ABSTRACT

A healthy and vibrant local economy depends on the well-being of local businesses. Local business health can be fostered via a community-led business retention and expansion (BR&E) program. A BR&E program involves a dialogue with local businesses to better understand their issues and concerns. Such efforts can show the community’s appreciation for business contributions to the community and enable local leadership to identify economic development strategies informed by local business, and can inform the community at large about individual and community-wide business concerns. Perhaps most importantly, however, a BR&E program facilitates improved relationships among local development organizations and individuals. This collaboration can lead to more effective communications and long-term working partnerships resulting in more cooperative community policy and decision-making.
SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

A declining sense of social-connectedness, a community’s lack of understanding of its economic resources, and an ill-informed economic development plan are confronting many struggling communities in today’s rapid societal and economic change. Many local governments are left with decreasing revenue streams, vacant buildings, and high unemployment rates. To address these issues and to more clearly identify strategies for community economic development, many Ohio communities have engaged in a formal community-based, ongoing Business Retention and Expansion Program. This bulletin attempts to outline the general format that many Ohio communities have employed over the past twenty years to help them better understand the community, its businesses, and ways in which both can be strengthened.
SECTION 2: WHAT IS BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION (BR&E)?

BR&E includes all ongoing local economic development programs that focus on retaining and growing the existing businesses in a community. A formal BR&E program is a structured effort usually involving a broad cross-section of community interests, engaged in ongoing dialogue with the business community to help existing businesses remain profitable, competitive, and efficient (Morse, 1990).
Engaging in dialogue with existing businesses to better understand their needs and concerns can provide economic development officials with the breadth and depth of data that enable them to develop a focused and deliberate plan of work that will strengthen the local economy. Open dialogue between the business community and local leaders as a result of an ongoing BR&E program can:

- Create a respectful, caring, and cooperative relationship between a community and its business employers. Such dialogue may focus around community amenities and issues that affect quality of life.

- Provide communities with an “early warning” system. Communities suffer financially and in other ways when existing employers announce mass layoffs or worse yet, a pending closure. An open, ongoing dialogue provides an opportunity for business and community leaders to share such information early and often, so that the effects of such announcements can be minimized, or avoided altogether.

- Generate improved community self-awareness, or an understanding of themselves. Ongoing data collection can provide local leaders with a clearer sense of key socio-economic characteristics such as: in-commuting/out-commuting patterns and locally owned and operated businesses vs. branch locations of a larger corporation, for example. Such information can also form the basis of a depository of local information valuable for grant applications, providing policy direction, and charting the community’s key economic characteristics over time (Harmon, 1990, 51).

- Identify issues critical to existing businesses, that when addressed, can help to increase productivity. Oftentimes, communities can aid in local business development through referral programs, creation of business networks, reduction of “red tape” and/or removal of actual physical barriers to business expansion such as utility or roadway easements.

- Build a database that is useful in the aggregate to influence local and state policies/procedures/legislation. One by one and voice by voice, an aggregated BR&E database of responses will clearly inform policies for legislative consideration.
Many communities have a long-term goal to stabilize and increase the local economy. BR&E programs help the community achieve this goal by developing and implementing a strategy to build a database of information that identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the local economy. Key elements to the program are goals, objectives, and key players.
PROGRAM GOALS

A local BR&E program is typically part of a broader economic development effort that encompasses the retention and expansion of existing enterprises, as well as the attraction of new businesses (Morse, 1990). A key element of the program is a survey designed to provide valuable information for and about existing businesses within one or more industry sectors (Harmon, 1990).

Depending upon the objectives of the program, the focus of your survey may include: company profile, business health, business climate, existing and projected workforce needs, workforce development issues, customer needs, municipal services, or residential concerns. However, most Ohio BR&E survey programs share similar long-term goals:

1. To implement a plan for action for retention and expansion of existing businesses and the workforce.
2. To increase the competitiveness of local businesses.
3. To create a narration of the local economy.
4. Using the strengthened local businesses as a tool for recruitment and/or business incubation.

Together these goals enable local economic development and community leaders to identify and address issues and opportunities that affect their local economy and the competitiveness of existing businesses.

