



North Jersey Marketing Research: Key Takeaways from Case Studies and Informant Interviews

**A Report of the Together North Jersey
Competitive Task Force**

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BACKGROUND

Together North Jersey was created in 2011 to develop the first comprehensive plan for a prosperous and sustainable future in northern New Jersey. The TNJ planning process identified a shared vision based on four themes (with a corresponding task force for each): Competitive, Efficient, Livable, and Resilient. The Competitive Task Force, under the leadership of co-chairs Mike McGuinness (Chief Executive Officer of NAIOP New Jersey) and Mike Kerwin (President & CEO of the Somerset County Business Partnership, retired) helps implement the actions and strategies identified in the Together North Jersey Plan.

As part of those implementation efforts, the Competitive Task Force prepared a 2018 report, *Review of Current Tourism and Economic Development Marketing Practices in the Together North Jersey Region*, which synthesizes current marketing and messaging for the counties and cities in the TNJ region, as well as statewide and regional initiatives. The report identifies marketing activities related to tourism, quality of life, and business growth; summarizes common themes and methods; and makes recommendations for messaging and outreach methods that could enhance North Jersey's visibility as both a tourist destination and a desirable business location.

Following on this report, the Competitive Task Force undertook additional research to better understand how/if the northern New Jersey region could benefit from a regional marketing initiative and if such an effort could improve collaboration on economic development and brand the region as a desirable place to live, work, and visit.

This research focused on business-to-business marketing, rather than marketing to attract tourists, which is related but beyond the focus of this effort. The research strategy included a series of key informant/stakeholder interviews with representatives from various sectors of the economy such as: major employers, industry organizations, universities/colleges, labor representatives, local economic development professionals, public sector representatives, and other entities that may have regional marketing insights. In addition, the research team conducted case study interviews with three successful regional marketing initiatives in other parts of the United States to learn from their experience – Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania, N2 Corridor in Massachusetts, and East Arkansas Coalition in Arkansas.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The key informant interviews reveal a variety of themes about the North Jersey region, as well as general suggestions for addressing marketing needs. While opinions and points of view were varied among the participants, there were certain themes and takeaways for which there was broad consensus. These themes and takeaways are summarized below:

POSITIVE THEMES FOR THE NORTH JERSEY REGION

The interviews conducted by the research team identified several positive themes and attributes for the North Jersey region. Participants indicated that the region has a lot to offer and said they are proud of their connection to North Jersey. Positive comments were mostly about the region's diversity, variety, and high quality of life. Some of the specific attributes/comments highlighted in the interviews included:

- The region has a variety of land types, including beaches, farms, cities, and towns.
- Northern New Jersey has a large diversity of cultures and ethnicities.
- Innovation is a New Jersey value and should be front and center of an economic development strategy.
- Northern New Jersey has an appealing labor force that is educated, willing to learn, and motivated.
- Northern New Jersey pulls employees from multiple labor markets.
- New Jersey has an outstanding public education system.
- Northern NJ is a central location on the east coast with good access to New York City.
- Northern New Jersey, while a little expensive, is still significantly more affordable than New York City.
- There are good transportation options in some parts of the region: ferries, highways, trains, and buses. This allows employers to attract workers from a broad geographic area beyond North Jersey.
- Arts and culture stimulate the northern New Jersey economy.
- The region has many nice downtown areas in older suburbs. These small downtowns are a unique feature of the region and are not found in many other parts of the United States.

NEGATIVE THEMES FOR THE NORTH JERSEY REGION

While the majority of the comments about the region were positive, participants did identify some areas for improvement, as well as some challenges that need to be addressed. These include:

- The public transit system can be difficult to use in some areas. Service is often unreliable and there is incomplete coverage of service areas.
- There is a high cost of living in northern New Jersey.
- It is hard to attract employees or convince workers to relocate to northern New Jersey because its attributes are not well known outside the region. It is also difficult to attract businesses to the region without financial incentives that are reliable, clearly understood, and relatively easy to use.

STAKEHOLDER THOUGHTS ABOUT THE MARKETING INITIATIVE

Overwhelmingly, the interview participants agreed that a regional marketing initiative could make a positive contribution to economic development in the North Jersey region. Specifically, the interviews identified the following potential positive impacts and opportunities of such an initiative:

- A regional marketing initiative will help engage, attract, and retain talent and can help counter the negative stigma associated with New Jersey. One way to do this is to promote the region's proximity to New York City, Philadelphia and Washington DC, and its excellent access to the world for people and goods.
- It is beneficial to educate employers, employees, and residents about the competitive advantages of locating in northern New Jersey, such as high-quality schools, public transportation, and recreational and cultural amenities.
- Employers in the region have similar and shared issues, and regional marketing is a more efficient use of their resources than individual marketing efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON BEST PRACTICES FOR A REGIONAL MARKETING INITIATIVE

Interview participants also have several recommendations and thoughts on how to collaborate, implement and create useful tools through a regional marketing initiative. Some recommendations include:

- It will be critically important to create a strong, regional identity. Make sure we can deliver on the "brand promise" of the North Jersey region (i.e. Is what we are offering/selling what "consumers" will find when they get here?) and connect the messaging to experiences that the public can relate to. If people don't experience the promise, they won't buy into the overall strategy.
- Because the North Jersey region is so broad and diverse, it will be important to break down a broad regional theme into sub-themes. These sub-themes can be used by counties, municipalities, cities, etc., to point out their unique message or differentiating factors and promote local offerings/assets but connect them to the regional identity. Materials should highlight local assets but keep sight of the big, regional picture.
- Promote diversity and inclusivity and draw the connection to how diversity makes this region inclusive and welcoming to all.
- Any associated collateral and deliverables from the marketing initiative should be user-friendly, easily sharable and electronic.
- Public utilities could be good partners in a regional marketing initiative. Because they cover large service areas, they are already marketing their coverage territory as a single region.
- Be upfront and honest about the high cost of living in North Jersey, but emphasize that you get what you pay for because of the high-quality school, vibrant communities, etc. In other words, emphasize that is worth it!
- Promote North Jersey as an arts destination with quality/variety that can compete with New York City. Highlight entertainment "names" that choose to perform in the region's theaters and venues.
- Find ways to get the brand message to people at times and places when they make a significant investment in their lives, such as changing careers, moving, attending college, retiring, starting a family. It will be important to make a case for North Jersey that is relevant for each life-stage decision point.
- Overall, the amount of funding and investment available to communities for tourism promotion and economic development marketing throughout the state is less than it used to be. Any new

initiative needs to be wary of creating friction/competition due to this scarcity of funding. Don't compete or jeopardize funding for current initiatives underway, especially Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs)

- There is a lack of adequate funding for local advertising. Also, a regional marketing initiative cannot compete for funding with local efforts.

ADVICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON INSTITUTIONAL NEEDS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Nearly all interview participants agreed that the region needs a clear institutional "owner" or entity to manage a regional marketing initiative. Many also agreed that the marketing approach needed to attract broad support from a variety of partners in order to be successful. Some specific recommendations to these ends include:

- Clear and consistent messaging is crucial to overall success. The best way to ensure that this happens is to have one entity that responsible for maintaining the brand and managing a consistent message.
- The entity or organization responsible for the regional marketing initiative needs to exist outside of politics and should not be susceptible to changes in administration priority. This will provide time/ clarity of purpose and the ability to build a strong brand.
- Make sure to have buy-in from municipalities, counties, businesses, state agencies, transit agencies, universities and other stakeholder organizations; create a collaborative partnership that represents all these interests.
- Large private corporations and developers are also likely to have an interest in being involved (with potential funding and promotion) in a regional marketing initiative to attract residents and talent to the region.
- Look for partners and agencies that will be willing to invest in this initiative over a long period of time, such as an already established regional institution with stable funding source.
- DMOs may be willing to support a regional marketing initiative if it aligns with their more localized promotions. Many of the same tools and messaging that attract tourists also attract talent and corporations.
- In addition, look for opportunities for pilot programs that can integrate regional messaging into local marketing initiatives. This quicker approach could be a good option to learn and build movement/support towards a more established initiative.
- Effective communication between the initiative, regional partners, businesses and stakeholders will be important. It is important to communicate to partners and stakeholders (businesses, counties, municipalities) that a regional marketing initiative can complement (not compete with) the branding and messaging they may already be doing.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Based on the interview results and the experiences of other regional marketing initiatives, a more regional approach to branding and messaging would be beneficial to Northern New Jersey the region's economic development. The case study research and key informant interviews have illustrated important lessons and best practices that should be applied to the development of such an initiative.

Together North Jersey could leverage existing programs, such as the Together North Jersey Local Technical Assistance program or the Together North Jersey Institute, to continue to develop best practices on marketing, both for regional and local initiatives. In past years, several of the Local Technical Assistance projects have included some marketing or branding component, including the Passaic Bistro District, Middlesex Greenway, and the Borough of Bound Brook. Together North Jersey could consider adding Marketing/Branding as a priority project category for the next solicitation for Local Technical Assistance and use that as an opportunity to look for ways to create cohesive messaging among the local projects. In addition, the Competitive Task Force could work with the Together North Jersey Institute to develop a workshop (either online or in-person) that both provides guidance and best practices on marketing, while encouraging communities to seek out opportunities to collaborate and work together to brand as a region. Such a workshop could also take advantage of marketing work TNJ has already done, such as bringing in speakers and presenter from the past technical assistance projects mentioned above.

