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Business Retention & Expansion

Business Retention and Expansion

WHY EXISTING BUSINESSES ARE IMPORTANT

Recruitment as an economic development activity has its limitations. Many times, community leaders and the media are caught up in the excitement of luring new companies to their area only to realize that they are replacing companies that have been "lured" someplace else (Maples, 1996).

Few people would argue with the assertion that existing businesses are important to the local economy. Over the past two decades, studies have documented the impact of existing businesses on job growth. Other studies have examined how businesses maintain strong local economies by investing in the community's social fabric. And it is generally accepted in the economic development community that existing businesses are a primary source of information about the community for companies looking to relocate there.

Existing Businesses Create More New Jobs
The widely quoted study Job Creation in America (Birch, 1987) reported that nationwide up to 80 percent of net new job growth comes from existing businesses. Other studies (Phillips, 1996; Kraybill, 1997) reported that existing businesses contributed anywhere from 31 percent to 86 percent job growth in individual states.

In terms of job creation and tax contributions, the expansion of businesses and operations, not new operations, has the greater impact in most communities over time (Gordon, 2001). Literally thousands of communities are involved in attracting new industry, yet fewer than 200 major plant relocations occur annually (Kotval, Mullin, and Payne, 1996).

Existing Businesses Invest in the Community
Every economy loses about 10 percent of its jobs annually due to such things as retirements, business closings, and product life cycles. Existing businesses are best positioned locally to replace those jobs (Kotval et al.).

Existing businesses that create jobs, pay taxes, and invest in facilities are at the heart of strong local economies (Maples, 1996). Keeping a business in a community is less costly than attracting new industry. Industry attraction efforts often include significant tax incentives and substantial infrastructure development costs. Existing businesses may seek some of these incentives, but more often than not, the fiscal cost per job created is less for an existing business than for a

new one (Morse, 2004).

Keeping what you have is good for the development and growth of smaller firms. Businesses that export goods and services generate the revenue that funds smaller, local, service businesses. Both types of firms are necessary, and the service firms may not survive if the exporting firms close or move away (Kotval et al.).

Existing Businesses Are Ambassadors for Industry Recruitment
By finding and fixing problems for existing businesses, city leaders may identify businesses for targeted recruitment efforts (Gordon).
Satisfied existing businesses can be a community's best ambassadors when recruiting new firms to the area as well as serving as a source of leads when seeking new firms to recruit (Morse).

APPROACHES TO BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION

Communities began to focus on the retention of existing businesses (BRE) as an economic development strategy in the 1970s when many manufacturing firms began to move in search of reduced operating costs (Blaine, Hudkins, and Taylor, 1999). These retention programs typically had four broad goals (Kraybill):

- Show quick results by immediately addressing urgent problems of local businesses.
- Describe the local economy by communicating its positive attributes and trends.
- Develop a strategic economic development plan to improve the local business climate.
- Foster local action through the creation of local implementation work groups.

Over time, two broad approaches to implementing BRE programs emerged. In a 1999 presentation these two approaches were labeled "traditional" and "continuous" (Kraybill). Today, these types of programs, as well as variations on each type, are in operation throughout the United States.

Traditional Approach
The traditional approach, sometimes referred to as the "volunteer" approach, was developed simultaneously (and separately) by New Jersey Bell Telephone and the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service in the early 1980s. These two organizations sought to bring structure to what had until then been informal efforts to improve public relations between the community and its local firms.

Kraybill (1995) described this approach:

- A designated local coordinator works with a leadership team of 10 to 25 business and government leaders as well as concerned citizens who meet over a period of a year and to guide all phases of the program.
- Community volunteers conduct face-to-face interviews using a common questionnaire.
- Volunteers visit between 50 and 100 local businesses during an intensive two- to three-week period.
- The survey is conducted every three to five years.
- A portion of the survey is designed to identify the immediate, urgent concerns of businesses. These issues are reviewed immediately by members of the program leadership team, and action is taken to provide a rapid response.
- The community may use outside assistance (typically applied economics faculty from a university) to obtain a survey, train local volunteers to conduct business visits, tabulate and interpret the survey results, and suggest long-term actions to strengthen the local economy.
- The leadership team chooses which long-term needs it will address and develops plans to deal with them.

