



The Right Place, Inc.

Overview

Founded in 1985, The Right Place, Inc. is a regional, nonprofit economic development organization directed by a Board consisting of business and community leaders. The Right Place's mission is to promote area economic growth through high-quality employment, productivity, and technology. To do so, it focuses on retaining existing jobs, supporting local business growth, and attracting new businesses to the Greater Grand Rapids area. The Right Place has recently played a prominent role in the area of growing and supporting a regional manufacturing base.

Regional Priorities

The Right Place, Inc. has been involved with numerous activities and strategies to support and strengthen the Greater Grand Rapids economy. In addition to its mission of retaining, expanding and attracting businesses to the region, The Right Place, Inc. has led local workforce development initiatives, played a key role in developing emerging industries such as the health services sector and has supported innovative manufacturing practices. For instance, in 1989 The Right Place, Inc. formed a Manufacturer's Council which represented the largest manufacturers in the region and organized their individual interests into a common purpose. The Manufacturer's Council also provided manufacturers with a forum for networking, sharing best practices, and community involvement. (See box on next page.)

More recently, The Right Place, Inc. convened and facilitated an Urban Redevelopment Council, through which it has developed an urban economic development strategy with the City of Grand Rapids. The council's mission is "to promote retention, expansion and attraction activities in the City of Grand Rapids through the productive reuse of the City's land and buildings, while strengthening the collaboration between the City and other units of government in the region."

Through this work, The Right Place, Inc. began working on "Brownfields," a strategy to revitalize cities. Some of this work is tied to the state's Renaissance Zones legislation to attract companies to the city. Within Renaissance Zones, virtually all

ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOT

Type of Organization

Primarily led by companies or employers

Unit of Membership

Company/organization

Number of Members

2003: 200

1998: N/A

Membership by Company Size

Small Companies: N/A

Mid-sized Companies: N/A

Large Companies: N/A

Dues Determined by

Does not have fees; rather, is an investor-based organization and investors contribute based on size of firm

Annual Investments Contributed by

Largest Member Companies: \$100

Smallest Member Companies: \$100,000

Annual Operating Budget

2003: \$1 million to less than \$2 million

1998: \$1 million to less than \$2 million

Staff Members (FTE)

2003: 11

1998: 17

Board Members

2003: 29

Regional Priorities

Retain, Expand and Attract Business;
Workforce Development; Support
Innovative Manufacturing Practices;
Advocate for Business

THE RIGHT PLACE, INC.'S MANUFACTURER'S COUNCIL

Composed of more than 250 local business executives, the Manufacturer's Council was instrumental in helping to design the inter-firm learning practices used at The Right Place, Inc. today — practices that have since become a model for numerous other economic development organizations. The Right Place has become a manufacturing "think tank," with inquiries from regions across the country about its efforts to gain and grow the industry through innovation. The Right Place's Manufacturer's Council recently released a position paper, *A Growth and Innovation Agenda for Manufacturing*, which details the status of U.S. manufacturing, challenges facing manufacturers, and specific innovation strategies for improving the health of the manufacturing sector.

For more information, visit <http://rightplace.org/Index/index.shtml>

state and local taxes are waived for business and residential properties until 2012. The Right Place, Inc. is initiating dialogue about the intersection of land use, brown-fields and sprawl, and how to take this focus regionally (e.g., how to make this work for smaller cities in the region). However, thus far it has been a difficult sell because townships do not have many direct financial incentives to participate.

The Right Place, Inc. has collaborated around regional and economic development. One example is the West Michigan Strategic Alliance, a coalition of economic, political and community leaders committed to regional collaboration. The Alliance engaged in a strategic planning process that resulted in several conclusions. One of the most telling conclusions, according to Birgit Klohs, President of The Right Place, Inc., was that "although many businesses in our region already compete on a global scale, the self image of the region is still that of small town Michigan. Whether the citizens realize it or not, West Michigan is already a competitive unit in the global economy. In order for the region to compete effectively for global opportunities, the people of West Michigan need to think and act from a larger metropolitan perspective."

In addition, out of the West Michigan Strategic Alliance process, another group was formed. The group consists of West Michigan economic developers, including representatives from The Right Place, Inc., the Holland Area Chamber of Commerce, the Grand Haven Chamber of Commerce, Muskegon Area First, Allegan County Economic Development, Ottawa County Economic Development, Consumers Energy's economic development department, and Whittaker Associates, Inc., an independent economic development consulting firm. The group began meeting to collaboratively design a regional marketing strategy for the Greater Grand Rapids Area. As its first project, the group is exploring how to create a regional economic development web site. The Right Place, Inc. has had to be careful in this process to not seem too dominant or threatening to others.

Structure and Operations

The Right Place, Inc. has 11 full-time employees and is governed by a group of 29 Board members. Over the years the organization has remained very consistent in terms of the number of member investors and its operational budget. For instance, The Right Place, Inc. has maintained roughly 200 investors over the last few years. However, recent mergers within the banking, law and accounting sectors could potentially reduce the organization's overall number of investors. Only time will tell how much this will affect its annual operating budget, which is between \$1 and \$2 million.