

NADO ATC CONFERENCE

Salt Lake City
October 14, 2025





SOUTHWEST TENNESSEE DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

JACKSON, TENNESSEE



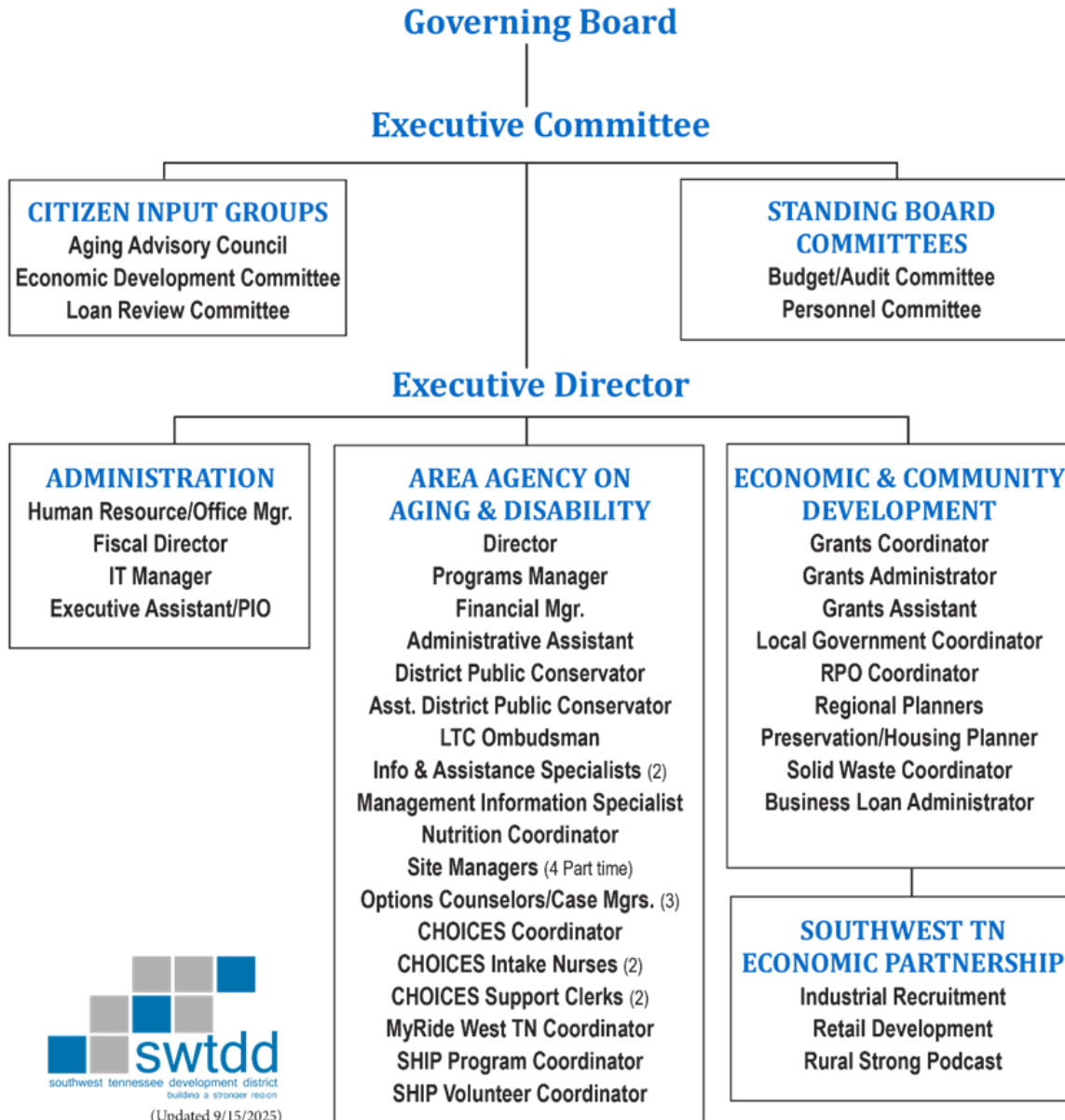
WHERE IS JACKSON TENNESSEE?



