

# 44GO!

## State of Idaho



# Academy Final Report

## January 2024

## **Executive Summary and Value Proposition of the Academy**

The State of Idaho team entered the Policy Academy with a firm belief in the value of strategic alignment and a hypothesis that the absence of existing alignment was due to limited institutional awareness within the State's economic development community. The Academy brought together stakeholders who traditionally operate in different areas of economic development but impact the overall ecosystem. It offered an opportunity to learn about each stakeholders' plans, programs, and roles and discover ways to collaborate. Our success can be attributed to everyone's willingness to work outside of their comfort zone and recalibrate their view of economic development in the State of Idaho.

### **Background/Operating Environment**

The State of Idaho currently has five (5) EDA-designated Economic Development Districts (EDD), with a sixth district in the development stages. These six districts represent every community in the State of Idaho. Each organization has a regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Additionally, the Economic Development Districts of Idaho (EDDI), a collective group with representation from each of the five designated EDDs, completed a statewide CEDS in Fall 2022 which depicts the priorities and initiatives of EDDI.

While the state and the five designated Idaho EDDs enjoyed collegial relationships prior to the Academy, planning processes and improvement strategies were mostly siloed, in part due to the perceived uniqueness of each district. The State's economy is based on varied industries including agriculture, manufacturing, mining, timber, and tourism. Idaho's low taxes, inexpensive utilities, and business friendly environment make it an attractive location for growth. Idaho was the fastest growing state in 2021 and the second fastest growing state in 2022. This growth has spurred significant public and private investment throughout the state. As local, regional, and state leaders work to craft economic development initiatives in response to this growth, existing obstacles to collaboration impede progress.

Idaho's rural vastness makes it difficult for economic development professionals and other stakeholders to communicate on a consistent basis. Community rivalries and the competition for limited financial resources often make economic development in Idaho more adversarial than collaborative. A wave of retirements in the economic development community along with turnover in local and state governments caused a loss of institutional knowledge and continued discord. The proposal was developed by the CORE team members with the intention to create a foundation for state-wide collaboration. Education and transparency are the cornerstones of Idaho's initiative.

### **Team Members and Affiliation**

Participants were strategically selected to provide geographic balance and a cross section of economic development stakeholders. Several individuals who were recruited for the Home Team were unable to participate due to limited capacity within their organization. The team envisions 44Go! to be an ongoing initiative and strives to expand participation through purposeful outreach to achieve its mission.

#### **Core Team Members**

- ❖ **Mr. Tom Kealey - Idaho Department of Commerce Director:** As Idaho Department of Commerce Director, Tom Kealey is Governor Little's eyes and ears for all things relating to economic development. Mr. Kealey oversees initiatives related to business retention, international trade, broadband access, community development, tourism, and business attraction.
  
- ❖ **Mr. Jerry Miller - Idaho Department of Commerce Interim Business Retention & Expansion Manager:** Mr. Miller is an Economic Development Specialist with the Idaho Department of Commerce. His responsibilities at the Department include director of the Northwest Community Development Institute, manager of the Idaho Gem Grant, Idaho Main Street, Idaho Private Activity Bond, and Rural Idaho Economic Development Professionals programs. Mr. Miller served as a co-lead for the Policy Academy Team.

- ❖ **Mr. Jeff McCurdy – Region IV Development Association (EDD) President:** Region IV Development Association provides hands-on economic development related technical assistance to communities throughout the eight counties of South-central Idaho.
  
- ❖ **Dr. Michele McFarlane - Region IV Development Association (EDD) Community & Economic Development Manager:** Dr. McFarlane works in partnership with South central Idaho cities and counties to solve common problems and help with the ever-growing demands of the communities. Her responsibilities include project planning, grant administration, and development of the region's CEDS. Dr. McFarlane also served as a co-lead for the Policy Academy Team.
  
- ❖ **Mr. Steve Hatten - TechHelp Executive Director:** As an Economic Development Administration University Center, TechHelp works in partnership with Idaho's three state universities (Boise State University, Idaho State University, and University of Idaho) and the Idaho Manufacturing Alliance to provide consultation, training and technical assistance services to Idaho manufactures, food processors, and entrepreneurs.

#### **Home Team Members**

- ❖ **Ms. Nancy Mabile - Panhandle Area Council (EDD) Economic Development Planner:** Panhandle Area Council provides economic development leadership for the five northern counties of Idaho.
  
- ❖ **Mr. Dodd Snodgrass - Clearwater Economic Development Association (EDD) Executive Director:** Clearwater Economic Development Association provides community and economic development services to the five Northcentral Idaho counties.
  
- ❖ **Ms. Emma Morton - Southeast Idaho Council of Governments (EDD) Community-based Economic Development Manager:** The Southeast Idaho Council of Governments serves the community and economic development needs of the seven counties of Southeast Idaho.

