The background of the entire page is a collage of US dollar bills. At the top, there is a blue horizontal band. Below it is a white band containing the main title. The rest of the page is a grayscale image of various dollar bills, including a prominent portrait of George Washington on a one-dollar bill.

NOW MORE THAN EVER

A "CALL FOR ACTION" TO STRENGTHEN WEST VIRGINIA'S
CAPACITY FOR OBTAINING FEDERAL GRANT DOLLARS

The logo for West Virginia, featuring a stylized sunburst or flower-like shape above the text.

West Virginia
A VISION SHARED
November 2008

Presented to:
The Vision Shared Board of Directors

Presented by:
The Vision Shared State/Federal Relations Team
Patrick J. Farrell, Chairman

NOW MORE THAN EVER
A “CALL FOR ACTION” TO STRENGTHEN WEST VIRGINIA’S
CAPACITY FOR OBTAINING GRANT DOLLARS

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The Vision Shared State/Federal Relations Team acknowledges the Vision Council 2007 meeting attendees for the background research and deliberations completed that provided a solid foundation to the team’s work that resulted in this “Call for Action”. Those who participated include:

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Call for Action	3
The Background Work	3
Action One	4
Action Two.....	8
Action Three.....	9
Summary	9

A “Call for Action” to Strengthen West Virginia’s Capacity for Obtaining Federal Grant Dollars

Call for Action

The Vision Shared State/Federal Focus Area Team recommends for the Vision Shared Board of Directors to advance the following actions to the appropriate parties:

Action One: Establish a Governor’s Office level Office of Grants Coordination with the goal of increasing West Virginia’s share of federal and other grant dollars through state agencies, local governments, non-profits and public-private sector partnerships.

Action Two: Develop a dedicated statewide non-profit association in order to enhance the non-profit sector capacity in a variety of ways such as providing technical assistance to increase grants acquisition and effective grants management.

Action Three: Continue the work of the State/Federal Relations Focus Area Team to identify additional ways to enhance relationships between the federal government and West Virginia that will benefit the state’s economic well-being.

The Background Work

West Virginia has not developed a structured process to study the effectiveness of state and federal relationships, primarily due to a historically strong congressional delegation and federal programs that provide significant funding to the state. Anecdotal evidence points to a need to understand better why West Virginia is not winning a larger share of available competitive grants and why potential federal dollars are being “left on the table.” Many believe the inability for West Virginia to obtain certain grants is based on a lack of collaboration and the limited capacity of many grant worthy organizations.

In addition, the Governor’s Office has expressed interest in pursuing a more focused approach to the planning and acquisition of federal grants, especially those that are competitive in nature. Further, the better coordinated the overall approach regarding federal grants, the greater the opportunity to be effective in identifying, acquiring and managing grants within West Virginia.

Vision Council

The Vision Council, a special component within Vision Shared that focuses on emerging issues for consideration, was asked to recommend a strategy to address the state/federal relationships issue. There had been earlier interest in this topic by the Governor’s Office. The Vision Council, with additional invited guests familiar with the topic area, met in November 2007 to consider the potential for enhancing state/federal relationships. Extensive advance research material was developed including two presentations, one of which focused specifically on West Virginia. The Council members studied the material which included detailed examples from other states that had implemented initiatives regarding state/federal relationships.

The Council’s review concluded that there appears to be missed grant opportunities, duplication of effort, and in some cases a lack of strategy and focus which results in a potential loss of revenue. With much need in the state, every chance to increase revenues for the right reasons should be considered.

The Vision Council deliberations on the topic also surfaced innovative ways to garner federal grants for the state. A number of ideas were mentioned from engaging private industry to more involvement from organized labor. The Council determined that a number of potential collaborative opportunities exist to leverage what is currently available and to enhance new opportunities not yet explored. In essence, the Council’s outcomes wholeheartedly endorsed a focused state effort at the Governor’s level, but also advocated building a model that would increase the amount of federal dollars to advance the economic well-being of West Virginia.

The Council determined that a more detailed study of the state/federal relationships topic was worthy of

consideration as a priority for Vision Shared. The Council asked Vision Shared to assemble a diverse team to review the Council's research, reach consensus on the merit of a Governor's Office level grants office, and to develop specific recommendations for the model. A critical goal of this effort would be to improve West Virginia's capacity to win competitive grants, especially in an era where congressional appropriations ("earmarks") may be waning. Grants obtained could be used at the state, regional or local government levels, as well as configured in various combinations with non-profits or private industry.

Vision Shared Focus Area Team

Vision Shared assembled a diverse team including members from state government agencies and non-profit organizations. Commercial businesses and the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation were also represented. Several members had been a part of the Vision Council's work.

Through a special meeting and a team member survey, the team discussed the Vision Council's task. Eric Brenner, director of the Maryland Governor's Office of Grants, provided the team with a detailed consultation on best practices in this area. Director Brenner had extensive experience working with similar issues in other states before filling his position in Maryland. This process verified the need for improved federal/state relations and validated the potential benefits of creating a new office. The team also worked with members of the Vision Shared Non-Profit Capacity Focus Area Team because of the importance of understanding the non-profit context for this work.

The remaining sections of this "Call for Action" provide details for implementing each of the three actions offered.

Action One

Establish a Governor's Office level Office of Grants Coordination with the goal of increasing West Virginia's share of federal and other grant dollars through state agencies, local governments, non-profits and public-private sector partnerships.

Based on the experiences reported in West Virginia and the study of best practices in several states, it is recommended that West Virginia establish a full-time office with responsibilities centered on improving acquisition of federal grants, especially competitive ones. We do not know of any existing full-time position or state level unit that has these responsibilities.

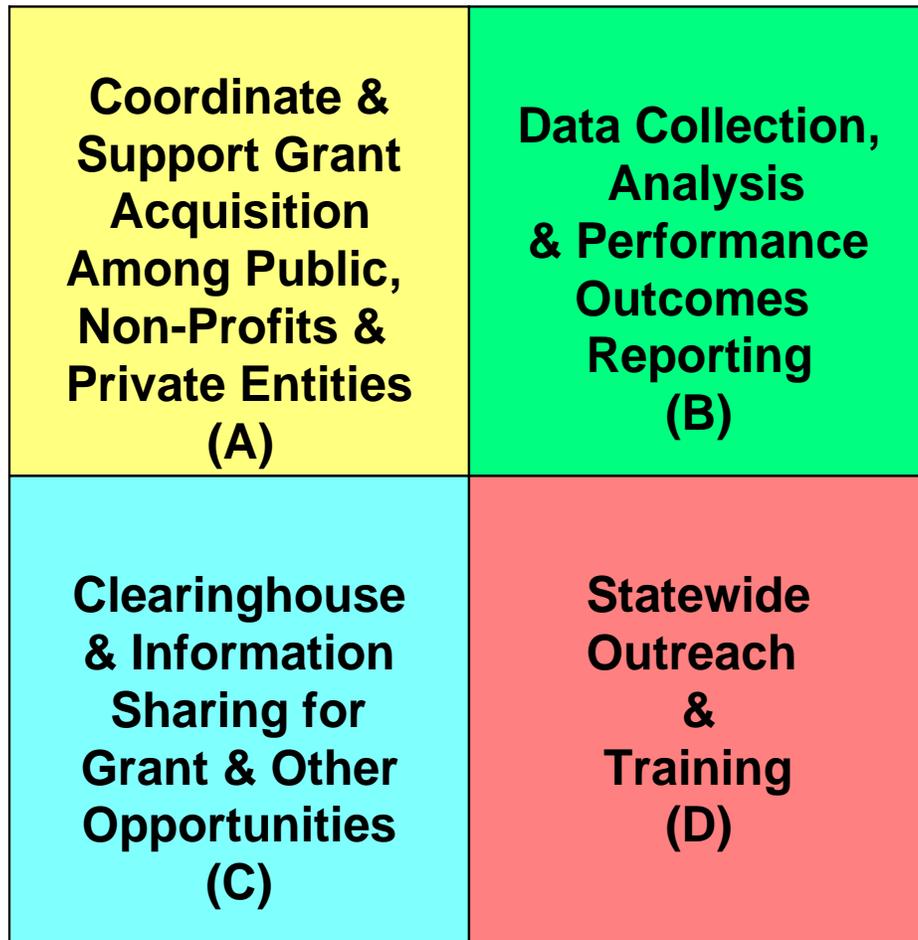
The Vision Shared State/Federal Relations Focus Area Team recommends creating an entity at the state level to facilitate consortiums between the government, private sector, non-profits and education institutions to achieve a competitive advantage for collaborating parties. The team concludes that a coordinated, entrepreneurial approach to identifying and creatively pursuing grants will deliver the best results. This will require as a cornerstone, state government partnering with outside agencies in a manner to "open up" the process of organizations - public and private - working with government. This currently is not happening as efficiently as it could be in the future.

In addition to the potential to increase the number and type of federal grants the state can obtain, it is important for the state to ensure compliance with the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006, an act of Congress that requires the full public disclosure of all entities or organizations receiving federal funds beginning in fiscal year 2007. The greater accountability and reporting by all types of organizations required by this act can be a natural outgrowth of establishing a dedicated office that can provide the appropriate training and technical support to those that need it.

Suggested Model Background

Diagram 1 depicts the four primary focus areas envisioned for this newly created office. These focus areas have been identified as successful in terms of maximizing benefits elsewhere, and are also suited for West Virginia. Not all areas will receive the same degree of time devoted to them on an on-going basis. There may be a greater expenditure of time in each area during the “start up” phases. In some cases, there are existing organizations, activities or direct efforts in place that can support development of the focus areas.

Diagram 1 Four Primary Focus Areas



The following table provides more specific roles envisioned for the new office mapped to the four primary focus areas in Diagram 1. Some of these roles will require further development to implement the concept once the process has begun.

Possible Specific Role/Responsibility	Focus Area
1. Coordinate state agency activities to identify and win competitive federal grants consistent with the policy goals of the Governor's Office and ensure that grants received are administered efficiently and effectively.	A
2. Work closely with West Virginia's Congressional delegation to ensure strong relationships with key federal agencies that best are able to provide direct grant assistance to the state.	C, A
3. Assist local governments, colleges, universities, community-based, and faith-based organizations in identifying federal grant opportunities and provide them with technical and programmatic support including awareness of assistance available through state agencies.	A, C
4. Identify specific opportunities to convene private sector parties and public agencies to partner on competitive grants.	A, B
5. Facilitate partnerships among state agencies, businesses, non-profits, and other interested parties at the state, regional, and local levels.	B, D
6. Measure, track, and report federal funding to the state including reporting summaries. This may include seeing what data is already gathered and reported.	B
7. Conduct research and other data collection that provides objective information regarding the status of grants acquisition and completion in West Virginia (data report on impact, progress, etc.).	B
8. Assist local governments and community-based organizations in identifying federal grant opportunities, as well as state or private foundation grants that are available.	C
9. Assist West Virginia's private sector (e.g., small businesses, entrepreneurs) in identifying federal procurement opportunities and find creative ways for public/private partnerships to increase the number of competitive grants submitted and won by West Virginia.	C
10. Develop and use communication tools such as email alerts, website, meetings, newsletters, etc. to support the office's work.	C, D
11. Work with existing resources committed to provide capacity building, grant-writing training, management and other technical assistance through workshops and other development opportunities that will assist state agency staff, local governments and other interested organizations with grant writing, administration and evaluation.	D
12. Introduce state agency officials to grant program officers in government, those in business and industries that may be partners, foundations, etc. and help to maintain and cultivate these relationships over time.	A, C, D
13. Create awareness of a demand for state-specific needs and expertise among federal and other external funders.	B, C, D
14. Mediate conflicts over authority, turf, and territory among state agencies and potentially others regarding competitive grants.	A
15. Anticipate future external funding trends and areas of focus (five, ten, twenty years into the future) and proactively coordinate planning of state resources to capitalize on these trends.	B, C
16. Tell the stories of successes in increasing grants; collect "lessons learned" where less-than-desired results occurred.	B, C
17. Assist the state in its responsibility regarding the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 and other compliance/regulatory matters.	B, D

Other Key Considerations for the Model

The team raised concerns regarding roles this new office should fulfill under the proposed model. The new office should do the following to address these concerns:

- Facilitate grant activity as opposed to being an “approval” office that reviews all grants as the final decision-maker or arbitrator of which grants are pursued or submitted.
- Avoid trying to manage all federal funding coming into the state.
- Provide technical assistance to help develop strong grants (e.g., showing how to get effective support letters, assisting with partnerships) instead of writing all, or part of, the grant submissions.
- Maintain a relatively lean staff.

Beyond the designated roles and responsibilities, the team’s discussions on the potential model offered other considerations that warrant further evaluation when finalizing the way the state will initiate the office.

Office Leadership

The person selected to operate the office should be well-qualified in the topic area and have demonstrated experience and skills to understand the grant process. He or she should have keen insights into the working relationships among all the potential parties from the federal government to the local governments in West Virginia. Data collection and analysis experience, especially as to funding, would also be an advantage. Most importantly, this person must have a strategic and process-oriented focus that not only quickly will prove the value of the office but also help build sustainable long-term benefits to the state.

State Agency Grants Representatives

Most successful models reviewed required each state agency to appoint a higher-level representative to serve as the single point of contact regarding the grant work. In some cases, larger agencies with missions that offer greater potential for grants may have more than one representative. The key is to ensure the representatives are knowledgeable about grants in their respective agencies and have first level decision making authority. Some agencies may not need representatives because of the nature of their work.

Placement of Office

The placement of the office was a significant discussion point for the team. Based on experience in Indiana and Maryland, the initial placement of the office directly within the Governor’s Office reporting to the governor has significant merit. This enabled these states to make the initiative a top priority. For example, in Indiana the governor used an executive order to establish the office and its priority to increase the amount of federal grant dollars coming to the state. Proponents of having the office at the governor’s office level stress the need to have all state agencies recognize the importance of the endeavor. In addition, the advantage of being engaged at cabinet meetings can drive home the importance of the effort. There was concern shared by some that there would be challenges to overcome systemic biases embedded in existing government bureaucracies if the placement is in a specific state agency rather than separated as in the Governor’s Office.

