

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
DECEMBER 6, 2010

# UNDERSTANDING THE REGIONAL COMMUNITY INITIATIVE



**BUILDING A STRONGER AND MORE  
COMPETITIVE METROPOLITAN REGION**





**THE REGIONAL COMMUNITY INITIATIVE:**

UALR Institute for Economic Advancement

The Little Rock Regional Chamber of Commerce

Metroplan

Central Arkansas Planning and Development District



# UNDERSTANDING THE REGIONAL COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

## BUILDING A STRONGER AND MORE COMPETITIVE METROPOLITAN REGION

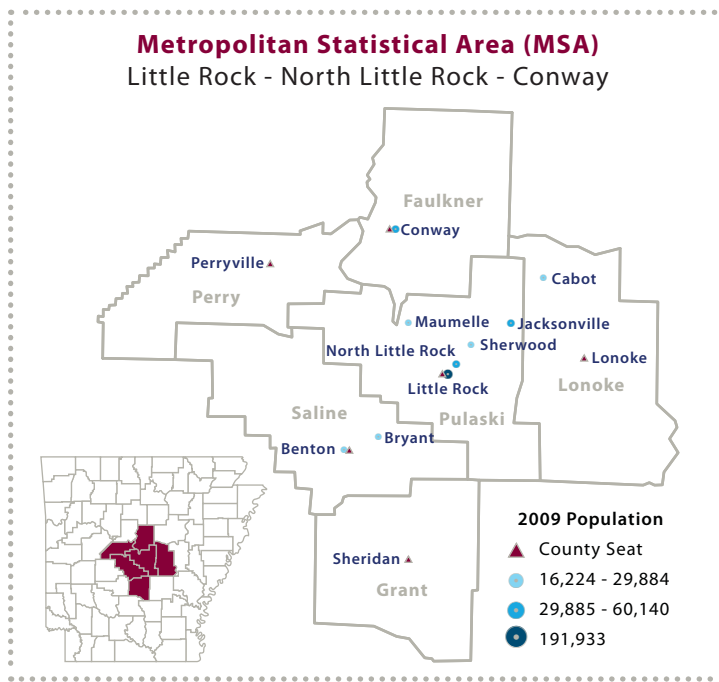
### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One of the greatest challenges any metropolitan region faces is fostering an understanding of the importance of a regional community. The more the citizens of multiple municipalities and counties within a defined region understand the significance of seeing the sum parts of a regional community, the greater the opportunity there is to enhance the community economic development and quality of place opportunities for their individual communities and their regional community.

community. Three of those stumbling blocks include term limits for elected officials, the lack of numerous corporate and industry headquarters, and a relatively low number of regional institutions.

The purpose of the Initiative is to stress the importance of regional approaches to enhance the provision of public services and initiatives through multijurisdictional delivery for consideration to the public and private sector leaders in the MSA.

The Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) of Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway consists of the counties of Pulaski, Saline, Faulkner, Lonoke, Perry, and Grant. It is the largest MSA in the state, the state seat of government, and one of the two most important corporate centers of the State of Arkansas.



In order to provide the region's leadership with some examples of best practices that might warrant duplication within the MSA's framework and circumstance, eight comparable/competitor metropolitan regions were identified by the Metro Little Rock Alliance. The eight metropolitan regions are Albuquerque, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Kansas City, St. Louis, Nashville,

### Understanding the Regional Community Initiative

is a collaborative effort of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and its Institute for Economic Advancement (IEA), the Little Rock Regional Chamber of Commerce, Metroplan, and the Central Arkansas Planning and Development District (CAPDD).

Memphis, and Jackson. The regional council or chamber of commerce in each of the regions agreed enthusiastically to administer a survey of 20-25 public and private entities or individuals in their respective regions. The survey asked for the identification of multijurisdictional initiatives, projects, and programs in the areas of regional planning, tax structure, law enforcement, emergency services, transportation, education and

The Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway MSA faces a number of stumbling blocks in developing a dynamic regional



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workforce issues, environment; arts, sports, tourism and entertainment; and regional advocacy, economic development, leadership, public participation, and social services.