Should Competitive Task Force members decide to pursue a regional marketing initiative further, independent of technical assistance from the Voorhees Transportation Center or the NJTPA, they might want to consider some additional next steps:

- **Market the marketing initiative:** Before a regional initiative of this scale can launch, it is important to continue to build support and momentum. Member of the Together North Jersey Competitive Task Force could continue to meet with partners – local and statewide organizations – to discuss the benefits of approaching marketing at the regional scale. Such an innovative approach may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable to some at first. But, with consistent outreach to these organizations, Task Force members can gather the critical support needed to get this initiative off the ground. In other words, Competitive Task Force members could undertake an effort to “market” their own marketing initiative to bring more partners and thought leaders in the region on board. This would involve discussions, presentations, webinars with potential partners such as regional and local chambers of commerce, Choose New Jersey, county and local officials, DMOs, and industry groups.
- **Look for partners:** A broad, regional marketing initiative will likely require collaboration and cooperation from a variety of partners, organization and stakeholders for messaging, branding and collateral to be effective. A regional identity for Northern New Jersey can only be effective if it is shared and adopted by a broad network of collaborators within the region. Furthermore, the initiative will need one central entity to manage the effort and coordinate how this collaboration manifests. The ideal entity's core mission and resources should be well aligned with promoting economic growth in an array or jurisdictions and industries. Should Task Force members elect to pursue this endeavor, working with a statewide agency, such as Choose New Jersey, might provide the stability, institutional support and expertise that the initiative would need.
- **Identify a role for statewide entities:** A statewide agency should be able to leverage the work of the North Jersey region to create unique messaging and branding campaigns for other regions in the state as well. This could broaden the support for a regional approach and provide benefits to partners statewide. The U.S. Economic Development Authority and Choose New Jersey are some potential statewide partners. The Competitive Task Force members and leadership could

talk with these entities about the creation of a regional marketing initiative. Some critical issues to explore are whether a statewide entity can support one region of the state and how to demonstrate the value of collaboration over competition between local interests such as counties, towns, or individual employers.

- **Create messaging options:** For the regional marketing initiative to resonate with potential partners it will likely be important to provide examples of what collateral and messaging could be. Competitive Task Force members could undertake an effort to create examples – sample pamphlets, talking points, online advertisements – that can be used to help illustrate the value of a regional approach to marketing. These sample materials should highlight the assets of the Northern New Jersey region through impactful visuals and clear messaging. However, it is important to keep in mind that the diversity of the region might pose a challenge for cohesive messaging. Finding messaging that resonates across the diverse region, while allowing for more localized deployment of that messaging, will be important for effectively showcasing the potential impact of regional marketing.
- **Pilot projects:** Through the Together North Jersey network of partners and collaborators, the Competitive Task Force could seek out opportunities to collaborate with these partners to undertake small pilot projects for regional marketing in order to demonstrate the value of this approach. For example, a smaller subset of municipal or county partners who might want to be early adopters of this regional approach could work together to create messaging around a common asset or unique attribute. Alternatively, Competitive Task Force members could work with a particular economic sector, such as theater arts, to create a regional brand for that sector. This work could be undertaken, to some extent, in conjunction with competitively selected projects from the Together North Jersey Local Technical Assistance Program. Competitive Task Force members should encourage communities with unique marketing/branding opportunities to apply for the program during the Fiscal Year 2021 application process.

Final Thoughts, Post-COVID-19

This research was conducted in the fall and early winter of 2019, just months before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States and devastated the economy. Though the economic realities have changed quite dramatically in recent months, the research still demonstrates that there is a wealth of opportunities to highlight and promote the unique talents and attributes of the Northern New Jersey region. As New Jersey works to rebuild its economy after the COVID-19 crisis, it will be more important than ever to encourage communities, stakeholder and private sectors partners to work cohesively and collectively to lift the region out of this economic crisis. Marketing and branding is only one small part of the work that will need to be done, but collaboration on messaging could serve as an opportunity to bring partners together, brainstorm ideas, and provide a unified vision for what the future of our region could look like.

**APPENDIX 1:
KEY INFORMANT
INTERVIEW REPORTS**

Together North Jersey Competitive Task Force Project – FY20

Interview Summary*: Metuchen Downtown Alliance

Participants: Isaac Kremer, Metuchen Downtown Alliance; Miriam Salerno, VTC; Lois Goldman, NJTPA

Interview Date: November 4, 2019

About Isaac Kremer: Isaac Kremer is the Executive Director of the Metuchen Downtown Alliance. He is a nationally recognized expert in the Main Street Approach® to commercial district revitalization. This approach is comprehensive and incremental, emphasizing grassroots action in four areas – Organization, Promotion, Design, and Economic Vitality. He has nearly two decades of experience working with Main Street and historic preservation organizations in Michigan, New York, Texas, Kentucky, and now New Jersey. Kremer has had additional training in historic preservation tax credits, historic real estate finance, economic development, and community philanthropy.

About Metuchen Downtown Alliance: The Metuchen Downtown Alliance is a volunteer-based, nonprofit downtown management corporation dedicated to the management and revitalization of the designated Metuchen business district in partnership with stakeholders, residents, municipal government, and other partners. In 2017, Metuchen Downtown Alliance released a Downtown Metuchen Strategic Plan (2017-2022) available in the "About Us" section of their website at www.downtownmetuchen.org. This plan identified two key transformation strategies: Family Friendly and Innovation. Since adopting the plan over 100 businesses have opened downtown. Family friendly programming and events have made Metuchen a regional destination, including numerous events on the Town Plaza. Over \$150,000 has been invested in public art, public spaces, and storefront improvements to make the downtown more vibrant. Recruitment is being targeted to a few areas which consumer surveys and market research indicate would do well (specialty apparel, home furnishings, specialty food, etc.). A grant from Middlesex County allowed the Borough of Metuchen to acquire the Forum Theater. This theater once renovated will be the core of the future Metuchen Arts District.

Key Takeaways

- A marketing plan needs to define a region's identity, the intended audience, and the region's unique advantages.
- All boats rise with the tide; everyone in the region benefits from successfully marketing and demonstrating the region's distinct areas worth living in, visiting, and exploring.
- Take a generally broad regional theme and break it down into sub-themes.
- Promoting downtowns will help attract people to the area.

How would a regional marketing approach affect the Metuchen Downtown Alliance?

Marketing is a subset of economic development. Regions have different levels of strategy, from strict marketing strategies to having no strategy at all.

North Jersey is a large and diverse area. Do you think a regional marketing strategy feasible?

Downtowns do have distinctly marketable traits that could be covered under a regional strategy. Marketing for economic development is generally underfunded. Downtowns are different; historically

* This report includes summarized responses to interview questions and does not include any direct quotes.

they have put advertising dollars in the hands of inexperienced marketers and their inexperience limits the impact of economic development. However, regional advertising is usually too generic; they cover broad areas with so much activity that they struggle to point out the region's unique message or differentiating factors.

There are three things that the strategy will need to consider:

1. Identity - what is the region's identity, and does it apply to the entire region?
2. Defined audience – who are you trying to reach with the marketing plan?
3. Foster advantage – what are the advantages of the region that we want to emphasize?

Would a broader regional approach benefit Metuchen or foster competition between towns and cities in the region?

We need to look at who has been marketing downtowns successfully? How do we incorporate the core elements and identity into the marketing campaign? In the Detroit metro area, the 1D brand has been a success. They developed a regional brand, an identity, and a logo for the Detroit metro area. Getting a large diverse group of people to buy into a plan is the biggest challenge. Another regional brand that stands out as a success is Kansas City. KDC had a large regional brand that was broken out into smaller sub-brands such as animal health, smart port etc.

A regional initiative in northern New Jersey should emphasize how different the communities in the region are, highlighting their demographics, economic status, and other characteristics. The overall plan might have to be generic, but you could breakout the subcategories into more detail.

How do we incorporate smaller downtowns into the marketing strategy?

No one is currently spending significant money to market downtowns. This new strategy would be an open opportunity, a blank slate. Metuchen does benefit from Middlesex County's regional branding. Middlesex county has done a good job tying all of the region's aspects together by telling a story of innovation. We are not necessarily branding Metuchen with the Middlesex county ideas of innovation and friendly family, but it does tie into the messaging. Be direct and explicit with how downtowns are promoted.

If we go through this process, what kind of organizations infrastructure do you think we would need?

Metuchen treats every project as a pilot project and gathers the necessary resources to test out ideas. There are generally two approaches to larger scale projects:

1. Convene people and facilitate a group process. Create a marketing strategy and identity, and then get partners to buy in to the project and to deploy the plan. This approach needs state, federal, and leaders of the corporate community to buy in.
2. Treat the project as a pilot, rapidly deploy something that has a recognizable benefit to community. Get buy in from the key players and use it as a building block. Target Economic Development Agencies, Housing and Urban Development, and property owners who have an interest in seeing community grow.

I recommend the second approach. The first process involves many meetings and outreach, which leads to a slow-moving process.

What messaging do you think we should include that in a marketing initiative?

It is important to determine what you will point out as the brand promise. If you put walkability on the center of the plan and people don't experience walkability when they visit, the brand and resources will evaporate. Innovation is a uniquely NJ value and I would put it front and center of your strategy.

Downtowns can tip the needle when determining where to move or visit, but there needs to be enough in the region to draw the initial interest. Attractors such as affordable housing, walking trails, and transit are some things that must be known in the area. Regional marketing is not about competition; all people benefit when we successfully market and demonstrate that we have distinct areas worth living in, visiting, and exploring.

Together North Jersey Competitive Task Force Project – FY20

Interview Summary*: Sanofi US

Participants: Audris Francis, Sanofi US, Mike Kerwin, Somerset County Business Partnership, Miriam Salerno, VTC, Lois Goldman, NJTPA.

Interview Date: November 8th, 2019

About Audris Francis: Ms. Francis is a talent professional with 17 years of expertise in strategic staffing, talent acquisition initiatives and metrics and reporting. She currently serves as the Director Talent Acquisition - Global Functions, SBS, and CHC of Sanofi. Audris Francis is also an executive committee member on the board of directors of the Somerset County Business Partnership (SCBP).

About Sanofi U.S.: Headquartered in Bridgewater, New Jersey Sanofi US is comprised of five business units that focus on human vaccines, rare diseases, multiple sclerosis, oncology, immunology, infectious diseases, diabetes, cardiovascular solutions, consumer healthcare, established prescription products and generics. Sanofi has over 14,000 employees in the United State and over 100,000 employees worldwide.

