

Case study: SCJ Alliance

A Lacey-based planning and engineering firm, SCJ Alliance entered Washington's statewide Economic Gardening program in June 2016. At that time, the company had about 85 employees and more than \$10 million in annual revenue. After completing its Economic Gardening engagement, SCJ opened a new office that is adding jobs and could bolster annual revenue by close to \$1 million.

“The Economic Gardening program really resonated with me because it wasn't for startup companies,” said senior principal Perry Shea, who co-founded SCJ in 2006. “We're a progressive company that's always looking for ways to better understand our clients' issues, deal with industry shifts and stay ahead of a changing environment.”



“The Economic Gardening program was a great experience,” said Perry Shea, senior principal of SCJ Alliance. “The cost and time investment on our part was minor compared to the opportunity we received.”

Over a four-month period, Shea and his senior managers worked with Economic Gardening specialists from the National Strategic Research Team (NSRT), who provided the company with assistance in three key areas:

- **Digital marketing** — The researchers evaluated SCJ's website and social media presence, benchmarking it against 10 regional competitors. “We compared fairly well, although the researchers identified several areas we could improve on,” Shea said. The researchers also made suggestions on how SCJ could improve its efforts to recruit talent through social media.
- **Federal contracting** — Located near Joint Base Lewis-McChord, one of the largest military bases on the west coast, SCJ wanted to win more government work. The Economic Gardening specialists provided a variety of contacts, links and resource documents to help the company beef up its contracting muscle. “Since then, we've connected with a design-build contractor on the base and are now on a team for one of their contracts,” Shea said. “Although the subcontract is an average size for us, it gets our foot in the door and helps us better understand the federal procurement process.”
- **New geographic market opportunities** — After reviewing SCJ's strategic growth plan, the researchers identified 428 target counties in 11 western states based on selected consumer demographic and business data. “The analysis was quite complex because there were so many different data points and ways of looking at the data,” said Wayne Kocina, a geographic

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information systems (GIS) specialist and NSRT team member who led this segment of the engagement. “Yet after creating a metric that evaluated the highest ratio of potential clients to competitors, we were able to narrow the hunt down to five high-priority target counties.”

The GIS mapping was probably SCJ’s biggest takeaway, Shea said, noting the company plans to evaluate at least one other geographic expansion opportunity each year.

When it entered the Economic Gardening program, SCJ had four offices in Washington and one in Denver. Shea and his partners had been considering a new office in nearby Centralia, about 40 miles south of the primary office in Lacey, but wanted to make sure a location there wouldn’t dilute and compete with work in the main office. The data from the Economic Gardening researchers indicated there was, indeed, plenty of work to go around, and SCJ opened a Centralia office in December 2016.

In March 2017, Shea characterized the office’s early performance as “crazy good,” noting it had far exceeded sales and revenue targets during the first three months — and might reach annual goals by mid-July.

Beyond revenue gains, expansion in Centralia has created new leadership opportunities and some needed elbowroom. Four employees relocated from SCJ’s crowded headquarters to open the Centralia office, where Shea anticipates adding three or four new hires. In fact, SCJ expects to create 15-20 new jobs firm-wide by the end of 2017, which includes the new spots in Centralia.

“The Economic Gardening program was a great experience,” Shea said. “In addition to all the new information provided, the researchers were very complimentary of our company, which was reassuring to staff about how we’re moving forward on strategic initiatives. The cost and time investment on our part was minor compared to the opportunity we received.”



The National Center for Economic Gardening is a partnership between the Edward Lowe Foundation and Chris Gibbons. NCEG helps state and regional organizations establish Economic Gardening networks, delivers Economic Gardening services and maintains national standards in training and certification. To learn more, visit www.edwardlowe.org.