JOE W. BARKER

- **Small Business Owner**
- **City Councilman**
- **City Mayor**
- **County Mayor**
- **Assistant Commissioner for the State of Tennessee
Department of Economic & Community Development**
- **SWTDD Board Member – 8 Years**
- **SWTDD Executive Director – 18 Years**

Southwest Tennessee Development District 2025/2026 Organizational Chart



SWTDD ORGANIZATION CHART

| JOE W. BARKER |

**BUILDING A
STRONG RDO
BEGINS WITH
HAVING A STRONG
FOUNDATION**

TABLETOP DISCUSSION

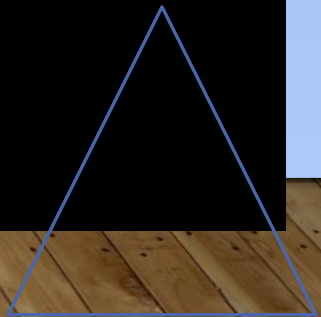
What is a program, policy, or initiative that could strengthen your RDO?





TEN KEY INGREDIENTS IN BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION

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I. VISION

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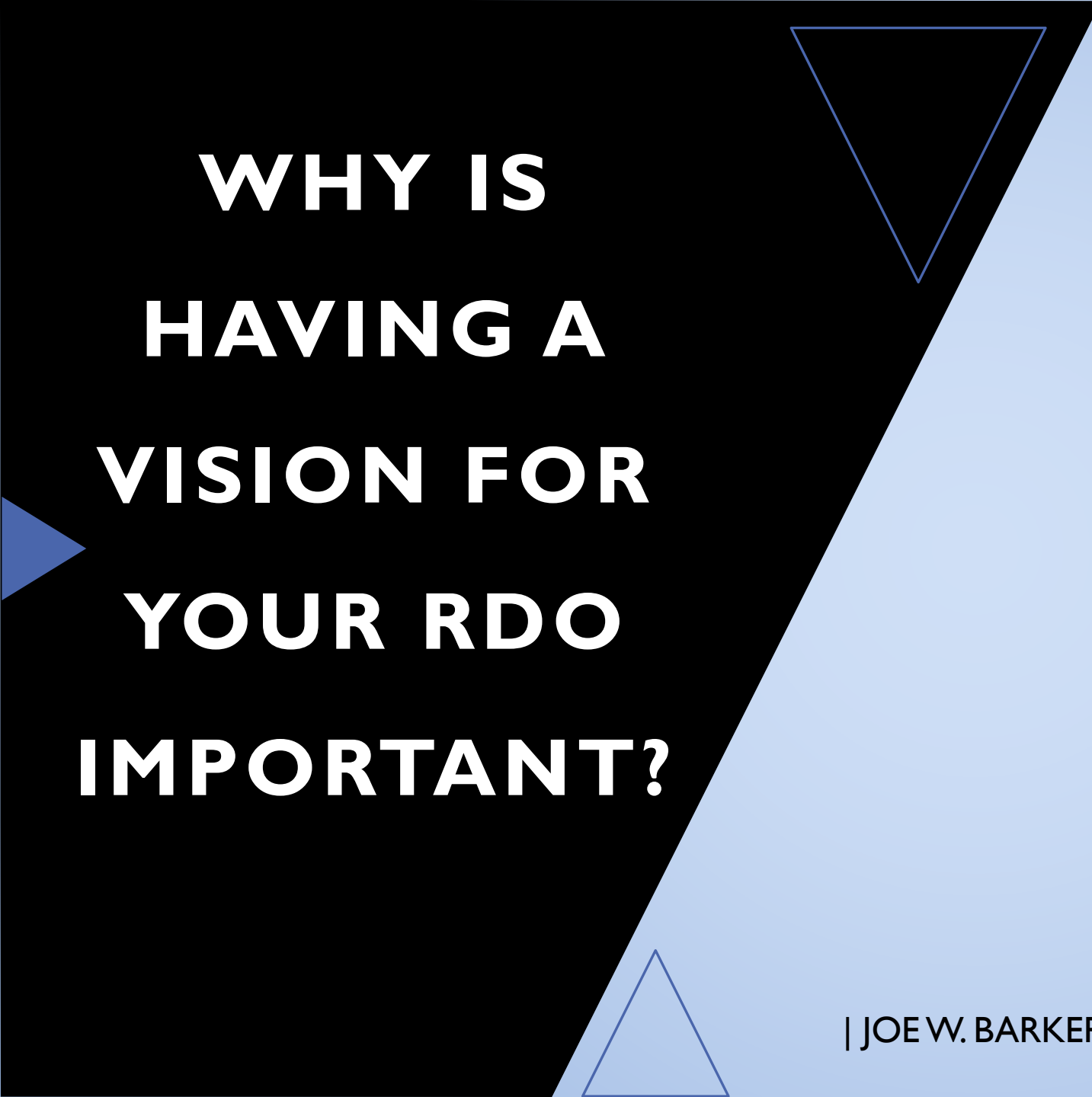