Partnership with SCBP: Sanofi US headquarters is in Bridgewater NJ, other locations include Swiftwater PA and parts of MA including Cambridge. Recruiting can be a challenge, especially from those abroad, due to Bridgewater not being a major city. Sanofi partnered with SCBP to help sell Bridgewater as a good location for potential employees. They trained their staff on the benefits and assets of Bridgewater and created collateral for Sanofi. They also directed the recruiting team to resources, websites and information highlighting quality of life in the area.

Key Takeaways

- We need to engage, retain, and attract talent to the region.
- Northern NJ is an ideal destination to live and work. In this region you can explore nature, enjoy city life, go to the beach, and raise a family among other offerings.
- We should promote our state's diversity and inclusivity.
- It is important that we educate both businesses and potential talent on local and regional offerings.

What are your perceptions on this regional marketing initiative? How would building this regional identity help support the work you do?

New Jersey is a place where one can both live and work. We're always asking "how do we engage, retain, and attract talent to the Bridgewater area?" Not only do we frame Sanofi as an employer of choice, but we also frame Bridgewater as a location of choice. Bridgewater is a one stop place to live, work, raise a family, enjoy nature, and access New York City. We use a one-page fact sheet to advertise not only Sanofi, but also Somerset county, where we have chosen to locate our US headquarters.

* This report includes summarized responses to interview questions and does not include any direct quotes.

The biggest challenge to selling NJ is the taxes; the cost of living is so high. There are a large number of people living in PA and commuting into NJ, with Easton, PA only 40 minutes away. Easton is a realistic and cost efficient option.

Given your experience recruiting potential talent to NJ, what assets of the area are highly valued?

The variety and diversity of options in the area is of high value. Whether someone is interested in acres of land or a more urban environment, those offerings are all within 15 miles of Sanofi. That has always resonated with potential talent and each has different priorities and needs. To people with families, we stress the importance of schools and safety, as Bridgewater/Bedminster have high quality schools. Younger talent is interested in Somerville or something closer to NYC. The challenge is that public transportation in the area is not an “easy commute.” Closest train station is about 2-3 miles from Sanofi so it’s the “last mile” effect; it’s difficult to get to the office from the train station.

What kind of collateral or materials highlighting those assets, the diversity and the opportunities to have it all here, would be useful for someone who works in recruitment?

Everything is electronic, such as a landing page, a link to a website, or a PDF attachment. Rarely do we mail anything, except sometimes to leadership or those that may be relocating to the area. There should be a nice way to showcase all of the assets of the area, including quality schools and colleges, close to NYC, access to arts, culture, parks, and more. Our one pager is good and covers many of these assets. We should showcase good examples that resonate with people regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, etc.

It’s a challenge to keep messages fresh. Most of the talent is interested in accessing local services and opportunities (e.g. good barber, dry cleaner, supermarket, happy hour).

Do you think it is appropriate to have something similar for the entire region? How do we message that so people are seeing the bigger picture of the entire region?

We would certainly welcome and join this collaboration of a North Jersey message. There’s a lot of negativity about New Jersey, but it has a great quality of life and there is a lot to appreciate. I was reading in a Destination NJ magazine about an alpaca farm. It’s only a mile away from my house and I never knew existed! I’m going to bring my kids next weekend. It would be great to educate businesses on their own backyards because there’s so much we don’t know about.

As an employer in the Somerset County, can you see other challenges or negatives in a regional approach? Could it interfere with local recruitment?

You don’t want individual employers competing with each other and losing sight of the big picture of marketing the North Jersey region. Experience the county/region and not just work there. If the message is focused on the region then there doesn’t seem to be any challenges. Promoting diversity and inclusion is not only important in terms of talent recruitment, but also for working parents.

What do you think are the best mechanism for engaging large employers on an effort like this? If we wanted to recruit 25 employers, what would be the best way of getting their attention or getting them engaged in the effort?

The hook is how can we work together to attract and retain talent. Others might be interested in corporate social responsibility. Only 10% of our hires are relocations but marketing to them requires a different angle.

Together North Jersey Competitive Task Force Project – FY20

Interview Summary: Cascades Containerboard Packaging

Participants: Alex Fowlie, Cascades; Miriam Salerno, VTC; Robert Brennan, VTC; Lois Goldman, NJTPA

Interview Date: November 8, 2019

About Alex Fowlie: Alex Fowlie is the current Human Resources Manager for Cascades Containerboard Packaging at their state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in Piscataway, NJ. Alex has responsibilities that cover a broad range of Human Resources areas, including recruitment, employee relations, performance management, training and development, and benefits administration.

About Cascades Containerboard Packaging: Founded in 1964, Cascades offers sustainable, innovative and value-added packaging, hygiene and recovery solutions. The company employs 11,000 women and men across a network of over 90 production units located in North America and Europe. Driven by its participative management, half a century of experience in recycling, and continuous research and development efforts, Cascades continues to provide innovative products that customers have come to rely on, while contributing to the well-being of people, communities and the entire planet.

Key Takeaways

- New Jersey, specifically Piscataway, was an ideal location in terms of its proximity and its labor market.
- Relocating workers from New York was difficult. The workers relied on public transportation in New York and didn't have cars to move to New Jersey.
- The cost of living in New Jersey is high.
- As a state, New Jersey needs to work on attracting and retaining talent.

What was attractive about locating your packaging facility to Piscataway and how have your employees experienced the NJ region?

Transportation and other related business costs in NYC led the company to look for alternative locations to build a new facility and transfer business. They looked at almost 75 locations across the northeast and mid-Atlantic, including several in New Jersey. They found that Piscataway was an ideal location in terms of geographical proximity to their core customer base and labor market. Seventy-five percent of the company's existing customer base is within a 100-mile radius of Piscataway, and there are a lot of major thoroughfares such as I-287 and I-95. The labor pool was also important; they pulled people not only from Middlesex County but from throughout New Jersey. Manufacturing has had a resurgence in NJ over the past few years in certain counties and areas, and Middlesex County is among the top two counties in NJ for manufacturing opportunities.

How many people from your Queens facility relocated to New Jersey?

Approximately 20 out of 150 employees relocated to Piscataway. Employees were given 18 months' notice, a generous severance package, and financial incentives to relocate. One of the issues was that many of the Queens employees do not own cars and are dependent on public transportation. Those that did own cars, were concerned about the commute, which can be about two-hours with traffic.

How are the new employees performing?

Surprisingly well. They've had to train a lot of new people. But the company invests in their training program, and new employees were willing and motivated to learn the process. They offer a competitive wage for new hires which helps attract and retain new talent.

Are your employees from Middlesex county or did you recruit from other parts of the state/country/company?

In addition to the employees from the Queens facility, most of the employees are from Middlesex and Essex Counties, with a few from Easton, PA. They estimate that their employees represent 10 New Jersey Counties.

As a Human Resources professional, would an initiative that creates a regional identity help you attract and retain talent?

There would definitely be a benefit to something like that. New Jersey is a great state. Sometimes it gets a poor reputation for traffic and other issues, but it is a great place. The cost of living is high. An initiative to attract and retain talent to New Jersey and demonstrate that it is a quality place to live and work would be helpful.

Are there any particular aspects of the region that that should be highlighted in the initiative?

Even though many employees have lived and worked in the region for years, they don't know what their options are for entertainment or housing. There are certain areas that are similar in price to Queens but the rest are certainly more reasonable. Either people don't take the initiative to look for housing and entertainment or don't know where to find that information. Employees that have children may be concerned about switching schools. New Jersey's location has a lot to offer with the beach, city life, and mountains nearby, and highlighting that would be beneficial.

If you had collateral or a way of sharing this information, would that have helped Cascades relocate more individuals from Queens?

Yes; the facility wasn't fully constructed so there was a limit to what they could show employees to encourage relocating. The plant is one of the best box manufacturing plants in the U.S. But if you're not familiar with the surrounding area, collateral could help sway talent. If more employees live and work in Middlesex County, both employer and employee benefit.

Do you anticipate a lot of movement from other regional facilities?

It's more common in salaried positions (like management) than plant positions, but it can happen and we offer employees the chance to do so.

If given the opportunity, is there one location where people would prefer to work?

Piscataway is considered the Flagship Location. People may hesitate to transfer here if they're in another state and they see the high cost of living, so that's definitely a challenge. But, working in Piscataway is a huge opportunity to move upward in the company. Cascades is eventually going to construct other facilities and it is likely people from Piscataway will be promoted to work in those new facilities.

I was wondering if anything surprised you about being in Middlesex county in terms of business environment or employee experience?

Overall employees are happy here, but it's very interesting that there's only one road in and out of the building. There are railroad tracks that cross that road and sometimes trains cause problems for our employees. I'd take this sentence out or just say that there is a lot of indirect (non-box making) manufacturing competition in Middlesex.

Together North Jersey Competitive Task Force Project – FY20

Interview Summary*: Anonymous Participant from NJ-wide Advocacy Group

Participants: Miriam Salerno, VTC; Lois Goldman, NJTPA; Anonymous

Interview Date: November 11, 2019

About Anonymous: This anonymous interview participant currently works at a large state-wide advocacy group. The interviewee participated on the condition that his/her name would be kept anonymous, as well as the name of the organization.

Key Takeaways

- It is important to help people recognize the value that NJ has to offer.
- New Jersey has an outstanding public school system.
- New Jersey is an incredibly diverse state.
- Trying to attract talent and businesses to one particular area of the state could result in bidding wars between cities and regions.

What are your perceptions or impressions about creating a northern NJ regional marketing initiative with the goal of economic development and building an identity for the region?

I believe in the power of marketing, and it makes a lot of sense to pursue the initiative. Bringing stakeholders together and marketing NJ would be beneficial. There's a lot of work that could be done to help people outside of the state recognize the value that New Jersey offers. One area that can always be talked about more is the outstanding quality of our public schools which are the best in the nation.

