

**Ohio Business Retention and Expansion  
Handbook  
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## Part 1. Introduction

The Ohio Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) Initiative provides the tools, resources and training for community leaders and economic development professionals to establish and maintain a successful, continuous business survey program. Since the Initiative's inception in 1986, more than 120 BR&E programs have been conducted.

Housed in the Department of Agricultural, Environmental and Development Economics on The Ohio State University campus, and supported by Ohio State University Extension, the BR&E Initiative is directed by Dawn Malone. Dr. David Kraybill serves as the Faculty Director.

The BR&E *Handbook* (Edition 6.7) is designed to be a “hands-on” ready reference guide. To the greatest extent possible, the *Handbook* is organized in sequential order, describing the major parts of a local BR&E program. Each part of the *Handbook* is listed in the Table of Contents on page i. The detailed contents of the *Handbook* are listed on page i.

Twenty years ago, when BR&E activities were begun by Ohio State University Extension, relatively few communities had full-time economic development professionals. Appropriately for that period, BR&E programming consisted of a step-by-step BR&E formula designed for volunteers who had little or no training in economic development. Today, many counties and municipalities have economic developers on staff or they provide funds for local economic development organizations that have full-time staff persons. These individuals are paid professionals, trained and experienced in local economic development. Rather than basic training, what they seek are tools and solutions that are flexible enough to address the problems of their communities and fit their busy schedules. In recent years, they have increasingly asked for BR&E assistance in the form of a “menu with options” rather than a set of procedures that must be followed by every community. In response to the changing needs of the economic development profession, the BR&E Initiative described in this handbook offers a set of resources and tools that can be adapted to fit the needs of communities and the skills and interests of local economic developers.

The overarching goal of the BR&E Initiative is to assist local leaders in monitoring and analyzing their local economy as it is today, and to use this information as a basis



for identifying, designing, and implementing improvements in the local economy. Existing businesses and the existing workforce are the best “barometers” of how well the community functions as a place to do business and as a place to live and work. The BR&E Initiative seeks to provide the tools, resources and training to communities to read the “local economic barometers” on a regular basis and to use this local knowledge to set and achieve economic development goals. The Initiative is based on the view that accurate local knowledge is a vital ingredient in self-sustaining community economies.

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## **Part 2.**

### **An Overview of the BR&E Initiative**

**T**he Ohio Business Retention & Expansion (BR&E) Initiative provides training, tools and resources to assist local leaders and economic developers in strengthening their communities' economies. The long-term goal of many communities is to stabilize and manage the local economy while at the same time preserving and improving its quality of life. The Initiative helps communities to 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. This information can, in turn, be used to make informed economic development decisions for optimal impact across all segments and sectors within the community.

#### **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 to a community. The program consists of a survey that provides valuable information for and about existing businesses within one or more industry sectors in a community. Depending upon the objectives of the program, it may be a survey of businesses, the local workforce, business customers, or consumers. The survey is typically conducted by a BR&E Committee or Task Force comprised of local leaders, and managed by an appointed Committee/Task Force Coordinator. Most BR&E survey programs share similar long-term goals:

#### **Long-Term BR&E Goals**

**To implement a plan for action for retention and expansion of existing businesses and the workforce**

**To increase the competitiveness of local businesses**

**To create a narration of the local economy**



Together these goals address the long-term perspective of local economic development. Initiating and implementing an on-going, or continuous, BR&E survey program enables community leaders to identify and address issues and opportunities that affect their local economy and the competitiveness of existing businesses. Some can be acted upon immediately. Others, which represent broader issues, are identified as “policy problems”. Policy problems require a change in the way things are done in the community. To address these problems, the Committee/Task Force develops a plan for action that identifies what will be done, who will do it, and when it will be done. This plan is a benchmark for continued “narration” of the economy. An accurate and effective “narration” of the local economy is necessary to create sustainable local economic change.

### **Program Benefits and Outcomes**

BR&E survey programs also have in common benefits and outcomes that result from the survey process. Taking the time and effort to listen and respond quickly to the issues, concerns, and suggestions of local businesses and the workforce promotes a pro-business climate in the community. It also establishes and improves relationships among businesses, residents, and community leaders.

A significant outcome of the survey process is the establishment and on-going development of a database about existing businesses and the local workforce. This information can be used in a number of ways ranging from collecting statistics for community marketing materials to developing trend analysis for strategic planning. In addition, the program facilitates coordination that may or may not have existed before among local development organizations and individuals. This coordination may lead to more effective communications and long-term working partnerships among these organizations resulting in cooperative policy decision-making.

