



Resource Development Group

30 Years of Economic Development Fundraising

Resource Development Group: 30 Years Later and Beyond

2025 will be a monumental year for our team at Resource Development Group (RDG). Thirty years ago, the seeds that grew into today's RDG were planted. Through many years of twists and turns, ups and downs, victories and defeats, RDG has survived and prospered. RDG will celebrate its 30th Anniversary this year! Starting small, RDG has become a trusted consultant for chambers and economic development organizations (EDOs) in fundraising.

We wanted to take this opportunity to sit down and hear the story from those involved. If you're interested in learning a bit about RDG's 30-year history, read on!

Interviewees:

[Clint Nessmith](#): RDG CEO

[Matthew Chambers](#): RDG COO

[Chip Holcombe](#): Co-founder of RDG / current RDG Senior Counsel

[Mike Trubiano](#): Co-founder of Capital Funding Strategies (CFS) / current RDG Senior Counsel

[Rob Radcliff](#): Co-founder of CFS / current RDG Senior Counsel

What motivated the creation of RDG?

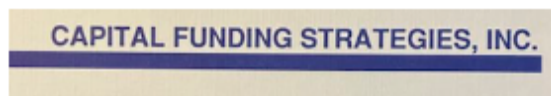
Chip: I met Rob and Mike while we all worked at the Suddes Group. In 1995, Bill Evans and I decided to break out on our own. In 1996, we acquired our first client. We hit our goal, they loved us, and it allowed us more time to cultivate additional clients. The rest is history. We never really crossed paths with Rob and Mike, as they primarily worked with large markets and regional groups, while we were happy focusing on the small and medium-sized markets.



What motivated the creation of CFS?

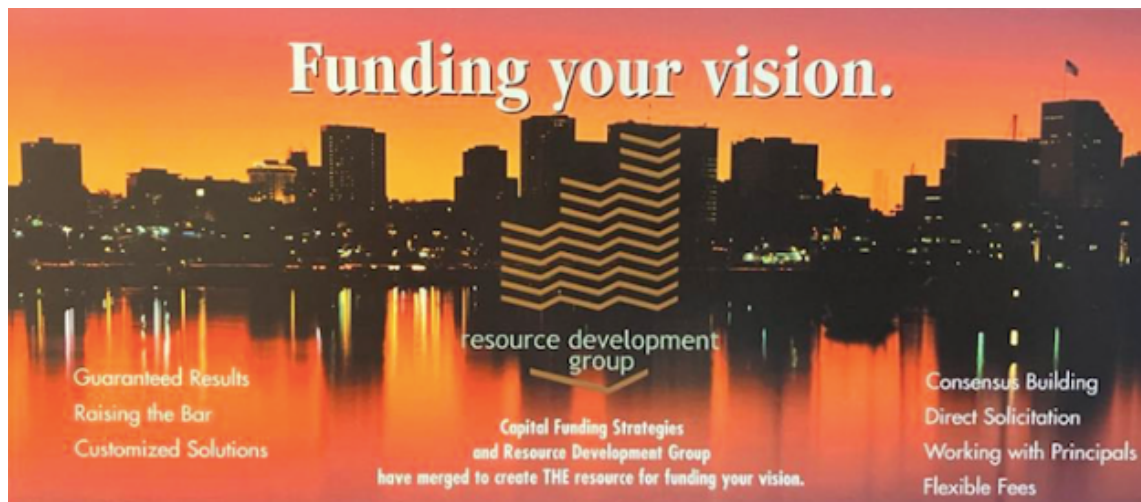
Mike: We believed we could do a better job, operate more efficiently, and earn more money if we were on our own.

Rob: I would add that it meant less travel. Suddes was moving west, and we were spending too much time on planes, which was challenging with growing families.



What prompted the merger of RDG and CFS?

Chip: In 2003, a Request for Proposal was released and sent to both RDG and CFS, marking the first time we encountered each other. This prompted some discussions about joining forces, as we had similar competitors. Bill decided it wasn't for him, so Rob, Mike, and I—the three amigos—moved ahead. In 2014, I joined Columbus 2020 and remained with them until January 2024.



What made the merger successful?

Chip: They brought big market experience, and we brought small market experience, so we could compete with any of the firms and be successful in all kinds of markets. We also realized that we did not want to do West Coast work because traveling was difficult. This allowed us to sort of “lock up” certain states. Between Rob, Mike, and I, we all had different skill sets. Rob is really good at business development and marketing, while Mike and I ran campaigns. From a specialization of function standpoint, that worked really well. We had a good team, we trusted each other, and everyone worked hard.

Did you envision CFS/RDG being around 30 years later?

