

Fundamentals Course Homework

Session 2

In this session, we've discussed the idea of integrating the idea of social capital into a BR&E program. In my view, this is only strengthened by the Regional Enterprise Networks Start-Up Guide (February 2014) that I assume you have been furnished (see the link on the course website if you don't have a copy of this document).

For this session, I'd like you to think about the ways in which you can strengthen the social capital within your RENs through a BR&E program. I'm not looking for an exhaustive study on this, but rather some ideas or practices that you could implement in your program that would increase the social capital standing with regard to your area's existing businesses. Please try to keep your responses to one page.

Due by the beginning of the June 9, 2020 session.

Response 1

A well-run and well-defined BRE program initiated out of the Chamber of Commerce should enlist volunteers from the community, board members and local city and county elected officials. By establishing this as a community collaborative effort, it will be an effective means to build social capital standing with our existing businesses.

The Chamber would develop the overall framework and procedures for the program. The program would be segmented by business clusters such as manufacturing, retail, hospitality, distribution, finance and insurance, medical and others as determined by a designated committee in the Chamber.

The program would consist of volunteers, board members or chamber ambassadors and elected officials who would be trained to visit and survey businesses within each sector each year. The results of these surveys would give the community a snapshot of the condition of the local economy, the condition of each business and would also relay any concerns that exiting businesses have within the county. The results would be compiled and reported and action plans developed to address any and all issues.

Industry appreciation would also be a component of the BRE program. We have two events each year. In the spring of the year, we have a plant manager's luncheon where we thank them for being in our county and to also allow our city and county mayors, our superintendent of schools and the president of our local college of applied technology to update the plant manager's on progress and projects in each of their respective areas. In the Fall of the year, we have an industry appreciation fish fry where we invite up to 10 management level individuals from each of our largest industrial sector companies for networking and to show our appreciation as a community.

Education would also be part of our program. We would provide workshops related to various aspects of business. In the past, we have hosted Lean Six Sigma classes, Dale Carnegie classes, social media marketing, active shooter training, etc.

All of these initiatives engage individuals from different areas of the community in collaborative efforts resulting in the overall increase of social capital.

Response 2

Social Capital is a key foundation for all of the activities for BRE with its stakeholders, especially businesses. It will greatly aid in visitations. It is also important for generating positive attitude among support (government) workers as well.

Our activities in the past 3 months have aided in achieving a positive image among businesses in the region, as the REN reached out to many businesses offering help in navigating government COVID-19 support programs. Business owner were offered help in navigating the information regarding financial aid plans. In addition, the REN has started a program called Western Winners which spotlights some of our local companies with novel ideas about dealing with COVID. All of this serves as a positive basis for our relationships with companies in the area.

In addition, we organized a COVID-19 response team including most of the Economic Development Officers from the 7 municipalities in the region who interfaced with most of the businesses in the region during the crisis, offering help. We have fostered a good, proactive, helpful attitude toward businesses among these key support workers during this time. This work should provide a great foundation in social capital and a positive mindset moving forward into more regularized BRE activities.

Some key activities for developing strong Social Capital would be:

Strategy

- Develop a clear working strategy for supporting existing businesses, promoting business' investment and developing the economy in the region.

Inclusion

- The strategy should be developed with the extensive consultation of business leaders, economic development leaders and politicians across the entire region. All seven of the municipalities in the region should be equally-, and well-represented by the working group that develops the strategy.

Communication

The strategy should be molded into a vision for the region and then communicated. For good communication, we need to have the following:

- A clear positive message of this strategy for businesses. The message should be condensed to be meaningful and succinct. It should be clear and tangible so that it is shared by the industry that it is being delivered to.
- A communication plan to reach business owners with the message, perhaps on a per industry level.
- A communication plan to reach government support members across the region with the strategy message. It should express the vision and support workers' role.

Response 3

Some ideas and or practices that I would use to implement into my program to help gain social capital would be the formation of groups. Creating a Regional Economic Development Advisory board with people from all industries with many skill levels, involving members from the local Chamber Board and Rotary would bring diversity to the group. Some key attributes that would be beneficial and something that I would be looking for is personable people, trustworthy people, hard working, bringing many ideas to the table due to the diverse industry knowledge. Having community engagement from these groups will help gain trust and help keep the buy in of the program.

Response 4

Our REN has been tasked with finding new ways to address two local challenges:

1. Chronic and increasing labour market shortages experienced by local businesses; and
2. Supporting increased employment rates particularly within our local First Nations and African Nova Scotian populations

Our aim is to build a bridge between the businesses with vacant jobs, and the community members in need of employment. We plan to tackle these different, but related, challenges by approaching the two issues separately before linking them together. First, we are undertaking an assessment with the businesses to identify where their areas of need are; what positions are sitting chronically vacant; and seeking their input regarding why they have a hard time filling the jobs.

Separately, we plan to connect directly with our First Nation and African Nova Scotian communities, as well as local organizations that work in support of these communities. We need to better understand what barriers exist that are unique to these populations, to find the right ways to support community members in obtaining full time employment.

We are in the early stages of one specific project that is aimed at using social capital to achieve our economic development goals.

Supported Education Project

A local employer faces continued challenges in finding qualified Early Childhood Educators to fill positions at a local childcare facility. In speaking with members of our FN and ANS communities, we heard that many community members do not have the ability to become full time students to take the nearest two year diploma program, located an hour away. We are working with the business and the community, as well as our local college, to develop a customized local program which would build in key supports needed by the students from these communities. The communities are working with us to identify the students who will take the course, and also to flag what supports may be required. This is building out new connections between the community and the employer, and will hopefully result in higher success rates with program completion and sustained employment.

More generally, the approach at our REN is to involve community organizations or partner groups whenever possible. We find that local solutions are more likely to be sustainable when there is broad

based community support and buy-in for them, rather than approaching them as a “business problem” only. Too often, different organizations operate in silos.

We recently started monthly meetings with ten different community organizations (REN, Chamber of Commerce, government funders, employment support organizations and the local college), simply to allow for a regular “check-in” so that we all have a better understanding of what each organization is working on, and will more quickly identify opportunities to collaborate for the greater economic good.

Response 5

IDEAS/PRACTICES FOR IMPLIMENTATION TO INCREASE THE SOCIAL CAPITAL STANDING OF LOCAL BRE

The first and foremost condition for success of the BRE effort (any effort) is that those involved **MUST CARE**. They must care about the community/region, the process, and setting a course for a better future, what every that is collectively determined to be.

Secondly the process must bring “value” to the targeted beneficiary and subsequently the community/region that is involved and will be doing the work.

A significant component for BRE success in rural areas is that those who are managing the process or conducting the activities must be trustworthy, respectable and have acceptance within the region or community being served.

Maybe it can be thought of as “Integrity Capital” and a person or organization that has experience, accountability and perhaps even has a relatable background. Think of it as the “Been There and Done That” and having “Skin in the Game” analogies. Using a successful reputation or previous successes to build off of will help others collectively capture a vision for progress is important in keeping engagement in the ongoing process.

One of the most common difficulties with regional networking in rural areas is that they **MUST** learn how to “Bury the Hatchet” and **NOT** in each other! Put those longstanding historical, social, cultural differences aside, or at least contain them to “Friday Nights” on the gridiron.

Other helpful aspects:

Train and Travel together as much as possible to build familiarity and grow acceptance of each other.

Communicate efficiently and effectively, sharing ideas and experiences that have both worked and failed

Build trust and once established or developed then maintain it beyond the minimal level

Communities must be accepting gracious and even generous with others