

Fundamentals Course Homework Responses

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 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 September 2, 2025 session.

Response 1

A foundational mechanism for building social capital through BR&E is consistent, relationship-based engagement with existing businesses. This can be measured through **engagement frequency indicators (KPI's)**, such as the number of repeat BR&E visits per organization, follow-up touchpoints completed within a defined timeframe, and the percentage of organizations participating in BR&E outreach year over year currently reported semi-annually. We track this data in Salesforce.

**Higher repeat engagement rates suggest growing trust and perceived value in the relationship, while timely follow-ups serve as a proxy for institutional reliability.*

The BR&E data can also be leveraged to strengthen **network participation**, a core dimension of social capital highlighted in the REN framework. Measurable indicators in this area include attendance at sector-roundtables (specific sector focused) or peer forums (i.e. HR Alliance) informed by BR&E findings, participation in workforce or supply-chain initiatives, and the number of organizations connected to one another as a result of BR&E referrals.

**Tracking repeat participation and cross-sector representation provides insight into the depth and durability of these networks.*

Trust—while more difficult to quantify—can be assessed by being embedded within BR&E processes. These may include survey-based measures such as willingness to share forward-looking information (e.g., expansion plans or workforce projections), and satisfaction ratings related to responsiveness and problem resolution. Additional indicators may include the percentage of organizations that proactively re-engage with our BR&E program without prompting, or the number of businesses that agree to serve as peer mentors, advisory participants, or program champions.

Finally, **institutional social capital** can be measured through indicators that reflect coordination and alignment across partner organizations. Examples include the number of joint referrals made between economic development, workforce, and education partners; the average time to resolution for issues identified through BR&E visits; and the percentage of BR&E-identified challenges addressed through collaborative solutions rather than single-agency responses. Public reporting of aggregated outcomes—

such as programs launched (Career Inspire) or policy changes informed by BR&E feedback (EDAC)—further reinforces transparency and shared accountability.

Incorporating these measurable indicators will strengthen our BR&E program to move beyond anecdotal relationship-building towards a disciplined, outcomes-oriented approach to social capital. By tracking engagement, participation, trust, and institutional responsiveness, we can demonstrate how social capital contributes directly to business retention, expansion readiness, and overall regional resilience.

Response 2

1. (Hodde Technical School offers hands-on, industry-partnered training for high-demand technical careers.) Hodde Technical School Advisory Board – Provide industry expertise, review and improve curriculum, support workforce development, guide program expansion.
 2. Economic Development and Community Update Presentations – Given to local service organizations (i.e. Lions Club, Republican and Democrat Clubs, Fortnightly, Chamber of Commerce banquets and events).
 3. HR Roundtable – A quarterly gathering of Human Resource leaders from local businesses, focused on discussing emerging challenges, sharing best practices, and exploring workforce trends in the community.
 4. Partnering with the Chamber of Commerce and Workforce Solutions to host a community-wide Job Fair in Brenham.
 5. Prairie View A&M – Washington County Community Economic Development Committee – Create career pathways for the workforce in Washington County.
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Response 3

A Business Retention & Expansion (BR&E) program provides a platform for strengthening social capital within a community because it centers on relationships, trust, and ongoing communication with existing businesses and Industries in your community.

One of the most effective ways to build social capital is through personal engagement with business owners and Industry partners. Regular visits, follow-up calls, and check-ins demonstrate commitment

and that you care. When businesses feel heard and see that their concerns are taken seriously, trust grows between the private sector and community partners.

Another strategy is to use BR&E activities to foster connections among businesses, not just between businesses and local organizations. Hosting roundtables, peer networking sessions, or sector-specific meetings allows business owners to share challenges, resources, and best practices. The Chamber of Broken Bow and the City of Broken Bow hosts monthly meetings with the downtown merchants. We plan community events and receive feedback on what has been working for the business and our community events and what has not worked. This has helped our community grow and become more of a partnership.

Transparency and follow-through are also critical. When issues are identified through BR&E surveys or visits, clearly communicating next steps and progress builds credibility. Even when solutions are not always achieved, honest communication reinforces trust. Businesses are more likely to remain engaged when they understand how information is used and see outcomes from their participation.

Leveraging local partners—such as chambers of commerce, civic organizations, utilities, and workforce organizations—can expand the reach of a BR&E program and strengthen networks and this has helped our community in several different ways. With transparency and with people being more involved. Coordinated responses to business needs signal unity and competence within the community, further increasing confidence in local leadership and institutions and recruitment of new businesses to our community.

In summary, a BR&E program that prioritizes relationship-building, peer connections, transparency, and partnership can significantly enhance social capital. These strengthened relationships not only support business retention and growth but also contribute to building strong relationships that are beneficial to everyone in our community.

