

Western New York Regional Council Work Group Meetings

Professional Services Work Group Meeting Report

Meeting #1

Monday, August 29, 2011

Attendees:

Howard Zemsky	Larkin Development (Co-chair, WNY Regional Economic Development Council)
Tom Kucharski	BNE (Work Group Chair)
Christina Orsi	ESD (Regional Council Executive Director)
Steve Bell	Eric Mower & Associates
Paul Bonaro	Yahoo! Data Center
Dr. Nan DiBello	SUNY Empire State College
Dr. Sonja Given	SUNY Empire State College
Therese Hickok	Uniland Development
Michael Murray	Ernst & Young LLP
David Nasca	Evans Bank
Sue Furlani	Shatter I.T.
Jeff Tredo	Bryant & Stratton
Jeff Wellington	M&T Bank
Diego Sirianni	ESD
Lorrie Abounader	BNE (Work Group Leader)
Rachel Teaman	Regional Institute (writer)
Kathysue Pohrte	Facilitator
Becky Landy	Facilitator

Summary of Meeting:

The meeting started with a welcome from Howard Zemsky, co-chair of the WNY Regional Council and from Tom Kucharski, a member of the WNY Regional Council and Chair of the Professional Services Work Group. After a round-the-room introduction, Christina Orsi from ESD presented an overview of what is the purpose of the Regional Council and the task for this working group.

The goal of the first meeting was to create a baseline of existing conditions, description of critical issues that must be overcome and the principal regional economic drivers that will advance the region's economic growth. Through a SWOT analysis, the group brainstormed over a hundred suggestions. The top three (or in some cases, four) of the analysis is as follows:

Strengths:

1. Extensive higher education system
2. Experienced, skilled workforce pool
3. Lower cost of operations, including labor and real estate
4. Headquarter city for several major financial services companies

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Weaknesses

1. High taxes/too much government
2. Excessive downstate focus in NYS – small projects ignored because no benefit to downstate
3. Negative image of area/bad weather perception
4. Region fails to align education with employer/industry needs of the region

Opportunities

1. Higher education and business partnerships to meet business needs/ create training program for industries
2. Attraction of companies from Canada/Downstate
3. Build on demonstrated success based on established cluster, success stories

Threats

1. Hierarchical decision making process and politics of government
2. Highest taxes compared to rest of country (and, in-state, highest relative to other counties/regions)
3. Global competitive environment for cluster

Rachel Teaman, our writer for the group, created an excellent summation of what our goal for the industry to be:

Overall Strategic Direction of the Professional Services Industry:

Buffalo Niagara's Professional Services industry is defined by several stellar examples of success, including its status as the headquarters for major banking institutions and the recent location of Yahoo!'s data center. In addition to leveraging these success stories to recruit new professional services businesses to the region, the industry has the potential to compete on a global scale by leveraging the region's favorable operating costs (particularly labor and real estate), a strategic location next to Canada and major metropolitan centers, and the opportunity to partner with colleges and universities for more targeted workforce development and access to knowledge and research.

Next Steps:

- Establish schedule for remainder of meetings
- Suggestions for additions to our group – any key sectors not being represented?