**A Vision For Your RDO
Is Not What The RDO
Is Today, But What
The RDO Can Achieve
In The Future**

**WHAT IS
YOUR
ELEVATOR
SPEECH
THAT BEST
DESCRIBES
YOUR VISION
FOR YOUR
RDO?**



| JOE W. BARKER |



WHY IS HAVING A VISION FOR YOUR RDO IMPORTANT?

- **Creates Focus On Your Goals**
- **Creates A Shared Sense Of Direction Across Different Teams**
- **Communicates Your Identity**
- **Attracts And Retains Talent**

2. VALUES

- **PRINCIPLES OR STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR**
- **WHAT VALUES ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU?**



Coach Steve Kerr



Coach Pete Carroll

MANY TIMES.....

**..... ORGANIZATIONS WILL
MIRROR THE VALUES AND
CONDUCT OF ITS LEADERS!**

3. COLLABORATION/TEAM BUILDING

- **Synergy – We Are Stronger As Parts Of A Whole Than We Are As Individuals**
- **Employees Are The Greatest Asset Of Any Organization**
- **Recognize Achievements**
- **We Have A New Generation Of Employees**

COLLABORATION/TEAM BUILDING

- **Encourage Innovation**
- **Every Person is an Important Team Member.
Encourage Team Activities!!**

4. TRUST

**WITHOUT ACHIEVING TRUST,
ACHIEVING POSITIVE RESULTS IS
ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE!**

THREE CAUSES OF DISTRUST IN ORGANIZATIONS AND TEAMS





CHANGE

UNCERTAINTY

INCONSISTENCY

RESULTS OF LOW TRUST

- **TURNOVER**
- **MARGINAL WORK**
- **GOSSIP**
- **INCREASED COSTS**
- **SUSPICIOUSNESS**

OUTCOMES OF TRUST

- **HIGH PERFORMANCE**
- **ACHIEVED GOALS**
- **INNOVATION**
- **JOB SATISFACTION**

BEST PRACTICES TO BUILD TRUST

- **MAKE AND KEEP COMMITMENTS.**
- **EXPLAIN DECISIONS AND DIRECTION.**
- **GIVE RECOGNITION.**
- **SEEK AND IMPLEMENT FEEDBACK.**
- **SEVER GRAPEVINE.**
- **USE EMPATHY.**
- **ACKNOWLEDGE ERRORS.**
- **ENGAGE IN CRUCIAL COMMUNICATIONS.**

5. COMMUNICATION

KEYS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- **Be Clear And Concise.**
- **Prepare Ahead Of Time.**
- **Watch Your Tone.**
- **Listen! Listen! Listen!**
- **Understand Non-Verbal Communication.**
- **Implement A Workplace Communication Strategy.**
- **Over Communication Is Better Than No Communication.**

MAKE CUSTOMER SERVICE PART OF YOUR COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

- **Customer Service Has Become A Forgotten Art in the Public Sector**
- **Remind Your Team Who They Work For**
- **Implement Customer Service Training**
- **Be Aware of The Fact That Not Everyone Agrees With Your Politics or Views**

DEALING WITH C.A.V.E PEOPLE

1. LISTEN TO THEM.
2. GET INTO THEIR SHOES.
3. STAY CALM.
4. CREATE A BUFFER.
Set a time limit. Don't meet alone.
5. WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS... EJECT!