LOCAL PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Prior to launching a BR&E study, the local Coordinator and Task Force members need to answer some key questions that will guide their program:

1. What are the goals of the BR&E program?
2. How is “community” defined for the purpose of BR&E? It may be a community of place, identity, or interest, or a combination thereof.
3. Who will we include in our BR&E programming efforts?
4. How will the information be used?
5. What business sector(s) and/or issue(s) will be targeted?
6. What survey format will be used? Mailed questionnaires, business visits (personal interviews), both? Monthly or quarterly surveys, or once per year?
7. How will the results be communicated and to whom?
8. How will the local program be funded and housed?
BR&E program objectives vary from community to community, and most programs have more than one. The community should establish short-term and long-term objectives that can be easily measured in the early stages of your BR&E program. They may include:

Short-term Objectives:
1. Assist businesses by addressing their immediate issues and concerns through an assessment and referral process.
2. Identify and respond to businesses that may be planning to close, sell, move, or expand.
3. Identify and implement improvements to community services.
4. Collect business/market data as part of a planning process.

Long-Term Objectives:
1. Foster and enhance the environment for business development.
2. Collect and analyze existing business data and local workforce data to develop a better understanding of the local in comparison to the statewide economy.
3. Survey residents for an analysis of the work skills, concerns, and future plans of the local labor force.
KEY PLAYERS

While narrating the local economy and gathering data to better inform economic development strategies can be effectively undertaken by one or two local development professionals, the development of community capacity to better understand the local economy is best achieved by involving a variety of community stakeholders. To develop community capacity and distribute the workload, the local community should consider creating a BR&E Task Force to assist the program coordinator. The key players in a local BR&E program typically include the:

- **Coordinator**: responsible for managing all aspects of the program.

- **BR&E Task Force**: typically consists of eight to fifteen community leaders. Ideally, it will include broad representation from agencies involved in community and economic development, educational institutions, local government, and private enterprises to strengthen the ability of the Task Force to address the myriad of issues that are often identified via the dialogue with business.

- **Referral Team**: entities, individuals, agencies who provide the resources and services that are indicated after an assessment of the business.

- **Participating Businesses**: the most important participants in the BR&E program.
SECTION 4: COORDINATOR AND TASK FORCE RESPONSIBILITIES

Your community’s BR&E Coordinator is typically responsible for the overall organization and management of the local program. Local Chamber of Commerce, economic development officials, and Extension professionals are all ideally suited to serve in this capacity.
BR&E COORDINATOR

The following is a list of tasks typically handled by the BR&E Coordinator:

1. Introduce the BR&E program to the community: Informing the community about the BR&E program can be accomplished through the local media (e.g., press releases and newspaper articles) or by contacting residents and business owners through the community’s informal communication network. Formal and informal methods used together would get through to the most people in a multi-“channel” world.

2. Organize and conduct meetings: A volunteer-driven program will require meetings to coordinate individual efforts. The Coordinator schedules and leads these meetings:
   a. Task Force orientation
   b. Volunteer Business Visitor training (if applicable)
   c. Task Force meetings to review surveys
   d. Action planning meetings
   e. Meetings to communicate the results of the program
   f. Annual program “Kick-Off” meeting

3. Prepare the list for selection of businesses.

4. Coordinate data collection and manage access to the data.

5. Collect the contact information for the targeted businesses, print the questionnaires and cover letters, mail or fax the materials.

6. Coordinate activities associated with business visits.

7. Collect and review completed questionnaires.


9. Manage the data entry and analysis process.

10. Coordinate action planning, program assessment, and reporting.

To assist the Coordinator with these responsibilities, you may want to assign sub-committees or individual Task Force members to be responsible for major tasks.
**BR&E TASK FORCE**

The Task Force provides solutions to local business issues, participates in critical economic development policy decision-making, and is responsible for using the survey information to develop and communicate the ongoing story of the local economy. The Coordinator should recruit community leaders who are able to commit to a minimum of a two-year term.

A Task Force of any size can work, but a group consisting of eight to fifteen community members is recommended. Broad representation from agencies involved in community and economic development, educational institutions, local government, and private enterprises strengthens the ability of the Task Force to address the various issues that are often raised in the completed questionnaires.