Finally, the BR&E survey process serves to build community capacity, which is one of the primary objectives of the Ohio BR&E Initiative. The Initiative is designed to provide community leaders the tools and resources to plan, develop, and successfully execute a continuous BR&E program that integrates “local knowledge” with economic data for use in planning and policy-setting for economic growth and sustainability.

### **Local Program Objectives**

Prior to the launch of the BR&E program, the Committee/Task Force and the Committee/Task Force Coordinator need to answer some key questions, including:



- What are the objectives/goals of the community?
- How is “community” defined?
- How will the information be used?
- What organizations will sponsor the program?
- How will the program be funded?
- What is the role of each Committee/Task Force member?
- What sector(s) and/or issue(s) will be targeted?
- How will the survey be conducted? Mailed surveys, business visits, both? Monthly or quarterly surveys, or once per year?
- How will the results be communicated to the public?

Addressing all of these issues upfront is critical to the success of the program. As in all projects of this type, the most important factor is setting clear and attainable objectives. If possible, all members of the Committee/Task Force should agree on these objectives. Complete buy-in from the Committee/Task Force will help to ensure their commitment to the program.

BR&E program objectives vary from community to community, and most programs have more than one. The Ohio BR&E Initiative recommends establishing both short-term and long-term objectives. They may include:

**Sample Long-Term Objectives:**

- Building a pro-business climate within the community
- Collecting and analyzing data about existing businesses and the local workforce to develop a better understanding of the local economy
- Surveying residents for an analysis of the work skills, concerns, and future plans of the local labor force
- Educating the community about the local economy

**Sample Short-term Objectives:**

- Assisting businesses by addressing their immediate issues and concerns
- Identifying businesses that are planning to close, sell, move, or expand
- Identifying community services that need improvement
- Collecting market data as part of a grant application or planning process
- Developing local market statistics and information for attraction and community marketing
- Establishing process for continuous dialogue with businesses



Setting clear and attainable objectives enables the Committee/Task Force to identify and define four major factors that are critical to the successful implementation of the program:

- 1) How “community” is defined,
- 2) How the information from the surveys will be used,
- 3) What types of information are required to meet the objectives, and
- 4) How to conduct the survey.

Clearly defining these factors assists the Committee/Task Force in making decisions such as which organizations will sponsor and fund the program, how results will be communicated to the public, and how to interpret the data.

### **Definition of “Community”**

The term “community” within the context of BR&E can have several definitions. It can be defined geographically, such as an area that includes one or more counties. It can include just one municipality or several. It may be defined by an industry sector that covers several counties. In other words, BR&E programs can be conducted on a multi-county, cross-county, single county, or sub-county level. It depends upon the objectives of the program. For instance, if the members of a Main Street organization are interested in conducting a retail BR&E, in order to accurately represent their trade region, they may extend the definition of community to include businesses, as well as other municipalities, beyond the downtown area.

Thinking through how “community” is defined relative to the objectives also helps to identify potential sponsors and funding for the program. Plus, it points to where to find Committee/Task Force members and Committee/Task Force Coordinator candidates, and what their individual roles will be.

### **Use of Survey Information**

Deciding how the information will be used directly impacts how it is communicated to the public. If the objective is to promote a pro-business climate, the Committee/Task Force should consider a comprehensive communications plan that includes frequent opportunities to share the successes of the program with local residents and businesses. These activities include news releases, public meetings, newsletter and newspaper articles and inserts, and interviews on local radio and television news and talk shows.

The use of information also affects the analysis of the data and the structure of the final report. The market research section of a comprehensive plan may require more comparison and analysis of secondary information, such as census data, than an Action Plan developed specifically for one industry sector within a community.



## **Types of Information**

BR&E programs make use of both primary and secondary data to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the local economy. Committee/Task Force members identify the types of data they need to meet the objectives of their program. This includes deciding on the targeted industry sector(s) and/or issue(s) and determining how to use secondary sources to develop a narrative of the local economy.

The source of the primary data is questionnaires. In a BR&E program, these questionnaires are targeted to businesses within one or more industry sectors. The questions on the survey forms are determined by the objectives of the program and the sector being targeted. The Ohio BR&E Initiative provides pre-tested questionnaires for the retail, industrial, agriculture, and travel and tourism sectors, covering a variety of topics and issues.

BR&E programs frequently require information that crosses sectors within a defined community, or a program objective may target just one issue within an industry sector. Workforce skills and development is an example where the source of primary data may come from surveys of businesses in several major sectors, as well as from residents of the community.

