Hampton Roads Partnership

Overview

The Hampton Roads Partnership is a multi-sector organization created in 1996. The Board of Directors draws its members from the major private employers and universities in the area as well as from the ranks of elected officials and other prominent private and public institutions. There are 86 Board members in all, including the chief elected officials from the 17 communities, labor, university presidents and corporate CEOs. The unit of membership is the individual. The Partnership's focus and activities span the Norfolk metropolitan statistical area, connecting the region's "Southside" (Norfolk and Virginia Beach) and "Peninsula" (Hampton and Newport News).

The Hampton Roads Partnership grew out of a three-year planning process that began in 1992. Leaders of the Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce initiated the process and, in the end, more than 400 business, university and public leaders took part in brainstorming sessions. The resulting plan, a 15-year plan for regional growth called "Plan 2007", addressed widespread concern about the impact of the recession, defense downsizing and intensified competition from other Eastern seaboard ports. The plan became the blueprint for the creation of the Hampton Roads Partnership. The Partnership is the strategy setting and implementation body for the plan. The Partnership first updated the plan in 1998 and is in the midst of its third update (2003-2004).

The Partnership's current regional priorities are to fix inefficiencies in regional transportation, bring technology-based economic development to the region and promote regional cooperation.

Regional Priorities

The Partnership's strategies address issues of regional competitiveness such as workforce development, infrastructure, regional governance and economic diversification. There are six current priorities: regional transportation, the ports, technology-based economic development, workforce development, tourism and regionalism, plus two complimentary priorities which are the plight of the cities and military partnering.

ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOT

Type of Organization
Multi-sector: Led by partnership of business, government, civic, community and other leaders

Unit of Membership
Individual

Number of Members
2003: 86
1998: 75

Membership by Company Size
Small Companies: 15%
Mid-sized Companies: 25%
Large Companies: 60%

Dues Determined by
Flat fees, dues or contributions

Annual Dues Paid by
Largest Member Companies: N/A
Smallest Member Companies: N/A

Annual Operating Budget
2003: $500,000 to less than $1 million
1998: Less than $500,000

Staff Members (FTE)
2003: 4
1998: 4

Board Members
2003: 86

Regional Priorities
Transportation, Ports, Tech-Based Economic Development, Tourism, Workforce, Regionalism

HAMPTON ROADS PROMOTES NEW TECHNOLOGY-BASED PARTNERSHIP

Three years ago the Hampton Roads Partnership issued a series of white papers that highlighted the importance of technology-based economic development in a region. High-technology development explained 65% of the difference in growth among metro regions in the 1990s. The papers also pointed out the importance, but lack of presence, of a major facility focused on research and technology transfer in the region.

With the research as its guiding force, the Partnership helped create the Hampton Roads Research Partnership (HRRP). Today, HRRP is a consortium of eight academic institutions and two federal research and development laboratories, including Old Dominion University, Norfolk State, NASA's Langley Research Center and the Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator federal lab. HRRP is leading research collaborations in Sensors, Modeling and Simulation, and Bioinformatics.

For more information, see http://www.hamptonroadsrp.org/

Notable achievements of the Hampton Roads Partnership include its regional work in transportation, early childhood education and technology-based economic development. (See box at top for the Hampton Roads Research Partnership.)

The Partnership has taken a strong lead on regional transportation issues. The region suffers from poor transportation connections between the Southside and Peninsula. Access between the two main commercial centers on each side (Norfolk on the Southside and Hampton on the Peninsula side) is hampered by a five-mile wide estuary. A narrow, four lane tunnel connects the two sides, making a five- to 10-mile drive a 45-minute commute. The Partnership is working with 25 other leadership organizations in the region — for example, the Hampton Roads Chamber and Virginia Peninsula Chamber — to boost awareness of this and other transportation issues.

The Partnership has led or supported regional efforts to find a dedicated funding source for six transportation projects that affect the entire region. One of the six projects is the "Hampton Roads Crossing." The Crossing would provide another bridge/tunnel connection between the Peninsula and Southside.

Its last effort was to pass an increase in the regional sales tax to support funding of the six projects. The Partnership put out briefing books that outlined the competitive benefits to increased investment in regional transportation. The Partnership also contributed $100,000 toward a local committee to advance legislation that would enact the sales tax increase. Even though the Legislature approved the placement of the sales tax initiative on the ballot, voters rejected the regional referendum in November 2002. The Partnership has regrouped despite the defeat and, in another attempt at boosting investment in the region's transportation infrastructure, is working with others to advance an increase in the gas tax.

VIRGINIA PROMOTES INNOVATION IN REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

The Partnership's collaborative structure and regional approach to competitiveness became the model for the Commonwealth of Virginia's Regional Competitiveness Act. The Act offers incentives to the state's regions to develop a shared agenda and pursue collaborative activities on competitiveness issues. The Legislature passed the Act in 1996. Between 1996 and 2002 the Legislature contributed millions of dollars to 19 regional collaboratives throughout the state, such as the Hampton Roads Partnership. The future of the program is in doubt beyond 2002. Its funding was not renewed — yet another victim to Virginia's budget crisis.

See http://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/CD/RCP/Docs/VA%20Partnerships.pdf

Another of the Partnership's regional successes has been its "Square One" initiative. The Partnership funded Square One to work with local social service agencies on early childhood development issues. The Partnership reports that "nearly a quarter of the region's children enter kindergarten unprepared for basic schoolwork, thus impairing their futures and threatening the region's economic competitiveness." The Partnership used funding from the Regional Competitiveness Act (see box at top) to leverage $115,000 in direct grants to support Square One. Program activities have included a billboard and transit card campaign promoting parental reading to young children, training sessions for local government staff in implementing parent education and support programs, and a web site (www.SqOne.org) to connect programs and services.

Structure and Operations

Four professionals staff the Hampton Roads Partnership. There has been little turnover in Board membership over the years, and membership has increased from 75 five years ago to 86 members today. The full Board of Directors meets quarterly. A smaller Executive Committee meets each of the other eight months. The Executive Committee consists of 20 or so members. The Executive Committee is involved in setting the Partnership's direction and overseeing its initiatives more so than the full Board.

The Partnership is confronting a major change in funding. The Regional Competitiveness Act funded between $1.2 million and $2.3 million in projects for the Partnership in each of the last three years. In 2002-2003, Virginia's budget woes resulted in the elimination of all new money statewide from the Regional Competitiveness Act. The Partnership's current budget ranges between $500,000 and $1 million with the loss of the RCA funding. Membership dues will continue to fund overhead expenses of the Partnership (e.g., staffing and rent), but support of programs and project implementation will suffer.

The Partnership is considering several options to respond to the elimination in funding from the Regional Competitiveness Act. First, the Partnership is considering how to make its projects and strategies self-sustaining. On this front, it will need to encourage greater ownership of project implementation from its institutional partners. Second, the Partnership is considering dedicating its efforts more exclusively to advocacy. It will need to become more of catalyst than agent for implementation. Finally, the Partnership is re-considering its dues structure. It may need to raise membership dues or expand its search for outside funding.