Choosing the Traditional Approach
This approach has been, and continues to be, successful in many communities. When followed exactly as described in the literature, it can produce both immediate results and a long-term economic development plan.
Traditional approach strengths include:

- Use of volunteers. The community is engaged in the process and develops an increased awareness of how businesses contribute to the community's economic well-being.
- Reduced data collection period. Using a large number of trained interviewers significantly reduces the time frame for data collection, which in turn decreases the time lag between the identification of concerns and the program's response.
- All or a random sample of businesses in the community are visited. This allows for the identification of systemic problems faced by all businesses.
- Low program costs. Because volunteers are used so extensively, program expenses are limited to small items such as refreshments for meetings, paper and printing costs, and postage.

Traditional approach weaknesses include:

- Lack of sustainability. As noted earlier these programs are typically large-scale surveys that occur every three-to-five years and do not continue with any type of business visitation effort in the intervening years.
- Lack of follow-through. Relying on external help may result in a drop-off in participation and implementation once the surveys are completed and the

outsider leaves the community. Some longer-term projects can be left undone.

- Many communities do not initiate another large-scale survey program once the original long-range plan implementation is completed.
- Managing and motivating a large group of volunteers can be difficult and time-consuming for the program leader.

Communities considering this approach should first obtain Implementing Local Business Retention and Expansion Programs, a video and five-booklet set of materials available from the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development at The Pennsylvania State University. The first of these booklets, Is It for Our Community?, provides a detailed overview of a volunteer-driven program and the roles and time commitment of all those involved. The booklet is a useful tool in deciding if this approach is right for a community. Please contact www.brei.org for more information on these materials.

The Continuous Approach
The continuous approach, sometimes referred to as the "professional staff" approach relies on local economic development professionals to develop and direct the program. As the name implies, this is an ongoing approach to business retention and expansion efforts. Kraybill (1995) described these programs:

- A local economic develop professional manages the program, which operates continuously with a limited number of business surveys conducted over the course of a year.
- The local economic developer interviews business managers either face-to-face or by telephone.
- The economic developer provides a rapid response to "quickly fixable" needs identified by the surveyed businesses. In this capacity, the developer acts as a convener or broker between the business and the entity that can address the identified need.
- The economic developer "narrates" the local economy, based on the ongoing business interviews, to the local press, business organizations, elected officials, and the general public.

The continuous approach also has been and continues to be successful in many communities.

Continuous approach strengths include:
- The program is sustainable. It is designed to be an ongoing effort.
- Relationships are developed. The use of a professional staff allows it to develop and maintain an ongoing relationship with other entities providing services to the community's existing businesses.
- Professional staff may be better able to inform the community about the needs and concerns of the existing business community on an ongoing

basis.
- The business community has a known point-of-contact when it has problems or needs assistance.

Continuous approach limitations include:
- Some concerns are overlooked. Visiting a limited number of businesses typically shifts the focus to a specifically targeted group of employers, often large exporting firms. This may leave the needs and concerns of small or emerging businesses unattended.
- Difficulty identifying systemic issues. Because only a limited number of businesses are visited, those issues impacting the entire business community are difficult to identify and document.
- It also may be difficult for economic development professionals to make a case for change in government policy since they may be viewed as putting business interests above community interest.
- Lack of community involvement. Failing to involve the broader community in economic development through some form of active participation will create or reinforce the belief that economic development is best left to the "professionals" and not something of concern to all community members.

Choosing the Continuous Approach
Communities choosing the continuous approach must first address three questions (Kotval,1996).
- How will the program be funded?
- Where will the program be housed?
- How will the program be staffed?

Funding comes from either public or private sources or some combination of the two. The community should consider carefully how its approach to funding may impact its ability to focus on and address the issues of existing businesses. Funding also drives the level of staffing and determines where the program will be housed. Of these two, staffing is probably the most important. Will the staff be dedicated solely to assisting existing businesses, or will this be one part of a larger set of job responsibilities?

