

Ohio Business Retention and Expansion Program

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Date: March 15, 2015

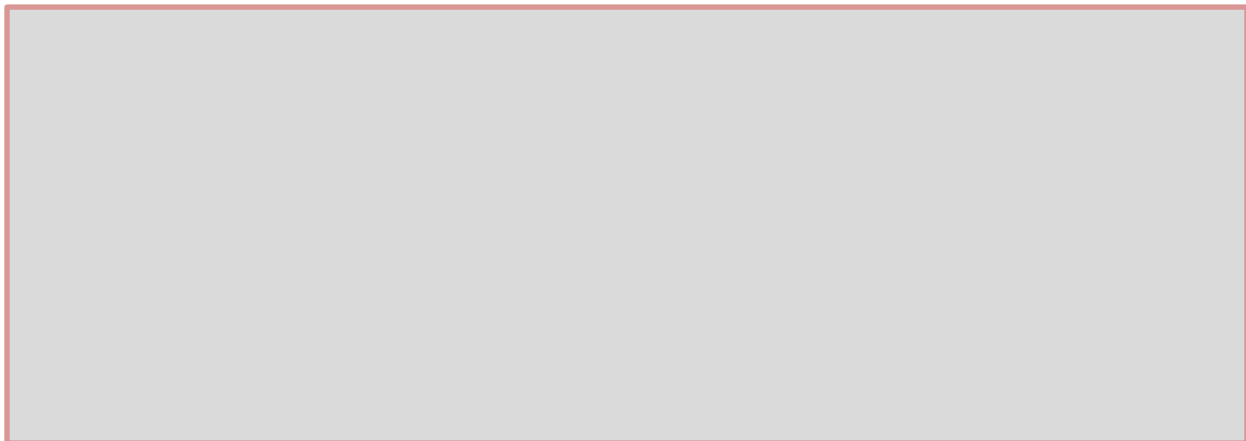
Business Retention & Expansion Program (BR&E)

Situation: Local communities in Ohio frequently lack an understanding of issues related to their economy. Local officials lack knowledge of existing business needs and resulting expansion and growth strategies. Relations among community stakeholders (businesses, residents, local leaders/officials) are often fragmented, challenging communities even more.

Description of the Activity (Program Response): The role of the Ohio Business Retention and Expansion program is to engage community stakeholders in a formal dialogue to empower local officials and the community at large to act on community and economic development issues of strategic importance. Extension BR&E program Educators have an important role by participating in helping local communities learn how to systematically gather and interpret information that is critical to understanding local development needs.

Assumptions: Participants in the BR&E program are desirous of cultivating relationships and value research-based information to assist in growing strong local economies.

Description of the Target Audience: local development officials, community volunteers, Extension professionals (direct); community stakeholders (indirect)



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NO BR&E



BR&E SINCE 2003

INPUTS

Typical BR&E Program Inputs include: **time** of Extension professional staff and community volunteers; **expenses** associated with mailings, meeting refreshments, required program software, Extension professional time, travel, and program maintenance; **equipment** such as projectors, computers, and software, and; **program research base** including creative and scholarly work presented and consumed by Extension professionals and practitioners.

OUTPUTS

Typical BR&E Program Outputs include: BR&E training, on-site workshops and one-on-one consultation, volunteer organizational efforts, establishing collaborative partnerships, continuous updating of BR&E hard copy and web-based materials such as questionnaires, reports, and presentations in cooperation with development officials, elected officials, businesses, and community stakeholders including Extension professionals.

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Overview

The Business Retention and Expansion Program (BR&E) is one of the original Signature Programs of Ohio State University Extension. The BR&E program was retired at the end of 2014 and is currently in graduated status. To date, BR&E Programs have been conducted in over 77 counties and 150 communities in Ohio (see above map).

Since being established as a Signature Program, a packaged curriculum has been developed to include three workshops, programmatic templates and turn-key software to support a comprehensive BR&E program on a local or regional level. New marketing materials, including a workbook and brochures have been professionally developed to promote the program. A trained team of professional Extension Educators and Specialists are also prepared to deliver the program throughout Ohio.

In February 2012, Nancy Bowen and David Civittolo were hired as Community Development Field Specialists focusing on Community Economics including an emphasis on Business Retention and Expansion. To re-create, re-define and re-brand the Business Retention and Expansion Program, Bowen and Civittolo applied for and received a grant (\$6,000) from the Assistant Director, Community Development to create promotional materials and reach out to niche markets.

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Extent to which the program is implemented across the state (e.g., who, where, how, how many, how long, etc.)