Response 4

Strengthening social capital through a Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) program is essential to building trust, collaboration, and long-term resilience within DeKalb County's business community. Social capital in this context means relationships, networks, and shared confidence that allow employers, public partners, and economic development staff to work together effectively. The DeKalb County EDA BR&E framework provides several practical opportunities to intentionally grow this social capital while advancing core program objectives.

Structured and consistent business visits are the primary mechanism for building trust. A predictable visit cycle ensures that outreach is ongoing, and relationship driven rather than reactive. During visits, the focus extends beyond data collection to active listening and rapid follow up on identified needs. For example, if multiple manufacturers raise workforce training concerns, DCEDA can coordinate with community colleges and workforce partners to align training programs. When businesses see their input leading to action, confidence in the BR&E program increases and relationships deepen.

A strong communications strategy reinforces these relationships by promoting transparency and shared awareness. Quarterly business climate newsletters, targeted email updates, and annual reporting help

employers understand available resources, infrastructure initiatives, and workforce efforts. Sharing aggregated trends from business visits allows companies to see how their feedback contributes to countywide planning. This consistent messaging positions DCEDA as a trusted connector and demonstrates accountability to the business community.

Peer networking opportunities further expand social capital by connecting employers directly with one another. Facilitated industry roundtables or small executive briefings can focus on common topics such as supply chain opportunities, childcare challenges, or housing availability. These gatherings encourage collaboration across sectors and foster a sense of shared responsibility for DeKalb County's economic future.

Finally, collaborative problem solving strengthens long term partnerships. When recurring issues are identified, DCEDA can convene short-term working groups that include employers, municipal leaders, utilities, and education partners. This approach transforms the BR&E program into a collaborative network rather than a one-way service model.

By combining intentional outreach, transparent communication, and structured collaboration, the DeKalb County EDA BR&E program can meaningfully strengthen social capital and enhance the competitiveness and resilience of the local business ecosystem.

Response 5

Building social capital within a BR&E program is essential to creating a strong, interconnected business community. When business owners feel part of something larger than themselves, they are more likely to engage, collaborate, and invest in the long-term success of the area. A powerful way to begin strengthening these relationships is by offering regular in-person networking opportunities. Hosting monthly gatherings that rotate through different business locations allows owners to introduce their operations, share their stories, and highlight the value they bring to the community. These visits not only build familiarity and trust but also create a sense of shared purpose among local entrepreneurs.

Once a foundation of connection has been established and business owners have begun forming genuine relationships, the program can expand outward to include the broader community. Hosting public events at local establishments invites residents to engage with the businesses in a more personal and meaningful way. Whether through open houses, demonstrations, themed evenings, or collaborative promotions, these events help residents feel more connected to the businesses that serve them. This step strengthens local loyalty, increases visibility, and reinforces the idea that supporting local businesses directly contributes to community wellbeing.

With strong business-to-business and business-to-resident relationships in place, the program can take a final step toward attracting visitors from outside the area. Creating signature events such as festivals, markets, cultural celebrations, or seasonal gatherings draws new people into the community and showcases what makes the local business environment unique. These events not only boost the local economy but also elevate the community's identity and reputation. By intentionally layering these phases, the BR&E program builds a resilient network of relationships that supports long-term economic vitality and strengthens the social fabric of the community.

Ultimately, the long-term success of any visitor-focused initiative depends on the strength of the relationships built at the local level. If the foundation of trust, collaboration, and shared identity among business owners and residents is not firmly in place, larger visitor-oriented events may generate short-term excitement but struggle to sustain momentum. Without that internal cohesion, the energy behind these efforts can fade after a couple of years, leaving businesses feeling disconnected and the community without a clear sense of direction. By investing first in strong social capital, business to business, then business to resident, the community ensures that any visitor experience is not only vibrant but also resilient, rooted in a network of people who are committed to showing up for one another and for the place they call home.

Response 6

The Converse Economic Development Corporation has had a BRE program for 8 years. My coworker started the program and has done a tremendous job of building trust in the local business community. She has done this by really listening to the needs of the business owners while also building a relationship with them. The EDC is known for our resources and ability to help whenever we can.

The next step is the formation of Groups. We once had a business networking group that met once a month. It was headed by some local business owners. Once they retired, the group didn't continue without a leader. We recently talked with another local business owner who expressed how much the group helped her business and the community as it gave them a space for their voice to be heard and provide a catalyst to make changes. This business owner expressed interest in starting this group again and we will support them by using our email database to get the information out to all the business owners in our city as well as post on our social media. We can also provide this group with information about our newsletter, training events and appreciation events. This initiative will help form a business owner group and promote group collaboration with a collective voice.

