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## High Road Economic Development: Best Practices

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## High Road Economic Development: Best Practices

### Abstract

High Road Economic Development is an economic development strategy that emphasizes high quality jobs, environmental sustainability, and broad access to opportunities for a diversity of businesses and workers. High Road Economic Development prioritizes both a healthy economy and a healthy community. It ensures that public dollars result in both public good and economic growth, and that economic benefits are distributed equitably. The following list captures many best practices of High Road Economic Development. In a high road project, these principles and practices would apply to any developers, businesses, contractors and sub-contractors involved in the project and often would be reflected in an enforceable community benefit agreement.

### Keywords

Buffalo, Economic Development, High Road Economic Development, Policy Brief, PPG, PDF

## High Road Economic Development: Best Practices

*Tina Meyers*

High Road Economic Development is an economic development strategy that emphasizes high quality jobs, environmental sustainability, and broad access to opportunities for a diversity of businesses and workers. High Road Economic Development prioritizes both a healthy economy and a healthy community. It ensures that public dollars result in both public good and economic growth, and that economic benefits are distributed equitably.

The following list captures many best practices of High Road Economic Development. In a high road project, these principles and practices would apply to any developers, businesses, contractors and sub-contractors involved in the project and often would be reflected in an enforceable community benefit agreement.

**High Road Practices** are used by policy-makers, businesses, community groups, and others to increase value and decrease waste.

### Workforce Opportunities

**Quality Jobs.** On the high road, businesses see high-skilled labor as an asset. Jobs are high quality and high wage, with opportunities for career advancement. Worker training and skill certification programs increase the productivity of workers while capturing that productivity in income. Workers are paid a living wage, which in turn raises company performance standards and increases productivity. Workers are organized and represented, and employers pledge neutrality regarding organizing.

*Specific practices include:*

- Employers pay all employees a living wage, indexed to inflation.
- All employees are entitled to comprehensive benefits including vacation and sick days, regardless of their status as full- or part-time.
- A set percentage of employees are hired for full-time work.
- For all construction projects, employers institute project labor agreements and pay a prevailing wage to workers.
- Employers make neutrality agreements regarding union representation.
- Employers offer quality and affordable child care for all workers and nearby residents.

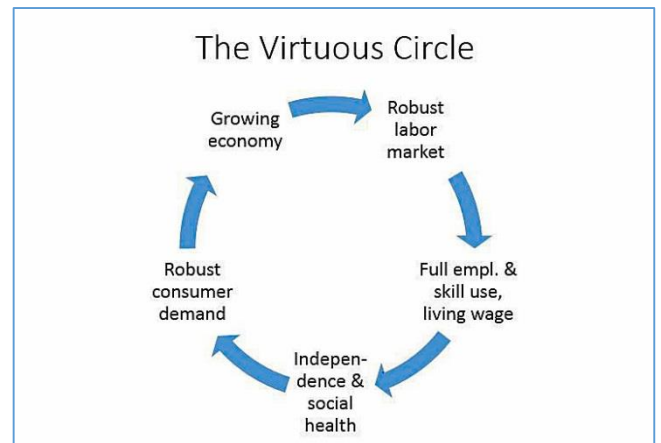
**Diverse and Local Workers.** Businesses prioritize the hiring of a local and diverse workforce, with an emphasis on minority, women, and low-income workers and those workers in the nearby neighborhoods most impacted by the business development.

*Specific practices include:*

- Employers hire set percentages of local, low-income, women and minority workers for construction and permanent jobs.
- Job notification is targeted to local, low-income, women and minority workers. Employers ensure that job opportunities are advertised through channels that effectively reach such workers and dedicate staff members to assist with this process.
- Employers provide access to job training and workforce development programs for local, low-income, women and minority workers. Training programs prepare workers for high quality jobs and career ladders.

### Business Opportunities

**Efficient and Profitable.** High Road Economic Development carefully targets public subsidies and tax dollars, with an emphasis on conserving precious resources and concentrating development where infrastructure already exists. Union pension funds are invested in local and responsible businesses to encourage and reward local high road businesses and allow workers to gain returns on investment.



*Specific practices include:*

- Public subsidies are contingent on employment of high road practices and restricted to projects that embrace and carry out high road principles.