IEA compiled a complete record of the survey responses for each of the eight comparable metropolitan regions and then gleaned out of the responses initiatives, programs, and projects that appeared to be multicounty efforts. IEA then conducted a focus group session in each of the metropolitan regions to get confirmation on which of the initiatives, programs, and projects were multicounty as well as provided the participants an opportunity to provide more in-depth information on those efforts. The focus groups session also allowed the opportunity to identify other initiatives, projects, or programs that were missed in the region's initial survey responses.

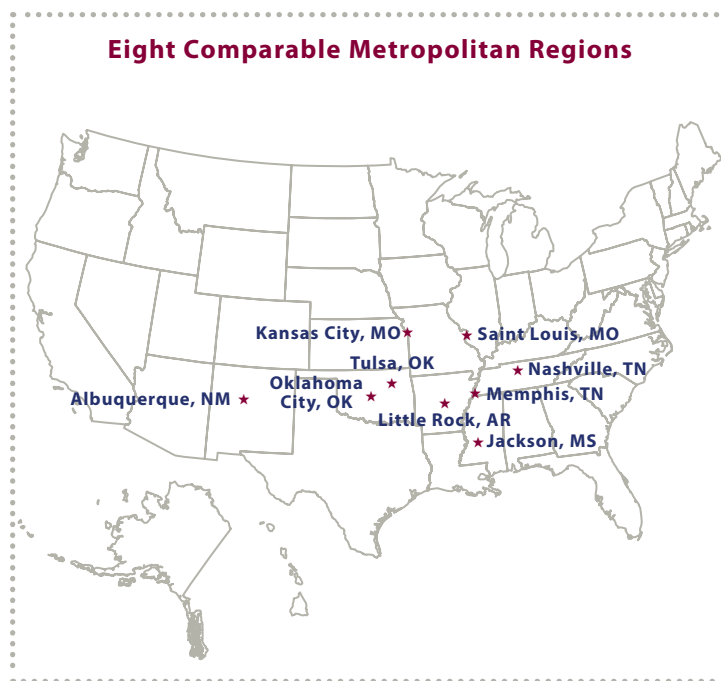
All the information gleaned from the survey and focus group effort has been compiled along with a data overview of each of the regions and have been bound into the document that appears in the CD in the back jacket of this executive summary and will be distributed back to each region. The document is divided by metropolitan region as well as by category for comparison. It is hoped that the document will be helpful in sharing initiatives, projects, and programs that may be considered for duplication elsewhere ("it will allow us to steal great ideas from others").


The best practices from the eight regions will be shared with the MSA's leaders at today's Understanding the Regional Community Summit (December 6th from 10 AM until 3:00 PM at the Wyndham Hotel in North Little Rock). The sharing of the best practices will be the basis for the facilitated discussion with summit attendees on how a strong regional community is built for the MSA. One of the great leaders nationally in building regional communities, Ron Littlefield, Mayor of Chattanooga is serving as the keynote speaker. Mayor Littlefield was one of the

key players in the renaissance of Chattanooga and its regional community. Governor Mike Beebe, a true advocate for regional cooperation and collaboration, is today's Summit lunch speaker.

It is the hope of IEA, the Little Rock Regional Chamber, Metroplan, and CAPDD that this will be an ongoing initiative that will lead to building a strong

regional community for the Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway MSA. Several of the comparable metropolitan regions have voiced an interest in developing a mechanism by which an ongoing dialogue can be fostered among the regions to share and learn. It is something that will be considered. It is also the hope of IEA that the concept of the project will be considered for duplication in the other metropolitan regions in Arkansas.





# BEST PRACTICES



## BEST PRACTICES

The enclosed CD provides the “*Best Practices*” from the eight participating metropolitan regions in the thirteen different categories of regional initiatives, projects, and programs, were chosen from the identified successful regional initiatives, projects, and programs found in each metro and from focus group discussions regarding these successful programs, initiatives, or structures in each metro region.

In this section, the name of the initiative, project, or program is listed along with the name of its metropolitan area and a brief description of each. A complete description of the program, initiative, or structure can be found in the complete record report of each of the eight metro regions that are found on your CD.

