

PEER KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE SERIES

MONIQUE BOULET

The Acadiana Regional Development District (ARDD) lost its Economic Development District (EDD) status in 2013, after misappropriation of funding. With oversight of the US EDA Austin Regional Office, ARDD went bankrupt to resolve the challenges caused by the previous Executive Director's misuse of funds and the EDA planning funds were given to the South Central Planning & Development Commission EDD, headed by Kevin Belanger, to help get the District reestablished. Monique Boulet was brought on to work with Kevin, and her salary was paid with EDA Planning grant funds to reestablish the District, which is now known as the Acadiana Planning Commission (APC).

When reestablishing the district, there were a lot of critical discussions and meetings held to build connections with communities, and to determine what regionalism in the APC would and could look like. A needs assessment was conducted with support from the Delta Regional Authority. Parishes (the equivalent of county governments in Louisiana) worked with Monique and Kevin and together built a Board from 2014-2015. Minimal dues had been negotiated, amounting to 15 cents per capita, and in 2015, local councils passed a joint resolution to join APC. Monique expressed that "there were challenges creating the partnership and connections, and ensuring that rural areas had a voice, which was crucial for the success of the District."

Many meetings were held, hosted in space provided by the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, and trust was built over time with local stakeholders and councils. The local Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) became part of APC in 2015, which allowed for more collaboration and great integration of their work with the Commission. Monique spoke of the challenges of integrating staff from another organization and the need to value their experiences, while also encouraging growth and development. For example, Monique worked with the MPO staff planners to broaden their scope of work to include rural areas of the region.

Monique spoke highly of the EDA Austin region and staff, who assisted her by asking questions like "how can we help staff you; how can we help develop you out," and emphasized how



Acadiana Planning Commission

*Chief Executive Officer, 2016 -
present
Acadiana Regional Administrator,
SCPDC, 2014-2016*

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Focus on deliverables and community impact to stay relevant
- Take the time to build connections and visit member communities
- Don't 'meet to meet' - ensure meetings provide value
- A District can prepare and facilitate meetings but shouldn't make decisions before everyone comes to the table
- Use your local university as a partner and asset
- Understand your District's accounting and HR systems

crucial relationships with Director Jorge Ayala and Economic Development Representative (EDR) Vicki Hendersot were. Monique also participated in the EDA Southwest Region Training Program for Emerging Leaders (TPEL) in 2015, which “was a huge help, and allowed me to have conversations with others in the same shoes.” APC took three years to ‘get back on solid ground’ and required a tremendous amount of work and dedication. “I don’t know how much I worked... a lot! During the week running things and on the weekend putting the admin piece in place.” Kevin served as interim CEO for six months, and Monique was made CEO of APC in January 2016.

The District was redesignated as an Economic Development District in 2017, and the occasion was marked by a large celebration. Today APC does a huge variety of work in the region and continues to grow. APC has a staff of 18 and is doing economic development work that the organization wasn’t before, which “has been transformational for some of our communities.” Monique knows that APC has to work to become and stay relevant. “We have to be relevant; we have to be in the space working and active for people to engage with us the way we want them to engage with us.”

Monique was asked to share advice or lessons learned from her experience rebuilding the APC. She stated the importance of APC “always being the safe space. We are where everyone can come together and trust that they will be included in decision making. APC is prepared and facilitates but doesn’t make decisions before everyone comes to the table.” She stressed the importance of not “meeting to meet” but rather allowing meetings to help inform decisions and outcomes. “When you have meetings and you have problems getting quorum, its because you aren’t bringing value to their daily work. People have a lot to do... they need to learn something of value to bring back to what they do.” Noting the benefits of their affiliation with the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, she recommended that if you have a university, “make them a partner, an asset.”

Monique and APC are continuing to work to bring resources to their region, including a recently obtaining a 30-million-dollar grant for broadband infrastructure from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and managing Region 5 of the Louisiana Regional Watershed Initiative.



Re-established in 2017

Serves the Parishes of Acadia, Evangeline, Iberia, Lafayette, St. Landry, St. Martin, and Vermilion

10 member board of directors; represent local governments, chamber of commerce, the university and the 2 community colleges in the region

Lafayette, LA

KEY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES INCLUDE:

- Watershed planning
- Broadband
- Transportation
- Brownfield Redevelopment
- Opportunity Zones
- CEDS

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