**Diverse and Local Businesses.** Development on the high road prioritizes the purchase of goods and services from local businesses and those owned and operated by women and minorities. In addition to injecting money into the local economy, this practice also increases the development’s ties to, and support from, its surrounding community.

*Specific practices include:*

- Local, Women, and Minority- Owned Business Procurement. Firms/businesses/developments will contract with a set percentage of local, women and minority-owned businesses for all projects, including construction projects.

“There is another vision for life in America. It is one in which the cascading effects of the low price, low wage economy and its vicious circle spiraling downward in a race to the bottom is replaced with a different cascade creating a ‘virtuous circle.’”

-*Made in America Again, Inc.*



- Firms/ businesses/ developments offer monetary and technical support and procurement preference for worker-owned cooperative businesses.

## Community Building Opportunities

**Community Building and Affordable Housing.** High road developments locate employment and business in cities and inner-ring suburbs where people, skills and infrastructure already exist in a densely packed way. This helps to alleviate poverty by placing jobs closer to the low-income people who need them.

High road development also preserves, and even increases, the vibrancy and livability of the surrounding urban area, without pushing existing residents out of their homes or decreasing the social and economic diversity of the community. It ensures the availability of quality, affordable housing in neighborhoods near the development.

*Specific practices include:*

- Anti-displacement practices to assist nearby residents to stay in their current homes. These may include property tax assessment freezes for nearby residents and financial assistance for home repairs, renovations and energy efficiency measures.
- Anti-gentrification and anti-speculation practices to promote the economic and social diversity of the area. These practices may include land trusts, restrictions on land purchases, and community approval for new uses.
- Affordable housing practices such as a minimum number of affordable housing units in all new and existing developments.
- Construction and new development that is consistent with the existing neighborhood aesthetics and urban fabric and maximizes historic preservation. New and existing developments may incorporate community-approved public art by local artists.

**Accountable and Transparent.** High road projects are accountable and transparent to their local communities. At a high road project or development, community members are workers, run businesses, and provide the urban fabric in which it thrives. Community members have a say in how the project is run and have a way of holding the project accountable if agreements are not upheld.

*Specific practices include:*

- High road practices memorialized in enforceable contract language, such as a community benefits agreement.
- Annual public reporting requirements for business developments, including reporting of hiring practices, worker demographics, and other status updates.
- Financial contribution by developers and companies for implementation of various high road practices.



**Collaboration and Inclusivity.** High Road Economic Development emphasizes collaboration over competition and often unites a wide range of partners that would not otherwise work together: cities and inner-ring suburbs, workers and environmentalists, organized labor and business owners, and people of different races and incomes.

*Specific practices include:*

- Ongoing business collaboration and interaction with community representatives, including approval authority by a board of community representatives for any future development and new businesses, and annual meetings with community members.

### **Environmental and Health Opportunities**

**Environmentally Sustainable.** High Road Economic Development minimizes environmental impact and maximizes innovation and sustainability. It reduces sprawl by increasing urban re-development instead of developing untouched farm and forest land. It uses existing buildings and infrastructure and increases the market for environmentally-conscious businesses that use green technology and sustainable practices.

*Specific practices include:*

- Promotion of energy efficiency throughout the project.
- Design and construction projects adhere to green building standards, such as LEED.
- Maximizing recycling and minimizing waste on a project-wide scale.
- Employing green infrastructure and other stormwater management techniques.
- Promotion of alternative transportation options and incentivizing non-auto transportation.
- Planting trees and other hardy, native vegetation throughout the project.
- Bicycle and pedestrian- friendly street design, including traffic calming features.
- Extensive utilization of renewable energy.
- Promotion of water conservation measures throughout the project.

**Emphasis on Health.** High road development priorities the health and wellness of its surrounding community by minimizing pollution and promoting alternative transportation and healthy living.

*Specific practices include:*

- Providing healthy food options throughout the project and for nearby residents.
- Employing community health workers to ensure that workers, visitors and nearby residents are connected with important health coverage and social services.
- Financial and other assistance for nearby neighborhoods to renovate, maintain and create housing that is lead-safe, asthma-safe, and otherwise healthy.

## Select Sources on High Road Economic Development

Green for All, “High Road Agreements”

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