- ❖ **Mr. Rick Miller - Altura Community Consulting & Business Finance (EDD) Community Development Manager:** Altura provides project management and technical assistance services to cities and counties in the nine counties in Eastern Idaho.
- ❖ **Mr. David Lincoln - Western Alliance for Economic Development Executive Director:** The Western Alliance for Economic Development is spearheading efforts to establish an EDA designated Economic Development District for the ten (10) counties of Southwestern Idaho, which is currently the only area in the state with an EDD.
- ❖ **Mr. Roger Brown - Boise State University Director of Economic Development and Community Affairs:** Roger Brown is uniquely positioned in the Office of Research and Economic Development, where he interfaces with university researchers, campus leadership, and economic development outreach organizations.
- ❖ **Dr. Bradley Ritts - University of Idaho Senior Associate VP of Research and Economic Development:** The UI Office of Research and Economic Development is dedicated to encouraging and supporting top-quality research, scholarly activity and creative work that achieves this goal. University of Idaho researchers contribute to society's health, knowledge, and culture.
- ❖ **Mr. Doug Covey - Idaho Small Business Development Center State Director:** The Idaho Small Business Development Center (SBDC) is a statewide, university-based organization which provides clients guidance on how to develop and grow a successful small-business.
- ❖ **Ms. Diane Bevan - Former Idaho Women's Business Center CEO/Executive Director:** Diane Bevan is the former CEO of the Idaho Hispanic Foundation and Executive Director of the Idaho Women's Business Center. She has built her career on being a super-connector and loves building ecosystems that create impact.

- ❖ **Mr. Nathan Murray - Idaho Power Economic and Community Development Advisor:** Mr. Murray works with economic development organizations to attract, retain, and expand business in Idaho Power's service area.
- ❖ **Ms. Beth Ineck – Boise Valley Economic Partnership Director of Economic Development:** Boise Valley Economic Partnership (BVEP) is a privately funded non-profit organization housed within the Boise Metro Chamber of Commerce, serving the broader Boise region. BVEP specializes in working with the local communities to grow and attract new business investment and job creation in the area.
- ❖ **Ms. Staci Nelson – Northwest I-90 Manufacturing Alliance Executive Director:** The Northwest I-90 Manufacturing Alliance is a collaboration of manufacturers and industry stakeholders working to promote and grow the supply chain across Central & Eastern Washington, North Idaho, and Montana.

### **Strategic Elements**

The initial Core Team meeting in Arlington, VA focused on what we hoped to achieve and its importance. Out of those conversations, the team developed the following vision to help guide the work:

***(What)* To Formalize and institutionalize collaborative regional and state planning processes...**

***(Why)* ...to create an inclusive economic development community within the state.**

The team then utilized their initial application to formalize five goals.

1. Create organization and program Asset Map for Idaho.
2. Develop Common Language with Home Team.
3. Create calendar of major planning document deadlines/approvals.
4. Identify long-term statewide organization to convene players.

5. Develop marketing strategy and materials for consistent story.

### **Timeline of Team's Activity Noting Accomplishments**

Following the Core Team's in-person meeting in April, the team developed a meeting schedule to help build momentum. The two Team Leads met with CREC staff on the second Tuesday of each month to discuss project progress and plan for Core and Home Team meetings. The Core Team met the third Tuesday of each month, followed by the Home and Core Teams meeting together on the fourth Tuesday of each month. In August, both teams met in-person in Boise for a day and a half, which allowed participants dedicated time to focus on project goals. Prior to the August in-person meeting committees were formed around the team's five goals. Committee break-out sessions made up most of the August agenda.

### **Outcomes/Deliverables**

The Idaho team focused on the need to create long-term, statewide culture change. The group determined the initiative needed a name to assist in sharing with and including stakeholders not part of the Academy experience. 44Go! was selected to represent the forty-four counties in the state.

The second deliverable is a website to house economic development information including organizational contact information, information on the importance of alignment, and message boards to share information on economic development initiatives. The website will house the third deliverable: a calendar of events and planning development timelines to encourage collaboration, discourage scheduling conflicts, and promote collaborative economic development activities.

### **Obstacles/Challenges**

The biggest obstacle the Idaho team faced was scheduling. Several team participants and their organizations experienced staffing, exacerbating scheduling and the capacity to collaborate. Had the team attempted this work independently, without a facilitator from the Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness (CREC), it is highly likely that the initiative would have failed. The technical assistance

from CREC created a sense of accountability, which encouraged the participants to remain engaged in the process.

### **Lessons Learned**

Idaho took away two key lessons:

1. The need for a state-wide culture change, including greater collaboration, transparency, and a willingness to put the needs of the State first.
2. The need to “get comfortable” communication with each other, including expanding our definition of who is “in” our area of impact, celebrating each other’s wins, and mourning each other’s losses.

By viewing the economic development sector as one, state-wide team working together for the betterment of the state, we believe the success of economic development activities will increase.

### **Sustainability**

Idaho is taking two preliminary steps to ensure the long-term sustainability of the work completed as part of the Academy. First, a website is being developed which will host contact information for economic development organizations and professionals, definitions of common economic development terms, and links to economic development resources. Second, Academy participants are actively seeking opportunities to share the 44Go! initiative at conferences and stakeholder meetings. The teams recognize that while the participants of the Academy laid the groundwork, the project will only be sustainable with state-wide participation and adoption. Informing other organizations about the vision and goals will be the first step in developing statewide buy-in. The Core and Home teams have also committed to continue meeting on a quarterly basis to ensure that relationships developed through the



Academy become institutionalized and not tied to merely the technical assistance portion of the Academy.

