Final Report

(Project Title)
“An Environmental Scan of Trends Impacting County Fair Boards in Appalachian Ohio”

(Sub-Contract Grantee Name/Authorized Signatory/Address/Phone)
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ATP Project Outline

Project Description:

Our students conducted an environmental scan and survey of county fair boards located throughout southeastern Ohio to assess how county fairs operate and fund themselves throughout the region. This information could help all the fair boards know what activities have potential for generating revenue year round at their facilities.

Our students interviewed members of seven fair boards in Belmont, Jefferson, Monroe, Muskingum, Ross, Scioto and Vinton Counties. The primary purpose of the interviews was to determine the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats to each fair board. Students also sought to ascertain each fair board’s major sources of revenue and developed a list of recommendations for change to enhance year round programming and revenue generation by county fair boards in the region.

Activities:

1. Students participated in a seminar where they learned how to construct a survey and to conduct semi-structured field interviews.
2. Students conducted interviews with fair board members of various county fair boards throughout the Appalachian Ohio region.
3. Students reviewed the strengths and weaknesses of their local county fair boards and developed problem-solving strategies for revenue generation.
4. Students presented their findings at the ATP conference in Washington, D.C., on December 2-4, 2010.
5. Students created a poster board presentation at the conference also.
6. Students shared their findings with local county fair board members.

Project Outcomes:

- The students learned how to conduct research and made recommendations that can promote action that can lead to sustainability of county fair boards in southeastern Ohio by capitalizing on their assets.
- The students developed leadership and civic-capacity through engagement in this project.
- Through the seminar, the students developed a greater awareness of their communities and the work of the ARC in their communities.
- This project increased the working relationships between Ohio University and local, state and federal partners in the work of the Commission.
- Students had the opportunity to experience various parts of the region and work with the Commission in Washington, DC.
• This project helped increase the working relationships among the institutions of higher education, the community and the Appalachian Regional Commission.
• This project helped improve the coordination of research and service efforts to promote the long-term sustainability of the county fairgrounds.
• Students prepared a poster board that was presented at the ATP conference.
• Students prepared a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the project that was presented at the ATP conference.
• Students shared the findings of the study with local county fair board members.

Problems Encountered:

It is challenging to coordinate an educational experience for students located on five different campuses throughout a large geographical region. Yet, this is the challenge for many in our region and with the assistance of technology and the use of distance learning classrooms and SKYPE we were able to accomplish our mission. The Quarter system presents problems in that we get started late and have to complete our project early. This makes for a very intense project that would be better served by the semester system that Ohio University will move to in the fall of 2010.

Program Continuation and Sustainability:

As it has been in the past, this was a wonderful educational experience for our students in every way. Our students got the opportunity to learn more about Appalachia, who they are as Appalachians and the role the Appalachian Regional Commission plays in assisting economic development in their region. They also learned some valuable research skills. All of this will enhance these students’ abilities to be active participants in their communities through service. This will have a lasting effect throughout their lifetime.

Unfortunately, I have just been asked to serve our university as an Interim Dean of another campus, in addition to my regular duties as Dean of the Eastern Campus. I love this project and believe in it wholeheartedly, but I will not be able to be the advisor for this program next year.

If I had stayed on, I think we would have sought to conduct a more in-depth study and considered putting on a regional conference for all county fair boards to more broadly share and learn from one another as they attempt to adapt to a changing environment for county fair boards in the future.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

Our students, county fair board members and myself learned much by participating in this project. We took time to reflect upon the history of county fair boards, assess the present status of these boards and consider what it will take to sustain the rural county fair into the 21st century. These fairs have contributed considerably to the development of rural youth in our communities and are an important part of our culture. However, to sustain themselves these
fair boards will have to change to survive in future years by diversifying funding streams, promoting year round events to generate additional funds, surveying the youth to ascertain their changing interests and needs, diversifying fair activities to reach a larger audience, and assessing alternative marketing strategies such as internet based marketing. It is readily apparent that our county fair boards are beginning to move in this direction and in time, they will make the necessary adjustments to thrive in the 21st century by maintaining their core values and traditions, with the addition of new activities and programming that emerge in the future to serve their local needs.

One final recommendation: I think it would be very valuable for our students and faculty to have the opportunity to visit the ARC offices to learn about the challenges the ARC faces in attempting to promote economic development in the region. This could have a major impact on our students and the kinds of projects we might pursue in the ATP.