



PART-TIME ELECTED OFFICIALS

TIP SHEET



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Many rural communities and counties have part-time elected officials (PTEO) that oversee the day-to-day administration and operations of their community. Rural regional organizations, in particular, often struggle to engage these officials in regional planning work.

With help from Economic Development Districts (EDDs) who have successfully built these relationships, the [NADO Research Foundation](#) has collected tips for regions that want to improve their relationship with part-time elected officials and help them drive economic prosperity in all of their communities.

This tip sheet may be valuable to:

- Regional organizations that have many newly elected part-time elected officials after an election year.
- Regional organizations that are trying to improve or build relationships with tenured elected officials that have not previously worked with the EDD.

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EDDs, PTEOs, and their communities can all benefit from a close working relationship. The following chart shows the benefit to an EDD from building relationships with PTEOs and the benefit to PTEOs communities' from engaging with their regional EDD partners.

VALUE PROPOSITION	
Benefits to an EDD	Benefits to a Part-Time Elected Official
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insight and perspective into the needs of the rural parts of the regional service area. • Bringing more federal and state investment to their regions. • More opportunities to contract with member communities for shared services. • Additional experienced voices engaged in the management of the EDD. • More opportunities to provide grant administration services to member communities to improve organizational revenue streams. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to have an influence on and provide insight to regional planning. • Greater access to federal or state funding opportunities. • More opportunities to coordinate with other municipalities or counties in the region. • More opportunities to work with experienced EDD planners or administrators. • Access to development pattern data, economic indicators, and other valuable economic information that the PTEO can use in decision-making.

How should EDDs work to improve their relationships with PTEOs?

1) Getting in Touch

Engaging with part-time elected officials must start with collecting accurate contact information and understanding their preferred communication mode and frequency. PTEOs may not have an email address associated with a city or county email server and may not frequently check their personal email address, so it is vital that EDDs collect several forms of contact from a PTEO. Additionally, PTEOs may prefer to separate their personal time, full-time employment time, and their time spent as an elected official. Repeatedly calling or messaging a PTEO during one of these conflicting times may reduce your chances of connecting with them.

Regional organizations may be able to lean on leaders in neighboring communities or personal networks to provide accurate contact information for the PTEO and their preferred mode and frequency of communication.

After you establish contact, EDDs should prioritize setting a time to meet with the PTEO in person.

Goals for the First Meeting:

- If an EDD is working with a newly elected official, they must work to understand that official's priorities for their community and provide them with a tangible, easy way to engage with EDD programming.
- For tenured PTEOs that have not engaged with EDD programming before, it can be helpful to level set with this official and understand why they have not previously sought out assistance from the EDD. This will be further discussed in the next section.

NOTE: EDDs have found success in having a binder or pamphlet that can be given to new officials at their first meeting. These materials should explain the services the EDDs provide and what the new official needs to know regarding time commitments to the EDD and current projects their community is engaged in with the EDD. This is also a great opportunity for the EDD to share impact data on the success of their programs and the benefit that comes from working with an EDD.

2) Election Cycles

Election cycles can be a useful time to engage new PTEOs as they are beginning a new role. After the election and before their term starts, EDDs can invite their region's new mayor-elects or county administrator-elects to an EDD 101 meeting to get these new officials familiar with the regional organization and what services they can provide. EDDs have found success in scheduling these introductory meetings after typical work hours to make these meetings more accessible to officials

that have full-time employment outside of their work at their municipality or county. This also offers these new officials the chance to meet and network with their neighboring communities' new leaders.

3) Understanding the Barrier

For EDDs that want to strengthen and build relationships with existing tenured PTEOs, EDDs must understand why the PTEO wasn't engaged in the past.

- Did the PTEO know that the EDD existed?
- Were they aware of the EDDs services and programming and the impact on their communities?
- Did they think they did not have enough time to engage with EDD programming?
- Were they aware that EDDs service and programming were available to their communities?
- Were there past political or personal issues that prevented the PTEO from engaging with the EDD?

Figuring out why the PTEO had not been engaged before is the first step in repairing the relationship or building a new one. Answers to these questions may reveal gaps in EDDs service delivery model, marketing and communication strategies, and other operational deficiencies that the EDD can then work to correct.

4) Simplifying Engagement

The next step to develop this new working relationship is to provide an easy opportunity for the PTEO to get involved and familiarize themselves with the type of work the EDD does. This easy, low-stakes engagement could mean several different 'asks' depending on the services and programming your EDD offers. Consider what may be a simple task that can further involve the PTEO in the EDDs services and programming. Invite the PTEO to visit with other board members who are champions of the organization to learn about the overall operation of the EDD. PTEOs may better relate to or have existing relationships with elected officials of neighboring communities that can introduce key concepts of the EDD to the PTEO.

For grant administration, consider lower-stakes, no-match required state grant programs that EDDs can assist a community with including parks and recreation grants, equipment purchases, or straight-forward infrastructure grants. Smaller, more rural communities may not have the match required or the staff capacity (even with EDD support) to handle larger projects. Smaller, less administratively intensive grant programs can be a good first introduction into the grant administration role EDDs play.

For the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) process, consider having the new PTEO sit in on a CEDS Strategy Committee meeting or input session. For EDDs that manage an RLF it can be helpful to invite a PTEO to observe a meeting of the region's RLF Loan Review Committee.

Simple, low-stakes engagement like these examples can give a PTEO first-hand experience and perspective on the available services of the EDD, and spark inspiration for the PTEO to join one of these EDD committees or working groups in the future.

5) Maintaining the Relationship

Once introductions have been made and a PTEO is more familiar with EDD services and programming, take what you have learned about their community and the PTEO and identify how to maintain this relationship through existing EDD services. Additionally, EDDs should set a regular schedule of in person check-ins with these elected officials. While monthly or even quarterly meetings may be too frequent, it is important to set a schedule that allows the EDD to understand the communities' changing needs without overburdening the PTEO with frequent meetings.

Questions to Maintain the Relationship:

- What motivated the elected official to run for office?
- What priorities does the PTEO have for their community?
- Did the PTEO mention in your introductory meetings any specific projects they are working on that the EDD can assist with?
- Are there any EDA or other federal funding opportunities that may be relevant to the community and its needs?
- What other departments at the regional organization can assist with issues affecting the community?

For more information on board engagement and working with local elected officials, explore [this training](#) from Dr. Monica Scamardo and the NADO Research Foundation. Additionally, the NADO Research Foundation [Leadership and Governance resources](#) can be helpful in managing an EDDs operations, member outreach strategies, and marketing and communications strategies, all of which can help build relationships with member communities.