



RESEARCH, PARTNERSHIPS, AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BETWEEN EDDS AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

TIP SHEET



TIP SHEET FOR RESEARCH, PARTNERSHIPS, AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BETWEEN EDDS AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)¹, which include both two-year and four-year colleges and universities, are important regional economic development partners. For the purposes of working with Economic Development Districts (EDDs)², HEIs can become a hub/connection point where EDDs can come to get information. These institutions also offer unique resources that may help increase the capacity of EDDs to carry out their work, including specialized research, training programs, technology transfer and commercialization capabilities, as well as faculty expertise and sophisticated facilities, among others. However, initiating and sustaining a partnership with various higher education institutions can be challenging. The following are tips compiled by the University Economic Development Association (UEDA)³ from both UEDA members and EDDs on how to improve/sustain this relationship, and what an EDD can do to initiate a partnership with a higher education institution.

1 Higher education institution (HEIs), as referenced throughout this tip sheet, refers to all formal post-secondary education, including public and private universities, colleges, technical training institutes, and vocational schools. According to the World Bank, these types of institutions are instrumental in fostering growth, reducing poverty, and boosting shared prosperity. See [Tertiary Education Overview \(worldbank.org\)](https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/tertiaryeducation/overview).

2 Over 400 regional organizations across the nation are designated by the U.S. Economic Development Administration as Economic Development Districts (EDDs). These multi-jurisdictional entities, commonly composed of multiple counties and in certain cases even cross-state borders, help lead the locally based, regionally driven economic development planning process that leverages the involvement of the public, private and non-profit sectors to establish a strategic blueprint/economic development roadmap for regional collaboration. See <https://www.eda.gov/about/economic-development-glossary/edd>.

3 Established in 1976, the University Economic Development Association has been working to bring together higher education institutions, private sector businesses, non-profits, government organizations, and community economic development stakeholders to create local and regional economic opportunity. See <https://universityeda.org>.

INITIATING AN EDD/HEI PARTNERSHIP

1) Building relationships is a two-way street: A higher education institution may not be aware that an EDD could utilize their resources. If there is potential for collaboration, the EDD may need to initiate outreach and state what the local needs are. Similarly, EDDs may not know what role a higher education institution is already playing/wanting to play in terms of regional economic development, and this is also an important conversation to have.

2) Be clear on requests: When discussing needs, it will be helpful if the EDD can tell the HEI contacts more about what they need the data/services for and preferences on how the information might be delivered (e.g., charts on their website, official reports, etc.). Having this context means the HEI can better tailor the final product to the larger goals and potentially be able to make some recommendations as well.

3) Be realistic about timelines: Both HEIs and EDDs are limited in capacity and staff availability. Having realistic expectations of “turnaround time” for research and technical assistance can set appropriate goals on the work.

4) Know the cost: The assistance from a university may not be free. HEIs are also limited in funding and may request compensation, depending on the request.

5) Consider if the partnership is a good fit: The EDD may need to assess what kind of expertise and partners are needed for a given project or strategy and each HEI’s capabilities, as there may be multiple in the region that can assist in different ways depending on the needs of the EDD.

IMPROVING AND SUSTAINING AN EDD/HEI PARTNERSHIP

6) Focus efforts beyond traditional economic development: Changing the mindset surrounding economic development from being primarily about the recruitment of companies to a specific jurisdiction for job creation, increased tax revenues, and capital investment into “community-economic development” that seeks more broadly to create the conditions for economic prosperity may position an EDD to better work with a HEI. Promoting advances in the quality of place make a region increasingly attractive to entrepreneurs/innovators, businesses, investors, and highly skilled jobseekers (and even students), which can often link better with the higher education institution’s efforts and resources.

7) Establish clear points of contact: Identifying a point(s) of contact at the HEI will create an effective means of communication. Having designated liaisons on both sides can streamline interactions. Finding good points of contact can be challenging as some HEI personnel may not be familiar with the various economic development resources at their institutions. Start by looking for relevant position titles such as Associate Vice President for Economic Development or dedicated Business and Economic Research units. If you are working with one of the 72 EDA University Centers (UC) covering 47 states and territories, you can find the main point of contact on the UC profile page: www.eda.gov/funding/programs/university-centers. That person would be the most familiar with the services of the UC and be able to best direct the person looking for a service.

8) Invite higher education institution representatives to events: Have the HEI participate in an annual conference or monthly meetings and establish a reoccurring meeting to share resources and projects with a larger audience to make others aware of the partnership.

9) Identify mutual goals: Rather than duplicating efforts, consider how the HEI and EDD can augment each other’s work. A good starting point is to review the CEDS or strategic plan of the partner organizations to determine mutual projects/goals. Promoting this type of alignment can expand capacity and better utilize the resources of both partners.

10) Create joint initiatives: The development of a joint program to bridge the gap between academic research and economic development practice can utilize the resources from both partners and create a mutually beneficial program.

11) Encourage student involvement: Engaging HEI students in economic development projects not only provides students with real-world experiences, but also brings new ideas to EDD initiatives. Offering volunteer or internship opportunities for students can also help an EDD with limited resources and lack of capacity.

IMPROVING AND SUSTAINING AN EDD/HEI PARTNERSHIP

12) Determine a plan for turnover: Personnel turnover occurs at both EDDs and HEIs, which results in having to start over with building relationships. Initiate these relationships once new hires join the organization or set up a meeting prior to someone leaving the organization to sustain the work.

13) Leave any issues at the door: Historical grievances or a lack of a previous relationship may prevent a new one from forming. Put egos aside and recognize what may be best for the overall community, not just the organization, and start the relationship with a clean slate.

To see these tips in practice, check out the Economic Development District Community of Practice at <https://www.nado.org/EDDCoP/>.

The tip sheet was written by the University Economic Development Association.

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