
CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

WBC is involved in an array of activities.

With the very broad purposes outlined in its enabling statute, WBC engages in a wide variety of activities: the staff administers grant and loan programs for local community governments and private business, provides technical business advice to employers, serves as the state’s marketing arm, trains and educates individuals in entrepreneurial practices, contracts for services from private companies and partners with the University of Wyoming, develops prospective business leads for local economic development organizations, and attends, sponsors and funds conventions, trade events, seminars and workshops.

Its response-driven philosophy leads it to be many things to many people.

In the process of establishing this wide-ranging presence, WBC has confronted various internal and external pressures. By reacting to these pressures and covering a “punch-list” of activities that primarily meet short-term agency goals, WBC has become an agency that attempts to be many things to many people. This response-driven operational philosophy is at odds with original expectations: that WBC be a dynamic, independent, and aggressive policy-making agency that would help shape and improve Wyoming’s economy. Its current low profile allows WBC to implement the more service and support oriented functions of statute, and also supplies ample reason not to pursue fulfilling other areas of its authority.

The benefits of quasi-governmental status are not readily apparent.

WBC was established to be administratively independent, but its quasi-governmental status cannot be said to have had a demonstrable impact on the state's investment in economic development. The importance of its status may have more to do with perception than with measurable results. That issue aside, WBC does operate much like an agency of the state, and it uses General Fund appropriations. To substantiate the need for continuation of its special status, WBC needs to show how being quasi-governmental enables it to deliver the “real world accountability” envisioned by the 1997 Steering Committee.

WBC should articulate its comprehensive economic development strategy.

In addition, WBC has not put forward (as statute directs it to) a comprehensive economic development strategy for the state, and instead has substituted strategic plans that focus at the task level. While WBC claims that it lacks the authority and resources to develop a comprehensive strategy, it nonetheless appears to have the fundamentals of such a plan in place. WBC needs to acknowledge its “economic development building blocks” approach as its comprehensive economic development strategy. Further, it should link its efforts to the SF 35 benchmarks and other measures so policymakers can determine whether or not this strategy is effective.

In establishing the WBC, the Legislature made clear an intention for the organization to report on its effectiveness. Since many of the statutory benchmarks are only loosely related to WBC’s performance, WBC needs to develop additional measures that demonstrate its impact. Also, the \$45 million in General Funds appropriated for BRC is nearly all committed, long before the end of FY ’06. WBC has quickly moved this money out to communities, but has not developed clear project review criteria, standards for prioritizing projects, or a monitoring process that tracks the outcomes of these projects long-term.

WBC needs to know if its course of action is having sufficient impact.

WBC remains popular and has the support of many stakeholders working on economic development. Moreover, since the inception of the BRC program, WBC appears to have more relevancy and to be making a discernable impact. But there is a disconnect between early expectations and current practice as to how, and for what results, WBC should be held accountable. Slated to sunset in 2008, WBC needs to know quickly if the service-oriented and money-dispensing niche it has selected for itself is having sufficient impact to satisfy expectations for the future.