Could building this stronger regional identity help your work?

Yes, a stronger economy leads to larger tax revenues which leads to investment opportunities. Building a stronger state economy aligns with our interests.

How do you talk about inequity in a way that brings people together rather than creates friction?

It is one of the ongoing challenges we have in New Jersey. We are an incredibly diverse and segregated state. We have over 600 municipalities, so inequity is almost inevitable. We talk openly about the need to find ways to address those challenges through greater investment and interventions in disadvantaged areas.

Do you think that those disadvantaged areas feel left out of the messaging?

The classic case of this response is Jersey City, which has gone from a struggling urban center to an extension of New York. The building and influx of wealth has created two distinct Jersey Cities coexisting

* This report includes summarized responses to interview questions and does not include any direct quotes.

next to each other; an incredibly poor and under resourced Jersey City and an incredibly affluent and wealthy Jersey City. It creates a lot of challenges and we are very aware of that inequality. But everyone has a parochial interest as well. In areas that are well resourced things are pretty good and they want to maintain the status quo. In areas that are under resourced there's a greater desire for change and reform. I have no problem with North Jersey marketing itself and tapping into that resource. If you talk more about how much better New Jersey is than NY, DE or CT we would certainly support that.

In the case of this project, our goal would be to convince people to come to New Jersey as opposed another state.

That makes sense, your audience primarily covers New York City commuters. Although parts of the state draw from Philadelphia as well. We wouldn't have any qualms seeing a group promoting the quality of life of North Jersey; working with organizations, cross promoting events, or sharing information.

What potential obstacles do you see with this initiative?

There's tremendous upside talking to stakeholders about economic development and bringing businesses and talent to the state. I don't see a lot of downside other than the possibility of regional competitions; cities offering large tax incentives to attract businesses to their location. But managing those competitions might be outside of the scope of a marketing initiative.

Together North Jersey Competitive Task Force Project – FY20

Interview Summary*: Eric Canada

Participants: Eric Canada, Blane Canada LTD; Isaac Kremer, Metuchen Downtown Alliance; Miriam Salerno, VTC; Lois Goldman, NJTPA

Interview Date: November 11, 2019

About Eric Canada: Eric Canada is a nationally recognized authority on economic development marketing and business retention. In his book *Economic Development: Marketing for Results!* Eric outlines the application of business-to-business marketing strategies in an economic development environment. He conducted marketing program audits of 50 of the top economic development organizations in the US and created a competitive capacity analysis technique and benchmarks to replace the subjective Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats analysis. Now, the Synchronist Key Performance Indicators allow local, regional, and state Economic Development Organizations to compare their findings to national benchmarks providing a clear picture of their competitive position. He also manages the largest business retention and expansion research collaborative in North America.

About Blane Canada LTD: Formed in 1983, Blane, Canada Ltd. is an economic development management-advisory firm. They work with clients on economic development strategy, business retention and expansion, talent development, marketing strategy and planning. They also do training and workshop facilitation. Clients mentioned on their website include Greater Dubuque Development Corp. IA; Corpus Christi Regional Economic Development Corp., TX; Louisiana Department of Economic Development; Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, TN.

Key Takeaways

- Marketing needs a single ongoing entity to manage the message with partners supporting it over a long period of time.
- Giving messages and materials to the counties for distribution does not allow for the necessary control to manage the message and receive feedback.
- Emphasize the common thread argument when discussing the project; everyone in the region has similar and shared issues with resources and labor when companies locate locally. Working together to market the region is more effective than individual efforts.
- Everyone across the country is fighting to retain and attract talent.

What are your perceptions about creating a North Jersey Regional Marketing Initiative to improve economic development and build an identity for the region as a desirable place to live and work?

I'm generally in favor of regional marketing because individual organizations can't afford it. It is the more difficult approach because more people are involved, but a regional approach is better from cost, impact, and durability perspectives.

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What are some of the best examples of regional collaboration in the U.S?

The most successful example, from a marketing standpoint, is Kansas City's 1KC initiative. They hired a brilliant marketer and were willing to invest in the project over a long period of time. The counties involved in the project function as one organization with one focus, which is also instrumental to its success. Columbus Ohio has started to follow that model with their 1 Columbus approach, and the Charleston region in South Carolina has also been successful.

NJ isn't centrally located around one city, is there an example of a successful marketing strategy that wasn't centered around a city?

Northwest Indiana has been functioning as a region for years. I'm unsure of its marketing strategy and success, though. Southwest Michigan First has been pretty successful marketing its region nationally. The locations without central cities come up less frequently.

What Infrastructure needs to be in place to have this marketing strategy work?

You need an organization, database, location to host the organization, people that are responsible, and people with the right backgrounds; not every regional economic developer is a marketer and vice versa. There is a difference between economic developer and marketer. A region needs an ongoing entity that can continuously drive the mission over time and maintain a consistent message. Regional campaigns are usually separated from political affiliations or administrations so that the entity does not have the variability that can come from political change. Changes in leadership and message can kill momentum for an initiative like this.

Are there any MPO's that host this type of initiative?

I don't know of any but that doesn't mean they doesn't exist.

Do we need a new type of entity to manage this or can we place this into an existing entity?

It depends on how you define marketing. Is marketing simply putting a message out? Or would this organization be responsible for continuing the conversation and interacting with people interested in New Jersey? How broadly you define marketing is going to determine the infrastructure requirements.

Should we send the marketing collateral and messaging out to partners or should we handle the marketing and then connect interested parties with partners?

It is harder to manage and be successful with an opt-in process. Giving messages and material to counties to distribute through their own systems doesn't give you the control that marketing requires. You need something that can both push the information out and then be a receptor for what comes back. Public utilities do this for their service territory to sell more energy. Utilities will promote their service territory and then they work with and help connect clients with good options for their interests within their territory. Having multiple municipalities means that the different municipalities purchase their utilities through different companies

How do we get stakeholders on board with this initiative? What strategies are effective to get the right partners?

Knowing who your partners are and who their competitors are is helpful. The biggest reason for it is financial. Pooling money is better than spending for one advertisement. It's a common thread argument; we all have similar and shared issues, resources and labor. Let's represent ourselves as a region instead of individually. You want to look at everyone: county governments, community governments, regional partners, municipalities. How broad that label is increases the number of people who could fund the effort. Millions of dollars could funnel into this and that requires 4 or 5 people to manage it. Most of these organizations are underfunded from the beginning. To succeed, it needs to be done at a high enough level to make it meaningful and done in a way that gives continuity.

Do you have suggestions for funding something like this other than utility companies?

You need multiple funding partners to make this happen. All of the people who have the potential to benefit in this partner mission to be the region's economic development engine should contribute. Even small market downtowns have some [financial] capacity. It might not be a lot of capital, but they still contribute to the effort. With the ongoing talent wars, all groups are equally involved in the talent recruiting process. The richer downtown experience is key to recruit talent and the downtown groups are front and center.

What do you mean when you say "talent wars"?

Everyone is fighting to retain and attract top talent; existing companies are even having trouble finding new employees. You can't bring in new businesses without new talent; employers won't support the initiative if you're trying to attract new competitors without attracting new talent. Quicken Loans relocated their entire suburb office into downtown Detroit, allowing them to retain those talented workers. This is driving a resurgence of downtown Detroit.

Would this talent competition be a hurdle to prevent collaboration between employers?

It definitely can be. Employers are having trouble recruiting talent and local businesses do not want competitors to take away talent. Talent recruitment is an issue that needs to be addressed. When you build a case study for creating the entity, you need to be ready to address these issues because they will come up in conversation.

Together North Jersey Competitive Task Force Project – FY20

Interview Summary*: Makerhoods

Participants: Avi Telyas, Makerhoods, Miriam Salerno, Rutgers VTC

Interview Date: November 11, 2019

About Avi Telyas: Avi is the founder and CEO of Makerhoods, a development company based in Newark, New Jersey. He is an American real estate developer, serial entrepreneur and pioneer in lean manufacturing and large scale modular construction. His passion for architecture and craft entrepreneurship has led him to found the organization called Makerhoods.

About Makerhoods: Makerhoods focuses on employment-oriented development. They provide entrepreneurs with workspace as well as housing at below market price typically located above the workspaces. The entrepreneurs rent both the commercial space and housing allowing them to build their business and increase take home pay for their families. The development also includes market rate apartments as well, so the developer can recoup construction costs and maintain a profitable property.

Key Takeaways

- Attractive attributes of Newark include the proximity to New York City, the arts and cultural areas, and the educated workforce.
- A marketing strategy would need a broad regional theme that can be broken into smaller themes for counties and towns.
- The principle of economic development can bring groups of stakeholders together and gain their support for a regional marketing strategy.

What is your impression of a regional marketing initiative?

I believe that it can be done if you focus on the more fundamental building blocks of economic development -- the opportunity for folks to earn a living wherever they are in NJ. Determine what works to make this area attractive for investment, staying in place, and creating opportunities here. This is a common thread that united communities all the way from Newark to Phillipsburg. So I think the idea of economic opportunity at all levels is the thread that could tie this all together.

Our company started in Jersey City, but unfortunately was rejected in Jersey City which is why we ended up in Newark. We certainly could have benefited from some type of regional comprehensive marketing approach and tie our messaging into that. There was skepticism that affordable live-work would be successful in Jersey City. Some type of advocacy that is region wide or state wide is very sensible.

What do you see as the potential benefits of this initiative?

The benefit is that mayors, economic development folks, councils etc. can all set their dial to a commonly accepted methodology and requirements that are backed by state marketing as well as

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programming and incentives that are at a higher level. One simple example is to have a common “Maker Zoning” that cities can agree on. We helped write such a zoning ordinance in Newark and Paterson.

How do you think this would help entrepreneurship in creating a culture that is friendly and attract them into the region?