Led by the Coordinator, the BR&E Task Force typically:

1. Sets clear, attainable, and manageable objectives for the program.
2. Assists in securing endorsements from local supporting organizations.
3. Serves on a variety of program sub-committees if necessary.
4. Participates in the development of the questionnaire.
5. Conducts business visits (if applicable).
6. Addresses local concerns and problems cited in the survey.
7. Participates in action planning and program assessment.
A typical BR&E program consists of volunteers visiting businesses and interviewing senior level management, mailed surveys, action planning, and public relations and communications. Such activities can be conducted in a continuous format where the community cycles through all the stages and starts over again or a one-time approach. Of course there are advantages and disadvantages to each approach. A continuous approach can enable BR&E to become a part of the community’s everyday economic development work but it also requires resources sufficient to ensure its success. A one-time approach can mobilize limited resources to bring about anticipated impact, but the long-term impact of those efforts may be limited considering that attention to and focus on BR&E will shift away to other community economic development efforts.
The Nine Steps to the BR&E Process outlined below is useful regardless of the approach you intend to take. Many communities lean toward the one-time approach to get started. If you choose this route, you should expect the nine steps below to involve at least 4–6 months from start to finish.

**NINE STEPS TO THE BR&E PROCESS**

1. **Form BR&E Task Force**
2. **Schedule and Hold Initial Task Force Meeting**
3. **Announce Local BR&E Program**
4. **Distribute Surveys**
5. **Conduct Business Visits**
6. **Enter and Tabulate Response Data**
7. **Address Issues Identified in Response Data**
8. **Analyze and Report “Big Picture” Response Data**
9. **Communicate Results — Share Success Stories**

**Step One: Form BR&E Task Force**

1. Coordinator identifies and recruits Task Force members

**Step Two: Schedule and Hold Initial Task Force Meeting**

1. Coordinator provides program overview and discusses goals with Task Force
2. Coordinator addresses concerns and questions
3. Coordinator discusses data collection methods and introduces timeline

**Step Three: Announce Local BR&E Program**

1. Task Force and Coordinator develop marketing material for media distribution

**Step Four: Distribute Surveys**

1. Task Force and Coordinator finalize business list
2. Coordinator and/or Task Force install software, build (or import) questionnaire, create and test web form (if applicable)
3. Coordinator and/or Task Force send advance notice letter or make advance calls to survey participants
4. Coordinator and/or Task Force e-mail link and/or mail hard copies of questionnaire
5. Coordinator and/or Task Force e-mail and/or mail reminder postcard and/or make reminder calls; mail and/or e-mail Thank You’s

**Step Five: Conduct Business Visits**
1. Task Force and Coordinator select businesses to visit
2. Coordinator assigns business visitors
3. Coordinator and/or Task Force make business visits

**Step Six: Enter and Tabulate Response Data**
1. Coordinator and/or Task Force enter response data from questionnaires into software

**Step Seven: Address Issues Identified in Response Data**
1. Coordinator and/or Task Force review questionnaires as they come in
2. Coordinator and/or Task Force subcommittee engage other Task Force members
3. The interviewers return to the business owner and share referrals made by the Task Force
4. As authorized by the business, the interviewer contacts the referral on behalf of the business owner
5. The referral resource assists the business as requested and enters service provided in the database, detailing if the referral was successful completed, unable to close, or pending

**Step Eight: Analyze and Report “Big Picture” Response Data**
1. Coordinator and/or Task Force subcommittee review aggregated responses with Task Force
2. Coordinator and/or Task Force subcommittee identify action items
3. Coordinator and/or Task Force implement action items
4. Coordinator and/or Task Force evaluate action implementation
Step Nine: Communicate Results — Share Success Stories

1. Coordinator and/or Task Force subcommittee identify internal and external audiences
2. Coordinator and/or Task Force subcommittee develop key messages
3. Coordinator and/or Task Force subcommittee create/hold appropriate media/events, showcasing business success stories
SECTION 6: CONDUCTING SURVEYS

Recall that goals and objectives were discussed in Section 3. These items play a key role in how you actually go about conducting the BR&E program. Beginning a program without first determining what you want to achieve and how you intend to achieve it will result in an inefficient use of resources and less than desirable results. Your goals and objectives will help determine such things as type of survey, the frequency and timing of survey administration, and how survey distribution and data entry are handled.
BUSINESS CONFIDENTIALITY
Before a discussion of survey methodology, it is important to first cover the critical issue of business confidentiality.

