



Regional Economic Development Council of the Southern Tier Opportunity Agenda Strategy: 2014

DRAFT: 5-23-14

Summary

In 2013 the Regional Economic Development Council of the Southern Tier adopted an Opportunity Agenda Strategy that demonstrated its commitment the overall goal to move impoverished populations into the workforce and revitalize distressed communities in our region.

According to information provided by the NYS Department of Labor, the target geographic areas in the Southern Tier Region to include those with the highest concentration of poverty demonstrated by low household incomes, high rates of poverty and unemployment, and a high percentage of residents receiving public assistance. Target areas include communities with census tracts representing concentrated distressed areas, as well as rural areas with a population of 5,000 – 25,000 that exhibit chronically distressed conditions. Based on data available from the US Census, target census tracts within municipalities include Binghamton (2, 5, 11, 12, 13), Corning (9625, 9627), Elmira (1, 2, 6, 7, 10), Endicott (134, 135, 136, 137), Hornell (9608, 9609), Johnson City (139, 140), and Norwich (9903, 9904). Examples of census tracts in the rural areas include Chenango County (9703, 9704, 9708.1), Delaware County (20.9); Steuben County (9608, 9609, 9621); Tioga County (207.3).

The Council took action to integrate the new Opportunity Agenda strategy into its overall economic development plan and strategic objectives including Healthcare, Energy, Transportation and Economic Development Backbone (downtown and waterfront revitalization, workforce development, business development, technology transfer and tourism).

In 2014 the Opportunity Agenda Work Group made a recommendation to the Regional Council that it maintain a regional approach, with a focus on both communities in the region that have concentrated pockets of poverty and distress in the urban cores, as well as rural areas with a high concentration of poverty demonstrated by low household incomes, high rates of poverty and unemployment, and a high percentage of residents receiving public assistance.

The Work Group further advised the Regional Council to retain its vision is to improve the economic position of the community and move impoverished individuals into jobs with projects and initiatives that:

- Involve joint efforts between educational institutions, employers and community organizations.
- Move impoverished people living in the targeted geographic areas into employment, preferably in job categories identified by the Southern Tier's Regional Council.
- Build human capital through learning of new skills
- Ensure residents of target areas have the tools to secure and retain jobs in targeted job categories while meeting employer hiring needs.
- Remove barriers to employment such as transportation, child care and lack of education and training.
- Revitalize distressed communities by revitalizing buildings and neighborhoods, and creating businesses and job opportunities.

Opportunity Agenda Strategies

The Work Group further recommends the Regional Council's overall strategies for integrating distressed communities into regional economic life and develop public-private partnerships include the following.

- Training and apprenticeship programs targeted at job categories that are both linked to the Southern Tier's economic strategies and have been identified by employers and growth areas by the NYS Department of Labor as Regional Demand Occupations. These include jobs in: Agriculture (food manufacturing); Healthcare (home health care, personal care, registered nurses, nurse aides, administrative assistants, clerks, physicians, licensed practical nurses, supervisors and managers, medical assistants, and cleaners); Energy (energy inspections, weatherization and installation of renewable systems); Transportation (manufacturing and assembly); Travel and Tourism (clerks, waiters and waitresses, landscapers, janitors and cleaners, cooks).
- Existing and proposed programs that support employment readiness designed to help people gain the skills, confidence and work ethic needed to seek, secure and retain employment. Examples include computer skills, job coaching, life skills training, interview skills, etc.
- New business development in targeted areas that generate employment opportunities as well as meet a need of the impoverished population.
- Creative solutions to barriers such as transportation; i.e., "car share" programs.
- Support programs for persons attending training and/or securing employments such as child care.
- Collaboration between communities and businesses to create employment opportunities.

Implementation Plan

The Work Group recommended the Regional Council adopt the following action items to implement the Opportunity Agenda strategies for 2014.

- Promote the Southern Tier Region's Rural Initiative Fund as an opportunity for agricultural business owners to expand their businesses and seek out impoverished persons as potential employees.
- Promote the Southern Tier Region's Community Revitalization Fund as an opportunity to renovate buildings that can support business development opportunities in those communities with the highest concentrations of poverty.
- Encourage and support Community Development and Main Street funding applications intended to revitalize downtowns and neighborhoods, particularly those with high concentrations of poverty.
- Conduct meetings of the Opportunity Agenda Work Group to continue assessing challenges and identifying projects and initiatives.
- Engage in one-on-one meetings with organizations that have the capacity to implement employment readiness activities and encourage them to align programs with Opportunity Agenda strategic priorities.
- Continue to use forums such as the Southern Tier Municipal Leadership Summit to engage municipal leaders in discussions about the region's challenges and opportunities identified in its Opportunity Agenda strategy.