment Session Outcomes**

This report fulfills our contract for services regarding planning and facilitation of TAC's Leadership Alignment Session, held on November 16, 2016 at the Texarkana Convention Center in Texarkana, Arkansas. Attached as part of the report are:

1. A list of Alignment Session attendees and
2. A reproduction of the participants' feedback from the half-day session

Project need and purpose. The clear need for this Alignment Session was substantiated in TAC's own request for proposal. TAC's stated purpose of the Session was two-fold: First, "to test the waters and determine the relative importance to local leadership of economic development structure in the greater Texarkana area." And second, to learn whether interest is sufficient to justify a more thorough assessment or "concept audit" that can actually serve to establish vision, strategy, and structure for the new entity, as well as position the effort for successful fundraising among public- and private-sector supporters throughout the region.

Preparation and research. Our planning and preparation took place over several weeks prior to the session, including two telephone conferences with TAC staff, independent online research, and the two-day advance trip that Colleen Nelson and myself made to Texarkana on October 24-26. Without question, the conversations we were able to have with more than 10 area business and elected leaders during those two days helped us to establish credibility and rapport with key participants, aided in our understanding of the community's culture and history, and provided necessary context for a successful facilitation on November 16. A detailed facilitation design and agenda was presented to TAC and approved prior to the event.

Process. The day began with a warm-up exercise that established a positive frame of mind and environment for the day's work, followed by TAC personnel's superb presentation on the market realities of economic development, Texarkana's competitive position and key assets. The participants were then engaged in a lively discussion of their vision for a more competitive Texarkana region. They also articulated a variety of ways in which regional collaboration could be accomplished, and how their new regional economic development entity might look and function.



At the first break, it became apparent that the group had already bought into the notion of launching a strong, regional E.D. effort and was eager to begin bringing some definition to the concept. So we quickly changed gears to accommodate this newfound enthusiasm. The late morning and a working lunchtime were spent in breakout sessions where participants were asked to tackle various aspects of moving the concept forward. These included:

- Leadership to drive the effort (identifying key leaders)
- Narrowing the focus (identifying program priorities)
- Best practices/Models (other communities that we can learn from)
- Education's role in E.D. (a special interest of educators in the room)
- Funding the new entity (potential sources)
- Obstacles to overcome (to be reframed as opportunities)

Each of the above breakout groups reported back to the entire assembly. As a final act, each participant was asked to write down and share with a tablemate her/his personal commitment – a statement about what they individually would commit to do to move the effort forward in some way. The session adjourned at 12:45pm with participants in high spirits.

Results. This Alignment Session was a monumental step forward for the community, as this was the third time in 20 years this effort had been considered, yet twice before it had failed. The feedback we received from a number of participants at the break can be summed up this way: “We’ve often done the ‘visioning,’ but it’s never gone anywhere. Now we’re ready to get going and make this a reality!”

The most compelling and important results of the session, in our view, were:

1. A clear and overwhelming vote of all the participants to move ahead with the creation of a regional economic development organization for greater Texarkana – specifically, a public/private partnership, but *led by the private sector*
2. Volunteer leadership from the Chamber of Commerce stepping up and *volunteering to lead* the creation of the new organization and assemble the right change agents in the community to assist
3. The emergence of a common language and shared vision to define success and how to collaborate voluntarily across the region
4. The demonstration of how individual leaders are ready to roll up their sleeves and work together as a team – certainly this was exemplified in the session and in the breakout groups

Without a doubt, serious momentum came from the breakout group working on Leadership, when group spokesperson Curt Schneekloth of Cooper Tire (and current Chairman of the Texarkana Chamber's Economic Development Council) volunteered the Chamber as the best organization to lead the creation and incorporation of the new entity. It was proposed the Chamber E.D. Council, working with TAC and other leaders, would select a group of incorporators to oversee the development of a new corporation. It was suggested that the effort should focus on the bi-state region and multiple counties within Texas and Arkansas. Schneekloth committed to place the issue on the Chamber's agenda.



There was also discussion of the need for an incentive fund to be established concurrently with the new entity's operational budget. In this way, the leadership could then tackle the issue of a potential tax-supported revenue base for the new effort, allowing Texarkana to take advantage of the 4A/4B legislation that so many other Texas communities have employed, and that gives them a serious advantage over Texarkana.

Recommendations. Swift and deliberate action must be taken in order to capitalize on the enthusiasm and momentum generated in this Alignment Session. We recommend the following steps be taken as soon as possible:

1. The Chamber of Commerce, under the guidance of Mr. Schneekloth and Chamber CEO Mike Malone, take up the proposal at its next board meeting.
2. TAC begin preparations immediately for the Concept Audit, the next phase of this project as identified in the RFP. Ideally, the Concept Audit should commence in January of 2017.

