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# **National Prosperity/Regional Leadership**

## **Feasibility Study**

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# Feasibility Study for a National Center for Regional Leadership

Our point of departure for this feasibility study has been “what does the field of regional economic development leadership need?” We have not assumed that creating a National Center for Regional Leadership is a foregone conclusion. Based on direct work in twenty-five regions since 2000, much of it in partnership with the EDA, and extensive case studies, individual conversations with experts, primary and secondary research, and roundtables and forums underwritten by this grant, we have come to some definitive conclusions about how to advance effective regional leadership around the country. Indeed, we have concluded that a National Center for Regional Leadership (with a better name!) will advance both the theory and practice of regional economic development leadership.

## What are the needs of the field?

Put simply, theory and practice in the field are disconnected and a Center could play a key role in bringing them together to produce the necessary knowledge for the field to be more effective. Why do we say this?

1. The study of regional leadership at the academic level is hit or miss. There is no such field or discipline although leadership is studied in many places, usually focused on organizations like corporate leadership, organizational leadership, military leadership, etc. But regional leadership, although it shares many characteristics with the various fields of leadership studies, is different because there is rarely a regional organization to lead. What you see in academia are individual students of regional leadership like Mary Walshok (UC San Diego), Roger Stough (George Mason), Anne Saxenian (UC Berkeley), Rick Stafford

(Carnegie Mellon), and many more who are very qualified but who have no institutional connection the way they would if there were a discipline for regional leadership. For this reason, the “field” of regional leadership has weak academic roots at a time when interest is spreading and opportunities for primary research are expanding.

2. The field needs strong academic ties to study the major questions that are emerging as the need for regional leadership develops and its practice expands. Realistically speaking, however, there is insufficient critical mass to create a discipline. On the other hand, a Center could bring the existing academic experts together for the purpose of sharing research, developing joint research projects, and providing expertise to both regional leaders and non-academic experts.
3. Just as there is a disconnect within the academic world on regional leadership, so too are the practitioners and leaders in the regions separated from one another and from academic and professional experts in this field. As a result there is much less learning occurring than could be the case. In our conversations around the country for our research we encountered countless practitioners with a burning curiosity about innovative practices being developed in other regions. A Center, with an academic arm, could provide an effective solution to these problems. It could be a crossroads that organizes conferences to bring these groups together, organizes exchange visits among leadership teams from different regions, collects and disseminates promising practices around the country, organizes communities of practice on common issues, etc.
4. As we point out in the accompanying paper, National Prosperity/Regional Leadership, developing regional leadership is more about nurture than nature. This fact is underscored by the number of regions that sponsor leadership development programs (see Appendix A: What Exists). What we have learned from our research is that, for the most part, while the sponsoring organizations are regional (frequently they are chambers of commerce who have evolved from local

to regional bodies), their leadership curricula remain local and badly need modernizing.<sup>1</sup> Yet there is no established way for these leadership programs to communicate among themselves or to connect with academic and professional experts systematically. This could be a vital function of a Center where model curricula could be developed based on broad experience and technical assistance could be offered to regions that needed it.

## What would a center do?

The various activities of a National Center for Regional Leadership would include:

1. Provide academic credibility as a field and serve as a crossroads where academics, experts, practitioners, and leaders from businesses, providers, regions, and office holders can create synergies.
2. Organize and seek funding for these and other activities to build the field:
  - Academic gatherings
  - Sponsored research papers
  - Conferences across disciplines
  - A WIKI to collect practices and programs across the country
  - Gatherings of researchers and practitioners
  - Curriculum design and other TA to regions
  - Boot camps for practitioners on college campuses

## Who would a center serve?

The various audiences for a Regional Leadership Institute would include:

- Colleges and universities
  - Presidents

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<sup>1</sup> The American Chamber of Commerce Executives, with the support of the Ford Foundation, offers the **Regional Sustainable Development (RSD)** fellowship program, but it is only open to select individuals.

- Professionals responsible for economic development (including research, business development and tech transfer)
- Regional leaders
- Individual academics, practitioners, and experts
- Economic development and workforce development organizations
  - Practitioners and board members of WIBS, economic development organizations, and entrepreneurial support organizations
- Regional planning and leadership organizations
- K-12 education systems
- Local/state political leadership
- Business leadership
- Foundations
  - Program officers and board members
- Media
  - Reporters covering local and regional economies

## What do we propose?

We propose the following:

- Organize a design collaboratory with a core group of universities, regional practitioners and experts tasked with designing a virtual center.
- Involve (if possible) the EDA University Centers program from the outset.
- The core group will develop a proposal and seek funding for a modest planning grant (\$50,000-\$100,000) to develop a governance structure, create a business model, draft further funding proposals (see What Would a Center Do above), expand the core group of universities, practitioners and experts, and identify a non-profit organization or university to manage the Center.

