

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE  
GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS  
EASTERN RURAL NORTH DAKOTA BUSINESS COMMUNITY  
FEBRUARY 25, 2004**

**What is the best reason for your business to be in North Dakota?**

- High character/work ethic of people and workforce
- Aggressive involvement by government
- Economic development package
- Large customer base and market area
- University System
- Untapped resources
  - Property available
- Large level of underemployment
  - Talent pool available
- Underserved areas (broadband business)
- Home (great place to be)
- Right-to-work state

**What is the biggest barrier of doing business in North Dakota?**

- Availability of qualified workers
- Perception of climate negatively affects recruitment
- Freight outbound - Need to import trailers
- Location
- Lack of intermodal connections
- Bringing customers to state from outside country
- Customer base is distant
- Inadequate supplier base
- Inadequate insurance availability
- Inadequate natural gas supply (high cost of natural gas)
- Lack of ability or willingness to pay transfer technology services
- Lack of capital - Conservative nature
  - Risk equity
- Investment for buildings in rural areas is difficult to find
- Poor market for physical facilities if business fails
- Drug problem in state (employees)
- Inadequate rural roads - Weight restrictions
- Rising energy costs - Rate of increase
- High property taxes

**What are the key elements to success in your business?**

- Talent pool - Employees
  - Need highly skilled employees
  - Must train employees due to inexperienced workforce
- Excellent infrastructure
  - Roads
- Developing key partnerships
- Access to trade students at State School of Science, Wahpeton
- Good workforce applicant pool in Valley City

**In what ways does the state influence your ability to succeed in North Dakota?**

- Positive Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) partnership

**What one thing could the state do to help your business expand in North Dakota?**

- Increase availability and affordability of risk capital

**What must occur for us to retain and expand job opportunities in North Dakota?**

- Relocation assistance (housing in rural areas)
- Recruitment
- Training programs
- Improve access to federal funds - Costly and time consuming for a small business
- Pay good labor well
  - Labor is an asset
  - Wage suppression mentality needs to be changed
- Build internship programs
  - Cooperation education
- Build business/education partnerships
- Promote homegrown businesses
  - Make people willing to stay
  - Be willing to pay good wages to people who stay
- Improve rural infrastructure and housing
- Improve technical skills of middle-aged people
  - A need to keep educating people

**What is your overall impression of the state's economic growth prospects?**

- Optimistic - Great potential
  - People will look to move to open areas
  - Need to sell the state
- Technology enables growth
- Attitudes are changing - People want growth
- Successful businesses are growing
- Pro-business attitude is growing
- Higher education partnerships are growing

**Do you think there are other states that might be more attractive places to do business? Which and why?**

- Difficult to compete with foreign countries
  - Cheaper labor with no regulation

**Who are the key economic development players in this state and what are their roles?**

- Rural electric cooperatives
- Local development groups
  - Need continued support from states
- Department of Commerce
- City/state/federal cooperation

**Are there any specific changes needed in legislation, regulations, funding, programs, etc.?**

- Decrease health care costs
- Increase access to risk capital (banks are not willing to take risks)
  - Bank of North Dakota may be able to provide this service
- Risk adverse mentality of state residents - Needs to be changed
- Decrease unemployment insurance - Manufacturers pay more

**What is the next step in enhancing the business climate?**

- Increase access to equity investment - Matching programs
- Increase access to risk capital for expansion
- Need to determine how risk can be reduced
  - Spread out risk through many initiatives

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE  
GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS  
GRAND FORKS BUSINESS COMMUNITY  
FEBRUARY 24, 2004**

**What is the best reason for your business to be in North Dakota?**

- Low-cost, highly educated, highly motivated workforce with strong work ethic
- University System
- Room to expand
- Tradition
- Uncharted territory (met a need)

**What is the biggest barrier of doing business in North Dakota?**

- Demographics
- Transportation (air)
- Perception from outside of lack of technology and capability
- Inferiority complex
- Retention of talented workforce in the state
  - Reluctance to pay employees enough
- Lack of access to venture capital
  - Lack of deal flow
  - Risk aversion, depression mentality
- Isolationist attitude
- Lack of awareness of North Dakota on a national and international scale
- Perception that development must come from outside (lack of confidence)
- Inertia - Need positive momentum (cultural and environmental)
- Lack of embracing innovators
  - Protectionism of existing business
- Thin markets - Need to reach out

**What are the key elements to success in your business?**

- Work ethic - Employees care
  - Vested interest
- Good employees from higher education
- Community initiatives for growth
- Flexibility - Adapt to business climate
- Innovation
- Infrastructure in place
- Ability to grow
- Proper marketing
- Luck
- Consistency - Stick to a plan
- University research
- Facilitation of technology transfer
- Trustworthiness - Reputation

**In what ways does the state influence your ability to succeed in North Dakota?**

- Access to government and officials and support
- Access to funds
- Regulatory climate
- Support - Encouraging
- Support science and technology policy, support of which would show state recognition of the importance of these fields (currently lacking such support)
- Invest for growth not just look at the cost - State tends to look at cost
- Inform North Dakota businesses of state and local government contracts (currently lacking this information)
- Promotion of state products

