

Report of the Organizational Collaboration Committee

Background

The Organizational Collaboration Committee convened to discuss challenges and opportunities to successfully build and implement a regional approach to economic resilience and recovery amid the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The committee consisted of various professionals throughout the 757 with expertise and knowledge in multiple aspects of collaboration. The unanimous consensus of the committee suggested, to ensure a holistic economic recovery would require a regional approach to address the challenges, opportunities, potential strategies, and possible metrics of success and key performance indicators for the region. In the past, Hampton Roads has had a reputation as a region that did not work collaboratively. However, there are many ongoing initiatives that refute such narratives. For example, the HRPDC/HRPTO/HRTAC-led highway improvement projects and the ongoing HRBT expansion are very significant collaborative efforts that were unanimously approved by 17 local jurisdictions. There are also several new partnerships that have been gaining momentum in the past several years. The pandemic has temporarily impacted these initiatives and they must be re-accelerated. All of these examples must be emphasized intentionally and celebrated publicly.

All this being said, the committee discussed the fact that collaboration is not a goal unto itself. It is rather a strategic tool to help get things accomplished and for sustaining efforts over a period of time. It is important to incorporate this strategy into all regional projects.

Challenges

In driving a unified, regional approach, there must be a culture that includes a willingness to approach issues regionally. The best way to address the myriad challenges that always exist in encouraging collaboration is to strive to create a culture of inclusive collaboration and cooperation.

These challenges include:

- Time constraints
- Lack of shared vision or mission
- Lack of clear goals or objectives
- Lack of awareness of issues or issue clarity
- Asymmetric relationships for power-sharing and decision-making
- Lack of effective leadership
- The pace of change and the scale of the problems are too significant.
- Scarcity of individuals who have the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities, including the ability to be an effective boundary crosser
- Turnover of leadership
- Lack of skill at tapping into the diversity that is resident among participants (i.e. resource hoarding)
- Competing demands
- Lack of awareness and relationships
- Lack of trust
- Partnership fatigue or saturation
- Lack of inclusive leadership and engagement with minority serving institutions in decision making

Proposal

As mentioned previously, there are several ongoing initiatives that are collaborative in nature and that should be encouraged, accelerated, and publicly touted as great and successful examples of regionalism that should be emulated moving forward. By emphasizing successful examples of a regional approach, we will drive a culture of collaboration. These initiatives include:

- Highway infrastructure improvements such as I-64 widening that are still ongoing by HRPDC/HRPTO/HRTAC
- Collaborative economic development efforts by the Alliance Regional Economic Development (RED) Team and by GoVirginia (ReInvent HR)
- Eastern Virginia Regional Industrial Facilities Authority (EVRIFA)
- Military Installation projects – HRMFFA and P4 initiatives
- Transit Transformation – Hampton Roads Transit
- Regional Branding – 757 Regional Branding Initiative
- Maritime Center of Excellence – HR Maritime Collaborative
- Education – Campus 757
- Inter-regional/Mega-Region – RVA 757 Connects

This committee initially discussed the creation of a regional organization to drive and track collaboration, but that idea was abandoned as unrealistic and impractical for various reasons. First and foremost, as previously stated, collaboration is a strategy or tool rather than a result unto itself. A new large, regional organization is not an idea that would be warmly received or supported. Rather, we should emphasize and continue to encourage the organizations that are already existent and already working on successful collaborative initiatives. For the past several years, a small group of representatives from Hampton Roads Regional organizations has been meeting monthly to discuss ongoing issues and initiatives to drive a more collaborative approach to economic development in this region. The organizations represented are as follows:

- The Hampton Roads Alliance
- Hampton Roads Chamber
- Virginia Peninsula Chamber of Commerce
- ReInvent Hampton Roads
- Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (HRPDC)
- Hampton Roads Transportation Accountability Commission (HRTAC)
- Hampton Roads Military and Federal Facilities Alliance (HRMFFA)
- Hampton Roads Transit (HRT)
- Hampton Roads Workforce Development Council
- Greater Peninsula Workforce Development Board
- Virginia Ship Repair Association (VSRA)

This group still meets regularly and is known informally as the Regional Roundtable. The already established Regional Roundtable's focus is to drive, accelerate and encourage collaboration. This group should be expanded to include a wider representation of regional organizations, without losing the cohesiveness, cooperative nature and collegiality that currently exist. The efficacy of this group is based on a desire to work together toward common goals and to do so without concern for who gets credit. The expansion of the group will serve to bring a broader more inclusive perspective to the regional vision and will enable us to tap into a large and diverse talent and idea pool. It will also create more "ambassadors" to help spread the narrative that collaboration is ongoing, effective, and expected. Potential regional organizations that should be considered in an expanded group include the following:

- Other Regional Chambers
- Local Universities/ VCCS institutions
- Health Care sector representation
- (Municipal) Small and Minority Business Managers (or SBDC?)
- Port of Virginia
- HR Maritime Collaborative
- Virginia Maritime Association
- United States Military Regional rep
- Energy sector
- Tourism/ Hospitality/ Restaurant sector
- Urban League
- Community Foundations
- Volunteer Hampton Roads
- CIVIC
- Retail Alliance
- RVA 757 Connects representation

Focus of the Regional Roundtable will be on capitalizing on and reigniting Pre-COVID momentum by:

- Driving membership in EVRIFA
- Driving participation in GoVirginia
- Accelerating roll-out/ gaining buy-in of Regional Branding Initiative (757 Brand)
- Accelerating RVA 757 Connects
- Accelerating P4 Partnerships with local military installations
- Accelerating Campus 757
- Developing a regional marketing plan/ narrative (tell the 757 story)
- Developing a roadmap and process for economic inclusion

Conclusion

The overarching goal coming out of this committee should be to change the existing culture into one of collaboration, cooperation, and inclusivity. By tapping into the organizations and initiatives that have already utilized collaboration successfully and publicizing the stories of success, the narrative can be changed. By expanding the Regional Roundtable and focusing on inclusivity, we can offer a wider perspective and build more ambassadors to spread the word about the good regionalism that is taking hold. This is a perfect example of “not reinventing the wheel.” Collaboration is already occurring at a significant rate. We just need to capitalize on it, by encouraging more and emphasizing its success.