

SONOMA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

BEST Implementation Action Agenda



Market Street took what was a raw plan for economic development and set us on the path to success. By working with our Board and key investors, the Market Street consultants were able to help us create solid objectives with tactics that were metrics driven. So often investors in economic development programs expect immediate and flashy results, but because of the deep experience that Market Street has in this field, those expectations were refined to become realistic and practical.

Carolyn Stark, Executive Director, Sonoma County BEST

Background

In March 2011, Sonoma County launched **BEST**, a strategic plan designed to respond to the challenges of the recession and improve the region's economy through business growth and job creation. **BEST** represents a bold collaboration between the private and public sectors to foster long term economic vitality across the community. With a solid framework in place, initial funding secured, and initial staff hired, Sonoma County turned to *Market Street Services* in 2012 to ensure that the transition from the planning and fundraising stages to implementation was as efficient as possible.

The original **BEST** plan included goals and action steps and a selection of program metrics, but Sonoma County **BEST** retained *Market Street* to develop a roadmap that expounds upon the strategy and provides actionable tactics to support its implementation. In addition to these tactical recommendations, *Market Street* also provided a discussion of budget and staffing dynamics necessary to support effective implementation, as well as an expanded list of potential performance metrics to gauge implementation success that follow a best practice approach. Input from a variety of stakeholders throughout Sonoma County informed the revisions of tactical recommendations and the assignment of implementation priorities.

The implementation plan was designed to maximize **BEST's** ability to accelerate its implementation efforts and further refine its value proposition moving forward. Toward that end, *Market Street* developed sixty-nine new tactics under the five original goals of **BEST** and suggested eight revisions to existing tactics.

Implementation Highlights

Since the implementation began in 2012, Sonoma County BEST has met fifty-two percent of their adopted 5 year goals and has seen some tangible results.



- Midway through 2014, BEST has reached 65% of its five year goal of creating 2,570 new jobs in the community. To date nearly 2,000 jobs have been created.
- In 2013, Forbes Magazine listed Santa Rosa and Sonoma County as one of the Best Places for Businesses and Careers. Also, in 2013, senior economist Jerry Nicklesburg of UCLA's Anderson School of Management stated that job growth in the area has outpaced growth in the Bay Area, the state, and the nation.
- One of the early areas of focus for BEST has been business retention and expansion and their efforts have been rewarded. Amy's Kitchen, the natural and organic food business, recently decided to bring jobs back to Sonoma County from out of state. Another large Sonoma manufacturer worked with BEST and the City of Petaluma to attract a Southern California company who will invest \$5 million to build a sterilization facility for area medical and life science manufacturers, which will not only help to attract new medical and life science manufacturers but will allow current ones to expand.
- After a local company laid off seventy employees including many highly sought after formulation and analytical chemists, Sonoma County BEST partnered with the local city's Economic Development Manager to help place these employees at other Sonoma County companies to ensure that these highly talented employees remained in Sonoma County.
- A key strategy for BEST has been to leverage its ability to facilitate "business to business" connections and relationships. BEST has founded two industry groups – one in the food manufacturing industry called "FIG" and one in the advanced manufacturing industry called "TIG." These groups focus economic growth through collective impact. The TIG recently held its first Supplier Fair, where ten original equipment manufacturers in Sonoma County met with over 100 local suppliers in an effort to build closer relationships with local suppliers and retain in the region as much as 10% of what was estimated to be a \$500M purchasing spend by these companies.
- BEST began a formal partnership with MANEX, a private non-profit corporation under contract to the U.S. Department of Commerce to provide services to small and mid-sized manufacturers in Northern California. Together they will work to create solutions for manufacturing growth and profitability by helping manufacturers reduce costs, increase revenue, and develop a strong workforce.
- In mid 2014, BEST launched their completely redesigned website. The new website was designed based on best practice sites to aid in business attraction efforts by capturing more leads for relocations. To complement the new website, BEST also developed a secure forum for online discussion for members of its industry groups. A marketing campaign is also in the works.
- BEST launched an initiative in 2014 with its economic development partners to assess the region's ability to attract, retain, and help grow industry. Through a deeply collaborative effort, this "scorecard" is being used as an honest assessment of strengths and weaknesses and will be used in many ways to help build economic success in Sonoma County.