Some initiatives, projects, and programs may seem to be in the wrong category or even missing when examining the following nominated “*Best Practices*.” For example, a regional council of governments may not show up as a “*best practice*” in the regional planning category, but appear as a “*best practice*” in the regional advocacy category. It is important to reiterate that where an item shows up as a “*best practice*” is solely the results of our review of the information provided or what we heard about a particular initiative, project, or program when we were out in the field conducting the followup work

sessions. To further clarify the example of the regional council of government’s instance, respondents in the focus group indicated that the council of governments was strong in technical assistance to individual member governments in the metro region, but not a strong player in overall regional planning. However, respondents indicated the council of governments was a strong advocate of regional planning and approaches to finding solutions to problems and issues confronting the metro area.



## **BEST OF THE BEST PRACTICES**

Based upon our visits to the eight regions and in-depth conversations with our partners in each region, we have chosen for this Summit Meeting Executive Summary the “Best of the Best Practice” in each of the 13 categories.



## **CATEGORY 1: REGIONAL PLANNING**

### **SMART GROWTH (CREATING QUALITY PLACES), KANSAS CITY**

This program fosters dialogue and provides elected officials, planners, private developers, and builders with a variety of resource information to facilitate implementation of quality design principles through the Kansas City region.

## **CATEGORY 2: TAX STRUCTURE**

### **METROPOLITAN AREA PROJECTS (MAPS), OKLAHOMA CITY**

Since its inception, sales tax funds have been used to revitalize the Oklahoma City entertainment district and fund educational initiatives. Plans for the current MAPS include funding for recreational attractions and city improvements. MAPS projects are considered and voted upon by the citizens.

## **CATEGORY 3: LAW ENFORCEMENT**

### **MAJOR CASE SQUAD OF GREATER ST. LOUIS, ST. LOUIS**

The premise behind the inception of the Major Case Squad is to bring together specially trained, extremely motivated, and highly experienced investigators from around the Metro East area to aggressively investigate major crimes.

## **CATEGORY 4: EMERGENCY SERVICES**

### **MISSISSIPPI MED-1, JACKSON**

Mississippi MED-1 is a state medical assistance team sponsored by the University of Mississippi Medical Center. During a declared disaster, it is a resource of the Mississippi State Department of Health and will be activated by the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency, as an ESF-8 resource.

## **CATEGORY 5: TRANSPORTATION (SURFACE)**

### **NEW MEXICO RAIL RUNNER EXPRESS, ALBUQUERQUE**

The New Mexico Rail Runner Express has become an increasingly popular public transportation option for workers who live in and around stations and work in Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

## **CATEGORY 5: TRANSPORTATION (AIR)**

### **AEROTROPOLIS, MEMPHIS**

The Memphis Aerotropolis focuses on linking airport based development with railway, river, and road development to spur regional development in the tristate metropolitan area.

## **CATEGORY 6: EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE ISSUES**

### **HIGHER EDUCATION FORUM OF NORTHEAST OKLAHOMA, TULSA**

The Higher Education Forum links high schools to colleges (2 and 4-year) through service learning projects, internships, and career exploration opportunities in an experiential learning environment.

## **CATEGORY 7: ENVIRONMENT**

### **CUMBERLAND RIVER COMPACT, NASHVILLE**

Cumberland River Compact works with the region's local officials, building professionals, watershed leaders, and homeowners to provide the resources needed to make smart choices that conserve water, save energy, and make the Nashville region more sustainable.

## **CATEGORY 8: ARTS, SPORTS, TOURISM, AND ENTERTAINMENT**

### **OKLAHOMA CITY BOATHOUSE FOUNDATION, OKLAHOMA CITY**

The OKC Boathouse Foundation develops and operates facilities and programs to improve the quality of life in Oklahoma City through the use of boathouses and related events that promote the use and development of the Oklahoma River as a world-class urban aquatic venue.

## **CATEGORY 9: REGIONAL ADVOCACY**

### **FOCUS ST. LOUIS, ST. LOUIS**

A locally-based nonprofit, FOCUS St. Louis® is committed to creating regional solutions through community leadership. FOCUS St. Louis works for the good of the entire 16-county, bistate region by developing leadership, influencing regionwide policy, and promoting community connections.