While supporting the networking efforts of our business owners, we also want to conduct round tables in each of our main industries. This is something we are implementing this year in alignment with our strategic plan to work to really understand each industry and where the EDC can help bridge gaps and increase wage and job opportunities in our city.

Along with understanding the needs of each industry, we plan to share our vision for the city and begin a narrative of who we are and where we are headed. With that collective identity and future vision, each person can lift where they are to level up the community and help build the story of our growth. This will create strength in the business community and drive future changes on each level. As we share the same messaging, we strengthen our collective identity and begin to construct a shared future.

While working on forming groups and industry round tables, we will also be visiting a sampling of businesses in each industry for a more one-on-one approach. We will combine the findings to help us see where we can help boost our businesses and share this information with city. As we listen and then act on what we heard, we continue to build real trust which will lead to real positive changes and growth, building a robust social capital asset for our city.

Response 7

We try to attend as many local business functions as we can. Our BRE is a staff of one however we shop locally and listen to the needs of the businesses. We volunteer where we can and connect businesses with people who can possibly help with a need. We share information verbally and through social media to include websites that are willing to participate in information sharing.

Social gatherings that include businesses and the community introduce services and/or products that would be of use to the public and/or other businesses.

Connecting businesses with the Chamber of Commerce for networking socials.

Invitations to community and City events like Farmer's Markets, Museums or Parades, School athletics, Church events, etc....

Entrepreneur summits to share information on their experiences and suggestions starting up a business. This could also include local resources on the panel.

Encourage businesses to be involved with government meetings on a local level so that they can work together for problem solving.

Lunch and learn and/or coffee gatherings that brings the community and businesses together for networking purposes.

Some local businesses collaborate for annual/bi-annual events that benefits each of their businesses Individually.

Shared marketing for small businesses for local or more broader areas for events that include detailed information on each business.

Response 8

A BR&E program builds real social capital when it focuses on consistent true relationships, not just data collection. I would strengthen our social capital by making regular, personal business visits, assigning a clear point of contact for follow-up, and making sure every concern raised gets a response and next step. I would also strengthen connections and collaborations between businesses themselves by hosting small confidential industry roundtables, and create intentional introductions so businesses see each other as partners not competition. This also gives an opportunity for new perspectives and ideas, creating a shared understanding. Bringing businesses together around shared challenges and working solutions in real time increases trust, collaboration, and long-term engagement, while also creating a larger economic impact on our region. Breaking silos and creating opportunities for our businesses to receive real time help with their issues creates an opportunity for not just the businesses to thrive but also the community we call home.

Response 9

The way that I believe would increase/strengthen social capital standing to my areas existing businesses, is bonding a tight network and bridging permeable and open boundaries. Planning a social event with a group of diverse people (looking under the table at the shoes), that are capable of being effectively functional to network relationships which will be productive towards advancing our goal.

Building relationships by honest and open communication, in order to build the capacity of the community to implement BR&E programs and other economic efforts. Bridging the gaps to be more trusting and open to change. Therefore, broadening perspectives and opening the door to new ideas.

Response 10

As someone who is relatively new to economic development, I am learning that strong business communities are built on relationships, trust, and communication—not just incentives or infrastructure. Social capital plays an important role in business retention and expansion, and a BR&E program provides a practical framework for strengthening those relationships in a meaningful way.

One of the primary ways a BR&E program builds social capital is through intentional, consistent engagement with existing businesses. Regular business visits or check-ins help establish familiarity and trust over time. Even when there is no immediate issue to address, these conversations demonstrate that the City or EDO values local businesses and wants to understand their day-to-day realities. This ongoing contact makes it easier for businesses to share concerns early, before small issues become major challenges.

For example, during a routine BR&E visit, a business may mention ongoing difficulty finding reliable employees. While this may not be a new issue, the conversation creates an opportunity to connect that business with workforce partners, training programs, or other employers facing similar challenges. Over time, these connections help businesses feel less isolated and more supported within the community.

Another important aspect of strengthening social capital is connecting businesses to available resources and support systems. Through BR&E conversations, economic development staff can identify gaps in awareness related to workforce programs, training opportunities, financing options, or regulatory processes. Helping businesses navigate these resources builds confidence and reinforces the idea that local partners are accessible and responsive.

The BR&E program also contributes to social capital by improving communication within local government and among partner organizations. Information gathered during business visits can help departments better understand how policies and processes impact local businesses. When businesses see improved coordination or follow-up as a result of these conversations, their trust in local institutions increases.

Overall, by focusing on listening, relationship-building, and consistent communication, a BR&E program can strengthen social capital in a way that supports long-term business retention and a more connected local business community.

