

## Come Out to Hear the Roanoke CCLP's 'Big Ideas'

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We've all had days like this. Ones that are at once energizing and exhausting. Filled with mental challenges that leave your brain a bit numb from it all once you reach the finish line.

That describes the first day of the two-day Roanoke Creative Communities Leadership Program seminar.

I and Roanoke's other "creative connectors" gathered at Kirk Avenue Music Hall in downtown Roanoke for a crash course in Richard Florida's 4T's — Technology, Talent, Tolerance, and Territorial Assets — and generated literally hundreds of ideas to reinvigorate the Roanoke region.

We learned about Roanoke "by the numbers" in comparison with 10 benchmark communities identified by the Creative Group: Charleston, S.C.; Greenville, N.C.; Colorado Springs, Colo.; Madison, Wisc.; Chattanooga, Tenn.; Portland, Me; Asheville, N.C.; Ann Arbor, Mich.; Charlottesville, Va.; and Athens, Ga.

Brace yourselves — some of the numbers\* aren't pretty. Roanoke's Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), defined as the counties of Roanoke, Franklin, Botetourt and Craig, ranks near the bottom in many key categories. Creative Class workers: 9th. College graduates or higher: 10th. Five-year job growth: 9th. Total patents: 8th. Median age: 11th (oldest).

But enough about the negatives, many of which we could have guessed. Let's focus on some of the positives.

Roanoke ranks first in home ownership. First in average commute time (shortest). First in arts and recreation. Second in two-year per capita income growth. Fourth in Creative Class workers per 100,000 residents. And, surprisingly, 6th in the "Brain Drain Index," which indicates that we're not losing as many of our best and brightest as one might believe.

We spent most of the day poring over these numbers, exploring and analyzing them from many angles and perspectives. And along the way, each of us wrote down ideas on large sticky notes. Between sessions, we'd gather around four large boards — one for each of the 4 T's — and place our stickies in the most appropriate category.

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The brain power in the room was staggering. I can honestly say that I didn't hear one bad idea (though I'm sure other connectors might disagree).

There's much more I can say, but I'm going to stop here so I can work on our homework assignment. I need to choose one of my ideas and put together a sale pitch to give in the morning, because tomorrow we're going through a "passion voting" exercise to narrow all our ideas down to four initiatives, one for each of the 4 T's.

Then, at 4 o'clock, the community is invited to join us at 22 Kirk Ave. to hear presentations about our initiatives.

Please come join us — we want to pack the place!

\* Sources: U.S. Census, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2003-07, American Community Survey 2005-2007, and Creative Class Group 2009.