## **CATEGORY 10: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

### **HOME BASED WORKER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM, ALBUQUERQUE**

The Home Based Worker plan attempts to find people in New Mexico who are working at home and help them get more work, identify people who want to work from home, bring in money from outside the state, and encourage out-of-state home based workers to relocate to New Mexico.

## **CATEGORY 11: LEADERSHIP**

### **YOUTH LEADERSHIP JACKSON, JACKSON**

Youth Leadership Jackson is a leadership development program that trains, motivates, and increases the awareness of selected high school sophomores and juniors through leadership training, community-oriented seminars, and interaction with adult leaders who model exemplary citizenship and service to the community.

## **CATEGORY 12: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

### **ONE KC VOICE, KANSAS CITY**

One KC Voice is a regional citizenship engagement initiative to allow the region's residents to actively participate in shaping the public agenda and deciding the direction of the community.

## **CATEGORY 13: SOCIAL SERVICES**

### **GIRL SCOUTS BEYOND BARS, TULSA**

Girl Scouts Beyond Bars works to lessen the impact of parental separation due to incarceration, to foster the personal and social development of girls and their mothers, and to provide girls with the opportunity to participate with their parents in the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.



## SPECIAL THANKS

- Chancellor Joel E. Anderson for UALR's financial support to enhance regionalism in the metropolitan Little Rock Region that enables such projects to take place.
- Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe for his interest in regionalism and support of efforts like this to enhance the quality of place of Arkansas' communities and through regional efforts, making those communities and regions more globally competitive for community economic development.
- Mayor Ron Littlefield, City of Chattanooga, for his support and promotion of not only building a vibrant regional community in the Chattanooga region, but throughout the United States.



## CLOSING THOUGHTS

This project has been a labor of love for the collaborative partnership of IEA, the Little Rock Regional Chamber of Commerce, Metroplan, and the Central Arkansas Planning and Development District. We have been kicking this project around for over a year. We hope that this will be the beginning of a strong and true public and private sector regional community effort to make the Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway MSA the very best globally competitive region it can be that has a quality of place for its residents second to none. Only by working together in a unified effort will we have a chance to realize that goal.

The collaborative partnership truly appreciates our partners in Albuquerque, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Kansas City, St. Louis, Jackson, Memphis, and Nashville who distributed and prepared survey information from public and private sector leaders in their respective regions, set up followup work sessions for us in each metropolitan area, and have supplied us with updates and clarifications through the entire process. A number of the partners have mentioned a hope that perhaps in the next year that we would have the occasion to all come together at a central point (Little Rock), to share our stories, good and bad, and to learn and develop an ongoing conversation on how we make all our communities better places by developing and enhancing our regional communities.

As one will see in reviewing this report in total or in part, all the participating regions have quality regional initiatives, projects, and programs that the other regions, including our region can learn and benefit from. As more than one of the participants of the survey effort said, *“this is a great opportunity to steal some great ideas!”*

We deliberately chose to begin this effort with the immediate Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway MSA instead of our broader economic region in order to focus on the core region before expanding. We all know that in the grand scheme of the world economy, we are often thought of as part of a greater Dallas or Memphis region. Where we can benefit from that, great. But, it will be an even greater benefit for us to focus in and work to maximize our immediate regional community, and we hope this process will begin that effort.

Based upon our research and visits to the eight comparable regions, we would highly recommend a field trip to the Kansas City region. While each region offers many innovative examples of regional initiatives, projects, and programs, the Kansas City region is truly a *“regional community.”* Sure, just like any place else, the Kansas City region has its warts, but it stands at the top of the barrel, not only among our comparables, but nationally because of the years and years of the public and private sector leadership of the region treating the Kansas City metropolitan area as a true regional community. The partnership that has been driven by the private (Greater Kansas City Chamber), public (Mid-America Regional Council), and its Civic League has built the foundation and brought other private and public individuals and organizations in to building a regional community that has made the individual communities that make up this region prosper.

We look forward to not only being actively involved in an ongoing process to build a stronger regional community here, but we look forward to a continuing relationship with our eight comparable partner regions.



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