

Course Outline

Unit 1 - The Importance of Business Retention and Expansion

With a focus on "Why we do it?," this unit explores why BRE should be a fundamental part of every community economic development effort.

Unit 2 - Establishing an Existing Business Program

Two distinct approaches have developed for BRE visitation programs. Which one is right your community? This unit introduces two different approaches to BRE and outlines a methodology for determining an appropriate approach for your community.

Unit 3 - Measuring Success

Documenting program success is an important part of a BRE program. Developing benchmarks, assessment tools and an assessment plan is one of the first orders of business in program development. This unit focuses on how programs and projects can be tracked, progress measured and success documented.

Unit 4 - Assessing Community Capacity

It is essential for BRE practitioners to have a keen understanding of their community. This unit provides information on how to find, interpret, analyze and present secondary data to describe a community. Several models for compiling and organizing profile data are presented. A small group exercise is included to introduce participants to finding, compiling and interpreting community data.

Unit 5 - The Business Survey

The heart of a business visitation program is the business survey. This unit outlines a process for developing a new survey or selecting questions from existing surveys to meet the goals of a BRE survey. Detailed information is given on the setting survey goals, formulating questions and the construction of a survey instrument. Small group exercises allow participants to evaluate a survey instrument and to see how questions are constructed and used in the survey process.

Unit 6 - Conducting Business Visits

Conducting successful business visits is not a matter of luck. Business visits ensure that the right data are collected and that business owner/operators are given an opportunity to be heard. This unit identifies various methods of data collection and discusses the advantages and disadvantages of each approach. Included in the session are a discussion of business visitation techniques and a mock interview.

Unit 7 - Responding to Business Concerns

It is not enough to visit a business. The BRE program must have a plan to respond to what is learned from business owners. This unit outlines the why and how of the follow-up that occurs after a business visit. Examples of "red flags" are presented and participants will have an opportunity to suggest ways to organize and address business concerns. A small group exercise

is included that allows participants to review survey instruments for red flag issues and to develop a response to business requests.

Unit 8 - Analyzing Data and Developing Recommendations

After survey responses are collected and compiled someone must review and interpret the information. And, based on that analysis, an action plan to address systemic concerns can be developed. This unit presents approaches to data analysis and a methodology for identifying projects to be implemented based on findings from the data analysis. A small group exercise allows participants an opportunity to analyze and interpret aggregated data and to develop recommended actions based on that analysis.

Unit 9 - Reporting Results and Implementing Projects

Why do project reports often go unread? Could it be that the report is written from the writer's point of view and not that of the reader? This unit outlines an approach to creating readable, and thus usable, reports of survey findings and recommendations.