

On the Brink...

Spring 2009

When I became the East Texas Council of Governments Executive Director in June, 2007, one of my top priorities was to get out in the region and determine how our customers viewed the organization. I capitalized on nearly every opportunity to ask our customers three questions:

- 1) What is ETCOG doing that it shouldn't be doing?
- 2) What isn't ETCOG doing that it should be doing?
- 3) How can ETCOG serve you better?



Many were sincerely complimentary of ETCOG. Others seemed to struggle to answer these questions. One East Texas leader summarized a perception I heard too many times, albeit stated in different ways. The customer indicated he was aware that ETCOG secured grants for the region, but beyond that he wasn't sure what the organization did. As Executive Director, I should be (and was) alarmed. If even one of our customers cannot readily identify at least three of ETCOG's specific service deliverables that is relevant and value-added to their community, we have a problem. Responsibility for this lack of knowledge did not lay with the customer, but rather with our organization that for whatever reason was not completely successful in getting the message out about ETCOG's activities in Economic Development, 9-1-1 Emergency Services, Criminal Justice, Transportation, Workforce Development and programs and services for senior citizens.

We have been getting better over the last year, in large part because we created a new Public Information Officer position and hired a stellar professional who is paying attention to our public communications on a daily basis. But we are also improving because there is a paradigm shift occurring within ETCOG and it is taking hold little by little with each passing day. Everyone at ETCOG is now personally responsible for looking for ways to improve our service. As a result, some new and exciting things are beginning to happen.

For example, in mid-December of this last year, we were made aware of company in a small town in our region that advised they could immediately create 25 net-new jobs with a full benefits package; but they could not find a suitable training facility. ETCOG's workforce team, including our subcontractor, Arbor Training & Education Services, took immediate action. A demonstration project was initiated. A contract was developed which provided the company with the use of the East Texas Workforce Solutions Board's fully equipped mobile training unit which was parked next to their facility for five days. What was the result? Twenty-Five jobs with benefits were created by the end of January, 2009! (These numbers are subject to final verification). The company's rental price for use of the unit was to create the jobs and complete the training, with accountability provisions built in the contract if they failed to deliver. This is just one example of a recent success. Stay tuned--in the coming months you will discover ETCOG is on the brink of many more successes that should never leave our customers grasping for examples of what we do!