



Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: Fostering Resilient Places: Sources of Economic Strength in Nonmetropolitan North Carolina – Project Update

By CED Guest Author

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“Fostering Resilient Places: Sources of Economic Strength in Nonmetropolitan North Carolina” is a CCP small-grant funded project that aims to identify community assets and policies contributing to the success of companies in traditional industries in the state, despite a struggling economy and shrinking markets.

Many non-metropolitan counties in North Carolina have experienced long-term decline as well as recent cyclical distress. This research attempts to identify strategies that could lead to better economic outcomes by learning about the connections between successful companies and the smaller communities in which they are located.

Findings

Our findings draw from information provided by over 50 companies. Subsequently, the principal investigator solicited feedback from local economic developers in several Tier I counties for additional information and corroboration.

The research reinforces the idea that no silver bullet exists to help companies in Tier I counties succeed. The surveyed companies range from struggling to thriving in this tough economy. Most currently operate with fewer employees than they once had on board. But they have managed to navigate through the recent recession and expect to continue doing business in NC.

Their workforce is the primary location anchor. In general, these companies have found good employees who will work for wages and salaries that the company can afford. Most companies show their appreciation by treating their workers with respect. They provide safe working conditions and decent benefits. The companies operate in “buyers markets” resulting from plant closings in their sector that have displaced many workers. The majority is more interested in re-employment than training for different positions. Given the dearth of local opportunities, manufacturing employment is better than part time jobs or low-wage work. In the long term when current workers retire, it is not clear that comparable workers will be available. Several companies specifically cited the lack of interest in factory work among young adults.

A few companies cite good relations with local government. A greater number complain about high tax and utility rates. But most do not consider public policies or regulations to be either major positive or negative contributors to their success.

The state, regional and local economic development network in NC is impressive. In general, these companies are aware of it but use it less frequently than expected.

Economic developers want to know why these companies selected their location, why they are staying, what is needed to keep them in place and what can be done to help them succeed. These companies have found locations where they can make money. They remain in these locations because they can hire and retain good employees. They need access to affordable productive employees to continue to succeed.