

## **The Project Idea**

A collaboration between the FirstEnergy Corporation and the Regional Prosperity Initiative to create an analysis of the existing infrastructure “grid” in Northeast Ohio. Then, take this analysis and use it to demonstrate how the interests of FirstEnergy and the goals of the RPI can meet synergistically on one path of progress toward restoring prosperity in Northeast Ohio.

Combining the voices of both the private and public sector can attract attention from a greater populace, thus engaging their interest. In support of that concept, the Stanford Social Innovation Review, Summer 2010, has an interesting commentary in the article, “Fermenting Innovation” (Page 7), to paraphrase - new public-private institutions, jointly governed partnerships between industry associations and government agencies “can function as *social and knowledge bridges*” between different entities for fostering innovative capacity. The article goes on to say that new methods to “map the knowledge networks, how knowledge flows, and who the key actors are for promoting learning and the diffusion of new knowledge” must be developed. These “local bridges” are vital to success. FirstEnergy and RPI can take the lead by performing collaboration that will ignite our local innovative resources.

In the short term, we see an opportunity to draw on the knowledge and experience of the FirstEnergy Corporation as a partner toward implementation of the Regional Prosperity Initiative’s objectives.

In the long term, we see the possibilities for continued collaboration between FirstEnergy and RPI as an impetus for developing clear strategies for regional planning that municipal and township planning agencies will be able to implement effectively.

Project steps to include:

- 1) Identify FirstEnergy’s infrastructure framework
- 2) Show how this framework can relate to other infrastructures, such as, transportation, potable water, wastewater, storm water, electricity, communications (including broadband connectivity), and innovation enabling infrastructures.
- 3) Obtain FirstEnergy’s input on the concepts and approaches developed by RPI.
- 4) Enumerate the economic advantages for FirstEnergy as a collaborator.

## **Why This, Why Now?**

The Regional Prosperity Initiative has spent well over 5,000 volunteer hours in the past three years, attending steering committee meetings; drill-down team workshops; gathering, compiling and analyzing pertinent data; creating communication tools; visiting regions that have implemented local infrastructure planning and new-growth tax-base sharing collaboration; community presentations;

and discussions with stakeholders and government entities, such as, MPOs, COGs, JEDDs, RPOs, and other non-governmental agencies. Now, RPI is poised to take the next step → engaging regional entities in actual collaborative projects.

This proposal is not just an opportunity for FirstEnergy to fund a project, but to become a regional partner in helping to solve some of the convoluted problems of fragmented governance in Northeast Ohio.

### **How is This Going to Work?**

The Regional Prosperity Initiative's committee members, the FirstEnergy Corporation and its Foundation representatives can work together *as a team* to refine our understanding and build our capacity for strategic collaborative planning.

Looking for a place to start as a demonstration of collaboration, and as an implementation of RPIs work, FirstEnergy fits the criteria for testing out RPIs assertions. As a corporation and a foundation whose vision includes the statement, "The Greater Good is Better Business", and publishes "Our Community Involvement Priorities" as:

- Help improve the vitality of our communities and support key safety initiatives
- Promote local and regional economic development and revitalization
- Advance an educated workforce by supporting professional development, literacy, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education initiatives
- Support FirstEnergy employees' community leadership and volunteer interests,

the team members of the Regional Prosperity Initiative feel that FirstEnergy is well-positioned to pilot this innovation. As an organization that plays the lead role in providing energy services from its western boundary of The Toledo Edison Company to its eastern edge at Jersey Central Power & Light, FirstEnergy has the broadest platform on which to show how a collaborative effort toward infrastructure planning could improve the economy of Northeast Ohio as well as the quality of life.

### **How Much Time is this Going to Take?**

Time spent on a collaborative project with FirstEnergy would vary based on how ambitious we choose to be. For starters, let's say that 40 hours per participant spread over a period of four months, ten hours per month would be reasonable. However, both parties would have to come up with a time frame suitable for everyone.

## **What is the Possible Outcome?**

The possibility exists that this demonstration of collaboration could serve to spark other entities to engage with RPI to facilitate the same process. Momentum will be established.

FirstEnergy will enjoy recognition as the lead corporate innovator toward regional collaboration.

## **Who will Find This Useful?**

Entities in Northeast Ohio who could benefit from this model include corporations, governments, social agencies, and educational institutions to name a few. Outside of Northeast Ohio, other regions will be able to learn from this collaborative example. Lastly, research organizations who track business, government, and societal trends, i.e., The Brookings Institution, will find the results of our project to be useful in their endeavors. On a side note, Northeast Ohio has been selected by the Brookings Institution as one of three regions where a study has been launched to research the rise and implementation of regional governmental collaboration (Seattle, Minneapolis/St. Paul are the other two). RPI is a named component of this study.

## **How will This Project be Evaluated?**

Efforts can be measured throughout the process by the achievements resulting from each step, i.e., planned agendas with specific action items. Evaluation also includes individual assessment (critique) of the project.

On a more technical scale, project evaluation metrics can be used to illuminate value.

## **What's Next?**

Specific projects such as,

1. Convene MPOs - face-to-face & virtual, to connect the dots on land-use planning and infrastructure design, share knowledge, experience.
2. Map existing conditions - to develop a comprehensive view of the region. Use existing planning agencies staff or combine consultants and current agency staff to assemble data. Direct the development of a regional land-use database.

3. Regional cultural component study - cultural nuances and attitudes of the region must be evaluated, understood, and applied in the context of regional collaboration - educational entities to assist in this assessment - then establish a regional identity and create a “brand”.
4. “Smart Grid” - how Civic Commons can be a virtual grid for community awareness. FirstEnergy can “power-up” this project - thus taking the lead in this revolution of how knowledge is seeded throughout a populace - and - how a new level of governance is emerging
5. Multi-Year Pattern of Infrastructure Planning - coordinate not only regional land use and transportation planning, but also municipal services such as, sewer, water, and power utilities into a blueprint depicting future scenarios. This blueprint could also include the alignment of regional economic development boundaries, as the report, “Restoring Prosperity, Transforming Ohio’s Communities for the Next Economy, by the Brookings Institution and the Greater Ohio Policy Center points out on page 41, “... Ohio seems to have a different set of administrative regional maps for just about every state economic development program... alignment according to a common geography, such as the ODOD economic development regions, will also presumably make it easier for state and local officials to blend and align state investments.”

“When I am after change, I want to make things happen - get results, reap rewards. This happens through people, interactions, networks of conversations, and people working together... engagement is the main event.”

Seth Kahan, “Getting Change Right”