This is where marketing and economic development can cross paths - a sensibility around the state that we support entrepreneurs throughout the region whether in Hunterdon or Newark. We could do that by encouraging zoning that would allow light industrial in residential neighborhoods, by encouraging entrepreneurial training and programs. There’s probably hundreds of these programs run by non-profits around the state but they’re so tiny that they aren’t known. A way to aggregate resources and fine tune the messaging in creating clean houses(not sure what you are trying to say here?) , that all comes from an idea that the state/region really want to encourage the bubbling of energy so that more folks can find easier paths towards entrepreneurship. There are a lot of dots but no one’s connected them.

What key assets of Northern New Jersey should we showcase in the initiative?

Proximity to New York, highly educated work force, great cultural areas are all key assets. The population is unique to this north east region. But the broad regional theme needs to be tied into micro-themes for the sub regions and counties.

As an economic development professional, do you have any suggestions or thoughts on how a North Jersey regional economic development or marketing initiative could be funded? Do you think it’s something that developers may have an interest in participating in?

Constituents have an interest in this initiative: the local towns, counties, developers, state economic development agencies. You want everyone to participate who might have an interest. The idea of a common theme that everyone can use would be very helpful.

In terms of funding, perhaps redirect some money into towns/villages/cities of NJ to present a common approach. If the state/Rutgers/some other entity could be an economic development consultant it would really help towns because the state would be able to deliver a similar but unique message. There are so many little towns that are all reinventing the wheel on their own with little resources. For example, there’s a whole market/industry called “impact investing” where the social mission is as important as the financial return, and billions of dollars are spent on it, whether from big hedge funds or banks. We need a concerted state-wide effort to investigate and attend their annual/regional conferences and invite them to invest in New Jersey.

I applaud the idea of a comprehensive strategy. However, it should not be limited to the local region but it should be the state itself. There is benefit in integrating so many different activities and speaking with a loud strategic voice. “This is what we want our state to be. This is who we are, this is how we want to do things, and these are the programs designed to support it if your towns want to tag along”

Together North Jersey Competitive Task Force Project – FY20

Interview Summary* : CBRE Group, Inc.

Participants: Jeff Babikian, CBRE; Miriam Salerno, VTC; Robert Brennan, VTC

Interview Date: November 13, 2019

About Jeff Babikian:

Executive Vice President for CBRE, Jeffery Babikian is a highly respected commercial real estate broker. His consultative approach has led to long-term relationships and a career representing tenants, investment clients and landlords in all facets of the commercial real estate process, on a local and national level. He is also a recipient, and multiple nominee, for NAIOP's Transaction of the Year Award and has been recognized as one of NJBiz's 50 most influential people in the real estate industry. Jeff works on short and long-term real estate strategies for a diverse client base that ranges from Fortune 500 corporations to non-profit institutions. He represented a significant number of Headquarter requirements in the State including Mars- Wrigley, GAF, Newell Brands, Quest Diagnostics, Everest reinsurance and Volvo.

About CBRE:

CBRE Group, Inc. is the world's largest commercial real estate services and investment firm, with 2018 revenues of \$21.3 billion and more than 90,000 employees. CBRE offers a broad range of integrated services, including facilities, transaction and project management; property management; investment management; appraisal and valuation; property leasing; strategic consulting; property sales; mortgage services and development services.

Key Takeaways:

- New Jersey offers multiple live, eat, and work communities.
- We need to overcome the stigma associated with New Jersey; acknowledge that the cost of living is high but you get what you pay for.
- An educated labor force, access to multiple labor markets, and mass transit make New Jersey an attractive location for businesses.
- Attracting a younger workforce is about having affordable living
- The state needs to figure out its business incentive plan to attract businesses.
- The labor force is educated, driven, hardworking, and diverse.

How would an initiative to brand the North Jersey region as a desirable place to live and work help economic development?

Yes. Incentives are critical to promoting businesses to make changes because of the tight labor market. Two phases are suggested. First, offer multiple live, eat, work communities. Second, promote incentive state packages that currently exist. New Jersey needs to be open and transparent regarding its high cost

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of living, but not as a stigma. Other characteristics that come with this region is a cerebral, educated workforce and highly dense demographics. Corporate tenants pay more to attract and retain clients and employees. Essentially, great things come at a great price.

When you're working with clients who have expressed both interest and trepidation about coming to this area, what selling points and assets win them over?

The attractive labor force and the multifaceted labor market. My clients love the close access to mass transit if possible. Millennial-friendly, amenity-rich buildings are very important today. Essentially, employees want a commute home that is less than 30-40 minutes. When employees can be present for their children's extracurricular games and be home for dinner, they do not want to lose that work-life balance. Additionally, they want access to stores, restaurants, and recreation. Quality of life is important. New Jersey is traffic-heavy, but many other places are as well. Many projects in New Jersey offer that experience.

You mentioned millennials as a group that companies are trying to recruit. How do you talk to companies about the reality of New Jersey's outmigration problem?

Attracting a younger workforce is about access to quality, affordable places to live. Unfortunately, that is a challenge. Nonetheless, we do find that with such a dense, large population, companies eventually find the right people with patience.

Mars was relocated to Newark from Chicago. Can you talk broadly about the thought process of moving here and why? Were there lessons you could extrapolate to other companies or the bigger picture?

With Mars, we took the time to try to understand the demographics of Newark and the surrounding area. At first, we looked at a one to two-mile radius of Newark, and were generally underwhelmed with the results. provided underwhelming results, but when we expanded the radius up to 12 miles, the results were impressive. The region's diversity, educated labor force, and transportation choices greatly improved the view of the region. Many markets do not provide all of these attractive features. Another benefit is that New York City is easily accessible.

The facility itself did a great job attracting Mars. Renovating an old historic facility with its large windows and high ceilings presents a young, modern design, which was very important to the company. It was a really cool vibe, something that could be seen in SOHO.

Do you know the first reaction of Chicago employees when they were told of the relocation to Newark? Did convincing have to occur?

Yes, of course. There was a lot of pushback. However, when they arrived, they were shocked to see that it was so nice. Often, people outside of the Newark community do not see Newark in this aesthetically pleasing way; it takes an education (i.e., of employees and employers) and it takes time.

Northern New Jersey is incredibly diverse, both geographically and demographically. How do you classify or break down the region into sub-regions? Are different businesses more attracted to some areas?

Companies intrigued by New Jersey for the first-time desire proximity to New York City. It has become more important than ever because it's such a technology driver. In Monmouth and Ocean County, there is an educated younger workforce and a good quality of life. There are a variety of markets but without any industry-specific region, except maybe the pharmacy belt in Princeton. A draw to that market for biotechnology and other technologies is present. Metropark is a complementary market with a prominent population of IT professionals, which is very attractive for companies trying to attract IT people. The desire for quiet, remote, suburban campuses has declined. Companies do not want locations in the forest; they search for locations near amenities, such as mass transit, proximity to cities, shopping, etc. If you can create that environment, the market is irrelevant. An example is the success R3 (a technology company) is having in Clifton, New Jersey. This company is in a beautiful mixed-use development with close proximity to the city. More challenges arise as you head further west in the state

Do you see any potential challenges or obstacles to avoid when thinking about the North Jersey regional marketing initiative?

I foresee three challenges. First, there is a lack of state direction regarding incentives. Second, taxes at multiple levels (i.e., corporate, personal, real estate, local) that create a perception of an overtaxed, over regulated state. Third, the unmet demand for more public transportation into the city; the gateway project must take precedence. When you start losing accessibility to the city, businesses become less interested in New Jersey. New York City is still a driving force to the New Jersey economy, so New Jersey needs easy access to New York.

Aside from the educated workforce, what other words would you use to describe the identity of the people of Northern New Jersey?

Seriously hard-working and driven. I am finding some really good young people to work for us with patience. I don't see a big systemic issue or concern; most of what I see is positive in terms of new employees.

Together North Jersey Competitive Task Force Project – FY20
Interview Summary* : Hudson County Office of Cultural & Heritage
Affairs/Tourism Development

Participants: Gina Hulings, HCOCHA/TD; Miriam Salerno, VTC

Interview Date: November 13, 2019

About Gina: Gina has been in her position as the Director of the Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs / Tourism Development for Hudson County for two years. She worked in marketing and advertising for the New York Daily News for 11 years, and similar experience at the San Jose Mercury News prior to her current position. She has a BA in Organizational Communications from Northeastern University.

About the Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs: The Hudson County Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs/Tourism Development (HCOCHA/TD) is a unit of the Office of the Hudson County Executive. The key functions of this office are:

- *Promotion of the Arts* - HCOCHA/TD is the major promoter and funder of arts and cultural organizations in Hudson County. The office administers the Local Arts Program, which provides annual funding to many of the county's non-profit groups. In addition, HCOCHA/TD offers technical assistance workshops to arts organizations and individual artists.
- *Tourism Development* - HCOCHA/TD is the main facilitator of tourism development and promotional services. The office maintains a dedicated tourism website - www.visithudson.org.
- *Promotion of Local history* - HCOCHA/TD works to promote local history through its Hudson County History Partnership Program. With the backing of the New Jersey Historical Commission, it provides grants to local historical organizations and arts non-profits with historical programming.
- *Cultural events* - HCOCHA/TD plans and facilitates official county civic and commemorative programs that celebrate the beautiful tapestry of ethnicities and communities that make up the populace.

Key Takeaways

- Hudson County is one of the most diverse counties in the country.
- Hudson County's arts and culture scene is diverse, growing and eclectic.
- Arts and culture stimulates the county's economic development.
- There is limited funding and limited opportunities for arts and culture advertising.
- There's no need to go to New York City for entertainment; we have so much to offer here even outside of the big attractions like Liberty Science Center.

Do you know of collaboration efforts when it comes to marketing outside of NJ?

