



State Economic Development Executives Network (SEDE)

Helping State Economic Development Leaders Thrive

The State Economic Development Executives (SEDE) Network's 2024 Winter Networking Meeting was held on January 29-30, in Las Vegas, Nevada. The meeting included discussions on a range of topics such as place-based initiatives, site development, apprenticeships, workforce development, organizational challenges, and federal programming.

After Sandra Watson, SEDE Chair and President/CEO of the Arizona Commerce Authority provided opening remarks, the leaders offered hot topics in their respective states. Issues included workforce, housing, community development, managing federal funds, inequality, organizational challenges, and energy, among others. The participants talked about coordination of federal programs and policy, energy requirements, housing (especially for middle income earners), childcare, elderly care and rural economic development.

The first topical session focused on place-based economic development initiatives. Eve Lieberman, Director of the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade, shared how Colorado is focusing on aligning national and state economic development priorities and focusing attention on initiatives such as the CHIPS & Science Act and NSF Engines. It is easy to do a one-size-fits-all approach, but it is important to recognize the regional differences and unique regional assets.

Apprenticeships were also discussed, beginning with highlights from the recent SEDE trip to Germany to learn more about the German apprenticeship system. Participants discussed state-specific programming and challenges with the apprenticeship model in the United States, as well as the necessary paradigm shift needed to market these programs and to grow this model.

Following lunch, Sandra Watson discussed Arizona's [Workforce Accelerators](#), a partnership between community colleges, industry leaders, the local community, and ACA to improve alignment between training and employer needs. The program led to the training of 2,000 participants to meet business demand. The discussion transitioned to measuring outcomes and modeling the impact of these strategies. A related topic was the availability (and affordability) of elderly care and childcare.

Chris Chung, CEO of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina led a discussion of site location requirements and actions to facilitate site expansions. Chris noted that projects are getting larger and site competitiveness is driven by three key factors: energy, workforce and site characteristics. All site programs face challenges, including acquisition, who will own, manage and maintain the property, and how protections can be written into state funding. North Carolina's [megasite program](#) was highlighted, along with smaller site (100 – 999 acres) programs including North Carolina's [SelectSites Program](#).

Sophorn Cheang, Director of Business Oregon led a discussion of economic development organizational challenges such as staff retention, legislative relations, and remote work. Leaders shared that hybrid work environments have improved access to talent from across the state. However, some states struggle with low performers working remotely or feeling a diminished connection to their team. States are finding creative ways to address these issues that work for their organization and staff, such as increasing communications and partnership development and creating internship programs to hire employee's children to assist with childcare challenges.



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The meeting's final discussions were all focused on federal programs. Ken Poole and Bob Isaacson from CREC led a discussion on the CHIPS & Science Act, focusing on CREC's project funded by Pew Charitable Trust to identify opportunities for states to collaborate on CHIPS-related workforce and supply chain issues. CREC is interested in the potential for multi-state collaboration to address key challenges that will arise from both fab plants and manufacturers supplying these facilities. In particular, the project is focused on interstate collaborations and coordination in workforce development and supply chains, with an emphasis on embracing DEI principles.

Jeff Stout from the U.S. Department of Treasury shared program updates on the SSBCI Capital and Technical Assistance programs, how states should interact with Treasury, and highlighted a grant funding opportunity. SSBCI 2.0 is much larger than the first round of SSBCI and he encouraged states to work with Treasury to ensure program success. He noted that the technical assistance programs continue to roll out, but the third and final SSBCI grant opportunity is the Investing in America [Small Business Opportunity Program](#) (SBOP), which will offer \$5 - \$10M grants to states, territories, and tribal governments with the objective of connecting small businesses to financing opportunities, with a focus on underserved businesses.

The last presenter for the meeting was Joda Thongnopnua from the National Science Foundation. Joda shared the recent NSF Engines award announcement and how NSF's innovation ecosystem programs work in coordination with other federal programs. The Regional Innovation Engines are focused on advancing critical technologies that will advance innovation, with 10 inaugural awards just announced. The strongest applications from the initial round had deep engagement from government to ensure that the area of focus aligned with regional priorities; the Engines should not solely be run by the research universities. Place matters, and NSF is interested in the reach of services and how a state's key competitive advantages can benefit the defined regions in the application.

The meeting concluded with a discussion of SEDE network business. Leaders proposed future topics for discussion, such as energy, rural opportunities, childcare, housing, and the dynamic between community and economic development.