Secondary data on businesses and households is provided by a number of sources including the U.S. Census, the Department of Commerce, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. This information along with the primary survey data can be used to develop a community narrative of the local economy, which includes its strengths and weaknesses, a contrast and comparison with other communities, and an historical, current, and future perspective on the economic development of the local community.

## **Conducting the Survey**

How the Committee/Task Force conducts the survey is influenced by nearly all of the program aspects discussed in this section. The type of survey, how often it is conducted, how it is distributed, and who handles and analyzes the data depend on the objectives of the program, but, perhaps more importantly on the availability of resources. For instance, some communities may have a limited number of local leaders available to serve on a Committee/Task Force. To address this issue, they may choose to conduct a select number of surveys each month rather than administer the program all at once. Part 7 covers the decisions Committee/Task Forces need to make concerning survey administration.



## **Major Players**

Successful BR&E programs exist because of the teamwork associated among all of the organizations and individuals involved in the program. The major players in a local BR&E program include:

- The Ohio BR&E Initiative
- Local Sponsoring Organization
- BR&E Coordinator
- BR&E Committee/Task Force
- Participating Businesses

## **The Ohio BR&E Initiative**

The Ohio BR&E Initiative is sponsored by Ohio State University Extension and managed by the Department of Agricultural, Environmental and Development Economics on the main campus of The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio.

Each local program conducted through the Initiative works with BR&E Representatives who are available as a source of guidance throughout the program. BR&E Representatives also provide information and training to the Committee/Task Force. In addition, resources and materials used in conducted a BR&E program such as questionnaires, forms, report templates, workshop registration and information, and useful links are available online to all members of the Ohio BR&E Initiative at <http://aede.osu.edu/programs/BRE>. Figure 1 breaks out the components provided by the Ohio BR&E Initiative and the responsibilities of the participating community.



<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Ohio BR&amp;E Initiative Offerings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training Workshops:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Coordinator’s Workshop</li> <li>○ Committee/Task Force Workshop</li> <li>○ Data Analysis &amp; Reporting Strategies Workshop</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Program Support</li> <li>• Pre-Tested Survey Questions</li> <li>• Survey Software</li> <li>• Online Access to Forms, Reports, Questions, Workshop Registration, Useful Links</li> <li>• Secondary Data Sources, Worksheets, and Forms</li> <li>• Comprehensive Handbook</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Participating Community Responsibilities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Sponsorship</li> <li>• Committee/Task Force &amp; Committee/Task Force Coordinator</li> <li>• Meeting Coordination</li> <li>• Business Selection</li> <li>• Survey Administration</li> <li>• Data Entry &amp; Analysis</li> <li>• “Red Flag” Review &amp; Follow-Up</li> <li>• Plan of Action and Program Assessment</li> <li>• Community Communications</li> <li>• Implementation of Action Items &amp; On-going BR&amp;E Program</li> </ul>
<p><b>Figure 1. BR&amp;E Initiative Offerings &amp; Community Responsibilities</b></p>	

**Sponsoring Organization**

The sponsor may be any organization with a role in community and economic development, such as the local economic development office, the chamber of commerce, Community Improvement Corporation (CIC), or a coalition of organizations. The sponsoring organization often pays the Initiative membership fee.

**Committee/Task Force Coordinator**

The Coordinator is responsible for managing all aspects of the program. For detailed information on the role of the Coordinator, see Part 3.

**BR&E Committee/Task Force**

The BR&E Committee/Task Force should consist of eight to fifteen leaders from throughout the community. Broad representation from agencies involved in community and economic development, educational institutions, local government, and private enterprises strengthens the ability of the Committee/Task Force to address



the myriad of issues that are often raised by the surveys. For more information on the role of the BR&E Committee/Task Force, see Part 3.

### **Participating Businesses**

The most important “players” in the BR&E process are the local businesses. The business owners, CEOs, or managers that agree to take time out of their busy schedules to answer the business survey should be recognized in BR&E reports and in community communications, such as press releases and newsletters.

### **The BR&E Handbook**

The Ohio BR&E Initiative allows for flexibility in the organization and activities of local BR&E programs. Not all communities have the same capacity to implement a BR&E program and objectives vary from community to community. Therefore, the purpose of this *Handbook* is to provide guidelines for communities to assist them in conducting BR&E business surveys and action planning.

The Handbook is organized into sections that describe the primary topics associated with implementing a continuous or one-time BR&E program. This Handbook is provided as a reference guide, exclusively to communities that are members of the Ohio BR&E Initiative.

