



# Resource Development Group

*30 Years of Economic  
Development Fundraising*

## **How Tariffs Could Disrupt Fundraising—and What Economic Development Leaders Can Do About It**

*By RDG Principal Brent Jonas*

As daily news about tariffs and trade realignment dominate the national spotlight, chamber and economic development executives are asking a critical question: *How might this impact our organization's revenue?*

At **Resource Development Group (RDG)**, we've worked directly with chambers and economic development organizations navigating complex economic landscapes for over 30 years. We've seen the impacts of global events like 9/11, the 2008 economic meltdown, and COVID on our clients. More importantly, we've helped our clients *respond* to these events. So, we understand how global shifts—like tariffs—can quickly affect local investment and business behavior.

Whether you're in the middle of a capital campaign or managing a mature investor program, understanding the ripple effects of tariffs can help you stay ahead of the curve—and protect the financial foundation of your organization.



## How Tariffs Can Affect Your Funding

As a reminder, tariffs increase the cost of imported goods, which can strain the operations of businesses reliant on global supply chains. For communities with strong manufacturing, agriculture, or logistics sectors, these changes may result in:

- Deferred capital investments or facility expansions
- Tighter margins that reduce philanthropic or sponsorship spending
- Increased business caution and slower decision-making

For chambers and EDOs, this translates to:

- Longer fundraising cycles
- Delayed or reduced renewals
- More scrutiny on ROI and outcomes

## Strategic Guidance from RDG

As your partners in resource development and campaign strategy, here are several actionable approaches to consider right now:

### 1. Reframe Your Value Proposition

Your organization is a stabilizing force during uncertain times. Use that position to emphasize your role in **protecting the business climate**, offering **trusted**

**advocacy**, and driving **long-term workforce and infrastructure investment**. Shift investor messaging from “support us” to “invest in community resilience.”

## 2. Introduce Flexible Investment Options

Offer pathways for continued engagement that align with current business realities. This might include **providing opportunities to break up payments over the course of the year, project-specific sponsorships, or tiered investments** with clearly defined benefits. Talk to your stakeholders and investors now - don't wait for “crisis response.”

## 3. Strengthen Sector-Specific Engagement

Identify which industries in your region are most exposed to tariff pressure and engage them directly. RDG recommends building ecosystem-strengthening sector-specific strategies, such as **manufacturing roundtables, trade readiness briefings, or business retention programs** tailored to their unique challenges.

## 4. Lead on Policy and Advocacy

We are all advocates for the economy in our markets. Now is the time to **amplify your policy voice and/or public official education efforts**. Advocacy has never been more critical to your value proposition. By communicating regularly on trade, competitiveness, and workforce policies, you position your organization as an indispensable partner—not just a fundraiser.

## 5. Diversify Revenue Through Strategic Partnerships

Look beyond traditional investor revenue. Pursue public-private partnerships, philanthropic grants, and collaborations with universities, workforce boards, and regional utilities. While the current administration is taking a proverbial chainsaw to many federal grant programs, elected leaders could look more favorably on efforts that are not solely reliant on federal assistance. Take a look at a [recent example](#) from Senator Tim Scott and U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Scott Turner in Charleston, SC. RDG can help analyze your investor base and look for base-broadening opportunities.

## 6. Stay Focused on Talent and Product

Despite economic turbulence, site readiness and workforce development remain top priorities. Continue to frame your work around **talent attraction, training programs, and shovel-ready sites**—core priorities that resonate with businesses, regardless of broader trade policies.

## Final Thoughts from RDG

The return of tariff-driven economic uncertainty reminds us that **global policy has local consequences**. Fundraising in this environment requires adaptability, clarity, and an unwavering focus on the long game.

At RDG, we believe that when you combine a strong value proposition with the right funding strategy, your organization doesn't just survive uncertainty—it leads through it.

If you're reevaluating your funding model, preparing for a campaign, repositioning in a shifting climate, or just need an independent third party opinion about strategies you are considering, we're here to help.

Let's navigate this moment—together.

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*Resource Development Group (RDG) partners with chambers of commerce and economic development organizations across the country to design and execute fundraising strategies that drive measurable impact.*

*Learn more at [www.rdgfundraising.com](http://www.rdgfundraising.com)*

**To learn more about Brent Jonas [go here](#). Please [go here](#) to visit the RDG Interactive Blog.**



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Resource Development Group (RDG) is an economic and community development consulting firm. In addition to capital campaign management, we conduct feasibility studies, best practice research, and organizational development and optimization work. Our client base includes chambers of commerce, economic development organizations and public-private partnerships throughout the United States. RDG was founded in Columbus, Ohio. We have three offices in Georgia (Atlanta, Statesboro, and Columbus) as well as in Asheville, NC, Indianapolis, IN, Charleston, SC, and Paris, France. Our mission is to help you elevate!

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