Your local BR&E program may make inquiries of businesses that may reveal confidential information. Because of the nature of items typically included in the questionnaire, it is extremely important that the businesses be made aware and are assured of the confidentiality of the information they share. It is the responsibility of the Coordinator to assure the survey respondent (business owner or operator) that the data and information being collected will, in fact, be held in the strictest of confidence and ensure that confidentiality is protected.

TYPES OF SURVEYS
There are a variety of ways the community can engage in dialogue with local businesses to help them be more profitable and to grow. Typically, the dialogue takes the form of a survey process involving business visits (i.e., personal interviews), mailed, faxed, web-based, or e-mailed surveys.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE
The Coordinator and the Task Force participate in the development of the questionnaire. Your local Extension office can work with the program committee to obtain a pool of questions to consider.

TRADITIONAL BUSINESS VISITATION PROGRAMS
Business visitation is a “traditional” approach to BR&E that readily demonstrates to business owners that the local community is truly interested in the success of their enterprise. This method also does much to communicate the value the community places in its businesses. Depending upon the objectives of the program, the time frame, and the capacity of the leadership in the community, the Task Force may choose one of several approaches to business visitation:

1. Using volunteers from the community to conduct the interviews — This will involve recruiting volunteers, pairing them with selected businesses, training them on how to conduct an in-person survey, and then sending them out to meet with business owners and managers to record their responses to the survey questions. This method will increase the number of businesses that can be reached and disperses knowledge of business concerns to a broader group of community members.

2. Using Task Force members — This option reduces the time and effort required in recruiting and training volunteers.

3. Pairing up resources — This option entails pairing Task Force members or the
local Economic Development Director with a local leader who is not a member of the Task Force, but who has an existing relationship with the targeted business.

Recruiting Volunteer Visitors
Identifying volunteers is a critical step in organizing the local BR&E visitation program because these volunteers, perhaps more than any other player, are seen as the “face” of the local program. Their performance and the impression they leave on the participating businesses greatly influences the success of the program.

Determining the Number of Volunteers Needed
Depending on level of interest of your volunteers and the number of volunteers you have, you should count on recruiting as many volunteers as you have businesses to visit. This number assumes each volunteer will be paired with another to form a Visiting Team, and together, they will visit two businesses.

Identifying Potential Volunteers
Local influential leaders who are or have been active in the community are usually the best volunteer visitors because they recognize the importance of helping to improve the community’s economy. If possible, the visitors should include people from both private and public sectors.

Ways to Recruit Volunteers
The entire BR&E Task Force should be responsible for recruiting volunteer visitors. The Coordinator may ask Task Force members to personally recruit two or more individuals to serve as volunteer visitors. Task Force members can serve on volunteer visitor teams as well.

Assigning Volunteer Visitor Teams to Businesses
The Coordinator should elicit the input of the entire Task Force in pairing volunteers and assigning volunteer teams to businesses. The goal is to avoid any personality, professional, or personal conflicts between the volunteers and assigned businesses. By drawing on the knowledge of the Task Force, most conflicts can be avoided.

Visitor Training
The importance of training the volunteer visitor cannot be overstated. A well-trained volunteer visiting team will demonstrate an organized and committed business assistance effort. Additionally, the volunteer visitor is collecting the data and information upon which the BR&E Action Plan will be formulated. The visitors are responsible
for eliciting meaningful, unbiased responses, and maintaining the confidentiality of the businesses.

To provide the Task Force with the opportunity to experience how an actual business interview might take place, you may find value in conducting several practice business visits before getting started.

After selecting businesses to participate in the practice visit, the Coordinator should call them and ask if they would be willing to take part in the practice visit. Usually, interviews last about one hour but may vary depending on the extent to which the business is willing to share.

**Conducting the Practice Visit**

The actual practice visit should be conducted in the manner in which all business visits take place. While conducting the survey, one visitor should act as the survey taker, asking the questions and responding to the business representative, and the other visitor should act as the survey recorder, writing the answers and responses of the business representative.

