

Community Economic Development – Possible Action Strategies

The following local actions and strategies are provided to stimulate thinking about the wide variety of initiatives that can be taken at the local and regional levels to enhance economic development and local job opportunities. These ideas are assembled under the six broad and interrelated approaches that stimulate economic and employment life.

1. Initiatives to retain and expand local businesses.

Evidence has clearly shown that more jobs are created through business expansion than through new business start-ups. The following initiatives focus on actions that assist local businesses to improve their productivity and market share.

Examples:

Campaign to examine the development of value-added products and product diversification (turning existing local products into consumer ready goods).

Provision of training programs to strengthen management and marketing capacities of local businesses.

Sponsorship of local business appreciation awards and events.

Introduction of mail order marketing for local products.

Creation and strengthening of business support networks such as business sector associations, "Business After Five Clubs" (where business people visit different enterprises and resource agencies to learn new ideas, resources and processes), "Entrepreneurs Breakfast Club", mutual support networks for sharing resources and expertise, etc.

Regular monitoring of Government purchasing patterns and needs to see what could be supplied locally.

Organisation of regular special events such as monthly market, swapmeet, fun days, specialist conferences, workshops, exhibitions.

Sponsorship of special sporting events.

Co-ordination of group marketing exercises (especially relevant for the craft sector).

Provision of information on alternative and speciality crops and vegetables for farmers.

Establishment of a revolving loan fund to provide direct loan guarantees and other necessary financial assistance to qualified businesses.

Establishment of local arts and crafts counters or shelves in local motels, hotels and restaurants.

Use of retired management people to examine receivership situations to advise on possible ways that the company and/or debt can be restructured.

Development of the 'Telecentre' concept - introduction of modern tele-communication equipment, services and network facilities to improve local business efficiency and provide access to non local markets, maybe as a means of saving/expanding the local post office services.

Encouragement of more active involvement by local government in economic planning and action, eg, choosing to buy locally made goods, providing expertise and unused buildings, applying for grants to develop infrastructure, appointing specialist economic employment development officers, changing attitudes of key personnel (eg, building inspectors) from being reactive to proactive etc.

Survey of local resident's attitudes towards business products. This can provide existing firms with confidence to alter or diversify their products or services.

Production and publication of Profile Sheets and newspaper stories on local businesses, unique businesses, award winning businesses etc.

Brokerage service for exporting overseas.

Packaging of the unique features of the community as a theme or an event.

Franchising good local ideas to other communities.

Direct market approaches such as farmers markets, colourful roadside stalls, 'pick your own' facilities etc.

Use of special rate levy for the business community to fund a marketing and public relations campaign.

Organisation of retail improvement seminar followed up by individual on site consultations.

Assistance to local businesses to stay in the community.

Construction of town entrance statements highlighting local award winning businesses.

Organisation of special seminars/workshops focussing on local problems, eg, themes like "Life After a By Pass" for towns about to face a highway by pass, "Keeping the Family Farm in the Family", "Marketing Without Advertising".

2. Initiatives to encourage the formation of new businesses.

This area includes a range of support to help potential new entrepreneurs to research and develop a viable business idea and obtain access to the appropriate skills and resources. Such actions encourage and support the creation of new businesses to add value to existing products, to meet changing consumer demands, or to capture sales which might otherwise go to other communities, regions or countries.

Increasingly, rural communities are discovering the new business potential in alternative tourism, small specialist manufacturing, information technology sectors, and alternative/speciality agricultural production.

Examples:

Provision of an integrated small business advisory service that supports local people so they can develop an idea into a business reality.

Provision of a local 'One Stop Shop' where people can gain information and assistance about establishing a business.

Provision of a regular updated register of available work space areas.

Organisation of workshops on the establishment of new home-based industries in such areas as bed and breakfast provision, food preparation, craft production etc.

Co-ordination of publicity regarding success stories and making more widely available "How to" information.

Organisation of a competition for new enterprising ideas.

Development local industrial or commercial work space.

Encouragement of local loan sources for new businesses such as local credit union.

Establishment of a local investment fund.

Development of an "Angel" network involving retired or semi-retired business people who are willing to provide venture capital for a local project in exchange for the excitement of being involved in a new local enterprise.

Provision of informal group guarantee arrangements where a group of people collectively take out a small loan and agree to guarantee each other.

Support to existing financial institutions establishing separate accounts dedicated to local economic development.

Organisation of regular idea generation workshops and entrepreneur training programs.

Instigation of projects which foster an enterprising spirit among local youth such as the "Livewire Youth Business Competition", a youth enterprise centre etc.