We do a lot of cooperative advertising; we partner with the Meadowlands, the gold coast area, Elizabeth, Newark, sometimes Bergen County depending on the initiative. We're open to ideas and

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communicate often because the goal is to bring people into the area and show off everything we have. There's so much happening. We are always open to partnering.

When you're advertising Hudson County, what percentage of your advertising is in state vs out of state?

For the most part we've focused our efforts in state. In the past we've done PATH advertising. This year we did NY waterway advertising as well. The marketing scale is small because of the limited funding. If there's a specific event, we can advertise broader. We are starting to research and analyze international tourism.

So do you plan to target international tourists and say, "Don't go to NYC; come to Hudson county and see what we have to offer"?

People often stay in Hudson County to visit New York but they don't know what's also here. We're targeting people staying nearby and advertising our amazing restaurants and events. We recently did two American Airlines advertising campaigns on their in-flight TV.

Do you think a regional marketing initiative could support the work of the individual County offices? For example, looking at the greater United States or internationally and collaborating on a regional scale to bring people into the region.

What I've found in the past year is that it's an education process. People don't know what we have to offer; whether they're international tourists or from Maine. They might only know the major landmarks. In fact, our director of tourism is attending a state meeting where they're creating itineraries for visitors by region. In the past, a lack of communication between the state, counties, DMO's, and cities made collaboration difficult. The completed itineraries will be posted on the NJ State website. We're hoping for more partnerships and collaborations.

Our office also does the local arts programming grants for non-profit organization within the county. We receive funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts with a county match. Messaging and promotion for our arts and culture amenities is imperative. We do our best to promote events throughout the County but we're not able to promote all of them. We need more support in that area. Promoting arts and culture is another reason why I would love to collaborate.

There's a great opportunity to promote northern NJ as an arts destination. Our high-quality theaters and music venues can compete with NYC. Arts and culture can be a nice messaging focus for the region.

Yes, it is the fabric of the community and it truly makes this region unique. We're completing our 10-year cultural development plan and we're focusing on tourism, arts and culture, and history for the next 10 years. One goal is to have a piece of functioning art in every county park in the next 10 years. We're trying to be proactive in keeping up with the pulse of the community.

Did you talk to other counties about their experiences when putting together the 10-year plan?

Unfortunately, no. We did a lot of research and hired a consultant to help create the plan. Her expertise alone with counties and cities across the country was phenomenal. She provided a lot of background, data and ideas. Most of the planning is being done through several rounds of interviews, surveys,

meetings, and steering committees made up of community leaders, elected officials, local organizations and stakeholders all within the County. I would have liked to speak with other Counties during this process, but unfortunately we ran out of time.

Together North Jersey Competitive Task Force Project – FY20

Interview Summary* : Hugo Neu

Participants: Michael Meyer, Hugo Neu; Miriam Salerno, VTC; Robert Brennan, VTC

Interview Date: November 15, 2019

About Michael Meyer:

Mike Meyer is the Director of Development at Hugo Neu. He is an urban community planning and development professional, with a track record for delivering high quality, large scale transformative projects and programs to advance social and economic justice and community health. At Hugo Neu, Mr. Meyer is responsible for leading Kearny Point's master planning and development. The adaptive re-use of this 130-acre formerly contaminated federal shipyard will result in three to four million square feet of commercial space repurposed within historic buildings. He has led efforts to drive Newark's economic turnaround through extensive redevelopment projects in Newark's downtown and neighborhoods, including housing, parks, public spaces and community facilities.

About Hugo Neu:

[Hugo Neu](#) invests, builds and manages innovative businesses in the recycling, real estate, and related industries. Hugo Neu is "a growing company founded on our principal values of economic, social, and environmental sustainability. With our global vision, we foster cross-integration between our companies and the activities of non-profit partners with whom we work. From our established base, we expand our reach through collaboration with business partners who share our values."

Key Takeaways

- New Jersey has a specific brand or identity that we should promote
- New Jersey's cost of living is high, but it is still cheaper than New York
- Our greatest demand comes from intrinsic Jersey, creative and entrepreneurial clients
- We have a lot of transportation options, but they're not always practical

What are your initial impressions about a North Jersey regional marketing and branding initiative to improve economic development and build North Jersey as a desirable place to live and work?

I think it's a great idea. New Jersey currently has a specific brand, some aspects are positive and helpful, and some not positive or helpful. Frankly, some of the notions considered not positive or helpful could be framed more thoughtfully as an asset. For example, the impression of gritty. Many people think about along the turnpike or our older, denser urban areas in general as a gritty experience. There are components of that industrial, older and historic character that are attractive to businesses, artists, or others. Figuring out how those adjectives and attributes can be framed in a more constructive way is a great idea. We are a very diverse state, geographically, culturally and ecologically, and turning that into something that is a more coherent celebration is a real challenge. However, it makes great sense.

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Have you done any marketing outside of the immediate New York market? Have you reached out to other regions around the country?

Initially, we did. But, ultimately determined that, given the types of spaces that we offer and the community that we trying to foster, that was a large investment for little return. Now we focus marketing locally to New Jersey and the New York City metro area.

How much of your space at Kearny Point is residential versus commercial?

It is a 100 percent commercial, mixed-use project, ranging from light industrial, light manufacturing, creative office, retail, and amenities to serve the site. We've got a lot of entrepreneurs, and we have several companies that were previously based in the suburbs. They came here to be closer to New York City and Jersey City and to have a cooler, hipper space.

How has access to the arts and culture as well as the New York City creative class shaped the Kearny Point project?

We launched an artist's residency program last Fall. We host about 15 artists, giving them stipends, a large-scale artist space and housing. In addition to supporting people working on great art, we also hope to create a buzz about our development in Kearny Point. There's also some kind of personal connection for the particular artist that's driving that interest. Both in Newark and in this area, there is a brand of "Jersey tough, gritty" kind of vibe, which we try to own to some respect. Whether or not that is something that is ultimately marketable on a more regional broader level, we try to own it and embrace it.

How has transit access impacted the kind of tenants that you attract or how you market Kearny Point?

About 60 percent of our space—700,000 square feet—is legacy old buildings that have been tenanted for over 20 years. Those buildings are generally trucking distribution, but we are shifting away from those types of uses. The modern product we have is selling the creative office uses. Probably 20 percent of our tenants have some connection to logistics and transportation. We do not actively market to those folks, but it organically occurs. More generally, our strategic location from a transportation and infrastructure perspective is something we tout often; it is one of the top advantages we discuss regarding our location. In this region, the history of transportation is both positive and negative. People are poorly served by public transit in this area and the quality of roads is insufficient. We are proud of our central location but have to explain that this central location sometimes means traffic congestion or limits on last mile connectivity. Nevertheless, the transportation issue and access are prioritized in how we market ourselves.

Do you think developers would be interested in participating in a North Jersey marketing plan?

Yes, but I suspect that developers will find it challenging to connect a regionally diverse marketing effort to their actual leasing activities.

Together North Jersey Competitive Task Force Project – FY20

Interview Summary*: Jersey City Office of Cultural Affairs

Participants: Christine Goodman-Jersey City Office of Cultural Affairs, Miriam Salerno-Rutgers VTC, Rob Brennan- Rutgers VTC, Rick Cippoletti-NJTPA

Interview Date: November 15, 2019

About Christine Goodman: Christine Goodman was appointed the director of Jersey City office of Cultural Affairs in 2017. As the director of Jersey City’s Office of Cultural affairs, she works on long range planning and support for the arts & culture sector. This includes: producing large-scale festivals and concerts, arts programming, cultural celebrations, arts education, new play development, fundraising, board engagement, and marketing/PR.

About Jersey City Office of Cultural Affairs: Jersey City’s Office of Cultural Affairs is a proponent and advocate for the arts in Jersey City, and serves to provide opportunities, resources, and education for artists of all disciplines. The Office of Cultural Affairs develops consistent cultural programming and events highlighting Jersey City’s burgeoning arts community while honoring its rich and vibrant cultural history. In addition to event curation and production, the Office of Cultural Affairs provides support and resources to cultural organizations, individual artists, and small businesses to raise the dialogue on the arts in Jersey City and encourage residents and visitors to invest in Jersey City’s arts and culture.

Key takeaways:

- NJ has high quality work that is passionate, professional, innovative and exciting.
- Be proud of living in New Jersey.
- We have some small to mid-sized permanent theaters that can bring in bigger entertainment names.
- It is important to start conversations to foster collaboration in the region.

What are your perceptions about creating a North Jersey Regional Marketing Initiative to build an identity for the region? How can such an initiative support the work that you do?

The more we can move forward with a vision we can all benefit from the better. With huge goals to accomplish and limited resources, any opportunity to come together is going to be a huge benefit for the region.

What about the arts and culture sector in particular?

What we struggle with here is the New York market. Northern New Jersey for arts and culture is not being better than New York, but what makes us different. What is changing the most is the idea of being proud of where you live, spending your dollars here, accessing high quality programming and not wanting to go into NYC for everything. This is home town pride and the desire to enjoy what we have

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and to connect with others in our neighborhoods and cities through events and programs. We also have very little press coverage. It would be great to have *NY Times* critics' reviews of the plays and shows that happen here as these reviews are major game changers for productions. We are also a little out of the scope of *Star Ledger* reviews. We fall into that zone or void where it's hard to get the press and coverage we need. The ever-changing landscape of newspapers and blogs makes it really hard for the public to connect to one source that they can trust.

What types of collateral for a Northern New Jersey Region would be helpful for you to have in your efforts to bring attention to the arts and culture of Jersey City?

Any new tool that will get exposure is a great tool. That could be a website with targeted coverage. For instance, NJPAC is this giant arena. However, there are other major performing arts institutions in the area as well. There are not a lot of dollars for marketing campaigns, so that would definitely be helpful. Partnerships are also important; the more we can build bridges the better. Exchanges of traveling performances could hit a few major venues in the region, bringing attention to small to mid-sized permanent theaters. If we combine resources, perhaps we can bring in some bigger names in the region that draw different audiences. And the same strategy can be used for visual arts.

