

GRANT COUNTY EDC: "IT'S ALL ABOUT JOBS"

How a rural economic development council competes in the global economy—and recruits Yahoo, Microsoft, Intuit, Ask.com, and more.

FINDING A COMPETITIVE EDGE IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

"It's all about jobs": that's the stated vision of Grant County Economic Development Council, located in rural Moses Lake, Washington. But adding jobs remains a challenge as economic development councils are no longer simply competing with their neighboring counties, but also potentially with dozens of international locations. With site selection becoming a global location hunt, economic development councils face demanding requests for detailed data on area assets, available workforce, and existing businesses.

Grant County EDC has met this challenge head-on with an approach that combines ambitious goals, commitment to infrastructure improvements, and detailed understanding of the region's economy. That's why the county is now the choice location for 19 ongoing projects, from innovative manufacturing firms to high-tech data centers for Yahoo, Ask.com, Intuit, and Microsoft. The county has dropped its unemployment rate from a 10.1% high in 2001 to a 6.6% low in 2006. And between 2006 and 2007 alone, the EDC recruited approximately 1,000 new jobs. These new jobs will be added over a five year period and will have an estimated ripple effect of 1,050 additional indirect jobs.

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—JONATHAN SMITH,
MANAGER OF COMMUNICATION & RESEARCH,
GRANT COUNTY EDC

GRANT COUNTY EDC'S DATA-DRIVEN STRATEGY

Grant County EDC uses a multi-faceted approach to leverage information and gain a competitive advantage. Its web site publishes a wealth of demographic, labor force, industry, government, transportation, and other socioeconomic information about the county, all integrated from multiple sources. Their innovative strategy for business recruitment includes a major focus on being data-driven. This focus includes:

1. Knowledge of local assets
2. Access to sub-county data
3. Regional economic modeling

KNOWLEDGE OF LOCAL ASSETS

Detailed knowledge of their marketable assets is the foundation of Grant County EDC's winning strategy. By identifying key competitive advantages of their location, Grant County can provide companies like Yahoo, Microsoft, Intuit, and Ask.com with a prime site for their data facilities. With available land parcels (as large as several hundred acres), close access to Interstate 90 (the longest interstate in the U.S.), rail access, inexpensive energy, low cost of doing business, and an extensive fiber optic network, Grant County has proven to be an ideal location for various companies, from manufacturing to data warehousing.

SUB-COUNTY DATA: HOW A RURAL COMMUNITY CAN COMPETE WITH METRO GIANTS

Jonathan Smith, Manager of Communication & Research at Grant County EDC, has about 50 data requests per year from site selectors all over the world. For its ease of use and sub-county labor market data, he uses [Analyst](#), a web-based data tool created by Economic Modeling Specialists Inc. (EMSI). Concerning a recent request from a large international company, Jonathan says, “They requested very specific information about only one community in our county. The information they wanted is not currently available in any public source, but because EMSI provides zip-code level data, I was able to complete the request and put our community in the running for a terrific economic development project.” Grant County’s competition—often large metro areas—generally have labor market and other data readily available. So for small towns in rural counties like Grant, access to scarce sub-county data has proven invaluable to their economic success. With detailed data at their fingertips, Grant County continues to be a contender in the face of the fast-paced demands of the global economy.

ECONOMIC MODELING FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Grant County EDC has also done something that few rural economic development councils attempt: They regularly use powerful economic modeling software for community education and business recruitment/retention. This modeling, known as “input-output,” has a reputation for being complex, academic, and expensive. However, with the rise of user-friendly, web-based software, the playing field has been leveled so that even the smallest rural EDC can leverage the information it can provide.

Jonathan Smith uses the web-based Economic Impact tool, which is an integral part of EMSI’s Analyst suite. Not only can it analyze the area’s economic base and discover gaps in inter-industry linkages, it also estimates the total impact of each new business in terms of additional “ripple effect” jobs and earnings. All of this information is posted on Grant County EDC’s [website](#) for the community and the businesses to view. This serves to both educate the community and retain current businesses by showing their valuable contribution to the local economy, which can be weighed against recruitment, incentive, and infrastructure improvement costs. It also shows potential businesses that Grant County is dedicated to assisting businesses that will positively affect their community with healthy economic growth. Grant County EDC proves that with the right tools, an innovative mindset, and detailed knowledge of their service region, a rural community can indeed compete in today’s global economy—and succeed.

RESOURCES AND ARTICLES

The work of Grant County EDC was recently covered here:

- <http://www.columbiabasinherald.com/articles/2007/06/29/news/news02.txt>
- <http://www.columbiabasinherald.com/articles/2008/01/16/editorials/edit01.txt>

ABOUT EMSI

Economic Modeling Specialists Inc. (EMSI) is a professional services firm that offers integrated regional data, web-based analysis tools, data-driven reports, and custom consulting services. EMSI has served thousands of workforce, education, economic development, and other policy professionals in the U.S., Canada, and the United Kingdom, and the company’s web-based Analyst research and analysis tool is used by over 2,500 professionals across the U.S. For more information, call (866) 999-3674 or visit www.economicmodeling.com.