Research into, and promotion of interesting business ideas from outside the community such as looking at newspapers from overseas/interstate.

Exploration of new trends and their potential business opportunities, eg, women in the workforce; growing proportion of senior citizens; more awareness of fitness and health, growing appreciation of the environment; 'green tourism'; experiential holidays, etc.

3. Initiatives to attract outside business and resources.

This involves actions which assist in bringing new investment, employment and funding to the community.

Examples:

Development of local industrial, office or commercial parks, workspaces, buildings.

Regular promotion strategies of the community and its commercial advantages, such as producing a video or a community fact book.

Study of local consumer needs and expenditure to identify new services that could be 'head hunted'.

Targeted searches for businesses which might be most suited to one's community and its future, eg, traditional crafts for a historical crafts space, manufacture of period furniture for a historical workspace, etc.

Targeted searches for businesses which might be interested in a local branch operation or local franchise.

Attraction of someone with a unique collection to establish a permanent museum, exhibition centre or display.

Encouragement of former residents with business success to "come home" and start a business or invest in ventures started by others.

Targeting of professionals to establish businesses, (especially those with 'weekenders' within the region) through the provision of shared office space complexes.

Organisation of business and lifestyle attraction campaign - attracting people with business skills in the area.

Regular monitoring of all government funding programs and services.

Regular review of available philanthropic trust funds.

Encouragement of retired people to remain in the area rather than move away. Recreation, housing and home care are all important areas. Transfer payments and income from investments earned by retirees are often significant for local purchasing and investment.

Full utilisation of government employment and training schemes.

Lobbying for specific projects, offices, facilities and services.

Encouragement of higher enrolment at local educational institutions and enhanced education services and facilities.

Development of "one stop" information/service centres that provide an outlet for a range of government departments and agencies.

Attraction of part-time presence of government agencies through provision of shared office facilities.

Design of new services and targeting of the corporate sector for sponsorship.

Identification and targeting of government officials sympathetic to community development.

4. Initiatives to 'Plug the Leaks' in the local economy.

Communities can limit the amount flowing out or 'leaking' from their local economy. Leaks occur whenever residents spend at regional shopping centres, invest in out-of-town businesses, holiday or recreate away from home, or pay for services from firms which commute into the area. Leaks also snowball because if residents travel to buy one item which is not available locally, they tend to buy other items while they are out of town. Obviously no community can keep all the dollars that circulate, but it is important that communities improve their ability to retain as much local income as possible.

Examples:

Plan "Buy Local" campaigns to counter the reasons people give for shopping out of town. Such myths include higher prices, better selection, inconvenience etc.

Establishing a matchmaker program to identify imported products and services which could be provided by local businesses.

Identification of local consumer needs and buying habits, and publication of the results.

Provision of an employee training program to improve the quality of service, eg introduction of the Aussie Host Customer Service Program.

Provision of community recognition awards for best employees - the aim is to make customer service more friendly and efficient.

Co-ordination of monthly and annual business awards for excellence - targeting various sectors.

Publication of a local business service directory.

Establishment of a community-owned company to help retain services, eg, Community Bank.

Operation of agency arrangements for different government departments through a community company or local government council.

Marketing of locally produced goods/services, through business directories, special sales etc.

Introduction of community recycling and waste separation programs, and schemes to improve insulation and energy consumption.

Identification and head hunting of services to a community which are presently unavailable.

Reduction of infrastructure costs of local government - using a reward system for employees to suggest improvements to productivity and cost reduction.

Co-ordination of a doorknock campaign of every resident asking what was needed to keep them in the community.

5. Initiatives that enhance the job linking capacity of a community and thus the flow of people into jobs.

This involves actions that utilise community development processes and social networks to support the job search activities of unemployed people, to help fill job vacancies more quickly, to discover hidden job opportunities, to improve information flows regarding job creation assistance and to help counter attitudinal reasons why some employers may not be increasing their workforce.

Examples:

Awareness and door knock campaigns targeting employers about wage subsidy and other forms of support.

Use of the yellow pages and direct telephoning to directly canvas local businesses for job vacancies.

Preparation of publicity summarising all forms of job assistance available locally.

Organisation of a job-mate scheme which links a job seeker to a job-mate. The job-mate provides one-to-one mentor support in the search for work.

Provision of a free job advertisement in the local newspaper for out-of-work people to advertise their skills.

Provision of a free radio spot service for out of work people to advertise their skills.

Promotion of local Traineeships.

