



University

Bowling Green State University
Ohio University

Center Director

Michael Carroll

Center Location

BGSU's Research and Economic Development
OU's Voinovich School of Leadership & Public Affairs

Center since 2011

Center Activities

- Technical assistance
- Early-stage/entrepreneurship support
- Applied research
- Information dissemination

Clients

- Small existing businesses
- Entrepreneurs/start-ups
- Economic development and workforce organizations
- Local governments

Assessment Techniques

- Client satisfaction surveys
- Client interviews
- Informal feedback

Contact Information

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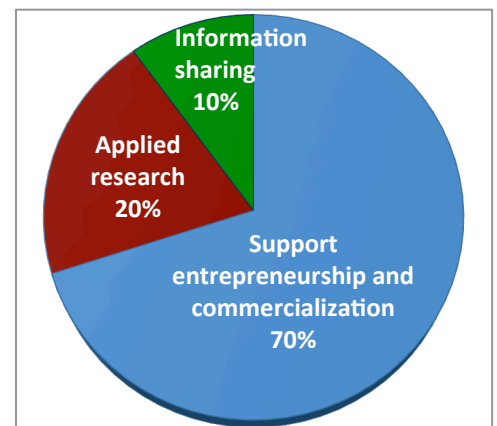
Rural Universities Consortium University Center

The Rural Universities Consortium (RUC) University Center is a joint endeavor of Bowling Green State University's (BGSU) Center for Regional Development and Ohio University's (OU) Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs. The two partners are located in very different regions within Ohio, each facing very different issues – fairly densely populated northwest Ohio and rural, sparsely populated southeast Ohio. Through programs that address gaps in services for entrepreneurs and small businesses, local economic data, and channels for information sharing, this Center is meeting the disparate needs of two economically distressed regions within the state of Ohio.

Goals & Activities

The Center's activities focus on coordinating and filling gaps in the economic infrastructure that supports small business growth, innovation, and entrepreneurship in its two regional service areas. The Center provides technical assistance to entrepreneurs and small businesses through both one-on-one counseling

and group seminars, which focus on topics such as feasibility studies, business plan development, market research, loan application assistance, and other needs. These activities aim to help businesses and entrepreneurs – especially in priority and emerging clusters – to acquire the resources they need to grow and thrive. Since its inception, the Center has assisted 17 companies. Seven of these have



secured grants or pre-seed investments totaling \$625,000, two have secured traditional bank financing, and several have experienced significant year-on-year revenue growth.

An additional focus of the Center is applied research and information

dissemination activities that address critical regional gaps in the economic information and data needed by economic developers and businesses.

The Center is building an online, GIS-based toolbox that will provide extensive

workforce data on occupations, skillsets, commuting patterns, layoffs, and other areas, both for its service region and the state as a whole.

Leveraging

The Center leverages, complements, and fills gaps in the economic development infrastructure within its

two service areas. The Center actively partners with economic development

organizations, and by doing so, these organizations become the source of many referrals to the Center for hands-on entrepreneurial assistance.

“Direct guidance and assistance which improved our business.”

--Center client

The Center also provides business support and commercialization services to rural-based innovators that fall outside other technology-based venture development organizations (most of which have an urban focus or serve university- and corporate-based innovators). Additionally, the Center borrows from the toolkits and experience of several other EDA-supported programs in the region and seeks to fill gaps in these programs.

Success

State of the Region Conferences

The RUC Center is addressing the unique challenges in the two regions it services by holding annual meetings focused on regional information sharing, panel discussions, and networking. Participants are a cross-section of regional businesses, public officials, economic development practitioners, academic stakeholders, media, and others.

While the issues to be discussed in each region are vastly different, the State of the Region conferences have been a big success in both regions because regional stakeholders are eager to hear reliable local economic information that is not available from other sources. Additionally, the

networking portion of the events is very popular as it provides a forum for people to make new connections and to forge new partnerships and collaborations.

The RUC Center supports information sharing and partnership building in two regions that lack strong networks and informational resources by sponsoring widely popular annual conferences for local stakeholders to discuss issues of local concern.

Online, Real-Time Workforce Tool

There is a fundamental need in NW and SE Ohio to support data-driven decision-making by regional economic and workforce development professionals. To address this gap, the Center is

building a suite of online geo-spatial tools that provide key workforce, occupational, and skill set data for its service region and for the state as a whole. The toolbox is currently at the prototype stage, and the goal is to have the entire suite of tools ready by 2016. This kind of information is invaluable for investment attraction, business location decisions, and alignment of workforce programs.

An online GIS-based workforce toolkit developed by the RUC Center will provide the up-to-date data required by businesses and economic developers to make informed decisions about investment, growth, and training opportunities and needs.