**MAILED, FAXED, WEB-BASED, OR E-MAILED SURVEYS**

The mailed, faxed, and/or web-based method of conducting BR&E surveys is typically used when a Task Force needs information quickly. This approach usually takes less time than business visitation, and it has the advantage of reaching busy executives who don’t have the time to meet personally with a visitor. Mailed surveys are also effective when responses to the questions require research on the part of the respondent, or if more than one person within the organization is needed to complete the survey form. Typically, however, response rates using these methods tend to be lower than the in-person visit.

In addition to planning public communications activities that promote the BR&E program, the community should follow a five-step process to help increase the response rate to mailed, faxed, web-based, or e-mailed surveys.

1. **Pre-test the questionnaire.** To ensure that the questions on the questionnaire accurately represent the objectives of the program, send your questionnaire to three to five of the targeted businesses.

2. **Send a personalized advance-notice letter.** Inform the businesses they have been selected for the survey and they will be receiving a questionnaire.

3. **About one week later, send a personalized cover letter, a questionnaire, and stamped return envelope (or fax number or e-mail address).** The cover letter should make the case why the respondent should complete the questionnaire. The tone of the letter is businesslike and the style is personalized.
4. Follow up four to eight days later. Send a follow-up postcard, call, fax, or send an e-mail thanking those who have responded and request a response from those who have not.

5. Don’t give up. Three weeks after the first questionnaire goes out, send a new personalized cover letter informing people, “We have not yet heard from you,” with a replacement questionnaire and stamped return envelope (or fax number or e-mail address). Again, a personal phone call from the Coordinator or a Task Force member is a particularly effective alternative.

Survey Design — Mailed Questionnaires

Because the mailed survey stands on its own, it should be designed to motivate the respondents to complete the survey. When designing the survey, the following four components should be considered:

1. **Questionnaire Title** should be clear and to the point. It should convey what the survey is about.

2. **Front Cover Design** attracts interest in the survey and can also set it apart from other surveys.

3. **Questionnaire Format and Layout** should convey a sense of flow with open space using a booklet format with questions printed on both sides of each inside page.

4. **Back Cover Design** should provide enough blank space for the respondent to make additional comments. At the bottom of the page, include a thank-you for completing and returning the survey.

Frequency of Business Surveys

How often should you conduct surveys? How often you collect key community data with surveys depends on the objectives of your local program and on the resources available to you. You can conduct continuous surveys (monthly, quarterly, etc.) using a “base” questionnaire. It may be targeted to a specific industry sector or to multiple sectors. The base questionnaire would contain questions that are used for trend analysis, such as business perception of local services or quality of workforce. This information is useful for planning, local business relations, and community marketing. When the need arises, you can also conduct an “issue-specific” survey. This is a one-time questionnaire (or set of questions added to the base survey) that focuses on one sector or issue. The issue-specific questionnaires are often used for decision support in designing economic development policy and programs.
Depending on your program objectives, the community may choose to survey businesses in one industry sector or a combination of sectors. The Task Force will need to identify the target population(s) and most likely will decide to survey a sample of the target population.
It is recommended that a new program begin with businesses most critical for sustaining the local economy, usually the businesses that hire the most employees. In small rural communities, however, the corner drug store is a key business, thus the business selection is relative to the community context.

In survey terminology, the “population” refers to all possible respondents that may be selected for a survey. In a BR&E program, the survey population typically includes all of the businesses in the community for the selected sector (industrial, retail, health care, agricultural, etc.).

To determine the population, a detailed list of all businesses fitting the appropriate classification must be generated. Various sources of information may be used to generate this list. The most common sources include telephone directories, yellow pages, chambers of commerce, county property tax rolls, municipal income tax rolls, and personal knowledge. Sources that charge a fee for their lists include Harris InfoSource and InfoUSA.com. Realize that no one source is perfect; therefore, errors should be expected.

