

Richland County Foundation Proactivity Project

"Like many community foundations throughout the country, we were operating as a reactive grant maker. Over time, we realized local social issues would require proactive steps to address underlying economic conditions to make a real impact in Richland County. We had the staff and the assets in place to make this transition, but it was something new for us. The JumpStart team took special steps to understand what we wanted to do and formulated a unique solution for our project."

- BRADY GROVES
PRESIDENT, RICHLAND COUNTY FOUNDATION

Richland County, Ohio

Background

Situated halfway between Cleveland and Columbus, Richland County has a total population of just over 120,000. More than a third of the population lives in the county seat of Mansfield, a former industrial powerhouse surrounded by small communities with good schools, safe streets and a low cost of living.

Despite its many charms, Richland County – like many other rural regions – has struggled to deal with two decades of vanishing jobs and general economic decline. One continuous bright spot in the community has been the Richland County Foundation (RCF), a respected community voice with seven decades of history, over \$100 million in assets and a deep desire to make life better for the people of the region by investing in initiatives that will create new jobs and catalyze economic growth.

Instead of waiting for the solution to come to them, the RCF made a bold decision in 2014 to be more proactive, enlisting JumpStart to help them achieve three overarching goals.

1. Uncover the core underlying issues that are holding back the Richland County economy.
2. Rally key community stakeholders (including the Richland Area Chamber of Commerce) around a collaborative, multi-year strategic plan to address these issues.
3. Drive real economic impact through the strategic use of RCF assets to put this collaborative plan into action and invest in initiatives that will create new jobs and catalyze economic growth.

Implementation

JumpStart began its work in Richland County with a comprehensive "regional assessment." This proprietary process combines dozens of stakeholder interviews, community surveys, secondary data analyses and strategy meetings to create a truly objective third-party analysis of a region's key opportunities for improvement.

In Richland County these opportunities included:

- A historic lack of collaboration between private, public and philanthropic organizations.
- A persistent skills gap that leaves business owners struggling to fill open jobs and unemployed residents unable to take advantage of the open opportunities.
- The lack of a clear leader with a mandate to rally the private, public and philanthropic community around a clear course of action.

Once these challenges were identified, JumpStart began the “regional alignment” process. This process is designed specifically to help stakeholders navigate through the strained relationships, siloed knowledge and entrenched perspectives that make it difficult to create a collaborative plan for the future.

By introducing an impartial, third-party perspective and scrutinizing all claims and recommendations against objective data gathered during the regional assessment, leaders are empowered to come together around an action plan.

In Richland County, stakeholders emerged from this alignment process reenergized and united around a set of collective recommendations, including:

- New resources to modernize and spearhead business retention/expansion/attraction efforts.
- A new program to assist existing high-potential, revenue-positive companies that are capable of aggressive growth/hiring, but have hit a plateau with respect to capital, sales or talent acquisition.
- A public-private partnership to help train local talent, then connect that talent with regional businesses who are struggling to find qualified employees.
- The development of a customized economic performance dashboard to track baseline data and measure progress over time.

Outcomes

1. JumpStart’s regional assessment and alignment processes have coalesced local private, public and philanthropic leaders around a common understanding of the challenges they face and helped them create a new strategic plan for spurring future growth and innovation in Richland County.
2. Each of the plan’s collaborative recommendations has been laid out in terms of tangible initiatives that can be funded and measured for impact.
3. JumpStart has helped RCF leaders create a five-year investment schedule to balance the projected impact of each initiative against their short-term and long-term philanthropic resources.
4. All planned initiatives are designed to become self-sustaining over time, with philanthropic dollars serving only as the initial catalyst.
5. Increased community alignment has already led to a new private-public partnership between the Richland County Department of Job and Family Services and the RCF to fund and administer expanded workforce development efforts.

“Every Chamber of Commerce leader understands that the business community can only be as strong as the overall community. The Richland Area Chamber of Commerce was pleased to be a key partner in the work Jumpstart is doing with the Richland County Foundation to bring about real economic, workforce and social change in our community. Going outside of our normal comfort zone to have crucial conversations on the best ways to encourage further economic, entrepreneurial and workforce development has been productive and brought about a serious plan to guide us into a more successful future for all.”

- JODIE PERRY
PRESIDENT, RICHLAND AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE