

Rhode Island Commerce Corporation
Marketing & Reputation Management Committee

Public Session

Monday, June 9, 2014, 3:30 p.m.

Rhode Island Commerce Corporation

315 Iron Horse Way, Suite 101, Providence, RI

The following were in attendance:

Committee

Maeve Donohue

Judith Diaz

Jason Kelly

Elizabeth Francis

Commerce RI Staff

Marcel Valois

JR Pagliarini

Mike Blazek

Melissa Czerwein

Jennifer Howard

Chris Cannata

Claudia Cardozo

Mr. Valois convened the meeting at 3:36 p.m. announcing that the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation (Commerce RI) fiscal year 2015 budget is being reviewed. He informed the committee that the general assembly's appropriation to the corporation is level-funded for the third consecutive year. With \$5.6 million in expenses and a \$4 million budget, the corporation is drawing from its cash reserves to make up the difference, but this is the last fiscal year that will be feasible.

Mr. Valois told the committee that he will present the budget to the board with a marketing line item that he would like to cover five priorities:

1. Continued support for the GreaterRI website
2. A redesign of the Commerce RI website
3. A resource portal within the Commerce RI website to acknowledge and support the growing Hispanic business population
4. Tourism marketing, which is not funded out of the state hotel tax but is responsible for the whole Rhode Island brand

5. Investment in the Rhode Island Foundation, which is investing in great organizations around the state

He wants to propose a marketing investment plan to the board, knowing that for every dollar put into marketing, the corporation and state will see a \$3-\$4 return.

Commerce RI Website

Ms. Czerwein gave some background on the state website branding, which Commerce RI adopted last year. Now, the corporation has the approval from the governor's office to build a newly branded, business-friendly website.

The corporation will release a full request for proposals to build an all-encompassing website using its experience launching the City Centre Warwick and Greater RI sites. The estimated cost is \$75,000. Mr. Kelly said that this number seemed low.

Ms. Donohue expressed encouragement of the redesign of the homepage of the Greater RI website and asked what the results have been so far. She said the current Commerce RI government site is safe and easy to use, despite being boring. She said it doesn't force people to think, which is the golden rule of website design. She wants to ensure, when the new site does launch, that the corporation does not lose the SEO that came from the ri.gov website. She suggested designing the site based on user profiles and how they will visit and navigate through the site. She said the corporation should conduct a needs assessment survey with communities on the ground talking to businesses.

Latino Web Portal

Mr. Valois told the committee that a group at Commerce RI met with the Latino business community about a month ago and heard their feedback on how they can best be supported.

Ms. Cardozo presented demographic statistics on the Latino population in Rhode Island and their employment and entrepreneur trends. She proposed and launched *Emprendedores Latinos RI* – a Latino-friendly, entrepreneurial web portal for networking, coaching and skills enhancement. She showed pages from the site, which features success stories and a resource directory.

Mr. Valois said this is a young, fast-growing business population in the state, and he wants to integrate the portal into Commerce RI.

Ms. Francis said that this is a step in the recently released economic development plan and suggested not limiting the audience to entrepreneurs. Education and workforce development are huge opportunities to address this population's skills gap, and the roll-out of the site should align with the already released plan.

Ms. Diaz asked to see a long-term vision of the corporation supporting all minority populations. Ms. Donohue sees this site as the first phase of that goal and starting the needs assessment process.

The committee was encouraging of the initiative and wants to see it grow with the help of a leadership venture group; it should be facilitated by Commerce RI and not necessarily owned by the corporation.

Mr. Valois said the intent is to draft an FY15 marketing plan and budget, and this initiative is a part of that. He said he would provide more detail to the committee and board over the next few weeks.

The meeting adjourned at 4:51 p.m.

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