We recommend a proposed operating budget of \$700,000 for the new entity, with an incentive fund starting at \$300,000 annually. This is comparable to budgets found in many organizations serving similar populations elsewhere in the U.S.

The basic plan must be laid out concisely, and the viability of the plan must be positioned properly with leaders throughout the region as part of the Concept Audit. The Concept Audit will also include crafting a compelling case for support of the new entity, determining financial feasibility, and identifying critical success factors and plan modifications to make it more supportable and strengthen the launch. Other organizational needs and governmental issues may emerge during the process. The Audit could be completed by March or April of 2017.

In summary, Texarkana represents a “sleeper” community that has lain dormant for decades, but is now ready to awaken from its lethargy and reinvent itself. It is a conservative community, but one with an emerging leadership base that is determined to drive positive change. This only serves to heighten the importance of getting it right through this exercise, as failure in this initiative will set the community back for another decade – and success will launch a fierce new competitor equipped to redefine its future. The McCarthy/Blansett Group stands ready to assist in this exciting new venture.

NOTE: This report was prepared under contract with Workforce Solutions Northeast Texas, with financial support from the Office of Economic Adjustment, Department of Defense. The content reflects the views of Workforce Solutions Northeast Texas and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Office of Economic Adjustment or the Department of Defense



Leadership Alignment Session Invitee List

Last Name	First Name	Business/Organization	Attended
Aaron	Mark	Southern Miller County RDA	Y
Allen	Kathy	Redwater ISD Superintendent	Y
Barry	Dean	Barry Insurance	Y
Bell	Ruth Penney	Texarkana AR Mayor	Y
Blair	LaTanya		Y
Blansett	Susan	McCarthy/Blansett Group	Y
Bowers	Doug	Nash City Manager	Y
Boyles	Dan	MTG Engineers	Y
Brewer	Jerry	NAF American Realty	Y
Brown	Chris	ATCOG	Y
Browsand	Debbie	Flowers Bakery	Y
Buchanan	Robin	RRAD	Y
Byrd	Ashley	TexAmericas Center	Y
Carlow	James	Bowie County Judge	Y
Clark	Shaun	UACCH-T	Y
Clayton	Jason	Curt Green & Co.	Y
Cockrell	David	Atlanta City Manager	Y
Davis	James	Network USA	Y
Dozier	Ronda	Texarkana College	Y
Dycus	Renee	SWA Planning	Y
Fowler	Ann	Citizens for a Better Community, Inc.	Y
Harland	Jennifer	AEP Swepeco	Y
Hayes	Scotty	Texarkana College	Y
Hazel	Lonnie	Southern Miller County RDA	Y
Hill	William	Harte Hanks	Y
Irwin	Robert	Guaranty Bank & Trust President	Y
Jaster	Shirley	City of Texarkana	Y
Johnson	Miranda	Atlanta Chamber of Commerce	Y
Jones	Deryl	Southern Miller County RDA	Y

Last Name	First Name	Business/Organization	Attended
Lindsey	Jeff	Lone Star Railcar Storage Co.	Y
Martin	Joey	Express Employment Services	Y
McCarthy	Mike	McCarthy/Blansett Group	Y
McCloskey	Devon	TexAmericas Center	Y
Mckellar	Marshall	RRAD	Y
Montgomery	Tim	Coldwell Banker Elite	Y
Moss	Reginald	Sterno CandleLamp	Y
Nelsen	Bob	Retired-- Cooper Tire	Y
Nelson	Colleen	McCarthy/Blansett Group	Y
Norton	Scott	TexAmericas Center	Y
Orr	David	City of Texarkana	Y
Ransom	Travis	Atlanta EDC	Y
Reavis	David	Texas A&M Texarkana	Y
Reed	Randy	Workforce Solutions NE	Y
Russell	James Henry	Texarkana College President	Y
Safer	Karen	OEA	Y
Sandefur	Mike	Sandefur Properties	Y
Schneekloth	Curt	Cooper Tire	Y
Spivey	Bart	Workforce Solutions NE	Y
Stading	Gary	Texas A&M Texarkana	Y
Thompson	Lisa	City of Texarkana	Y
Voyles	Eric	TexAmericas Center	Y
Whitt	Ruth	Leadership Texarkana	Y
Williams	David	MTG Engineers	Y
Williamson	Vicki	ATCOG	Y

