

The Importance of Collaboration Between EDOs and Chambers in Challenging Times

By RDG CEO Clint Nessmith

Matt Chambers and I attended IEDC's Leadership Conference in Washington D.C. a few weeks ago. The conference was excellent, and we were particularly enthused to see that one of the themes reinforced repeatedly is the importance of economic development organizations (EDOs) and chambers of commerce collaborating more closely. In today's climate of economic uncertainty, driven by federal policies such as tariffs, pauses in grant payments, and policy changes impacting workforce, the collaboration between EDOs and chambers is crucial. Both entities play pivotal roles in fostering economic growth within the ecosystem, but their combined efforts can create a synergistic impact that benefits businesses and communities alike.



Left: Clint Nessmith, CEO, Resource Development Group
Center: Sheree Anne Kelly, President & CEO, Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives
Right: Nathan Ohle, President & CEO, International Economic Development Council

Why Collaboration Matters

EDOs and chambers share overlapping goals: promoting business growth, creating jobs, and enhancing community prosperity. However, they often approach these objectives from different angles. EDOs focus on strategic planning, infrastructure investment, and attracting external funding, while chambers excel at advocacy, networking, and community engagement. By working together, these organizations can leverage their unique strengths to address economic challenges more effectively.

For example, chambers are adept at representing the interests of local businesses in policy discussions. Partnering with EDOs allows chambers to back their advocacy efforts with robust research and data analysis. Together, they can push for policies that mitigate the negative impacts of tariffs and other federal measures while fostering a favorable business climate.

Additionally, EDOs often have access to funding opportunities that can support local economic initiatives. By collaborating with EDOs, chambers can help businesses secure resources for workforce development, infrastructure improvements, and other critical projects. This partnership ensures that funding aligns with the community's broader economic goals.

Both entities play key roles in addressing workforce challenges. Chambers often support the talent pipeline producers to align curricula with market needs, while EDOs tend to attract new talent to the market. Joint efforts can bridge skills gaps and ensure a well-trained labor force capable of adapting to economic shifts.

Strategies for Effective Collaboration

To maximize their impact, chambers of commerce and EDOs must establish strong partnerships based on trust and shared goals:

- **Open Communication:** Regular meetings and joint events foster dialogue and identify opportunities for collaboration.
- **Formal Agreements:** Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and / or roles agreements can define roles and responsibilities, ensuring clarity in joint initiatives.
- **Resource Sharing:** Establishing systems for sharing data on grants, investment opportunities, and business trends enhances decision-making.

How RDG Can Assist

As most of our readers know, RDG only works with EDOs and chambers. Our clients value this specialization as it allows us to deploy our national perspective and expertise in many situations, including the development of ecosystem organizational roles matrices.

This is a common exercise for our firm, with a goal of developing and defining primary and supporting roles for the key partners operating in the economic ecosystems in which

we work. In addition to elevating cooperation and collaboration, defining roles has a positive impact on fundraising. Bringing role clarity allows all organizations involved to more clearly state and communicate their unique value propositions, tamping down on perceptions of duplicative services and programs by funders and potential funders.

An organizational roles matrix is typically built between a Feasibility Study and the solicitation phase of a funding campaign but could be completed independent of this process if we can obtain the necessary feedback to inform the work.

The Path Forward

As federal-driven uncertainty continues to shape the economic landscape, the need for regional collaboration becomes increasingly evident. By combining their expertise in advocacy, resource allocation, and workforce development, EDOs and chambers can create a unified front to support businesses, build industry sector ecosystems, and drive sustainable growth.

In these challenging times, working together is not just beneficial—it is essential for building resilient economies that thrive despite uncertainty.

Clint Nessmith is CEO of Resource Development Group. Read his bio by using this [link](#) and schedule a meeting to discuss this blog and how RDG can help you by using this [link](#).

Please [go here](#) to visit the RDG Interactive Blog.