- Provide improved information for suppliers and vendors
- Address problems with performance bonds (standardize guarantee requirements)

**What one thing could the state do to help your business expand in North Dakota?**

- Improve access to business insurance
- Modify PACE loan program requirements
  - Change measurements to gauge success, such as employee number requirements
- Provide marketing infrastructure assistance
- Provide management training (hiring and marketing)
- Assist with workforce development
- Improve attitude (more positive)

**What must occur for us to retain and expand job opportunities in North Dakota?**

- Change self-image and develop positive image outside the state
- Point out do not have to leave the state to succeed
- Embrace success
- Reduce perception of lack of opportunity
- Create state business plan
- Improve job mobility in state (affects retention and recruiting)
  - Spousal mobility

**What is your overall impression of the state's economic growth prospects?**

- Optimistic
  - Need to turn attitudes
  - Need to expand business boundaries
- Concern with the business climates of secondary cities

**Do you think there are other states that might be more attractive places to do business? Which and why?**

**Who are the key economic development players in this state and what are their roles?**

- Universities
- Banks (risk adverse)
  - Bank of North Dakota may fill this void
- State
- Congressional Delegation
- Private sector leaders (need larger presence)
- Bank of North Dakota - Reevaluate criteria for economic development assistance
- North Dakota Development Fund

**Are there any specific changes needed in legislation, regulations, funding, programs, etc.?**

- Improve access to certain markets and venture capital
- Need talent in the state to push innovation (need to market business climate)
- Improve impression
- State needs to look long term
- State and businesses need to be bold and brash (be a leader)
- Use Bank of North Dakota to grow the state
- Need portfolio approach to development
- Increase flexibility
- Increase research productivity at universities
  - Need more assistance from state (such as assistance in meeting money matches)
  - Look at outside partners needed to bring in business

**What is the next step in enhancing the business climate?**

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE  
GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS  
FARGO BUSINESS COMMUNITY  
FEBRUARY 25, 2004**

**What is the best reason for your business to be in North Dakota?**

- Tradition - History
- Native North Dakotan
- People - Responsible, reliable, and honest
- Location
- Access to government
- Work ethic
- Access to local vendors
- University System
- Affordable cost of living

**What is the biggest barrier of doing business in North Dakota?**

- Lack of available employees with required experience (technical workers, skilled workers, and high-tech workers)
- Low unemployment
- Inadequate workforce training
- Climate
- Image - Lack of trust or credibility in professional business  
Need to develop reputation
- Negativity of people
- Need to promote state in positive manner
- Poor self-image
- Lack of venture capital

**What are the key elements to success in your business?**

- Customer focus
- Work ethic (workforce also needs experience)
- Quality employees - Loyalty
- Technology
- Integrity and persistence
- Creativity
- Productivity
- Timeliness
- Competitiveness (North Dakotans are less competitive culturally)
- Build good relationships

**In what ways does the state influence your ability to succeed in North Dakota?**

- Regulatory environment
- Workforce training support (financial assistance for training)
- Loan programs and other incentives
- Workers' compensation
- Lack of barriers to enter business
- Access to state leaders

**What one thing could the state do to help your business expand in North Dakota?**

- Marketing - Corporate business development
- Attract business and people
- Improve image
- Focus on things other than cowboy image  
Promote quality of life, education, and high values  
"Sell" the people of North Dakota as a reason to do business in North Dakota

Balance the image - Social and cultural amenities

- Develop tourism
- Coordinate tourism and business development

**What must occur for us to retain and expand job opportunities in North Dakota?**

- Stop outsourcing to other countries
- Improve flexibility to meet changing needs
- Focus on targeted industries to match the resources of the state
- Improve public/private partnerships
- Reduce duplication
- Improve training and education to meet needs of businesses
- Protect intellectual property
- Improve opportunity for mobility and career of workforce
- Emphasize promoting state
- Attract immigrants and accept diversity

**What is your overall impression of the state's economic growth prospects?**

**Do you think there are other states that might be more attractive places to do business? Which and why?**

- South Dakota
  - Tax environment
- Wisconsin
  - High-tech center, access to capital, connectivity, location, positive attitude, and pride

**Who are the key economic development players in this state and what are their roles?**

- University System
- State
- Venture capitalist
- Students
- Individual networks
- Medical institutions

**Are there any specific changes needed in legislation, regulations, funding, programs, etc.?**

- Control health care costs
  - Tort reform
- Workers' compensation
  - Limit frivolous claims
- Taxation and unemployment insurance do not need any big changes
- Address aging concerns and elder care issues
- Maintain low health insurance costs
- Improve regulatory permitting process
- Encourage new business in new locations with enlightened regulatory and permitting to facilitate process, efficiency, encouragement, and good attitude

**What is the next step in enhancing the business climate?**