Selecting the "Right" Approach for Your Community
Most BRE programs can trace their roots to one of the two historical approaches. However, there is no single right way to implement a local business retention and expansion program. Professionals and volunteers who have established and implemented BRE programs using both these approaches have modified each one to fit the needs and capabilities of the communities in which they live and work, resulting in a variety of programs focused on existing businesses. Community efforts range from single-event activities (e.g., annual business appreciation dinners) to professionally staffed offices offering a full range of

training and technical assistance to the existing business community.

The types of programs and range of services are limited only by the community's resources and efforts. As former Director of Research for the Council on Urban Economic Development Alan Gregerman said, "The form that works best ... is a function of many factors, including community size, economic circumstances, local development objectives, and the level of commitment of (the) public and private sectors to economic improvement."

COMMON ELEMENTS FOR ALL BRE PROGRAMS

Whether a community chooses to do a large survey program every three to five years, visit a limited number of businesses annually, or combine the two approaches, fundamental elements are common to each approach. These include:

- Leadership
- Development-community support
- Partner organizations
- Visitation teams
- A community assessment
- A survey process and questionnaire
- Data analysis and interpretation skills
- Measures to assess program success
- Regular reports documenting activities and progress

Leadership
Leaders of successful BRE programs focus on the need to value and serve the existing business community as a sound economic development strategy. They know their community's history, its socio-economic characteristics, and how it compares to other similar communities. They know both the community's businesses and the people responsible for the day-to-day operation of those businesses. Leadership is often viewed as the exercise of power and authority, but most people would agree that in practice leadership involves much more than simply issuing directives and waiting for results to occur. The best leaders are effective because they go beyond words to action. Effective leaders focus on opportunities rather than problems. They understand that partnering with other organizations and individuals who have an interest in and mission to serve existing businesses is essential to success. To this end they seek to establish and maintain partnerships. These leaders establish strong business visitation teams and train them to be successful. They set achievable and measurable goals. Finally, dynamic leaders share credit for success.

Development-Community Support

Retention and expansion programs continue to gain popularity as more and more communities learn that keeping what they have is less costly and far more successful at job creation over the long run than industry recruitment. Yet these programs are challenging to implement because BRE is not a glamorous activity. Far more press attention is paid to industries moving in (or out) than to keeping a company in the community. A successful BRE program enjoys the full support of the rest of the economic development community as an equal partner in the task of increasing jobs and wealth in the community. These programs are seen as partners – not competitors -- in recruitment and in many cases lead to targeted industry attraction efforts that further serve to make an existing business more competitive.

Partner Organizations

While recruitment may be seen as something of a solo effort (best left to the "professional"), retention programs are clearly team activities. Existing businesses need access to a wide range of programs and services covering such diverse areas as workforce development, marketing, land acquisition, and financing. These diverse needs make it clear that BRE efforts cannot be successful without partnerships. Service providers in both the public and private sectors must be actively sought out and engaged in the retention and expansion program and process.

The role of the BRE program leader is to identify all potential partners, enlist those that can and will join in a collaborative relationship, and serve as a focal point for identifying business needs and coordinating responses to those needs. The BRE program leader ensures that follow-up action is taken and determines the degree of success that is achieved in meeting business needs.

Typical partner organizations include educational institutions, workforce development organizations, local government regulatory and service providers, utilities, and associations of business owner/operators. Successful programs engage their partners in the process of program and service development and delivery and rely on these partners to provide resources to enhance and expand the BRE program's capabilities.

Strong partnerships form when the right partners are selected for the right reasons. Knowing what the partner can provide, having a clear understanding of the partner's role in the BRE process, and a willingness to share credit for success works to ensure a successful and lasting partnership.

Appendix A contains a list of questions that may be used to guide the identification and selection of partner organizations to participate in the BRE program.