Response 11

Western Regional Enterprise Network – Southwest Nova Scotia

Social capital refers to the relationships and connections that allow businesses and communities to work together to solve problems. In Southwest Nova Scotia, where many businesses operate in small, rural, and relationship-based environments, strengthening social capital is a key opportunity of a BR&E program. Rather than focusing only on data collection, Western REN can intentionally use BR&E practices to build trust, collaboration, and stronger business networks

One practical way to strengthen **bonding social capital** is through **consistent and relationship-based business visits**. In Southwest Nova Scotia, many business owners value long-term relationships and personal trust. By using the same trained staff, ensuring confidentiality, and following up on issues raised, the BR&E program reinforces trust within existing business networks. This approach encourages business owners to openly discuss challenges such as succession planning, workforce shortages, and infrastructure constraints.

Another bonding practice is **sector-focused engagement**. Many businesses in the region operate in traditional sectors such as fisheries, manufacturing, tourism, and agriculture. Small, informal sector conversations or peer discussions, supported by BR&E insights, allow business owners to face similar challenges to learn from one another and strengthen local ties.

To balance this, the BR&E program must also strengthen **bridging social capital**, which connects businesses to new people, ideas, and resources. One key practice is using BR&E findings to **bring businesses together across communities and sectors**. For example, businesses in Digby, Yarmouth, and Barrington may face similar labour or supply-chain challenges but rarely interact. Facilitated roundtables or cross-sector sessions help create open and flexible networks beyond local boundaries.

Another important bridging practice is **connecting businesses to external resources**. Through BR&E visits, Western REN can identify businesses that would benefit from provincial programs, workforce initiatives, immigration support, or innovation services. Making warm introductions, not just referrals, helps businesses access new knowledge and strengthens trust in the regional economic development system.

Finally, **clear communication and visible follow-up** are essential practices. Sharing aggregated BR&E themes, highlighting success stories show businesses that their participation leads to action. This legitimizes diverse perspectives and reinforces confidence in collective problem-solving.

In conclusion, by applying practical BR&E practices that intentionally build both bonding and bridging social capital, Western REN can strengthen trust, collaboration, and resilience among existing businesses in Southwest Nova Scotia. These stronger relationships form a foundation for effective business retention and long-term regional economic development.

Response 12

Social capital is defined by the relationships, trust, and networks that connect businesses to one another and to local institutions and is a critical component of a successful Business Retention & Expansion (BR&E) program. As emphasized in the *Regional Enterprise Networks (REN) Start-Up Guide*, economic development efforts are strongest when they focus on building networks and relationships rather than relying solely on transactional or incentive-based approaches. For the City of Sanger, intentionally integrating social capital into its BR&E program can strengthen business confidence, collaboration, and long-term economic resilience.

One of the most effective ways Sanger can strengthen social capital is through consistent, relationship-based business outreach. The REN framework highlights the importance of trust developed through repeated, meaningful interactions. Regular BR&E visits that prioritize listening and follow-through allow the Sanger EDC to build credibility with existing businesses. Over time, these relationships encourage business owners to share concerns earlier and more openly, improving problem identification and response.

Another key practice aligned with the REN Start-Up Guide is facilitating peer-to-peer connections among businesses. Rather than operating solely as a service provider, the Sanger EDC can act as a connector by identifying common challenges and opportunities within the local business community. Small business roundtables, industry-specific discussions, or informal networking events hosted in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce create opportunities for collaboration and shared learning. These connections strengthen the local business network and reinforce a sense of belonging within Sanger.

Business recognition and visibility further support social capital development. Publicly highlighting business milestones, expansions, and success stories signals that Sanger values its existing employers. This practice aligns with REN principles by reinforcing positive relationships and strengthening the emotional connection between businesses and the community. Recognition also increases awareness of local enterprises and encourages mutual support among business owners.

The REN framework also emphasizes collaborative problem-solving across institutions, which can be incorporated into Sanger's BR&E program. When issues identified during business visits are addressed through coordinated efforts involving city departments, utilities, workforce partners, or regional organizations, businesses gain confidence in the local system. Even when challenges require time to resolve, transparent communication and coordinated responses help build trust and strengthen institutional relationships.

Finally, social capital is reinforced when BR&E serves as a two-way communication channel. Sharing information about local initiatives, infrastructure projects, or regional trends keeps businesses informed, while elevating business feedback to city leadership ensures decision-making reflects real-world conditions. This approach mirrors the REN emphasis on continuous engagement and shared ownership of economic outcomes.

By using its BR&E program as a platform for network-building, trust development, and collaboration, the City of Sanger can intentionally grow social capital in a way that aligns with the principles outlined in the *Regional Enterprise Networks Start-Up Guide*. This approach positions Sanger not only as a place that supports businesses, but as a connected community where existing businesses are engaged partners in long-term economic success.

Response 13