

INTRODUCTION

A healthy local economy and an improved business climate are the goals of the Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) Visitation program. The program promotes job growth by helping communities identify the concerns and barriers to survival and growth facing local businesses. This approach focuses on existing businesses. Studies show forty to eighty percent of all new jobs are created by existing firms rather than by attracting new businesses to communities. Furthermore, business attraction efforts are less likely to be successful if existing businesses are not happy with the local business climate.

OBJECTIVES

Short-Term

- Provide community support for local business
- Solve immediate individual business concerns

Long-Term

- Increase the competitiveness of local establishments
- Establish and implement a strategic action plan for economic development

In the long-term, the BR&E Visitation program can make local businesses more competitive by evaluating and addressing their broader needs and concerns. Businesses that stay competitive are more likely to remain in the community and possibly expand. The program establishes an economic development plan for the local community. The process creates a broad-based community coalition to sustain long-term economic development efforts.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Firm Visits: Local community leaders receive training on how to conduct the local BR&E Visitation program. After receiving training, *Volunteer Visitors* call on businesses and interview the firm manager or owner. A proven survey tailored to local communities is used for the interviews. The survey pinpoints business needs, concerns and development plans. Individual firm data is kept confidential.



BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION VISITATION PROGRAM

Immediate Follow-Up: A local *Task Force* reviews the survey results and responds to the needs and concerns expressed by businesses. Support from resources within and outside the community becomes mobilized.

Strategic Planning: University faculty or other experts computerize the information and prepare an initial draft report for the *Task Force*. The report includes data analysis and suggests recommendations for improving the local business climate. The *Task Force* uses this report, its knowledge of the community, and a strategic planning process to develop an action plan.

Implementation: The action planning process fosters the development of local implementation teams. These teams spearhead efforts to achieve the goals in the action plans. Local businesses and a variety of agencies may be drawn into the process by these teams.

MAIN PLAYERS

The Leadership Team introduces and promotes the program in the community, coordinates task force meetings, and organizes immediate follow-up to the survey results. The *Leadership Team* serves on the *Task Force* and arranges for the training of the business *Volunteer Visitors*.

The Task Force is a broad-based group of local community leaders. The *Task Force* should include representatives of local Economic Development Councils, Industrial Development Authorities, Chambers of Commerce, local government, area utilities, community colleges, and other well-respected, influential community leaders.

Business Visitation Teams consist of two persons per team. *Visitation Teams* will visit from two to four firms. These teams can be made up of *Task Force* members, educators, business people or retirees.

BREV TASK FORCE

What do BR&E Task Force Members Do?

If your community decides to undertake a Business Retention and Expansion Visitation program (often simply called a BR&E Visitation program), it will need a local *Task Force* of twenty-five to thirty-five committed local leaders. If you decide to serve as a *Task Force* member, you will help set the overall policy of the BR&E Visitation program, visit two to four local businesses, assist in immediate follow-up to firms when necessary, and set priorities on future BR&E Visitation projects.

During the early part of your BR&E Visitation program, you will be expected to attend seven to eight *Task Force* meetings and to visit two to four firms. This requires a total of about twenty hours (or two to five hours per month depending on how fast your program progresses).

Before going on the firm visits, you will attend a two-hour orientation session that provides an overview of how the visitation process works and includes tips on how to effectively interview firm managers and owners.

Who will serve on the Task Force?

Individuals from the following five groups will serve on the Task Force:

- Business Owners and Leaders
- Local Government Officials
- Local and Regional Development Staff
- Education Officials
- Other Community Leaders

Why do Citizens Volunteer for BR&E?

With your time spread so thin between your family and your work, why would you contribute time to a BR&E Visitation program? Citizens and local leaders who have participated in a BR&E Visitation program cite the following reasons they have been active in them:

- **BR&E demonstrates that “we CARE about business.”** Just visiting firms demonstrates that *your community cares* about its local businesses and appreciates their economic contributions to the area. It is surprising how many business leaders feel unappreciated and have not been personally told that the community values them.

- **BR&E is FUN!** We guarantee you will have *fun!!* Everybody says, “This is fun!” after completing their first firm visit. You will enjoy socializing with other key community leaders and participating in and influencing important community decisions.

- **BR&E builds NETWORKS.** You can build networks with both other local businesses and leaders and with regional and state economic development professionals. These contacts can often help your business or future development efforts.
- **BR&E is a LEARNING experience.** You will *learn* about your local economies' strengths and weaknesses from the perspective of local businesses and gain insights on how your community is likely to develop in the future. You will *learn* about new options for working with existing firms and ways you can shape your local destiny.
- **BR&E brings the community TOGETHER.** In many communities, citizens and local leaders are thinking about their future, but they are not working *together* to impact the future. The BR&E Visitation program brings your community together. Business persons, local government officials, education officials, professional developers and interested citizens all work *together* for the benefit of existing local businesses and their community.
- **BR&E is DO-ABLE, and it gets RESULTS.** Citizens just like you and your neighbors have *done* this program in all sizes and types of communities. BR&E Visitation projects have been completed in rural, suburban, and urban areas and are getting results. Naturally, it is more rewarding to work on projects that are both feasible and achieve *results*.
- **BR&E is RISK FREE.** When done correctly, the BR&E Visitation program is *safe*. As one *Task Force* member and small firm owner said, "I just can't see any risk in getting involved in this. How can you possibly lose?"



FOR MORE INFORMATION

*Programs of the regional rural
development centers are
available equally to all people.*

BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION VISITATION PROGRAM



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BR&E TASK FORCE

*A community-based
program to encourage the
growth of local business*

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