Flip-Chart Contents from TAC Leadership Alignment Session
Texarkana Convention Center, Nov. 16, 2016

SESSION AGENDA, IN BRIEF

TexAmericas “The Future We Want For the Region” (Session Agenda):

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| 1. Welcome & Prep | 6. Momentum |
| 2. Defining Success | 7. Regionalism |
| 3. E.D. Realities | 8. Decision Time |
| 4. Imagined Future | 9. Next Steps |
| 5. Priorities | 10. Wrap-Up |

DEFINING SUCCESS: *KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR VISION FOR THE GREATER TEXARKANA REGION*

Infrastructure:

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| • Roads | • Intermodal |
| • Gas | • I-69, I-49 |
| • Broadband | • Airport |
| • H2O | |

Workforce/ Education:

- | | |
|---|---|
| • 30% Post-Secondary/ Higher Education | • University of Arkansas Community College at Hope- Texarkana to be at 8,000 students |
| • Promote Need for More Education | • Building the Bench |
| • Appreciate Vocational Training | • Partnering/ Internships |
| • Plus-1 Program | • Re-Training/ Continued Education |
| • Texas A&M University- Texarkana to be at 8,000 Students | |

Community/ Sense of Place:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| • Renovated Downtown | • Attract Young People/ Retain Every Age |
| • Culture & Arts | • Food Networks/ Local Farming |
| • Health Care Strength | • Housing and Subdivisions & Downtown Living |
| • Sidewalks/ Trails | • Improved Hours & Schedules of Public Transportation |
| • Clean & Green, Neat & Pretty | • More Flights from the Texarkana Regional Airport |
| • Special, Unique, FUN!! | |
| • Safe City Image | |
| • Military Friendly | |
| • Path Airport – City | |

Sites/ Buildings:

- Assess Inventory & Get it LISTED!
- More Pad-ready Property
- Empty Buildings
- Incentives/ Closing \$\$\$

Marketing/Branding:

- Info/Data/Online
- Incentives to Use & Ready
- Funding
- Brand Consistency Across Region
- Best-fit Industries
- Who We Want
- Tourism & Downtown
- Depot & Downtown History
- Intention to Capture \$\$
- Stop Leakage
- Promote K-12 Education & Family Lifestyle
- Cost of Living

Other:

- Development of Recreational Areas
- High-Speed Rail
- Recognized as a Manufacturing Center

E.D. Regional Entity (how it might look and function):

- Self-selecting Opt-in
- Develop Trust/ Avoid Turf-Wars
- Representation
- FWD-looking to Build Capacity before it's needed
- Independent
- Full-time Staff
- Authority to Act Bi-State
- Shared Funding/ Responsibility
- Not Subject to Sunshine Laws
- Private-Sector Led
- Builds on Best Practices
- Professional, Accountable, Capable

How We Work Together:

- Municipality & County Collaboration Across Boundaries
- Cross-State Collaboration
- Engaging Rural Communities
- Why did T.R.I. fail? *Texarkana Regional Initiative?
- Partnership with Employers
- Incubator for Businesses
- Mentorships
- Develop a Regional E.D. Organization—Lead a Cooperative Effort
- 4 States/ 12 Counties
- C.E.D.S.- Combine Synergy Realized
- Especially Arkansas-Texas Outreach to Rural Areas
- Public-Private Partnerships
- \$ Available through States on Workforce Development & Federal Leadership Development Program
- Other Affiliate Organizations, Chambers, CVB
- Young Professionals
- More Support for the Fire & Police Officers

DECISION-MAKING TIME: *CONCLUSIONS, SOLUTIONS, NEXT STEPS*

Lunch Breakout Group Topics (Note: only some groups used flip charts)

Best Practices/ Models (Determine Comparable Regional Models with Successful Results)

- Multi-State or City
- Commutable Population
- Size
- Independent EDO Such as Tyler, TX, Northwest Arkansas, or Carolinas
- Accountable but Independent

Funding

- 12 Counties
- 40 Cities
- 200-300 businesses
- 500k+

Education's Role in E.D.

Program Priorities/ Capacity & Product Development

Leadership

Obstacles as Opportunities

- Broad Based Funding
- Turf Wars
- Competing Priorities
- Lack of Success in the Past
- Possible Solutions to Regional Collaboration:
 - Get More Community Discussion Going
 - Explore Governmental Win-win Regionally
 - What Does Our Preferred Organization Look Like?
 - How to Respond Regionally, Quickly, and Confidentially
 - Identifying Leaders to Drive It