



PREPARED COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

The **Prepared Communities Program** recognizes that our region has its own unique set of circumstances and there is no blanket approach that will work across the diverse economic landscape that we have in southeastern Ohio. By engaging with our local communities to hear their needs, act as a resource and utilize the tools we have at OhioSE and JobsOhio - together we can create a plan to move each of our communities forward in their own way.

The mission of Ohio Southeast Economic Development (OhioSE) is to promote enduring widely-shared economic prosperity across 25 counties of Appalachian Ohio by serving as the regional JobsOhio partner delivering business retention, expansion, attraction, site selection, and site development services.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Ohio Southeast understands a community strategy or a common vision is necessary in order to achieve economic development success. With a vision that becomes an actionable plan, you have direction. OhioSE wants to help counties/communities in its region create a vision and develop an actionable plan. The Prepared Communities program will provide selected counties/communities with free technical assistance from the professional team at Bricker Graydon and OhioSE. Selected communities will receive six hours of virtual economic development planning assistance. This assistance will provide the framework for developing a workable plan for future economic development strategy.

ELIGIBILITY

- This program is open to all local elected officials including County Commissioners, Mayors and City Managers within the region.
- The local elected official can be a current office holder, recently appointed or elected to office for a term beginning in 2024.
- The local elected official must complete the ED Now Series by attending both sessions on October 20 and October 27, 2023.
- The local elected official must complete the program application and include a separate goals and strategies document to be returned no later than December 15, 2023. We strongly encourage collaboration with the local county economic development offices and other key stakeholders in a community.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND PROJECT EVALUATION

Projects will be evaluated on a number of criteria to assess need and community impact. To be considered for support, applicants are asked to complete the program application. Key evaluation criteria include:

Current conditions in your county

- Provide the name and population of the community
- Provide a short narrative describing the business climate of community – include the top 10 largest employers in the community

Economic challenges

- Provide a short narrative describing the current economic challenges
- Include relevant information pertaining to jobs, unemployment rates, business closures within the last 5 years, and any decline in population
- Provide a narrative describing the quality of life in your community including school districts, cost of living, median home price, average income, area attractions
- Include area assets that provide insight on the following:
 - Workforce (demographics, availability, & etc.)
 - Infrastructure for utilities, broadband, and transportation
 - Tourism
 - Technical or vocational training schools, Community Colleges, Universities
 - Downtowns

Economic development goals

- Provide a narrative describing at least 5 goals you seek for your community to combat the challenges you face

Please return your completed application and any supplemental materials **no later than Dec. 15, 2023** to Destiny Bryson at destiny@ohiose.com. Once your application is received, Destiny will call to follow up and verify that your application has been accepted and review the documents to ensure all supplemental materials have been properly delivered for evaluation. Awards will be made in January 2024, with technical assistance sessions to be scheduled soon after the beginning of 2024.

Should you have any questions regarding the program, please reach out to the OhioSE Engagement Team Ed Looman (ed@ohiose.com) (740) 381-4119 or Destiny Bryson (destiny@ohiose.com) (614) 440-1885.



PREPARED COMMUNITIES PROGRAM APPLICATION

Requesting County/Community: _____

Contact Person: _____ Title: _____

Mailing Address: _____ City: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Short description of the project and goals for your community:

APPLICATION PROCEDURE:

To be eligible for a targeted technical assistance award, an elected official from the applicant community MUST participate in both upcoming ED NOW webinars, scheduled for October 20 and October 27, 2023. At the conclusion of this series, please complete this application and include a separate goals and strategies document with the following information:

- Current conditions in your county
- Economic challenges
- Economic assets
- Economic development goals

A sample copy of a goals and strategies document is attached to this application. Please follow this format with your application.

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Please return your completed application and any supplemental materials **no later than Dec. 15, 2023** to Destiny Bryson (destiny@ohiose.com).

For additional information, contact the OhioSE Engagement Team:

Ed Looman (ed@ohiose.com) (740) 381-4119 or Destiny Bryson (destiny@ohiose.com) (614) 440-1885

EXAMPLE County Economic Development Goals & Strategies Document

Current Conditions

SEO County, population 50,000, has historically had an economy based upon manufacturing, mining, energy production, retail, government, and agriculture. In the last 20 years, due to several plant closures/downsizings, coal mine closures and a coal-fired power plant shut down, 1,500 well-paying jobs in value-added sectors disappeared.

Today the largest employment sectors are now health care, government and retail. The largest employers in the county are currently:

1. ABC Hospital	1,500 employees
2. SEO County Government	800 employees
3. Walmart	250 employees
4. Kroger	200 employees
5. ABC Plastics	175 employees
6. ABC Community College	150 employees
7. Yellow Helmet Construction	130 employees
8. ABC metal fabrication	100 employees
9. ABC oil well services	75 employees
10. Git R' Done Trucking	50 employees

Economic Challenges

The loss of manufacturing, mining and utility jobs and replacing them with lower paying retail jobs and non-profit healthcare jobs has reduced wages and benefits of the SEO workers and hurt property tax collections. Property tax collections in 2020 were 20% less than 2013. SEO County has also experienced a 2% decline in population over the last 20 years.