Another model is to have the office director on the governor’s staff, but to be housed in a state agency such as the Department of Administration. This would, in part, signal that the office has more of a coordination role rather than oversight role. There could be a strategy to initiate the office directly within the Governor’s Office and then after a year or two move it to an agency location. Whichever model is selected, there needs to be consideration as to whether the position is a state employee or an at-will employee appointed by the Governor.

Strategic Fit Approach

Considering the potential fit of a grant within the governor’s overall strategic plan for the state is fundamentally important. Pursuing a grant for “grant’s sake” may not be a benefit to West Virginia in the

long run; therefore, as the model is being implemented, there should be processes that assist in considering the long term strategic plan of the state regardless of the nature of the grant or who is seeking it.

Working with Existing Groups

Early work by any new state-level government entity should leverage knowledge gained by existing organizations. In many cases these groups provide programs and services in the areas of grant-writing and grant management. For example, the Regional Planning and Development Councils assist smaller communities in managing grants. WV Grantmakers, a non-profit organization that supports the work of public and private foundations which make grants in WV, is another example that operates in this area.

Advisory Group

The new office should establish a diverse state-wide advisory group to assist with early implementation and outreach because of the significant number of stakeholders in this process. The two Vision Shared teams focused in this area may be a natural place to find individuals who would be valued members of an advisory group.

Suggested Steps for Action One

1. Vision Shared Board of Directors is asked to endorse this action and advance this to the Governor's Office for full consideration.
2. The Vision Shared State/Federal Relations Focus Area Team can provide technical assistance in the final design of the concept. The expertise of individuals such as Eric Brenner from the Maryland Governor's Grants Office should be included.

Action Two

Develop a dedicated statewide non-profit association in order to enhance the non-profit sector capacity in a variety of ways such as providing technical assistance to increase grants acquisition and effective grants management.

As a by-product of the deliberations, the need for a statewide non-profit association surfaced. Previous efforts have identified this need and nonprofit organizations remain interested in developing such an organization. The Vision Shared Non-Profit Capacity Focus Area Team also is a strong advocate for advancing this concept.

There are differences of opinion regarding the ultimate mission, structure and operating processes of such an entity. In states where a strong non-profit association exists efficiencies are realized to help in the areas of grant-writing, grant acquisition, and overall training in the areas of grants management. This group could help identify not only federal opportunities, but also opportunities for pursuing grants from large national foundations. While a handful of groups in the state have previously considered development of a non-profit association as a part of their work, no group to date has actually produced an operable model that has been well-accepted statewide.

The Vision Shared State/Federal Relations Focus Area Team agreed that addressing Action Two concurrently with Action One would open opportunities from the onset to build collaborative models that advance the acquisition of grants throughout the state. Furthermore, the interest in this area has gained momentum and there may be some dedicated funding to help move this initiative along to fruition.

Suggested Steps for Action Two

1. Vision Shared Board of Directors is asked to endorse this action and advance this to the Governor's Office for full consideration.
2. The Vision Shared State/Federal Relations Focus Area Team can provide technical assistance in the final design of the concept. The expertise of individuals such as Eric Brenner from the Maryland Governor's Grants Office should be included.

Action Three

Continue the work of the State/Federal Relations Focus Area Team to identify additional ways to enhance relationships between the federal government and West Virginia that will benefit the state's economic well-being.

Based on the team's charter, there are other issues centered on state/federal relations that should be explored beyond those presented in Action One and Action Two.

These issues include the following:

- Working with existing federal agencies/organizations presently in the state to see how West Virginia can find new opportunities to tap federal resources, including how the West Virginia Development Office can best work with the federal government on economic development issues.
- Focusing study on West Virginia's potential role in supporting the federal government in the areas of homeland security, back-up offices, etc.
- Determining how entities within the state (e.g., universities, local governments, community organizations) best can develop relationships with the federal government that augment the relationship work championed by the congressional delegation.
- Addressing other issues that surface within the team's planning work.

Suggested Steps for Action Three

1. Include the State/Federal Relations Focus Team in the Vision Shared work plan.
2. Invite suggested individuals to be part of the team going forward.
3. Convene a meeting and develop the specific areas that the team would address.

Summary

The Vision Shared State/Federal Relations Focus Area Team has worked diligently to create recommended actions for Vision Shared to advance within the framework of Vision Shared's overall economic development plan. These actions, once fully realized, will significantly contribute to a more prosperous West Virginia at the local, regional and state levels. Much of the expected new resources directly will enhance the well-being of our citizens.

It is anticipated that the capacity-building emphasis and the innovative approaches to engaging private industry and other non-government entities actively in the process will lead to great opportunities for all parties. The team respectfully requests full and positive consideration of the suggestions presented in this "Call for Action." West Virginia needs to move on these **now more than ever**.