Mike: I think at first, Rob and I thought this was going to be a six-month to six-month thing. But after a couple of years, we started establishing relationships to the point where we began to see this as our career moving forward.

Rob: The answer is no. I would like to tell you that we were great visionaries with grand plans, but honestly, for the first few years, we were paycheck to paycheck. It wasn't until the successful completion of our first two large market campaigns in the late '90s that we began to feel comfortable with the idea that we might be around for a while.

Mike: The relationships that we established during those early years gave us the courage to believe we could sustain for a long time.

Rob: That's the most valuable part of the company. It was establishing those relationships. It wasn't just what we did; it was who we knew and our ability to leverage that. Shortly before the recession in early 2008, the consulting arm of a law firm in Columbus invited Mike, Chip, and I to lunch and during that lunch, mentioned they might be interested in buying our company. I have to say that was the first time the idea of seriously planning beyond six months entered our collective mindset.



What has been one of the most difficult things to overcome as a company?

Mike: Forecasting the economy. We always put the client first. Always. We turned down business and stopped work on projects because we knew we wouldn't be successful due to external circumstances like the economy. Being able to forecast that and say, “Sorry, you shouldn't proceed with a campaign,” was challenging. From a client standpoint, it was just the right thing to do.

Rob: It's a reflection of the industry in which we work. Nobody could predict terrorist attacks, global recessions, or worldwide pandemics and the impact they might have on a small company. Oftentimes, we found ourselves right in the middle of it, making it up as we went along.

Chip: 2008 was a tough time for the firm—having to downsize and stuff...it was just awful.

How did you originally get connected with the firm?



Clint: In 2000, my first job after graduating from Georgia Southern University was at the Metro Atlanta Chamber. I worked as the assistant to Rob and Mike, who were managing what was then the latest iteration of the Forward Atlanta campaign. About six months into the role, they pulled me aside and asked, “Hey, what do you want to do after this?” I replied, “I want to do what you guys do!” Their response was, “Great! You’re hired!”

Matt: Clint was on the Board for the Center for Entrepreneurial Learning and Leadership at Georgia Southern University where I served as a graduate assistant and President of Students and Free Enterprise. I had made a couple of presentations to the Board, and Clint set up a coffee meeting with me to say, “I think I want to hire you.” I completed my graduate assistantship, but the timing wasn’t right, so I went to work for a third-party logistics company. About a year later, Clint called and said, “I think it’s time.” Fast forward a few weeks, I met Mike in Chattanooga, and he said, “I think you’re the guy!” That’s how I got involved with the firm. Chattanooga was one of my very first capital campaigns, and the rest is history.

Clint: The reason I knew I wanted to hire Matt was that he made a presentation to the Board during his time as a graduate assistant, and it was so impressive. Here’s this young guy, not even out of college, who seemed incredibly mature, organized, and engaging. That’s when I decided he had everything he needed to excel in this job.

Clint, you have 20+ years of experience with RDG, and Matt, you have 10+ years. What have been some of the most important lessons learned during this time period?

Clint: One of the first lessons Rob impressed upon me early on was to *never tell a client we can’t take on a project*. Early in my career, during a funding campaign, Pat Danahy, CEO of the Greensboro Partnership asked if RDG could do an economic impact analysis. I said, “No, we don’t do that.” I mentioned this to Rob shortly thereafter, and he replied, “Clint, no, we can do that. I know we don’t typically do it, but we can make it happen. Never say no.” Our clients view us as national experts and have a lot of confidence in our ability to get things done or to connect with those who can. That lesson was incredibly important; I live by it, and we always say yes. Even if we can’t do it ourselves, we can connect them with someone who can. Second, that customer service mentality is crucial. We’re not just about raising money. Yes, that’s a significant part of it—helping clients fully fund their work—but it’s also about helping our clients identify

solutions to challenges beyond just securing resources for economic growth. We are problem solvers.

Matt: There is no playbook for this work. We have to be nimble and adapt to each organization's specific needs, as every community is a little bit different. Boulder is not Fargo, so you can't use the same approach.

It's important to identify and recognize the value of the civic leadership structure in each community. This aspect is crucial to what we do and is why RDG has always been successful: our ability to develop relationships quickly, not just with people within the organization but also with leadership outside of it.

What has been one of the biggest challenges for RDG over the last decade?

Clint: One challenge we've had to navigate is leadership transitions within the industry. As members of our network have retired or moved on, new leaders have emerged, requiring us to establish and build new relationships and, most importantly, reconfirm our value proposition. The new generation of leaders thinks differently, and we have had to adapt accordingly.

