

The GRIT (Growing Rural Independence Together Through Jobs) Project: An Integrated Approach to the Economic Empowerment of Rural America

- I. **Mission:** The GRIT Project (GRIT) is a collaborative approach designed to maximize Federal, State & County Resources in rural Ohio (OMJ, Common Pleas/Drug Court(s), K-12 School Systems, Colleges & Universities, Economic Development [JobsOhio/APEG], Jobs & Family Services, Drug Treatment Providers, Businesses and Other Not-For-Profit Agencies) to build a high demand workforce and stimulate economic growth through public/private partnerships. GRIT is focused on a five-county area in Southern Ohio that includes Adams, Brown, Highland, Pike and Scioto counties. ***Leaders from Adams County spearheaded this initiative, building grassroots support and they are currently implementing Phase I of the program to target 1000 participants. They have maximized their local agency dollars (state & federal), partnered with local business leaders and the education system to launch the program. The goal is to create hope through career choices and opportunity for local and virtual jobs.***
- II. **Problem:** The State of Ohio has hundreds of programs to support people in poverty and distress. What is needed are more scalable programs that move a larger percentage of people out of poverty and towards hope - which is defined as the opportunity for a living wage job that creates purpose and meaning through contribution & self-sufficiency. We need a coordinated and widely agreed upon approach to delivery for the region that maximizes the financial investment of services through new tools and technology that target the historic limitations of current models while providing an end-to-end solution that focuses on: individual empowerment; targeted skill development; and both local and virtual job opportunities.
- III. **Strategy:** GRIT utilizes a multi-organizational approach focused on addressing the barriers that impede economic freedom (individuals/families earning a living wage). Community leaders from both private and public entities have come together and agreed that the lack of living wage employment opportunities is at the root of many of the social ills of the rural community. While most economic development initiatives start with the need to create or fill jobs (Demand), the GRIT project recognizes that rural transformation must give equal attention to the people (Supply). If the supply is not able to work due to barriers that include generational poverty/dependency, opioid and other drug addiction, criminal records, limited transportation, limited childcare, limited access to tools and technology, or lack of educated or skilled workers, then the region will not be able to retain or attract employers. As a result, the GRIT project focuses on systematically and collaboratively addressing the barriers of the supply chain while simultaneously working on the attraction of jobs by utilizing an end-to-end tool kit (GetWorkerFIT) to access, coach, train and place all eligible workers in jobs within the counties in which the residence live through the support of local employers and national employers focused on hiring a remote workforce (Virtual Job Centers).
 - Collaboration & Transparency Across all Agencies & Organizations – Across Counties
 - Focused & Shared Process
 - First, there has to be a clear understanding about what is meant by the workforce “gap” and the common language GRIT has adopted is to talk about Supply and Demand. Most economic development initiatives start with the need to create or fill jobs (Demand), The GRIT Project recognizes that rural transformation must give equal attention to the people (Supply). If the supply is not able to work due to barriers that include generational poverty/dependency, opioid and other drug addiction, criminal records, limited transportation, limited childcare, limited access to tools and technology, or lack of educated or skilled workers, then the region will not be able to retain or attract employers. As a result, the GRIT project focuses on systematically and collaboratively addressing the barriers of the supply chain while simultaneously working on the attraction of jobs.
 - Second, it is believed that the majority of those persons being served by The GRIT Project will need additional education and training but historically there has been a breakdown between training providers (educational institutions) and demand (employers). GRIT will promote Supply and Demand informed creation of workforce training program within educational institutions and by training providers.
 - Third, due to the limited opportunities related to high demand living wage jobs and the limited access to the internet, GRIT will support the development of shared workspace.

- Fourth, with the support of GetWorkerFIT, participants need to have opportunity and exposure to the virtual job market and how to participate in it.
- Common Approach – GetWorkerFIT Toolkit
- Common Data for Decision Making
- Virtual Job Centers

IV. **Targeted Actions:** The GRIT Project will target 7,500-10,000 residence of Adams, Brown, Highland, Pike and Scioto counties from January 2019-June 2021 to:

- Assess the interest, aptitudes, values and personality of each participant and match them to high demand jobs (locally and remotely)
- Create educational/training plans for 100% of the participants
- Create and share data on the “ability” and “interest” of the supply chain with economic development leaders and educators to inform recruitment efforts and workforce development training program creation
- Provide wrap-around services to remove barriers to individual plan success
- Support 75% of participants to engage in targeted education/training to match demand
- Establish viable childcare and after-care programs in each county
- Establish virtual shared workspace centers for remote employees (Virtual Job Centers)
- Support 50% of participants in finding work in the five-county area for local employers or remote employers (Virtual Job Centers)

V. **Timetable:** (Contingent on funding availability)

- January 2019-June 2021

VI. **Targeted Outcomes:**

- Education:
 - High School Graduates are Work Ready with a Post-Secondary/Education Plan
 - Increased Participation in Post-Secondary Education
 - Increased Completion in Post-Secondary Education
- Jobs
 - Increased Job Placement
 - Increased 90-Day Job Retention
- Economics
 - Increased Wages
 - Decrease in Those Living Below/Near the Poverty Level
 - Increase in Small Business Development
 - Increase in Local Sales Tax Revenue
- Social
 - Drug Usage Prevention
 - Reduce Relapse & Recidivism Rates
 - Great Economic Inclusion of All Persons Eligible for Work

VII. **Proposed Budget:**

- Approximately \$20M over 2-year (2019-2021) budget cycle