Do you have any ideas that municipalities can do together to promote arts?

We posted through our JCAST social media platforms. We use social media. We had a cultural affairs table at the Bayonne Bridge Arts Festival to promote our arts and studio tour. This was the first time we went to a different city to promote Jersey City. We have the energy, excitement and capacity to work with people but not everyone has the same capacity.

How does art help to create a city/region's identity?

Art is very much a part of the Jersey City identity. Public art is a huge piece of that as you see a living gallery around you and that makes you feel like you're in a creative space. Musical entertainment is a huge draw to the region. What really sets our region apart is creativity, community and building on that sense of connection. The people here are very connected to their community and it's very important to them.

We have high quality work with a lot of passion and professionalism, but we also don't have enough arts funding. Tourism dollars are down too. We decided to pilot a holiday theater with the theater companies contributing to regional advertising. We're doing a billboard on the PATH and an ad NJ.com, with a messages to come to NJ for your off the beaten path holiday shows – enjoy our multimedia theaters and free choral concerts.

Together North Jersey Competitive Task Force Project – FY20

Interview Summary* : Magna-Power Electronics

Participants: Ryan Roberts, Magna-Power Electronics, Inc.; Miriam Salerno, VTC; Robert Brennan, VTC

Interview Date: November 19, 2019

About Ryan Roberts:

Ryan Roberts is the Director of Human Resources for Magna-Power Electronics in Hunterdon County. At Magna-Power, Ryan is responsible for the development of the company's talented team, including employee recruitment, benefits development and administration, employee relations, labor law compliance, and safety along with training and compensation analysis.

About Magna-Power Electronics, Inc.:

Magna Power was founded in 1981 and operates in Flemington, New Jersey. The company pivoted several times before settling into its niche of engineering, manufacturing, and selling high-power sources and loads. Magna-Power designs and manufactures robust programmable power products in the USA that set industry standards for quality, size, and control.

Key Takeaways

- Hunterdon County's business incentives played a large role in locating in Flemington NJ
- Flemington is centrally located, which allows most workers to commute approximately 45-minutes or less.
- It is difficult finding people who want to live or work in Flemington because the town does not have unique entertainment options.
- There is no access to public transportation in Flemington.

What is your perception about creating this marketing initiative to improve economic development and build an identity for Northern New Jersey as a desirable place to live, work, and visit?

When it came to recruiting and attracting people to work here at Magna Power, I did not realize the initial challenge I was going to have recruiting qualified people. Many high school students were not interested in pursuing a summer job in manufacturing or they were vacationing for the entire summer. Thus, it is challenging to recruit in Hunterdon County because many of the people living here are not looking for a career in manufacturing. Magna-Power used to be in Boonton, New Jersey; one of the reasons they came to Hunterdon County was because of the incentives to build a business here. I have attempted to find team- or company-oriented activities to reinforce comradery and socialize outside of work. However, Hunterdon County is challenged in that area as well. There are no engagement venues, such as bowling alleys or miniature golf. The main venue type in Flemington is shopping and food. In order to attract employees to relocate from a different area or reside here, attraction-oriented development is critical.

* This report includes summarized responses to interview questions and does not include any direct quotes.

When you are looking to attract employees, do you talk about what is within a 45-minute radius of Flemington or do you mostly focus on the immediate local area?

We have to go really broad. I try to keep the commute within a 45-minute drive, but we have people coming as far as Sussex, New Jersey and Easton, Pennsylvania. I work with several different staffing agencies, and they have the same challenge. We cannot identify people that want to live or work in Flemington.

One of the other challenges I had, when I began my position at Magna Power, was that the starting pay for an individual who had no experience but had mechanical aptitude was anywhere from \$12.50 to around \$14.00 per hour. So I initially did some research and found that the competition around here offered a starting pay of \$13.00 or \$14.00 per hour for non-direct competitors and similarly for a direct competitor. Thus, in April 2018, we changed the starting pay to \$15 per hour for someone who has zero experience that we will train, but they have a mechanical aptitude and can follow instructions. We also have a referral bonus; if an employee refers someone and they last more than 90 days, the employee receives \$250 in their paycheck and the person who was referred would receive \$250 in their paycheck. We also did a pay adjustment company-wide, so that everyone received an increase based on a sliding scale formula. Morale, excitement, performance, and production all went up because we recognized that we were not attracting quality people and we were not doing justice to the employees that were here.

Do you have apprenticeship programs?

We are attempting to work with Raritan Valley Community College because they have an advanced metalwork program. When I worked in Pennsylvania, I was on the workforce development committee for both Bucks County and Montgomery County. Bucks County Community College had a 12-week advanced manufacturing program that was funded by the state and the county, where people that were either unemployed, underemployed, or veterans would receive a 12-week course for free. They received a National Institute for Metalworking Skills (NIMS) certificate and we were hiring 2-3 graduates every 12 weeks. There was also a reimbursement grant for the training of those we employed at our facility. I was heavily involved in this program, so I am hoping we can take advantage of a similar type of program in Hunterdon County.

It sounds like recruiting in the greater Hunterdon County area has been difficult. What has made it easier for your business to operate?

One of the opportunities that we pursued this past year is expanding our facility, but there were limitations in the ability to expand our building. This puts us in a situation of deciding if we should continue growing or should we look elsewhere for a larger building. The attraction of Hunterdon County at the beginning was all of the incentives they provided to come here, but the inability to expand prompts us to ask if we want to continue business here. It may eventually force us to seek another facility somewhere else.

What does your company highlight about moving into the Hunterdon County area?

We tell potential employees that we are within driving distance of New York and Philadelphia. We have to search the outskirts of Flemington itself to find additional entertainment.

Would you use a website or brochure for recruiting that highlights culture, entertainment, tours, etc. of Northern New Jersey if created? The essence of the website or document would be to highlight why someone should come live and work here.

Absolutely.

What is a challenge to marketing the Flemington area?

There is no access to public transportation. I have had multiple candidates ask “Can I commute there by bus? A train? Or a boat?” The answer to that is no. We partnered with GoHunterdon, the Transportation Management Association for Hunterdon County, and they provide our employees with an incentive to carpool. Multiple employees here carpool, coming from their respective residences outside of Flemington. They drive about 30-40 minutes and alternate who is going to drive each week; it saves them on gas and wear and tear on their vehicles. The lack of public transportation accessibility limits our pool of candidates.

With increased public transit access, do you think the pool or quality of workers would increase?

I do. When I talk to candidates, I ask them “Do you have a valid driver’s license? Do you have reliable transportation?” Some of them don’t have transportation. There is no access to the facility without a car.

What would you say are some of the characteristics of the people you employ?

We are about 24 people in the office, consisting of engineers, purchasing, planning, HR, and finance. The remaining 76 employees are all production; blue-collar employees with wages ranging from \$15 per hour up to \$28 per hour. They are very team-oriented. We rarely have employee-relations issues, and that is one of the things that was very inspiring for me coming here. Another incentive we offer our production team is to work four 10-hour days so that they can potentially receive a 3-day weekend each week, unless they take the option to work that fifth day for 10 hours of overtime.

APPENDIX 2: CASE STUDY REPORTS



Where Innovation Meets Opportunity

East Arkansas Crossroad Coalition

Crittenden, Cross, Lee, Monroe, Phillips, Poinsett, St. Francis, and Woodruff Counties, AR
Economic Development Marketing

What it is: The East Arkansas Crossroad Coalition (herein referred to as the EACC) was formed in 2013 when the previous governor of Arkansas (Mike Beebe) allocated funding for a public-private partnership to commence the economic revitalization of this area. The EACC consists of 8 counties outside of Memphis, Tennessee, known as the “Delta” Region. The total population of the region is 130,000. By combining the 8 counties together, it allowed them to create their own Metro Service Area and to compete with other larger cities. By combining their resources, they were able to make pitches to recruiters and partner with public universities and community colleges to retain and offer quality employees and workforce to attract businesses to the area.



The Eight Counties in the “Delta” Region
Via <http://www.crossroadscoalition.org/>

Interest to NJTPA: This region is mainly a rural region, and has different needs than their suburban counterparts. Together North Jersey will have rural counties involved, including Hunterdon and Sussex Counties. Additionally, the focus of EACC is to expand businesses that currently exist in the area, and with less of a priority on bringing in new businesses. Their main goal was retention of the current population, and ultimately grow the population in this region.

Major Takeaways:

- 1. Focus on Improving Quality of Life:** The goal of the EACC was to improve the quality of life for eastern Arkansas. Although they market to entrepreneurs to start businesses in the region, the main focus is to promote companies to expand in the region through warehouses and office space (Amazon Warehouses is an example).
- 2. Pivotal Role of Volunteers:** The EACC relies on volunteers or part time mayors in the area to assist with the economic development of the region. There is a board that consists of 13-15 people (with at least one person on the board representing each region). Board members include economic developers, chamber officials, judges, utility workers, financial advisors and local, state and federal government employees. The EACC is also partners with public universities and community colleges to recruit students not only as potential employees for businesses but also as leaders in the community.
- 3. Funding Issues and Changes to Program:** EACC lost a majority of its public funding from the state after its initial establishment. Therefore, they have been forced to rely more on the communities and counties to complete duties previously performed by the coalition, which leads to multiple issues (inconsistency, change in priorities, timeliness, etc.). Some of the programs that were initially included in their marketing strategy, such as the Business Ambassador Program, were canceled due to loss of funding, and their work with local colleges was further cut back due to the funding cuts.

Discussion: *The following is additional talking points taken from the interview not covered in the Major Takeaways section.*

What are the next steps for the Coalition and how will it move forward without state funding?

Much of the credit for keeping some momentum of the program is the dedication of state and local volunteers who have continued to give their time and energy, despite the lack of funding. In the next few months, the Coalition may be offering memberships, sponsorships and/or donations to the foundation to cover expenses. The EACC may function more like a regional chamber of commerce.