Matt: The leadership transition has certainly been a challenge, but it has also presented a great opportunity for us. Clint's biggest asset to the firm is not just fundraising; it's also relationship building and business development, and he has a great opportunity to develop connections with these new leaders. Additionally, we have had a massive opportunity to capitalize on new technology. Our transition to 100% virtual management during COVID was seamless. Yes, we were forced to make that change, but we kept things moving forward. Being completely transparent with clients about the difficulties of raising money during the uncertainty of COVID, while also being nimble enough to respond to those who had no choice, was critically important to maintaining the integrity of the firm.

What sets RDG apart from other firms?

Chip: Our specialization in economic development fundraising provides us with a deep inventory of knowledge and experience. There is very little we haven't seen and solved. We've encountered a wide range of situations, allowing us to offer solid counsel and advice. It's not just about raising the money; it's about strengthening the organization, building stronger leadership, and ensuring their program of work is effective. Raising the money is almost an afterthought—we will secure the funds, but you need a solid plan, a competent staff, a motivated board, and consensus-building. A testament to the firm is the number of times we have been engaged on a repeat basis. The market has changed, and Clint has done an excellent job navigating those changes while remaining true to key principles about how the business is done. He has effectively brought us into the modern age, utilizing technology to get the job done. I believe RDG will continue to thrive for years to come!

Clint: RDG's 30-year endurance is a testament to our unique approach, which centers on providing highly customized and specialized services to every client. Our national perspective enables us to identify best practices and potential solutions, while our team's economic development and chamber backgrounds allows us to leverage knowledge and connections for our clients' benefit. This specialized focus on economic development sets us apart. Our clients recognize that we operate within this space daily, and our team embodies this expertise. We take pride in the positive impact our work has on millions of lives. Our ability

to embed ourselves within our clients' teams allows us to maximize our impact and deliver the best possible results.

What does the future hold for RDG?



Clint: March (2025) will mark three years of my tenure as CEO and Matt's as COO. It's been exciting, challenging, and at times, exhausting. What's great is that we took over a firm with a solid foundation. Consequently, we have focused on further strengthening that base while also expanding our service offerings to support our core focus. We have been very intentional about identifying what else we can do while staying true to our mantra of "Building Organizations that Build Communities."



Resource Development Group

*30 Years of Economic
Development Fundraising*

This has included finding ways to be more flexible in our campaign models concerning hybrid campaigns and consulting situations, ensuring our team of experts can remain nimble and adaptable regardless of the scope of work.

We are also increasingly focusing on helping our clients with investor engagement. Major regional EDOs and single-county entities are utilizing our team to ensure their Investor Relations (IR) staff are appropriately trained and that engagement management mid-funding cycle is effectively fulfilled for all investors.

We are very excited to launch Campaign Manager 3.0, the next iteration of our proprietary web-based campaign tracking system. Campaign Manager 3.0 will not only offer improved mechanisms for tracking campaigns but also provide our clients with the capability to track investor engagement, which is crucial for revenue retention. We believe the simplicity of our engagement tracking system will be welcomed by every IR professional in the industry.

Matt: When I first entered this field, many investments stemmed from corporate stewardship. One of the biggest transitions has been shifting from a model of investing based on corporate stewardship to one focused on return on investment (ROI). ROI is what we are selling now. I'm excited about witnessing

this transition in the future. That's one of the most rewarding aspects of our job—returning to visit and realizing RDG had a part in the economic growth of the city. While we didn't do it all, we contributed to that strategy and vision. Being part of these transformations across the country is truly exciting.

These interviews provide valuable insights into RDG's journey, challenges, and future aspirations. RDG's dedication to client service, adaptability, and specialization in economic development fundraising over three decades has been instrumental in the firm's success. As they navigate the ever-evolving landscape of economic development, the firm's commitment to innovation, technology adoption, and delivering tangible results for their clients remains unwavering. With a strong foundation and a clear vision for the future, RDG is poised to continue making a positive impact on communities and organizations across the nation.

Thanks for reading our story! We are excited about the future!

Please [go here](#) to visit the RDG Interactive Blog.

RDG is proud to be a new sponsor of the "Econ Dev Show" e-newsletter. If you want a wealth of industry relevant knowledge at your fingertips weekly, become a subscriber [here](#).

RDG is a proud silver sponsor of [ACCE](#).

RDG is a proud sponsor of [IEDC](#).

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!

Current Clients:



Detroit
Regional
Partnership



Greater Wichita
Partnership



Hendricks County
Economic Development
Partnership



Columbia | Mt. Pleasant | Spring Hill
MAURY COUNTY
Chamber & Economic Alliance



ROANOKE - BLACKSBURG
TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL



Resource Development Group | [Website](#)



Resource Development Group | 907 Monarch Circle | Statesboro, GA 30458 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!