When the Co-leaders of the Business Retention and Expansion Team reviewed the data provided by the Program and Development and Evaluation (PDE) office, it becomes apparent that the BR&E program was conducted throughout Ohio and by Extension Educators from two of the four Program Areas (Community Development, and Agriculture and Natural Resources). In 2014, the data indicates that over 50 programs, more than 65 events, at least 11,000 participants (500 plus contact hours), and 60 volunteers participated in Business Retention and Expansion program.

In Van Wert County, the Community Development Educator, Cindy Leis, annually conducts a BR&E survey. The purpose is to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Van Wert economy while creating a means of communication between local business, community leaders, and public officials. Data is collected through the survey, which was distributed by electronic and physical means. Armed with the data results, trends are examined and new directives and policy created to address local issues. Some of the outcomes include: educating local business leaders on the new state and federal level programs and on pre-existing programs that apply to their current needs. Changes in awareness were identified as some of the program participants utilized available local and state level programs.

Kelly Jo O'Bryant, OSU South Centers indicates that over the past 5 years, OCDC has successfully assisted clients and cooperatives to improve the economic condition of rural Ohio. Over this time, the clients that OCDC has assisted have formed 34 cooperatives and cooperative-like organizations in various industry sectors ranging from local foods, commercial exhaust cleaning, manufacturing, and healthcare; created 106 new jobs, and retained 123 jobs. In 2013 alone, these cooperatives invested \$636,000 generated nearly \$1 million in new sales, created 27 new jobs retained 58 jobs. In addition, new and emerging cooperatives have been awarded \$9000 in seed grants that assisted them in starting and or growing their businesses.

Community Field Specialists also collaborated to develop a new BR&E program: On-Site Distributed Energy as a BR&E Strategy, a workshop which was delivered in West Central Ohio (Findlay) in March 2013. The workshop is also being planned in two other counties in the state in 2015 (Allen and Auglaize) and has been presented as a model program at numerous venues nationwide, including annual conferences for NACDEP, IEDC and CDS. The program is described in marketing materials including a brochure, flyer, case studies, workshop agenda, and other outputs. Three fact sheets have also been developed for this initiative. The purpose of the program is to introduce companies to on-site distributed energy systems as a means of creating efficiencies, improving the bottom line and increasing energy reliability, while investing in local communities and assuring retention and growth.

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Above are just three of the BR&E programs that were offered by Ohio State University Community Development Extension in 2014. It should be noted that a BR&E program often takes more than 12 months to complete so some of the data for programs started in 2013 have not been incorporated because the project will be completed (final report to the community) in 2014.

Extent to which the program achieves the anticipated short-term, mid-term, and/or long-term changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills, practices, or conditions

The Business Retention and Expansion Program is guided by the following outcomes:

SHORT TERM - Local leaders and community residents will:

1. Improve their understanding of the concept of economic development and appreciate the need to better understand existing businesses.
2. Be more familiar with the concept of an ongoing Business Retention & Expansion program.
3. Be more willing and able to play an active role in the development of their community and be more aware of the roles they can play in the development of their community's economy.
4. Devote time necessary to develop a working relationship with existing businesses in their region.
5. Be more familiar with different ways of analyzing data and more capable of interpreting data needed to make important community decisions.
6. Track key indicators specific to their community.

MEDIUM TERM - Local leaders and community residents will:

1. Use BR&E data and other secondary data available to make better-informed community decisions.
2. Adopt one or more recommended practices for retaining and/or expanding existing businesses as a result of formal BR&E efforts.
3. 'Donate' volunteer hours in undertaking the BR&E program in their community.

LONG TERM

1. Jobs will be retained and created by existing businesses.
2. New businesses will be created.
3. Community leaders, residents, and businesses will engage in ongoing, meaningful dialogue.

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Extent to which the program elevates the public's knowledge of OSUE

As indicated earlier, report data indicate that two of the four Extension program areas use the Business Retention and Expansion Program to foster community economics in their respective county/region/area. Data indicates that:

- Over 640 individuals have been contacted via regular mail
- 478 BRE materials have been distributed
- 21 media appearances by Extension personnel
- 258 telephone contacts

Based on the above numbers along with the geographic coverage of the BR&E program, it becomes apparent that the public is quite aware of the impact of OSUE on their county and on the entire state of Ohio. The BR&E program is focused on using trained educators to conduct a community economics program, BR&E specifically, in communities throughout Ohio. The team engages the local Extension Educator (or Extension Office if there are no Extension Educators), a local community volunteer to serve as a coordinator, and local committee members to conduct the program. The team then assists with survey development and survey analysis.