How will the marketing strategy expand, despite the lack of funding?

The Coalition is looking to expand their marketing strategy by focusing more on social media and attending less large national trade shows. They will be attending more events locally and within the region, such as local and state fairs and conferences, in order to get the word out about their mission.



N-Squared Innovation District
Newton and Needham, Massachusetts
Economic Development Marketing

What it is: The N-Squared Innovation District (herein referred to as “the District”) was established in 2016 as a “hub for innovation.” It exists within two municipalities – Needham and Newton in Massachusetts. The area, prior to the establishment of the economic development organization, had stalled in economic growth, and local leaders wanted to boost economic development in that district. The goal of the N-Squared Innovation District is to attract new businesses, with a focus on so called “innovation businesses” as well as expand businesses that currently exist in the area capitalizing on cutting-edge technology. The goal of the District is to attract businesses that would normally establish in or near the city of Boston.



N-Squared Innovation District Neighborhoods
Via <https://www.n2innovationdistrict.com/about/n2-neighborhoods>

Interest to NJTPA: Newton and Needham are suburbs to Boston. This is similar to many of the municipalities in northern New Jersey being a suburb of New York City and would like a piece of the businesses that establish in large urban areas. The area also consists of many empty business offices, an issue many municipalities in Northern New Jersey face.

Major Takeaways:

1. **Support from Local and State Government is critical:** The District was funded through two main mechanisms: (1) \$45,000 from the state government for initial funding; and (2) a total of \$350,000 from the state government for subsequent three years of the program. Needham and Newton each provided additional funding of their own. The District was not able to raise money as initially hoped, and state funding ended after three years. Because of the limited funding, the District was sustained with the support of donations and through fundraisers.

When the plan was initially put forward, several methods of raising funds outside of state and local areas were considered. One such method established a Business Improvement District (BID) specific to the District area, in which property owners vote to initiate, manage, and finance supplemental services or enhancements above and beyond the baseline of services already provided by their local city or town governments. Another method considered was establishing a Tax Increment Financing Program (TIF), in which landowners within a designated TIF Zone may be granted property tax exemptions of up to 100% of the tax increment. These ideas, however, never got off the ground because support and funding for the project disappeared within three years of commencement.

2. **Innovation Hub vs. General Economic Development:** The area was originally an “innovation hub,” with the goal of bringing more technology companies to the area, competing directly with Boston. However, innovation companies did not come to the area as expected. The area is already very wealthy, and many potentially interested innovation companies wanted to invest in an area to improve its economic development; any future economic development should focus on bringing in businesses, not just “innovative” or technology based businesses.

Similar areas may not have similar needs: The N-Squared District is a homogeneous suburban area with a predominantly white population. Prior to the establishment of the District, it was generally assumed that both the community and local leaders would have similar needs and objectives in terms of economic development. However, once the N-squared District was established and marketed, differences between the two municipalities became more apparent. Disagreements about how much each municipality would pay almost immediately rose to the surface. For example, each municipality initially put in equal amounts of funding to support the project. However, as Needham is the smaller of the two municipalities (in terms of population density and area), representatives believed Newton should pay more. Since Needham was attracting more businesses, representatives assumed Needham should pay more. Newton residents further imagined more mixed-use development, while Needham residents

prefer “white picket fence” housing development and separate office facilities. This caused conflict between representatives in the municipalities and stalled progress in the area. Needham had a “NIMBY” (“Not in My Backyard”) attitude toward the innovation district, and provided little financial and general support after initial funding.

3. **Paid Staff and Marketing Budget are essential:** There was little staff to work directly on the District due to limited funding. Board members were mainly volunteers who lived in the area and could not devote their time fully to the District. Volunteers attended trade shows on behalf of the N-Squared District, to advocate and promote the innovation district (specifically for transportation policy). Much of the work that was completed for free, however was not at the high standard initially expected during the establishment of the District.

There were no designated funds specifically allocated toward marketing for the N-Squared Innovation District, and marketing initiatives slowed down following its initial establishment. Marketing was limited to attending trade shows and posting on social media. The website was launched with initial funds. The logo for the District was completed at cost by a volunteer within the District, and used widely across their marketing efforts.

4. **Lack of Partnerships:** While the having an economic marketing plan and brand were important to attract businesses to the area, establishing key partnerships (University or a large corporation) would have been important to forge and sustain. Brand or big name partnerships would draw more developers and businesses to the District as well as funding to help sustain the program.
5. **Local Businesses had no investment in the District:** N-squared District established within the Newton-Needham Regional Chamber of Commerce, and there are no membership fees attached to being a member of the Chamber. The District’s limited marketing and the branding and logo was used by many nearby companies and businesses already in the area, and as a result benefitted financially without actual investment or contributions to the District. Because these businesses had no requirement to pay fees, the District did not have the funding needed to increase their marketing efforts. Additionally, developers began to raise the rents of their buildings, making it harder to attract new and small businesses.

Current status of the N-Squared Innovation District:

The N-Squared Innovation District is not defunct, however, control of the District resides with the Needham Newton Regional Chamber instead of an independent agency. Since the Executive Director position that Chuck previously filled is no longer being funded, staff at the

Newton-Needham Regional Chamber will fill in the gaps to build and market the District. The branding and logo of the District will be maintained.

Activities if funding was sustained for the District:

More partnerships with real estate brokers would have helped immensely by tying in marketing and funding by absorbing a portion of the real estate fees toward the District. The District was also interested in developing a mobile app that would map out the businesses in the area to provide users with an easier method of finding a business or office space/building to fit their need. Additionally, a newsletter sent every week to residents and businesses in the area (via email or print) would have helped to get the area more excited about the work that was completed as well as the existing services and businesses available.

**Lehigh Valley Development Corporation Interview Summary
Together North Jersey Competitive Task Force Project – FY20**



About the Lehigh Valley Region in Pennsylvania: The Lehigh Valley is the third most populous Metropolitan Statistical Area in the state of Pennsylvania with a population of 821,173 residents as of the 2010 U.S. Census, which increased to 841,913 residents in 2018 according to the latest U.S. Census Estimate. The Lehigh Valley region is eclipsed in total population in Pennsylvania only by the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh metropolitan areas. The region officially consists of Carbon, Lehigh and Northampton counties in eastern Pennsylvania and Warren County on the western edge of New Jersey, in the Eastern United States. The Lehigh Valley's largest city, with a population of 120,443 residents as of the 2010 U.S. Census, is Allentown.

Made Possible in Lehigh Valley: Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC) worked closely with its stakeholders and regional companies in crafting the “Made Possible in Lehigh Valley” campaign, holding focus groups and detailed conversations with expert consultants, HR professionals, government partners, employers, and local talent to express a common vision of Lehigh Valley and what makes it a special place. In addition to the marketing campaign, LVEDC highlighted multiple stories about the economic growth Lehigh Valley has experienced over the past year.

Discussion Summary:

Can you give us some background on how/why this initiative came to be?

We received a HUD sustainable communities grant as an Economic Development Organization. Lehigh Valley Development Corporation used some of those resources to launch an economic development initiative aimed at business recruitment and attracting talent to the region. We started off by trying to understand talent supply issues, looking into long term understanding of education labor force and the future labor force. From that the Education and Talent Supply Council was formed. This 2018 study gave us education skill gap information, and information with which we can explain to industries why there are skills that are lacking in the labor force's supply.

The study also brought the colleges and universities in the region together to coordinate on internships and they launched an internship summit with businesses to help develop internship opportunities and improve internship experiences. The study also started to work on regional initiatives to improve talent pool for businesses, and to have businesses to recruit from all educational locations. Education and Talent Supply Council's primary role is to gather information and release it to the public (businesses, colleges, etc.) to help secure the region's talent pipeline.

Was there ever any sense of competition among the counties or municipalities in Leigh High Valley?

Lehigh Valley had willing partners who wanted to establish this regional identity. At this point there isn't any competition because our counties have been working together for so long. It is no longer an issue. Effective leadership has helped foster this cross-county relationship.

What kind of funding organization or mechanism supports this work in Leigh High Valley?

Lehigh Valley Partnership, a non-profit organization consisting of 20 CEO's in region started this effort. They were frustrated by the lack of collaboration between two counties and pushed for the counties to work together. Bethlehem steel had just closed all of its functions, so we recognized the need to market Leigh High Valley as a region and to diversify the economy. The funding structure in 1995 was all corporate private support. Then in 2000, the Partnership made an agreement with Convention and Visitor's Bureau to receive a portion of the hotel tax generated within the counties (makes up 50% of current revenue) through 2050. All other counties use hotel tax funding for capital projects or destination marketing through the Visitor's Bureau. We do a lot with only a little funding (relative to other regional organizations). We also continue to receive private support from corporations. New Jersey has a lot of big companies (fortune 500 companies) but needs business champions who want to support talent recruitment.

Do people and companies with multiple locations all over hesitate to support a region that is marketing itself?

Pennsylvania is a big enough state that the Pittsburg region and the Lehigh Valley region don't really compete for business recruitment. Philly and Lehigh Valley have a little more in common, but generally do not compete. Businesses understand that you get very different things in Leigh High Valley and Philadelphia. As a state, Pennsylvania has a lot of comradery among the regions for business recruitment. Talent recruitment can be a bit more competitive. Leigh High Valley has two of counties in Pennsylvania that are actually growing in population. Part of our pitch is to recruit from places like Hoboken and Jersey City for people who are looking for something more affordable, and places like Scranton or Lancaster for people who want better access to established urban areas.

What do you think is the most critical aspect of success for such an initiative?

Having a department and leadership that values this information is critical. In order for an initiative like this to succeed, you need a person who is dedicated. Ideally, it should be someone who has a strong basis in analytics, strategy, grasp of education, and work experience. The person in this role should also have stature and experience (not a young graduate) in order to effectively recruit partners and stakeholders.