

Innovation Reconstructed Community Conversations

Background

Our future economic prosperity will occur in the midst of an increasing global flow of people, finance, goods, services, data and communications. As this connectivity drives changes, North Carolina must reconsider how to support and fuel innovation.

IEI convened communities throughout North Carolina to understand how they are innovating to compete. These focus groups were a critical first step to understanding *what communities need to attract or retain innovative companies and entrepreneurs*.

Communities Visited

IEI engaged civic leaders, city and county officials, members of K-12 and higher education, as well as non-profit leaders in the following locations:

- City of Fayetteville
- City of Elizabeth City
- Granville County
- Town of Boone
- Town of New Bern

Shared Challenges

Focus group participants discussed the following challenges:

- Workforce participation
- Shell building construction or other ready worksites
- Regional collaboration
- Community leadership
- Innovation outlook
- Broadband access and usage

Explanation of Points:

1. Workforce participation
 - Persistent poverty and problems with preparation for building new skills
 - Demographic variations (i.e., older retired population, youth brain drain)
2. Quality of K-12 education
 - Degree of parental capacity
 - Shortage of educational resources

3. Ready made worksite (“shell building”)
 - Resources must be expended if one does not exist (i.e., property taxes)
 - Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA) regulations impact building construction
4. Corporate entities
 - Relative lack of corporate businesses results in fewer resources invested in the community and leadership for community development
5. Risk aversion for innovation or development opportunities (i.e., wanting to control growth; fear of technology in classrooms or navigating technology in the wider world)
6. Broadband access and participation
 - Affordability and availability