Selecting the Survey Sample from the Population

The survey sample is the list of businesses that you have identified from the larger population about which you would like to learn more. You want to identify a list of businesses to survey in a way that adequately represents the larger population. The following technique allows for three distinct sets of businesses to be targeted. First, the largest businesses (in terms of employment) are selected. Second, businesses that the Task Force feels “must be surveyed” are selected. Finally, a list is created of randomly selected businesses. Random selection ensures that each business has an equal chance of being selected and creates a survey sample list that is representative of the population of businesses in your community. For some communities, there are not enough businesses within the targeted sector to use the method described above. In that case, you can survey the entire business population within the sector.
Successful BR&E programs depend largely on the extent to which the community can effectively follow up on the short-term and long-term business needs and requests. The Coordinator should review each questionnaire when it is returned. In this review, typically the Coordinator identifies the need for short-term follow-up and immediate action items to address as “critical” issues. The Coordinator also keeps the Task Force informed by holding meetings to review the survey results.
LOCAL REVIEW OF QUESTIONNAIRES
After each questionnaire is returned, the Coordinator should complete three immediate tasks.

1. Send a letter thanking the business for participating in the BR&E program.
2. Review the completed questionnaire and address simple, short-term, and urgent, “critical” items pertaining to that business.
3. Ensure that an accurate record of the completed questionnaire be made.
   You may want to:
   a. Check off the targeted business as “survey complete.”
   b. Record the names of the volunteer visitors if a site visit was made.
   c. Ensure that the survey ID is recorded on each page of the survey instrument.

RESPONDING TO ISSUES
During the review of the surveys, you may conclude that there is a need for an immediate action. A business may indicate, for example, that it intends to relocate or close in the next two months. Uncovering such an issue is a key function of the BR&E program. It is of critical importance for the Coordinator to have a plan for addressing such issues. The Coordinator may want to plan an immediate meeting with the business owner. Or, it may be prudent to call an emergency Task Force meeting to address the problem. Careful documentation of the actions taken to uncover and address the issue is also recommended.

REPORTING IMMEDIATE SUCCESS STORIES
Following any immediate successful responses to businesses, the Coordinator may also want to consider writing a news release describing the follow-up actions taken by the Task Force. Such a news release should be written in consultation with the assisted business.

TASK FORCE REVIEW OF SURVEYS
The Task Force should be informed of the progress and interim results of the survey administration phase of the BR&E program. To keep the lines of communication open between the Coordinator and the Task Force, the Coordinator may want to hold periodic Task Force meetings during the business survey administration stage. The method by which the Coordinator involves the Task Force in the review of the survey results is at the discretion of the Coordinator.
There are two ways to keep abreast of the survey results:

1. **Coordinator Summary Review Method** requires the Coordinator to put a significant amount of time into reviewing each individual questionnaire. After approximately one-fourth of the questionnaires have been returned, the Coordinator should compile a summary of the key problems and concerns that have been uncovered. The Coordinator then schedules a Task Force meeting to share the summary review. The Task Force is asked to respond to the concerns summarized and suggest short-term and immediate action.

2. **Task Force Survey Review Method** requires the Task Force to review each of the returned questionnaires individually. This method enables the sharing of Task Force “group expertise” and permits a greater amount of Task Force involvement in the questionnaire review. This method also calls for regular Task Force meetings at which approximately ten to twelve questionnaires are reviewed at each meeting.

**DATA ENTRY AND ANALYSIS SOFTWARE**

Many community BR&E programs rely on computer-based software for data entry, analysis, storage, and management. There is a variety of computer-based software that enables communities to conduct surveys online, over the phone, or in person, and then analyze, manage, print, publish, and post the results.
Perhaps the two most important components of a BR&E program are planning for action and assessing program effectiveness. How these tasks are handled varies from community to community.
Action planning refers to addressing individual business issues that can enable the business to become more profitable and expand as well as identifying the larger community issues that when properly addressed, can foster a more business-friendly environment. It can take place in “real time” or be conducted in an annual periodic format.

- **“Real-time” Action Planning** requires the Coordinator to conduct an ongoing or “real-time” review and analysis of the survey data within the context of secondary data analysis and local knowledge. This format requires the Coordinator and/or the Task Force to detect trends and other key business issues and relay such information to the individual or organization that is appropriately equipped to address the issue or use the information.

When developing the Plan for Action, the Coordinator and/or Task Force members should contact the appropriate local/regional government offices to inform them of the process and confirm their participation. In situations where the actions are in response to specific businesses, the Coordinator should also contact the respondents for their permission to pass on the information to preserve confidentiality.