Visitation Teams

Retention and expansion is a contact sport. It is difficult, if not impossible, to convince someone that his or her business is important to the community if the BRE program leader is unwilling to engage in personal contact to demonstrate that importance. Thus the business visit is a critical component of successful BRE programs. These visits generally serve one of three specific purposes: learning about the business's concerns, introducing a program or service to the business, or responding to a request for specific assistance. While a visit to learn about the business may be done by a single individual, introducing programs or responding to specific concerns requires a team approach.

A retention and expansion visitation team is a cadre of people selected by the BRE program leader and trained in the art and science of business visits. Visitation team members may be recruited from a variety of areas, the most obvious being partner organizations. Often these organizations will make business visits part of an employee's assigned duties, thus ensuring a longer-term commitment to the team and visitation process. Having service providers who serve as visitation team members also has the added benefit of increasing the provider owner contact and putting a person in the business who can address and potentially resolve concerns raised by the business owner.

A Community Assessment

A community assessment is a valuable tool for use in economic development programs. The assessment includes all the components of a more traditional community socio-economic profile as well as an inventory of programs and services available to businesses, a look at existing infrastructure, a history of the community, and information on the community's quality of life. An assessment goes even further in that it also may contain a look at some aspects of the community to determine both the direction and intensity of change over time.

It can be likened to a snapshot: a picture of the community at a single point in time. It consists of information about the economic, demographic, infrastructure, quality of life and history of the community. It is a combination of primary information, which is found in community records and other locally assembled data unique to the community, and secondary data, typically available from external sources such as state and federal agencies. It is a document designed to meet the information needs of end users such as those involved in community economic development efforts.

A community assessment has three broad uses:
- A tool for educating the BRE program staff and team members
- A source for baseline socio-economic, infrastructure, services, and quality of life data for the community.
- Background for the development of a retention and expansion strategy. A

more detailed description of a community assessment can be found in Module 2 of the LED Tools (www.LouisianaCommunityNetwork.com)

A Survey Process and Questionnaire
Though often used interchangeably, "a survey is the entire data-gathering process, whereas a questionnaire is the survey instrument used to ask questions and record responses" (Degner, 2006).

The primary method for learning about business needs, the use of local programs and services, attitudes about the community, and future plans is by conducting business surveys. And the preferred method of collecting information during the survey is with the use of a written questionnaire. A written questionnaire is preferred because it allows for all responses to be tabulated, allowing the identification of common problems and issues that may impact the entire business community. The most common approach for administering a written questionnaire is a face-to-face visit with the owner/operator of a business. BRE surveys generally include the following steps:

- Determine the purpose of the survey.
- Choose a survey method.
- Select businesses to survey.
- Develop the questionnaire.

Determine the Purpose of the Survey
Reviews of business questionnaires (Kraybill, 1995; Morse and Loveridge, 1998) found that the goals (objectives or purposes) of most surveys were:

- Identify immediate concerns of the businesses.
- Identify training and technical assistance needs.
- Identify future plans for the businesses.
- Show the community's appreciation for the businesses.
- Develop an economic development plan to improve the local business climate.
- Foster local action through the creation of local implementation work groups. Key questions that must be addressed in creating business surveys (Salant and Dillman, 1994) are:
- What is the purpose of the survey? (This requires a thorough understanding the problem you are trying to solve.)
- What method(s) should be used to collect the required information? Taking the time to answer these two fundamental questions before starting the questionnaire development process has two distinct benefits:
- Questions irrelevant to the purpose can be identified and eliminated.
- Questions that are not clearly focused can be identified and changed. Involving several business owner/operators is one way to ensure that

these two questions are addressed at the outset of the questionnaire development process.

Choose a Survey Method

Having clearly defined the survey's purpose, consideration should be given to how it will be administered. Selecting the best method for data collection includes consideration of available resources (Salant and Dillman), including access to facilities and equipment; the amount of time to conduct the survey; the need for, availability, and cost of outside assistance; how much money can be spent on the project; and how many people can assist in data collection, as well as whether they need specific training in interviewing techniques. Survey data can be collected using a variety of methods including face-to-face interviews, mail, telephone, the internet, drop-off of written surveys, or combinations of these methods.