Economic Assets

SEO County, while suffering some economic challenges, still offers tremendous potential for the future. Our schools perform above state averages on proficiency tests, and our consolidated school district has built brand new state-of-the-art facilities. We have maintained a quaint downtown in our historic county seat. Our cost of living in the county seat is 80% of the USA average. Our median home price is \$80,000, which is ... of the Ohio median. FBI crime statistics show violent crime occurs 10 percent less than the national average. We have exceptional outdoor recreation areas with 3 state parks, ABC Lake, and XYZ River. While we do lose young people and working people to larger cities with more robust economies, it is common for young people to move back to SEO County to raise a family or move back later in life to retire because of the strong family ties in the area and our great quality of life.

While we have experienced corporations from outside the area shutting down plants, we also have several thriving locally owned businesses, and an emerging group of entrepreneurs starting new businesses. Both groups are committed to grow their businesses in SEO County *if they can*.

Other assets include:

- A work force of 20,000 people, 8,000 of which leave the county for work with an average drive-time of 35 minutes. Of those out-commuters, many would prefer to work closer to home for comparable wages.
- Cost of living and wage rates 20% below the USA average.
- 4-lane U.S. 99 running through the center of the county with undeveloped land near the interchange.
- ABC Plastics says their workers are more productive and more reliable than sister plants across the country in larger cities. ABC has some newly patented products that could really take off in the market place if they can expand their operations and find workers.
- For the last 10 years, we have experienced growing visitors to our state parks from Metro City an hour away. Several couples have moved here from Metro City to start businesses, including a winery and an inn. Visitors say our climate, soil and springs are perfect for growing grapes, hops, wineries, and craft beer making. They say financing a new business in Metro City is twice as expensive as doing it here. Also, during deer and turkey hunting seasons, we seem to have growing numbers of visiting hunters.
- While many rural parts of the county lack broadband, ABC cable has run fiber optics through the downtown of the county seat. It is common to see local people bringing their laptops and tablets to McDonalds to work to use wifi while eating or getting coffee. It seems that some folks who commute to Metro City are allowed to work from home a day or two a week if they can connect to high-speed broadband.
- Our vocational school has very active business advisory councils. We routinely hear that SEO's welding program produces welders that are in high demand. Employers come from Metro City to recruit graduates.
- The SEO Community College has a great computer science professor who retired from Microsoft and decided to move back home and give back to the community. Every year her graduates recruited by Metro City employers.
- Because of our great soil, many of our local farmers have started to dedicate some of their fields to fruits and vegetables in demand at good prices by Metro City restaurants. The restaurants there will pay more for produce since they can call it "farm to table."
- Our downtown still has many original brick buildings from the late 1800s. They have real charm and are solid structurally.

Goals

1. Seek out every opportunity to assist local employers retain jobs and grow additional jobs in the community through a consistent BRE visitation strategy, working to connect employers with resources, maintaining a good business climate and ensuring our educational resources are aligned with the needs of local employers.
2. Develop location in the downtown county seat where remote workers can access high-speed wifi in an environment conducive to work and where entrepreneurs can be near other entrepreneurs in a collaborative environment. In order to truly provide the help entrepreneurs need, we would like to provide small business coaching and counselling services and work with a lending network or loan fund to help entrepreneurs grow their businesses.

3. The SEO County work force has provable advantages based upon employer testimonials, commuting patterns, wage comparisons, and vocational school graduate skills. While SEO County is not likely to attract a major industry due to our relatively small size and distance from a large city, we do have the ability to be appealing to companies struggling to grow in Metro City. We also have the ability to accommodate the growth of some dynamic local companies. The original county industrial park built in the 1960s is occupied, although the number of people employed there has shrunk. SEO County needs a new, infrastructure-served business park near the US Route 99 Interchange. This park would be available to growing businesses already in the community as well as new businesses to the county. Land can be purchased but infrastructure extensions will be needed.
4. An idea that has merit and we want to research is that SEO County may be able to support a more tourist destinations if we orchestrate a professional marketing and promotional program: both to attract visitors and more entrepreneurs.
5. An idea that has merit and deserves exploration is that some farmers believe if a first-rate farmers market or farm cooperative were organized, we the amount of produce being sold to Metro City restaurants could be increased five fold.
6. Finally, we believe many educated millennials might return to SEO County or become first time home owners here if only we could find a way to convey all of our advantages (cost, less congestion, safety, recreation opportunities, good schools, the ability to finance not just a house but a start-up business, etc.) and we made it easy for them. This idea needs fleshed out and for someone to execute it.