It is the responsibility of the designated individuals/organizations to respond to the Coordinator/Task Force, in a timely manner, with their plan of action for each item. This plan identifies the item, what will be done, who will do it, and when and how it will be done. The Coordinator keeps the documentation of each plan. At the end of a designated period of time, typically 12 months, this record along with the Plan for Action Worksheet can be used to inform program assessment and evaluation purposes.

You may want rely on a form like the one on page 36 to keep track of the issues:
BR&E PLAN FOR ACTION TRACKING FORM

Item Number (use this self-assigned number for tracking):

Survey Category (identify from which survey or other source the issue originates):

Issue Description:

Level of Urgency:

___RED (immediate)  ___YELLOW (3-6 mos)  ___BLUE (more than 6 mos)

Organization/Person(s) Responsible:

Date Contacted:

Recommended Action:

Update/Date of Resolution:
• **Annual Action Planning** is the traditional approach to BR&E action and assessment and requires the Task Force and Coordinator to develop action items from the analysis of the survey data and secondary data. From this analysis, an action plan, which they are responsible for implementing, is drafted. The goal is to develop short-term and long-term recommendations and actions to support business retention and expansion and overall community and economic development.

The Annual Action Planning process can be summarized as including the following three meetings:

*Meeting 1*
1. Review BR&E report and data, identify BR&E issues, formulate issues and objectives

*Meeting 2*
1. Prioritize BR&E objectives
2. Break into sub-groups to develop detailed action strategies for each priority objective

*Meeting 3*
1. Sub-groups report back to one another and continue to develop strategies

**ANNUAL BR&E TASK FORCE PROGRAM ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN REVIEW**

To evaluate the effectiveness of the program, and review the cumulative data in order to detect trends and issues that may have been missed, you may want to conduct an assessment of the program on an annual basis. The assessment should include a summary highlighting the secondary data and survey responses collected throughout the evaluation period. In addition, the assessment should identify all the open and closed Plan for Action items.
One of the key functions of a BR&E program is to facilitate improved community self-awareness. Cultivating such self-awareness requires sharing your BR&E efforts with the community. There are several communication strategies that can help generate interest and awareness.
LOCAL BR&E MARKETING
Many local BR&E efforts have found it advantageous to develop their own letterhead, create a BR&E program web page, and communicate progress using social media. Using these marketing tools can serve to formalize and communicate to others the BR&E organizational structure, important dates, key issues, etc.

MEDIA COVERAGE
Media coverage of the BR&E program can help generate community interest, develop an awareness of the program, and inform businesses and residents of key findings and results.

Working with the local media during BR&E programming demonstrates that the program is action-oriented and is a sincere attempt to improve the local business climate. It also can provide tangible news regarding the local economy. Media representatives can interview the parties involved in the program.

Remember to rely on all sources of publicity for your BR&E program. Newspapers, radio interviews, television coverage (including cable access TV), Chamber of Commerce and trade organization newsletters, and information bulletins are all excellent methods of informing the community and state about your community’s pro-business attitude and efforts to promote economic development.

PUBLICITY AND THE RESPONSE RATE
Realize that the survey response rate is directly impacted by publicity of the program prior to its official launch and while it is being conducted. Whether you use the local media as your primary communications channel, or informal personal networking, working to inform the public of the purpose of the program and its intended outcomes will likely lead to greater interest and participation among the business community.

BR&E COMMUNITY MEETING
Community meetings are ideal vehicles for recognizing the participants in the program and sharing the results with the public. Typically a community meeting is held after the Action Plan has been completed so that the Annual BR&E Report may be presented to the public and business community. It is also an opportunity to review the previous year’s Action Plan, thank all the participants, and challenge the community to rally around and support the BR&E Action Plan.
SECTION 11: SUSTAINING EFFORTS WITH NEW YEAR KICK-OFF MEETING
The New Year Kick-Off serves a key function in the community BR&E program. It enables the community to recognize departing Task Force members, welcome the incoming Task Force members, and introduce them and other community members to the BR&E program. It provides the community an opportunity to celebrate past successes and envision new ones. It provides a forum for enhancing community self-awareness via sharing an annual “state of the economy” report with participants.
A BR&E program requires time and effort to listen and respond quickly to the issues, concerns, and suggestions of local businesses and the workforce. These efforts can promote a pro-business climate in the community and develop the capacity of the Coordinator and members of the Task Force to engage in meaningful community and economic development efforts. Exercising this capacity enhances the local BR&E efforts, enables better informed community and economic development strategies, and helps to inform Task Force Members and the community at large about individual and community-wide business concerns. Perhaps most importantly, however, it fosters improved relationships among local development organizations and individuals. This coordination may lead to more effective communications and long-term working partnerships resulting in more cooperative policy and decision-making.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX I: BR&E PROGRAM PLAN CHECKLIST

