

Community Listening Session on Economic Development: Sussex County

University of Delaware, Caravel Research and Education Center

16483 County Seat Highway, Georgetown, DE 19947

October 24, 2017

5:30 P.M. – 8:00 P.M.

5:30 PM: Information Session

Participants signed in. Participants were able to walk around the venue and review each station to familiarize themselves with scenarios prepared to spur discussion about the Division of Small Business, Development and Tourism's future. Staff from the University of Delaware's Institute for Public Administration (IPA) was on hand to answer questions and provide clarification.

6:00 PM: Overview of Delaware's Small Business Landscape & Introduction of Scenarios for the Division's Future

IPA Policy Scientist Troy Mix delivered a presentation outlining the small business landscape in Delaware. He reviewed five findings on Delaware's Small Business Landscape:

1. Large companies with more than 5,000 employees account for a higher than average share of Delaware-based employment.
2. There is significant regional variation in the share of employment with fewer than 50 employees.
3. Minority-owned businesses account for below average share of Delaware's employees and receipts.
4. Women-owned businesses account for below average share of Delaware's employee's and receipts.
5. There is no obvious lack of providers and programs, with an estimated 73 service providers offering 275 programs supportive of small business development.

Mr. Mix provided an overview of each of the three scenarios that would be discussed for the remainder of the evening: (1) Connecting people to resources; (2) Being a great distributor of funding and resources; and (3) Championing local and regional economies.

6:15 PM: Facilitated Discussion on Scenarios for the Division's Future

IPA Senior Fellow Bill McGowan led participants in a facilitated discussion on scenarios for the Division's future.

Scenario 1 was discussed first, with participants expressing sentiments including the following:

- Participants felt that the Division needed to vet service providers whose help may be offered through a potential online portal
- Some felt an online portal could compromise the privacy of users and partners.
- Some appreciated that the portal would provide users with a single access point, allowing for “one-stop-shopping.”

Next, Scenario 2 was discussed. Sentiments such as the following were expressed:

- Participants disliked the idea that tax payer dollars would be used to support small businesses, given there was a chance the business could fail.
- The Capital Access Program was highlighted as an effective and helpful program.
- Participants felt that, in order for the Division to be successful in this scenario, they would need close partnerships with local banks.

Comments on Scenario 3 included:

- Participants liked the idea that regional development in Sussex County would be a focus, though there was a worry that resources and assistance may not be distributed equitably.
- Participants warned that the creation of regions should not be arbitrary; individuals and businesses should not be lumped together if they do not associate with one another.

Time was allotted for public comment, but there was no one that wished to speak.

8:00 PM: The Community Listening Session was adjourned.