

Fairfax, MontCo compete for jobs using vastly different budgets, strategies

By: [Rachel Baye](#) | 10/15/11 8:05 PM

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Fairfax County's Economic Development Authority has a marketing reach that stretches the globe, with offices in Los Angeles, Germany, India, Israel, South Korea and Britain. The private organization spends about \$1 million advertising Fairfax to businesses each year.

But in Montgomery County, its rival across the Potomac, Department of Economic Development Director Steve Silverman said that level of marketing isn't necessary. He presented his marketing plan -- based on a \$500,000 budget -- to members of the County Council.

The plan highlights conference appearances, website upgrades and some advertising. But the advertising budget alone is one-tenth of the size of Fairfax's.

Despite differences of scale, Silverman's office brought 4,475 new jobs to the county in the last fiscal year, slightly less than the 5,022 its Fairfax County counterpart brought in during the same period.

The type of marketing that involves traveling the globe and courting clients is only part of economic development, according to economist Anirban Basu, the chairman and chief executive officer of Sage Policy Group in Baltimore. The rest is about branding.

"Because the world is increasingly global ... this type of marketing allows the community to define itself to the rest of the world," Basu said. He pointed to Silicon Valley and North Carolina's Research Triangle. "Montgomery County tries to do the same thing, talking about the I-270 'Tech Corridor.'"

Silverman agreed. It's more important to help existing companies expand, help small businesses get their footing and even just keep existing businesses from leaving than trying to convince Fortune 500 companies to relocate to the area, he said.

"I was happy to have Microsoft move their 500 employees from D.C. to Montgomery County a year ago. It just didn't get all the play that Northrop Grumman did [when they moved their headquarters to Fairfax last year] because they were moving from Los Angeles."

Fairfax Economic Development Authority President Gerald Gordon was not available for comment.

To some extent, it's more valuable for Montgomery County to have federal agencies like the National Institutes of Health and the Food and Drug Administration than it is to have an office in Los Angeles, Basu said. At the same time, Fairfax's global presence is beneficial.

"There are people in the world that are not familiar with the assets of Montgomery County."