## How feasible is a center?

We divide this question into two parts. (1) Is there a critical mass of academics, universities, regional leaders, practitioners, and experts who would be willing to become involved? (2) Is there a business model to sustain such a Center?

1. This is the easier question to answer. Our modest sampling (see Appendix B: April 21, 2009 Meeting Summary) suggests that there is a groundswell of interest in some entity to perform the tasks we describe. The Council, itself, with more than 60 university presidents among its members, is but one example. Likewise the group who attended the Roundtable on Regional Partnerships held at the Council in cooperation with the National Center for Education and the Economy and the Brookings Institution (see participants list) reflects the growing interest in regional economic development and regional leadership. Frankly, organizing a core group would be more of a problem of who to exclude than to include.
2. The issue of the business model is more problematical. The one previous effort, the Alliance for Regional Stewardship, which gathered some of the most outstanding experts we have together and produced the best practical publications on regionalism, has not survived as a stand alone entity. The differences between what we propose and the ARS are multiple.
  - The ARS was created at a time when interest in regionalism was beginning whereas now it is a widespread phenomenon with growing demand for technical assistance, communication, and research. The growing practice of regionalism around the country and the need for assistance creates the *potential* to monetize some of the activities of the proposed Center including: holding on campus boot camps on regional leadership development, sponsoring conferences on regional leadership, offering specialized technical assistance, providing grant funded research and development projects, etc.

- The ARS did not have an academic base, which we think is critical. Our proposal includes similar constituents to those who created the ARS (experts, practitioners, and leaders) but is also grounded in the institutional support of colleges and universities.
- Our design is based on creating a consortium of institutions and individuals not an association of individuals. We believe that this difference alone would allow the Center to leverage resources that were not available to the ARS.
- The creation of a business model and business plan for the Center will depend on the success of organizing the core collaborative group and the solicitation of funding.

## What Exists

Many leadership programs at the regional level are housed within, or affiliated with, the metro, regional, or greater chamber of commerce for the surrounding area. We looked at the top 20 largest MSA regions and surveyed their chambers of commerce for leadership development programs. Of the chambers that offered leadership programs, the style in which they were implemented varied greatly. Generally speaking, the programs that we observed incorporated activities including community involvement, networking, mentoring, and seminars that examine critical issues facing the region.

The following matrix lists these regional leadership programs and lists whether or not their curricula include the following aspects: a section on the state of the region, networking opportunities, a section on regionalism, travel for participants, a regional project, leadership development, or civic engagement components.

Region	Chamber	Leadership Program	State of the Region	Networking	Regionalism	Travel	Regional Project	Leadership Development	Civic Engagement
New York, NY	Greater New York Chamber of Commerce	n/a							
Los Angeles, CA	Loa Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce	Southern California Leadership Network	Y	Y	Y	Y			
Chicago, IL	Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce	Chicagoland Innovation Leadership Network	Y	Y					
Dallas, TX	Dallas Regional Chamber	Leadership Development Program		Y					Y
Philadelphia, PA	Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce	Youth Leadership Network		Y					Y
Houston, TX	Greater Houston Partnership	Leadership Houston		Y	Y			Y	
Miami, FL	Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce	Leadership Miami	Y	Y			Y		Y
Washington, DC	Metro Washington Council of Governments	Institute for Regional Excellence	Y	Y	Y		Y		
Atlanta, GA	Atlanta Regional Commission	Regional Leadership Institute	Y	Y	Y				

Region	Chamber	Leadership Program	State of the Region	Networking	Regionalism	Travel	Regional Project	Leadership Development	Civic Engagement
Boston, MA	Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce	Boston's Future Leaders		Y					Y
Detroit, MI	Detroit Renaissance	n/a							
San Francisco, CA	San Francisco Chamber of Commerce	Leadership San Francisco	Y	Y	Y			Y	
Phoenix, AZ	Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce	n/a		Y					Y
Seattle, WA	Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce	Leadership Tomorrow	Y					Y	Y
Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN	Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce	Leadership Twin Cities		Y					Y
San Diego, CA	San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce	n/a							
St. Louis, MO	St. Louis Regional Chamber and Growth Association	n/a							
Tampa, FL	The Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce	Leadership Tampa, Emerge Tampa, Insights Tampa		Y					Y
Baltimore, MD	Greater Baltimore Committee	The LEADERship	Y	Y	Y				Y
Denver, CO	Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce	Leadership Denver	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	



## April 21, 2009 Meeting Summary

The Council is completing a grant from the EDA on a National Center for Regional Leadership (the Center) that includes a feasibility study for such an institution. We gathered the following individuals to discuss the question, “what does the field of regional economic development leadership need to flourish?”