TEXT AND EMAILS BEFORE YOU HIT SEND:

- 1. Consider The Ramifications**
- 2. Write It, Read It, Save It**
- 3. Have A Clear Head**
- 4. When It's Sent, It's Sent (You Own It!)**

TABLETOP DISCUSSION

How can your RDO's value be better communicated to stakeholders such as local governments, state governments, and critical partners?



6. CREATE AN IDENTITY

- **Are you recognized as a leader in economic and community development, workforce development, social services, transportation, planning, etc.? If not, why?**
- **Clearly articulate your purpose**
- **SWOT Analysis – Internal and External Assessment of Your Organization's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats**
- **Don't be Timid!!!**

**REMEMBER – IF YOU ARE NOT THE LEAD
DOG, THE SCENERY NEVER CHANGES!**



7. BE VISIBLE

- **Your Organization is an Extension of Local Government and Should Be Viewed As a Key Partner**
- **Support Your Member Communities by Being Present at Events**
- **Consider Having a Local Government Representative/Liaison on Your Staff**
- **Have a Strong Social Media Presence**
- **Create a Newsletter to Promote your Communities**

8. BE A VALUE-ADDED ORGANIZATION

- **Demand Excellence In the Delivery of Your Core Programs and Services**
- **Always Seek Out Ways to Add Tools to Your Organization's Toolbox**



9. HAVE A STRATEGIC PLAN

- **A Vision without Action is Only a Dream**
- **Convene Your Stakeholders**
- **Develop a Strategy/Plan to Meet the Needs of Your Stakeholders**
- **Assign Responsibility**
- **Create a Timeline**
- **Monitor and Assess Progress**

TABLETOP DISCUSSION

How can RDO's overcome issues of political fragmentation and competition among local jurisdictions to foster genuine regional collaboration?



10. LEADERSHIP

Leadership is the mortar that binds the ingredients of a strong foundation.

“Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.”

~ Warren Bennis

**WHO DO YOU THINK OF WHEN
YOU THINK OF A GREAT LEADER?**

**WHAT ATTRIBUTES ARE COMMON
IN GREAT LEADERS?**

PUBLIC SERVANT LEADERSHIP

**PUBLIC SERVANT: A PERSON WHO IS APPOINTED
OR ELECTED TO A PUBLIC OFFICE**

**LEADERSHIP: THE ACTION OF LEADING A GROUP
OF PEOPLE OR AN ORGANIZATION**

CORE VALUES OF PUBLIC SERVANT LEADERSHIP

- **STEWARDSHIP OF PUBLIC TRUST**

Public servants should be held to the highest standards of integrity.

- **COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC GOOD**

Deep rooted belief in the value of public service and a strong commitment to the public good.

KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC SERVANT LEADERSHIP

- Holding a Public Servant Leadership Position does not Necessarily Make You the Smartest Person in the Room.
- Communicate. Communicate. Communicate.
- Take Advice from Others.
- Transparency.
- Successful Leadership is a Team Sport.
- Never Let the Vision Fade from Sight.
- Inspire Others to Achieve a Common Goal or Purpose through Collaboration.

TABLETOP DISCUSSION

**What can NADO, a National Organization, Do To Assist
in Building and Strengthening a Local RDO?**



RURALSTRONG

The RuralStrong podcast explores the people, partnerships, and projects driving economic growth in rural America. Hosted by veteran economic developer and Southwest Tennessee Development District Executive Director Joe Barker, this podcast dives into real-world stories of community transformation, major industrial recruitment and the challenges and opportunities facing rural regions today.

From leadership and collaboration to workforce and infrastructure, RuralStrong brings firsthand insights from the voices shaping rural progress.

RuralStrong can be found on:

Spotify open.spotify.com/show/2dwglpcuZRmUPaBRkGXqa3

YouTube youtube.com/@RuralStrong



Joe W. Barker Consulting

Build Your Local Leadership Capacity

Joe W. Barker has been involved with local government and not-for-profit organizations for more than five decades. The success or failure of these organizations, mostly, depends on effective leadership.

“Building Local Leadership Capacity” is a two-hour training session focused on essential leadership traits: Creating A Vision, Building Trust, Communication, Team Building, and Asset-Based Planning.

Contact Joe about the Conference Attendee Discount for this training.

jwbarkerconsulting@gmail.com or 731.607.5616

