

Introduction

A more self-reliant local economy and an improved business climate are the goals of the Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) Program. The program promotes job growth by helping communities identify the concerns and barriers to survival and growth facing local businesses. This approach focuses on existing businesses. Studies show 40 percent to 80 percent of all new jobs are created by existing firms rather than by attracting new businesses to the community. Business attraction efforts are less likely to be successful if existing businesses are not happy.

Main Players

The Task Force is a broad-based group of local community leaders. The task force should include representatives of local Economic Development Councils, Industrial Development Authorities, Chambers of Commerce, local government, area utilities, community colleges, and other well-respected, influential community leaders.

The **Leadership Team** introduces and promotes the program in the community, coordinates task force meetings, and organizes immediate follow-up to the survey results. The leadership team also arranges for the training of the business visitation volunteers.

Business Visitation Volunteer Teams

consisting of two persons per team will visit from two to four firms. These teams can be made up of task force members, educators, business people, or retirees.

Objectives

Short-Term

- Demonstrate community support for local business.
- Solve immediate short-term problems.

Long-Term

- Increase the competitiveness of local establishments.
- Establish and implement a strategic plan for economic development.

In the long term, the Business Retention and Expansion Program can make local businesses more competitive by evaluating and addressing their broader needs and concerns. Businesses that stay competitive are more likely to remain in the community and possibly expand. The program establishes an economic development plan for the community. The process creates a broad-based community coalition to sustain long-term economic development efforts.

Program Structure

Firm Visits: Local community leaders receive training on how to conduct the local BR&E program. After receiving training, volunteer visitors call on businesses. A proven survey tailored to West Virginia communities is used for the interviews. The survey pinpoints business needs, concerns, and development plans. The data obtained during business visitations is confidential information.

Immediate Follow-Up: A local task force reviews the survey results and responds to the needs and concerns expressed by businesses. Support from resources within and outside the community is mobilized.

Strategic Planning: West Virginia University computerizes the information and prepares an initial draft report for the task force. The report includes data analysis and suggested recommendations for improving the local business climate. The task force uses this report, its knowledge of the community, and a strategic planning process to develop an action plan.

Implementation: The strategic planning process fosters the development of local implementation teams. These teams spearhead efforts to achieve the goals in the action plans. Local businesses and a variety of agencies may be drawn into the process by these teams.

How We Help You

- Information on the most effective local strategies
- Training for volunteer visitors and local leaders
- Facilitation of local BR&E Task Force meetings
- Analysis of survey information and development of suggested recommendations
- Production of Community Strategic Plan report
- Information on state and federal programs to strengthen local business
- Troubleshooting

More Information

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BR&E PROGRAM

Business Retention & Expansion Program

*A community-based
program to encourage the
growth of local business*

Extension Service
West Virginia University
*Center for Community, Economic,
and Workforce Development*

Helping You Put Knowledge to Work