Research has shown that each method of collecting data has different response rates and is subject to different levels of error. Face-to-face surveys typically have the highest response rate and signal a genuine interest in both building a relationship and learning about the concerns of the business, making this approach the one most favored in BRE programs. Mail, telephone, and internet surveys are often used by BRE programs when the scope of the questionnaire is limited and the survey is directed to a specific person in the business. The drop-off method can be used for BRE programs that want face-to-face contact with the business but lack sufficient professional staff or volunteers to conduct the interviews. This method requires that a questionnaire be hand-delivered (dropped off) to the person who will complete it. When the questionnaire is dropped off, a time is scheduled to retrieve the completed questionnaire. This method significantly reduces the time needed to interact with business owners/operators and offers minimal face-to-face contact.

In those instances when it is desirable to include all the businesses in a survey but the necessary human resources are lacking to conduct face-to-face interviews, combining two or more data collection methods may be used. However, care must be taken in how the questionnaire is put together and results interpreted since each data collection method has different response rates and potential for response errors.

Select Businesses to Survey

The purpose of the survey will dictate which businesses to visit. For example, if a survey is meant to identify systemic issues impacting the entire business community, then you might choose to survey all the businesses or a randomly selected sample of all businesses. If the purpose of the survey is to identify concerns of a subset of all businesses, for example businesses identified as having potential for future expansion or attraction efforts, a targeted selection

process might be used. In both instances it will be necessary to first identify all those businesses that fit in with the goals of the survey. While this may seem an easy task, it often proves to be difficult if not impossible because no single source identifies all of the businesses in a community. To identify as many businesses as possible, you will need to consult multiple sources. Common sources of business lists include:

- Tax Assessor (business licenses)
- Utility lists
- Sales tax rolls
- Chamber membership lists
- ES 202 (Covered Employment and Wages) reports
- County Extension Office or Conservation District (for agricultural enterprises)
- Commercial business directories
- Local telephone directory
- Other businesses

Ideally, every business that can provide information directly related to the purpose of the survey should have an opportunity to participate in the survey. Realistically, this is rarely the case. Aside from the fact that it may be impossible to identify every business, resource constraints (time, staffing, and money) limit what can be accomplished by the survey program. As a result, most economic development survey efforts, whether focusing on a single sector or all businesses in a community, target a sample of the total population. While the selecting of a sample and the issues associated with sampling are outside the scope of this publication, it is important that the sample be randomly chosen to ensure that the results of the sample can be generalized to the overall business community.

Once all the businesses have been identified and businesses have been selected for the survey, you must find the "right" person in each business to interview. The general practice in business surveys is to talk to the owner/operator; however, if this is impossible, then talk to the highest-ranking person in the organization who can respond accurately to the questions being posed.

Develop the Survey Questions
Few BRE programs take the time to engage in a process that develops and tests the questions included in their surveys. The typical approach is to use existing questionnaires, or to pick and choose questions from a variety of questionnaires and assemble these into a "new" questionnaire. While this is not in and of itself wrong, it often leads to surveys that include "bad" questions or omit "good" questions. Either way, the knowledge gained from such a survey is of limited use.

So, how do you tell a good question from a bad question? Whether you choose

to use existing questions, develop the questions yourself, or use outside assistance, some simple guidelines can be used to assist in evaluating each question.

- Is the question related to a survey's stated purpose?
- Is the question strategically important?
- Can the answer be found from a secondary source or from someone in the company other than the owner/operator?
- Can the person being interviewed answer the question?
- Can the question be easily read and understood?
- Does the desired answer lend itself to analysis?
- Are terms or abbreviations used that will not be understood by the respondent?

Conducting Successful Business Retention and Expansion Visits

Business retention and expansion visits are conducted by professional staff, volunteers, or some combination of the two. These visits serve four general purposes:

- Introduce the BRE program staff.
- Provide information about available programs and services.
- Respond to specific requests.
- Learn about business needs, plans, and attitudes of the community through a formal or informal survey.

Identify the Purpose of the Visit

Before embarking on a business visitation program, it is necessary to determine the purpose of the visit, the method of collecting data, the number of firms to be visited, and the time frame within which the visits will take place. Each of these determinations will influence who will participate in the visit and the number of people involved in the visitation process.

