Economic Development Summit Brings Together Higher Ed, State Leaders
In his keynote remarks at the 2012 Idaho Economic Development Summit, Idaho Department of Commerce Director Jeff Sayer called the state “a big small town” and emphasized the need to work as a team to build the state’s economy.

University of Idaho leaders view higher education as a major part of that team – hence the Summit’s subtitle, “Defining the Role of Higher Education in Economic Development.”

Working with the state’s seven other public institutions of higher education, the UI hosted the Summit and invited industry leaders, economic development professionals, government leaders and other economic development stakeholders to come ready to discuss how public higher education can best support Idaho-based economic development now and into the future.

The summit was born from the need to better engage statewide stakeholders. In 2010, shortly after creation of the Office of Economic Development, the University of Idaho sought input from stakeholders across Idaho using an assessment instrument developed by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities’ Commission on Innovation, Competitiveness and Economic Prosperity. Participants responded to questions about the importance of the university’s involvement in economic development activities and their awareness and evaluation of such activities.

The participants overwhelmingly responded that they thought the university’s involvement was important—but they weren’t aware of it.

The summit allowed for a more personal, collaborative approach to discussing UI and other institutions’ significant roles in local, state and regional economies.

Before the summit, representatives from each institution and the State Board of Education met frequently to prepare. Along with regional economic development organizations, the institutional representatives encouraged stakeholders across the state to attend the summit.

On Feb. 28, 2012, the summit welcomed 209 registered guests. Keynote speakers outlined the importance of business, education and industry and the need for economic innovation in Idaho.
Summit attendees then broke into small groups to discuss their views on Idaho higher education institutions’ roles in TRE Networks’ six areas in which higher education generally has capacity in supporting economic development: talent development, technology development, firm/enterprise development, industrial cluster development, quality-connected place (community) development and regional development.

Key takeaways were the desire for more collaboration between higher education institutions and all the stakeholders, for the institutions to be more responsive to economic development needs of all stakeholders, and for the institutions to better communicate with stakeholders about economic development opportunities and outcomes. Detailed results can be viewed at http://idahoeconomicsummit.com/edsummit.php.

After a lunchtime speech from Idaho Lt. Gov. Brad Little, the attendees split into a second set of small-group discussions, this time divided by region.

The participants found that identifying key regional economic development initiatives and higher education’s role in supporting those initiatives to be much more difficult than identifying overall economic development roles, as in the morning session. In most cases, these participants representing diverse sectors had not worked together to consider economic development needs and opportunities in their regions. The hour and 45 minutes allotted to identifying and prioritizing the potential initiatives did not provide sufficient time.

The consensus of all participants was that more regional input from business and industry was necessary to identify and prioritize the most impactful initiatives. The Idaho Pathways project, see Case Study 3, created the opportunity for the more engaged regional strategic planning.

METRICS

Economic engagement with a range of stakeholders—Of the attendees, 74 were from education, 48 from local, state, or federal government, 33 from the private sector, 28 from economic development NGOs, and 2 from foundations.

LINKS

http://www.idahoeconomicsummit.com/