Provision of a casual labour exchange which provides a focus for notifying casual work opportunities and provides a direct link to the out of work with appropriate skills.

Instigation of an agency that co-ordinates the seasonal needs for farmers with people looking for work.

Maximum utilisation of Government employment programs to create local jobs, eg, works programs, conservation schemes etc.

Organisation of a local group apprenticeship/traineeship scheme where a group of employers collectively employ a group of apprentices/trainees.

Recognition of employers who employ local young people.

A door knock campaign of every employer as part of a community job awareness program, eg, 'give an unemployed community member a job', 'take on an extra apprentice' campaigns etc.

Organisation of an "Employ Me" competition where school leavers and the unemployed enter a poem, essay or cartoon on the theme "Employ Me". Publish the best in the local newspaper.

Organisation of a regular door knocking campaign of businesses to find out skill shortages and develop immediate short courses to fill local job needs.

Organisation of community job clubs where job seekers can learn job search skills and support each other through sharing information and job leads.

Establishment of a Local Employment Trading Scheme (L.E.T.S) where employment skills are bartered.

Creation of Regional Training Trust to act as an official training provider.

Organisation of a local support program for redundant workers as soon as possible after the redundancy or preferably prior to the factory or office closing, including a systematic telephone program re job vacancies of every business within a certain radius of the community.

Preparation of a community skills register.

Promotion campaigns to encourage employers to create extra jobs - use of incentive prizes.

Co-ordination of an "Adopt a School" program by local businesses - Educational Compacts.

Establishment of a Rural Youth Information Service.

Co-ordination of a community campaign to add new jobs to the community, eg, 'Many hands make Christchurch work', Project Employ Youth etc.

6. Initiatives that market the community.

This includes actions that enhance the appeal and image of a community to potential visitors and new settlers.

Examples:

Adoption of Mainstreet program - including research into original condition and colour of buildings, provision of a free architectural service, advice on restoration techniques, organisation of discount paint schemes, cash grant scheme to help with design work, building code flexibility, street furniture, tree planting.

Promotion of heritage redevelopment.

Co-ordination of town beautification and landscaping - including improvements to town entrances.

Co-ordination of heritage trail development - offering visitors a framework with points of reference.

Development and publication of regional special interest trails, eg, flower trail, sea coast recreational trail, a hand made treasure trail featuring quality crafts people.

Co-ordination of "Country Village Weekend Breaks" program - a rural tourism marketing initiative which promotes packaged weekends to selected villages across the country.

Development of a theme(s) for the town.

Construction and maintenance of toilets on the main street - need to be well sign posted.

Targeted packaging of a community publication, eg, "Spend a day in ..." brochure, incorporating a series of tourist drives, preparation of car rally packages etc.

Use of museum exhibits to improve attraction of buildings and services.

Promotion of retirement support services.

Attraction of businesses which encourage people to stop, such as a hot bread shop, antique shop, country gardens etc.

Preparation and distribution of a local promotional brochure, post cards, maps and T shirts.

Promotion of the town's famous sons and daughters.

Organisation of special market days.

Development of facilities/activities targeting children, eg, special playgrounds, activity books focussing on things to do in the region.

Improvements in the quality of life to encourage people to live there, such as maintaining or establishing a full range of medical services, increasing recreation opportunities etc.

Filling of empty shop windows with local displays etc.

Creative use of murals on toilet blocks, bus stops, playgrounds, public buildings etc.

Promotion of the 'only one in Australia' attractions or the unique 'lifestyle' of the community.
Production of local song/jingle.

Surveys of local residents regarding what they feel they miss by living in a rural community, and trying to respond with practical projects.

Staging of an annual award, exhibitions, attracting entrants from around the country, eg. Wood Turners Annual Award Exhibition.

Co-ordination and co-operative marketing of home stay accommodation, local guides, colonial accommodation etc.

Identification and promotion of specific themes or events based on cultural, historical or natural strengths.

Promotion of special features, eg, unique meals/dishes/drinks etc.

Publication of regular calendar of local events.

Promotion of alternative interpretive forms of tourism.

Development of innovative and attractive playground equipment.

Development of a town strategy to get passing traffic to stop.

Development of a systematic signage system for towns by-passed that covers all major services and shops.

Formation of a community 'image' committee.

Regular publication in larger urban areas of the benefits of moving to one's community, eg, comparing housing costs etc.

Renovation of unused farm cottages/buildings for non-farm enterprises and or attractions.

Development of possible base tourism sites/products in the area.

Establishment of local information centre with volunteer ambassadors.