If the visit's purpose is to inform the business that a local BRE program exists, then that often can be done by a single individual (usually an employee of an economic development organization, the Chamber of Commerce, or local utility company). The visit might involve BRE program representatives and selected service providers if the purpose is to provide information about a particular program or service (e.g., a new worker-training program). If the purpose of the visit is to collect information via a written survey instrument, then the general practice is to send a two-person team.

Recruit Business Visitors

If the survey requires a large number of businesses visited in a relatively short period of time (as in the traditional BRE approach), programs often rely on a cadre of short-term volunteers. If the program uses volunteers, these may be recruited from a variety of sources, including economic, business, civic, social,

and religious organizations. Some volunteer programs also use educators, elected officials, and representatives of government agencies.

Programs using professional staff utilize people involved in some aspect of economic development, either as employees of the local Economic Development Organization (EDO) or as service providers, such as the Work Force Development Board, technical schools, or community colleges. Partner organizations may assign staff to participate in the business visits as part of normal work assignment, and the business visits are coordinated through the local EDO.

Establish Visitation Teams

While interviews may be conducted by a single individual, the most common approach to business visits is to send a two-person team. One person is assigned to ask the survey questions and the other person is assigned to record the responses. The reasons for a two person team are practical:

- People who do not interview as a full-time occupation may find it difficult to handle both tasks.
- The loss of eye contact when transitioning from asking a question to recording the answer makes it difficult to establish and maintain rapport with the person being interviewed.
- A separate recorder makes it easier to ask probing questions and ensures that the responses are complete.

Train for Business Visits

Athletic teams are successful if they recruit good team players, have a plan for winning, and train to carry out that plan. A successful business visitation program can be viewed in the same way: recruit the best people for participating in the visit, know in advance what the visitors are to accomplish and why, and train the visitors in successful interview techniques.

A training session for business visitors is not a long or difficult process. The elements of a successful visit can be conveyed in a three-hour mandatory training session for everyone participating in the interview process. A typical survey training program has at least the following six components (Loveridge and Morse):

1. An explanation of the survey's purpose.
2. An explanation of the interview team's role.
3. A detailed review of the survey instrument.
4. Assignment of the teams to businesses for the actual interviews.
5. Training on interviewing and note-taking techniques.
6. A practice interview.

These components are described in detail in Appendix B.

Responding to Business Concerns
During a business interview, opportunities arise to learn about the critical issues and concerns that impact the business. These issues and concerns are often called "red flags." BRE survey instruments are constructed to encourage business owners to identify those critical issues so the BRE partners can try to resolve them.

What Is a Red Flag?
A red flag is typically an issue of immediate concern to the business that, left unaddressed, might negatively impact the business. Red flags are generally identified in one of three ways: responses to individual survey questions, responses to probing questions, or an in-depth analysis of the survey through a cross-tabulation of multiple question responses. It also may be possible to identify a red flag simply by observing conditions at the business site as indicators of potential problems (e.g., the facility is in a declining state of repair).

Are There Other Issues, Not Necessarily "Red Flags," That May Deserve Attention?
During an interview the business may ask for additional information about a program or service available through the BRE program or its partner organizations. While this type of request may not need an immediate, partner-based response, it should be handled with the same sense as when dealing with a red flag.

How Do You Respond?
The BRE program should have a plan in place to respond to all business requests before the first business visit occurs. The plan need not be elaborate, but it should include a specific process for identifying issues and responding in a timely manner. The plan should address how requests for information (not a red flag) will be handled; who will assign partner agencies for responses; and how the follow-up reporting process will be handled to ensure the partner met with the business, when that follow-up occurred, and the outcome of the follow-up visit.

Responses to information requests begin before the interview by compiling information and materials based on the survey questions. The material could be included in a letter thanking the business for agreeing to the interview and noting that the enclosed material is being sent in response to a specific request.

Responding to red flags is more complex in that it requires a pre-visit agreement from the BRE program partners to respond to requests for follow-up and assistance.