Extent to which proposed program marketing, communication, implementation and evaluation methods and strategies are followed

As indicated throughout this report, BR&E program has continued in its current state to produce traditional programs with Extension Educators throughout Ohio. As we moved through 2014, it became imperative that we continued to brand our product and created additional opportunities to further enhance the Community Economics Program.

The BR&E team has developed and followed specific objectives for the program. The data provided indicates that BR&E survey is following specific implementation and evaluation methods originally designed by the program leaders. That is, pre-post evaluation tools as well as follow up end of the year surveys indicated specific outputs and outcomes are being met on a yearly basis.

To that end, The BR&E team has introduced the program into new venues. For example, the team has worked with officials from Indiana, Florida, Iowa and New York to develop a survey specifically designed for agribusinesses that are currently developing in today's economy. Also in New York, a three day workshop was conducted in June, 2014 educating New York Extension educators on how to conduct BR&E in their State. Tentative plans are in place to replicate the program in other southern states.

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2014 NCRCRD Grant Update.

The BR&E team has recently been awarded a grant (October 2013-September 2014 \$18,500) from the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (NCRCRD). The title of the grant is: “Elevating and Expanding the Business Retention & Expansion Signature Program”.

The goal of this project is to build a multi-state (partners include Iowa, Indiana, Minnesota, and North Dakota) effort that will modernize the BR&E program and approach to positively impact rural economies by targeting agribusiness growth. At the conclusion of the grant, new curriculum focused on the agribusiness economy will be developed along with a mobile application that will be created for use by economic development directors and other practitioners working in the field. The project core team includes Scott Hutchinson (Purdue), Nora Ladjahasen (Iowa), and Nancy Bowen and David Civittolo. The project outputs, outcomes and intended impacts are listed below:

A. Project Outputs

Following is a list of tasks/activities that have or will be conducted by members of the project team to accomplish the objectives of the project:

1. Submit presentation proposal for Galaxy Conference on “Evolution of BR&E Program and regional plans.” Initial meeting during conference with core team to lay out meeting schedule and plans.
2. Conduct initial WebEx meeting with core/tech teams to outline plans, decide which technology/curriculum tools to incorporate with program builder and surveys application, and determine next steps.
3. Facilitate team work in individual states with tech partners to outline the scope and prepare initial curriculum tools, surveys and methods.
4. Conduct two-day curriculum development session with team/tech partners.
5. Schedule four WebEx meetings to track progress of continued work on curriculum, tools and mobile application.
6. Rollout and testing of new interactive survey application and tools. Roundtable meeting with BR&E teams in partner states will be conducted.
7. Finalize work on curriculum with final two WebEx meetings.
8. Submit presentation workshop on evolution of BR&E for NACDEP to include a test “user roundtable” of mobile application and curriculum.
9. Evaluate results from test workshop and roundtables and incorporate into final curriculum development.
10. Launch program and share program in NCRCRD webinar.
11. Market and demonstrate program throughout the NCRCRD region.

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B. Project Outcomes

Following is a listing and description of curricular materials that will be developed as a result of this project:

1. New mobile application for BR&E that blends tools and surveys using the 'Program Builder' model for easy use by practitioners throughout the region.
2. Web page and social media announcements on community development web sites throughout the NCRCRD region.
3. Curriculum tools tied to BR&E mobile application (IMPLAN, GIS, market research analytics, database of NAICS codes, labor force data and demographics).
4. Redeveloped survey and survey questions to expand upon traditional BR&E Surveys (Commercial and Industrial) and include emerging issues and niche economies.
5. New marketing brochure and pricing structure for the BR&E Program.
6. Powerpoint presentations and workshop materials for regional and national meetings and conferences including NCRCRD and NACDEP to enable the team to promote the program throughout the NCRCRD region.
7. Evaluation results from test roundtables and workshop.

C. Project Intended Impacts

Short term:

- Establish relationships with neighboring NCRCRD states on common focus program
- Provide information for public leaders to tell the local "story"
- Demonstrate support for local businesses
- Address immediate business needs

This grant project is scheduled to be completed by April 30, 2015 and will be introduced at the NACDEP conference in Little Rock, AR. A webinar is also planned in summer 2015, to roll out the new curriculum, which is focused on growth within the agribusiness sector.

The Business Retention and Expansion Program continues to be a viable program for Ohio State University Extension. The program is evolving as a regional collaborative model with program elements being added or revised to retain relevancy and to address the current needs of communities and practitioners. Through grants, multi-state projects and new partnerships, the BR&E Leadership is prepared to move this signature program into the next generation of community economics.