This report describes the Mobilize Maine process used for developing Four Action Areas that can be leveraged to create opportunities for strategic economic development in the Midcoast Economic Development District (MCEDD).
MOBILIZE MIDCOAST MAINE

Local Leadership Driven

BACKGROUND

Mobilize Maine is a statewide initiative to revitalize the economy. The effort is led by the state’s seven Economic Development Districts and funded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). The funding is for one year, with a second year available with good performance.

Mobilize ME a new way of doing economic development. The traditional approach focuses on problems and needs and its aim is to qualify for a government grant. The Mobilize ME process focuses on assets and opportunities. Its aim is to make the case for new private investment and supportive government policies and its process is the same that a private business would follow in identifying a new growth opportunity.

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Mobilize Midcoast Maine began in the spring of 2012 by creating a Leadership Team for the project. The team is private sector-led, and includes:

- Chris Hamilton, Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
- Bill Cullina, Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens
- Amy Lent, Maine Maritime Museum
- Catherine Wygant, Boothbay Harbor Region Chamber of Commerce
- James Whitten, Southern Maine Community College
- Jack Williams, Camden National Bank
- Eric Waters, Penobscot Bay Medical Center
- Lisa Martin, Maine Manufacturers Association
- Chris Rector, Senator, District 22
- Mary Kate Reny, Renys, Twin Villages Downtown Alliance

AN ASSET VERSES NEEDS BASED APPROACH

“Mobilize Maine changes the entire culture of how we approach economic development.”

Michael Aube
President of the Eastern Maine Development Corporation

SCHEDULE 2012

Spring:
Recruit Leadership Team

Summer:
Develop Benchmarks
Conduct Asset Mapping

Fall:
Adopt Benchmarks
Identify Opportunities
Establish Action Teams

Fall/Winter:
Recommendations for
Phase II
Prepare Final Report
William Peterson, Integrated Marine Systems, Brunswick Air Sea Integration Center (BASIC)
Jennifer Geiger, Maine Street Bath Director
Kim Olsen, State House Representative
Rick Knowlton, Maine Water Company

The team’s role is to champion the process, guide analysis and planning and participate in the action teams.

**BENCHMARKS FOR SUCCESS**

The Leadership Team has identified benchmarks for economic success for the region. They provide statistical measures of where the region is in terms of population, jobs, income, entrepreneurship, tourism, Main Street development – and set measurable goals for progress by 2017. This will be an accountable process – people will be able to see whether it is working or not.

**IDENTIFYING ASSETS**

The Team then authorized three *asset mapping* exercises with different groups across the region:

- Local officials involved in economic development
- Local Chamber of Commerce directors
- Local professionals active in arts, culture, and historic organizations

The groups listed and evaluated the region’s assets, including:

- Natural assets such as islands, harbors, rivers, conservation land, fisheries, and trails.
- Historical, cultural, and arts assets such as the Botanical Gardens, the Farnsworth Museum, the Maine Maritime Museum, Bowdoin Museum, agricultural fairs, art fairs, historic architecture, forts, great restaurants, attractive main streets, many local artists and craftspeople, seasonal festivals and fairs
- Educational assets such as the new community college center at Brunswick Landing, specialized schools for boatbuilding and photography and blacksmithing and nursing and homebuilding and nature education, extension programs and university colleges.
- Business assets such as strong clusters in boatbuilding, shipbuilding, marine research, composites manufacturing, tourism, fishing, food processing, agriculture, and medical equipment manufacturing.
- People assets in groups including talented retirees, visitors to the region’s conferences and attractions, students (and alumni) from Bowdoin and area camps, artists and craftspeople; and a “can-do” spirit, self-reliance, and strong work ethic.
- Other assets include the new Amtrak train line, new broadband internet capacity (“3 ring binder”), Brunswick Landing, access to Boston, access to airports, and downtown associations.

Each group then considered which of those assets were particularly special to the region, and had the potential of being leveraged to create new economic activity and jobs.
AREAS OF FOCUS

The Leadership Team considered the list of several hundred assets developed through the exercises, and looked most carefully at the top 25 or so identified in each group as special.

They distilled the assets into four key clusters. The clusters were chosen to represent the highest potential for economic growth in the years ahead. Each would be the subject of special “action teams” to be formed this fall and continued through 2013. The action teams will analyze the assets, and opportunities arising from those assets, in detail; identify promising possibilities; set a strategy for realizing the opportunity; and begin the process of making it happen.

Here are the four areas of focus.

**Talent** – tourists, retirees, alumni of local schools and camps, young people – attracting, retaining, engaging new residents.

Future economic growth for the Midcoast, and for Maine, requires attracting and retaining a talented population. The Midcoast already has a unique concentration of talent. Some have retired here, some vacation or summer here; some come to destinations such as the Shelter Institute, Maine Media Workshops, and the Center for Furniture Craftsmanship. Some come for events like The Camden Conference and PopTech. A fourth action team will consider creative ways to attract, engage, and retain talented people, both young and old.

**Manufacturing and Technology** – composites, boat building, medical products, technical education, and Brunswick Landing complex – connecting workers and employers.

Midcoast area businesses hold leading positions in certain cutting-edge manufacturing sectors: boatbuilding, composites, food processing, medical components. It also has businesses, nonprofits, and educators with skills and interests in energy conservation. The area has a new technical education complex at Brunswick Landing, and strong technical programs in other locations. It has a research and development capacity at Bigelow Laboratory and at Bath Iron Works. How to translate these competitive advantages into new jobs would be the focus of a second team.

**Local Food, Fishing and Farming** – farming, fishing, specialty products, restaurants, R+D (Bigelow, Darling Marine Center) – building the cluster.

The “local foods” movement is sweeping the country. The Midcoast has an infrastructure of farmers, fishermen, farmers markets, food processors, and restaurants that can serve this growing market. There are many community supported agriculture (CSA) programs and even (in Port Clyde) a community supported fishery (CSF). A third action team would be formed to help this cluster grow.
Cultural and Natural Attractions - local art, history, main streets, culture, trails, beaches, harbors, islands – increasing visitation.

The Midcoast region has an unusual concentration of arts, cultural, historic and natural attractions. Only a few are “destinations” – places that are identifiable outside of Maine, and that motivate visitors to come to the area. However it might be possible to “package” the collective assets in a way that creates a new destination focus. There is also an opportunity to “brand” the assets as authentic Maine. More visitors, more use of the assets, both create opportunities for tourism revenue, and also attract people to move to the area year-round. This would be the focus of one action team.

FOUNDATION AND DISCOVERY MEETING

On October 30th, there will be a Foundation and Discovery Event to introduce the Mobilize ME process to the region, to present our initial findings, and to make the initial steps towards organizing action teams.

ACTION TEAMS

Action teams will be formulated in November and December of 2012. Over the course of 2013, they will systematically:

- Analyze data related to their opportunity
- Interview key actors – and recruit them to participate in the planning
- Screen potential opportunities to identify those with the most economic impact, and those with the most realistic chances for success
- Lay out a strategy for implementation
- Achieve small wins along the way

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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