Data Analysis and Interpretation Skills

A national economic development consultant once said, "Ninety-nine percent of the time the most powerful statistical technique I use is long division" (Cortright and Reamer, 1998). All of the data collected from businesses consist of two things: (1) responses that can be coded with numbers and (2) comments (that can also be assigned to categories by assigning a number to the type of comment). Thus the input, summarization, and reporting of aggregate responses is limited to the provision of counts, percentages, and summaries of comments.

Data analysis begins with the initiation of a survey effort and culminates in the development of findings, recommendations, and an action plan. Analyzing and interpreting data is not as complicated or difficult as one might think. A number of software packages on the commercial market assist in data analysis. Perhaps the easiest to use is a database management system. Most people are familiar with software programs like Microsoft Office©. These programs give the user a combination of word processing, spreadsheet, and database management system software that allow for relatively easy movement of data between the programs.

There are four steps in using a database.
1. Build the database. Mimic the survey form to reduce the likelihood of data entry error.
2. Input the data. Using a "data dump," scan the input data for obvious data entry errors.
3. Manipulate the data. Write queries to allow for quick summarization of aggregate survey results, cross-tabulation of multiple queries, and sorting and classification of comments.
4. Create a report of the output. Provide a summary of all responses, results of cross-tabulated responses, and the interpretation of what the aggregate data "tell" the community about the businesses' responses.

Data analysis can go a bit further by combining information from other sources, for example information contained in the community assessment, with business owner/operator responses. An example of this would be information about commute time to work combined with responses indicating a lack of local housing affordable to the firm's employees. The key to strong analysis is to have questions that can lead to a set of predictive responses from the business owner/operator.

Ability to Measure Program Results

Management expert Peter Drucker said, "What gets measured gets done." Physicist Albert Einstein said, "Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted." How do you decide what to measure, how it should be measured, and whether the measurement can be done?

Understanding measurement terminology and following a set of measurement guidelines can demystify the process and ensure your ability to report progress in your BRE program.

The following guidelines provide a checklist for establishing appropriate measures for evaluating your BRE program.

- Decide what can and should be measured
- Choose the "real" measure of the goal
- Focus on positive outcomes
- Measure progress, not activities
- Conduct intermediate "checks" on progress
- Balance the number of measures
- Use commonly accepted and clearly defined measurement terms

A detailed discussion of establishing program measures is found in Appendix C.

Preparing a Written Report of Survey Findings and Recommendations
This report, by its very length, defends itself against the risk of being read. - Winston Churchill

Prime Minister Churchill was right in his complaint about long, difficult-to-read reports. Once published, many reports are never read--they just sit on shelves gathering dust. Beyond the obvious requirements of good content and well-documented findings, conclusions, and recommendations, there are strategies that can be employed to maximize the readability of reports and enhance the chances that they will be read, understood, and utilized. Using language and terms familiar to readers, providing a guide to the layout of a report, and following a logical and consistent format help make reports effective and attract multiple audiences (The Structure of Business Reports, 2000).

The key to a preparing a readable report is to design the layout with the reader in mind. Research has shown that people have different learning styles. Writers must keep these learning styles in mind as reports are formatted and written. Hilligoss (2000) notes that readers approach documents in various ways, depending upon their goals. Readers may want to:
- *Skim* for the general meaning of the whole document.
- *Scan* quickly for specific meaning.
- *Search* more thoroughly to comprehend specific information.
- *Read receptively* for thorough comprehension of the document.
- *Read critically* for evaluation of the document. Knowing what potential readers want and how they read to meet their goals will help you design the layout and structure the content of reports to ensure maximum readability and usefulness. In addition, visual design and text arrangement

are important in writing reports. Several visual rules must be followed:

- Don't be afraid of white space.
- Leave adequate margins.
- Start sections on new pages.
- Don't place headings on a page without some accompanying narrative.
- Crowded text and graphics make the document difficult to read and may obscure important information (Producing Effective Written Reports, 2006).

Additional information on writing readable reports can be found in Appendix D.

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