### Participants:

- Sam Leiken, Council on Competitiveness
- Maura Mondelli, Council on Competitiveness
- Tim Franklin, Penn State University
- Nancy Franklin, Penn State University
- Eleanor Schiff, Penn State University
- Linda Fowler, NIST
- Diane Palminteri, Innovation Associates
- Robert Samors, Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities
- Ed Morrison, Purdue University
- Irene Petrick, Penn State University (on the phone)

From the outset, the participants agreed with the discussion paper’s point that a robust academic connection is necessary for the regional leadership field. There was extensive conversation about the variety of benefits that could be derived from the academic connection, including:

- Linking academic experts at various institutions for conferences, joint research projects, and focused research.
- Linking academics and practitioners for their mutual benefit
- Serving as a source for curriculum development for regional leadership programs that currently lack a regional focus.
- Offering specialized on-campus institutes, academies and boot camps for advanced leadership development in regions.

- Providing a central source for the collection and dissemination of best practices and practical applications.

The group then brainstormed a list of audiences that such a center might serve including:

- Economic development and workforce development organizations
  - Practitioners and board members of WIBS, economic development organizations, and entrepreneurial support organizations
- Regional planning organizations
  - Practitioners and board members
- K-12 education
  - Superintendents and members of local school boards
- Local political leadership
- Business leadership
  - Chamber boards
  - Utility economic development organizations
  - Healthcare companies
- Colleges and universities:
  - Presidents
  - Professionals responsible for engagement
  - Professionals responsible for economic development (including research, business development and tech transfer)
- Foundations
  - Program officers and board members
- Media
  - Reporters covering local and regional economies

Embedded in this discussion of audiences was the issue of whether the Center’s purpose should be to convince new places to adopt a regional approach or to help regions already open to regionalism in moving forward. As one person put it, to decide between targeting the top “16%” to assist the advancement of leading regions and/or casting a broader net to encompass a larger audience.

The group then turned to the questions of what the Center will actually do, and what the Center will provide. Everyone agreed that it needs to be the “go to” place for regional leadership, offering practical steps to advance the “field.” Specifically, it needs to be a resource for convening, curriculum development, and expertise.<sup>1</sup> The group agreed that there is a need for data tools on regional leadership including research on models and best practices for knowledge of what others are doing. Also, the Center can provide a registry of technical assistance providers.

Another component that all of the participants agreed on was *face-to-face* knowledge dissemination and the provision of a central crossroads for regions to network. Some in the group emphasized the importance of face-to-face contact for connecting people and warned to be careful relying too heavily on the internet for these purposes. Taking this into consideration, the Internet can also be a resource and tool for regional leaders. This could possibly incorporate a wiki where practitioners can share knowledge and resources.

After discussing the mission of the Center, the group focused on how the Center will start. There was a consensus that it must (1) start small and build; (2) create a leadership body of universities and others; and (3) include an intermediary function for a group such as the Council or APLU. Since this study is funded by the EDA, it was a natural starting point for this discussion. For example, it could begin in the EDA University Center program starting with award grants made in 3 regions. There are also other sources in the EDA which may provide funds to start this program. Above all, however, the group agreed that there is a need to reach out to any number of core partners. This can include a core group of universities and should incorporate non-academic experts and practitioners. Participants suggested various organizations that the Council can reach out to including the Center for Creative Leadership which is working on a similar curriculum in the Piedmont region, the OECD, UEDA, NGA, and Brookings’ Metropolitan Policy Studies Program.

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<sup>1</sup> The discussion incorporated many aspects that are critical to the curriculum development. Among the suggestions, we captured these responses: the need for basic/practical level of education, education of government leaders, best practices to leverage the private sector, coalition building skills, and address why regionalism matters. Furthermore, the group agreed on the importance of an “open source” and skill-based common curriculum which can be customized at the local (regional) level and should emphasize how you “need to look at the *core* of the region, not its boundaries.”

At the conclusion of the meeting, the group agreed that the next step should be a design workshop with potential invites extended to Luis Proenza or Wayne Watkins from the University of Akron.