Use of this checklist will help identify BR&E program participants, focus program objectives and measurable outcomes, and identify data collection and management strategies. Working through the items on this checklist will help communicate the overall program approach to BR&E Task Force members.

A. BR&E Stakeholders
Identify and categorize program stakeholders.
___1. Public
   ___a. City
   ___b. Regional
   ___c. State
   ___d. Other ________________________________

___2. Private
   ___a. Chamber of Commerce
   ___b. Local businesses
   ___c. Trade unions
   ___d. Non-governmental organizations
   ___e. Other ________________________________

___3. Residents
___4. Other ________________________________
___5. Other ________________________________

B. Program Measurement
Determine how you intend to measure impact of your BR&E efforts.
___1. Increased tax revenue
___2. Press mentions
___3. Vacancy rate
___4. Jobs retained
___5. Jobs created
___6. Promotional materials created
___7. Other ________________________________

C. Use(s) of Information
Identify ways in which BR&E data can be used.
___1. Increase/retain jobs
___2. Develop/improve relations with businesses
   ___a. Identify top businesses for relationship development and maintenance
___3. Develop programs for business
   ___a. Address needs of existing businesses
   ___b. Promote entrepreneurship
   ___c. Attract new business
___4. Improve/change community image (internal and/or external)
___5. Improve/preserve quality of life
___6. Program assessment
___7. Community planning
___8. Other ________________________________
___9. Other ________________________________

D. Type(s) of Information — Areas of Focus
What do you need to know in order to address items mentioned in “C” above?
___1. Business investment forecast (BIF): businesses planning to downsize, sell, move, or expand
___2. Perceptions of:
   ___a. Education
   ___b. Health care
   ___c. Infrastructure
   ___d. Government services
   ___e. Recreation
   ___f. Labor force
   ___g. Retail/services
   ___h. Housing
   ___i. Quality of life
   ___j. Other ________________________________
   ___k. Other ________________________________
3. Business linkages
   a. Inputs
   b. Outputs
   c. Customers
   d. Suppliers

4. Operations
   a. Change in product mix
   b. Change in sales/number of employees
   c. Marketing
   d. Business hours
   e. Succession plans
   f. Financial
   g. Other

5. Business conditions
   a. Legislation
   b. Technology changes
   c. Competition
   d. Economy
   e. Customers
   f. Other
   g. Other

6. Workforce
   a. Training
   b. Quantity/quality/availability
   c. Recruiting
   d. Housing
   e. Other
   f. Other
   g. Other

7. Other

E. Source(s) of Information

Where can data listed in “D” above be acquired?

1. Secondary
   a. Publicly available
      1. Location
   b. Purchased reports
   c. Other
F. Methodology

In what way(s) would you like to go about collecting and making use of data?

__1. Survey type
   __a. Visitation
   __b. Mailed
   __c. Web-based
   __d. Fax
   __e. Telephone
   __f. Combination ______________________

__2. Frequency of survey
   __a. One-time
   __b. Every month
   __c. Once per quarter
   __d. Twice per year

__3. Data management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person(s) responsible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Data entry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Data tabulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Data storage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Ohio Business Retention & Expansion Initiative
Phone: 614-292-6356 • Fax: 614-292-0078
http://localecon.osu.edu

Supported by Ohio State University Extension and the Department of Agricultural, Environmental, and Development Economics

Ohio State University Extension embraces human diversity and is committed to ensuring that all research and related educational programs are available to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, or veteran status. This statement is in accordance with United States Civil Rights Laws and the USDA.

Keith L. Smith, Ph.D., Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Director, Ohio State University Extension
TDD No. 800-589-8292 (Ohio only) or 614-292-1868