

# 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

### Strengthening BR&E Outcomes with Social Capital

One of the most effective ways to strengthen social capital is through consistency. Building consistent, trust-first social capital into BR&E initiatives is critical to building trust, improving communication, and strengthening long-term relationships between businesses and the Choctaw Nation.

As emphasized in Halifax's model, one-on-one diagnostic visits allowed account executives to listen effectively rather than solely advising. Through consistent, relationship driven business visitation, over time the repeated interactions and follow-up visits drove familiarity, credibility and trust, transforming the BR&E program from beyond being a service provider to being a trusted connector.

A key practice was the intentional development of a strong Action Team. Social capital increases when businesses are not only connected to government resources, but to broader ecosystems with workforce, education, finance, and peer business networks. Streamlining referrals and having quick response times demonstrates reliability and strengthens confidence in the network. The referral and follow-up process is crucial, when businesses aren't just provided advice, but tangible action oriented results, they develop trust.

For example, our team assisted a business and municipality in finding a grant to connect the city water and sewer to a formerly vacant industrial site which had been purchased by a new business some years later. The team had hired two women and needed to connect the site to water and sewer to accommodate the needs of the women. The Choctaw Nation economic development team had built trust with the business owner, and then sourced an action team of an engineer, grant authority who allocated up to \$4 million for the connection needs, city leadership, tribal leadership, and the business owners. In addition to the initial need of connection to water services, now the city and business are working to enhance water treatment capability that the business needs for its operations.

The cornerstone of strong social capital within the existing BR&E program at Choctaw Nation is relationships built on consistency, responsiveness, trust and collaboration. An emphasis on consistent engagement and transparent communication supports business growth and builds a strong, connected economic ecosystem.

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## **Response 2**

My approach to instilling social capital in our BR&E Program would be to develop a focus group with members from the following organizations:

- Rotary Club
- Clear Lake Area Chamber of Commerce
- The Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership
- EDC Board Members
- City Elected Officials
- City Management
- Small Business Development Center
- University of Houston – Clear Lake
- Owners representing different business sectors

We would explain the aim and mission of the focus group to members or potential members to educate them about the group. This focus group could meet once a quarter and have a roundtable discussion on possible solutions to help address issues businesses are facing in Seabrook. This will definitely help strengthen the program and bring different viewpoints to the table.

Another way of instilling social capital in our BR&E Program is to develop and send out a survey via e-mail and post it on the website and on social media to get the community's input on who they would recommend being a part of this focus group. This approach involves community participation in the formation of this group rather than the EDC solely choosing its members.

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## **Response 3**

Social capital refers to the networks of trust, reciprocity, and shared purpose that enable communities to function and thrive. It is not automatically generated by a BR&E program. It must be deliberately built. The Halifax Partnership's Regional Enterprise Networks Start-Up Guide reinforces this point: effective BR&E is not a data-collection exercise; it is a relationship-building infrastructure. With that framing in mind, I propose centering my BR&E program around a Network Navigator model.

The core idea is straightforward: one person or a small, dedicated team serves as a trusted, proactive connector between existing businesses and the full ecosystem of support resources available to them, including workforce boards, community colleges, permit offices, lenders, suppliers, and chambers of commerce.

In practice, this means each business visited through the BR&E program receives a single point of contact. This is someone they can call hiring challenges, permitting delays, expansion questions, or supply chain gaps. Rather than leaving firms to navigate a fragmented landscape of agencies on their own, the Network Navigator absorbs that complexity, routes issues to the right partners, and follows up until the referral produces a real outcome. Every closed loop and every problem solved deposits trust into the relationship and strengthens the bond between the firm and the broader economic development community.

This approach directly strengthens social capital in three ways. First, it builds bridging capital by connecting firms to institutions and networks they may not otherwise access. Second, it builds bonding capital by creating repeat, trust-based interactions between businesses and the BR&E program itself, transforming one-time survey visits into ongoing relationships. Third, and perhaps most importantly, it creates a sense of collective investment. When businesses see their concerns taken seriously and acted upon, they become more willing to participate, refer peers, and engage in future economic development initiatives.

### **Example**

If a local manufacturer reports difficulty filling skilled positions during a BR&E visit, the Network Navigator does not simply pass along a phone number. Instead, they convene a three-way introduction between the firm, the regional workforce development board, and a nearby community college's apprenticeship coordinator, then schedule a 30-day check-in to track progress. That follow-through is what converts a transactional encounter into a lasting relationship and a BR&E visit into genuine social capital.

The Halifax Partnership model supports this approach by emphasizing that regional enterprise networks succeed when businesses feel they are part of something, not just surveyed by it. A Network Navigator operationalizes that principle. It is a low-cost, high-impact mechanism that makes the BR&E program the connective tissue of the local economy, building the kind of durable trust that no single visit can create alone.

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## **Response 4**

The course materials describe social capital as the relationships, trust, and connections that help communities work together and take action. In a BR&E program, I believe social capital is not just an outcome of the work, but part of the strategy itself.

Businesses are more likely to share concerns, opportunities, and future plans when they trust that conversations will lead to meaningful follow-up. In my experience, businesses have often participated in consultations or visits as photo ops before without seeing action, so credibility matters.

Some ways I would strengthen social capital through a BR&E program include:

- Prioritizing timely follow-up after business visits, especially when red flag issues are identified. Even when immediate solutions are not possible, communication with check-ins and transparency help build trust.

- Focusing first on understanding challenges before trying to influence perspectives or promote solutions. Businesses want to feel heard before they want advice.
- Creating opportunities for businesses to connect around shared challenges and opportunities through roundtables, peer discussions, and collaborative problem solving. This helps build stronger networks across sectors.
- Demonstrating that business feedback leads to action by sharing updates, identifying trends, and communicating advocacy efforts tied to BR&E findings.
- Maintaining relationships outside of formal project cycles through regular check-ins and community presence. Social capital is built through consistency, not one-time engagement.

Strong social capital helps businesses, organizations, and communities work together more effectively. It improves trust, communication, and collaboration, while also strengthening the local capacity needed to support long-term economic resilience and growth.

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## Response 5

You can strengthen social capital in a BRE program by using your visits and follow-up to build ongoing, trust-based relationships and connections among local businesses and partners. Below are some example practices that could be implemented.

### Relationship-focused visits

- Treat each visit as the start of a long-term relationship, asking about ways to work together and who else the business would like to be connected to.
- Schedule a brief follow-up 60–90 days after each visit to report what you did with their input and to check on progress.

### Peer connections and roundtables

- Use BR&E data to spot common issues (such as workforce or supply chain) and if needed or supported, organize small roundtables where businesses can share challenges and solutions.
- Rotate meeting locations among participating firms to deepen connections and understanding across sectors and neighborhoods.

### Connector roles and mentorship

- Designate someone in your program as a “business connector” who brokers introductions between firms and support organizations.
- Encourage more established businesses to serve as informal mentors or “buddies” for newer or growing firms.

### Shared information and visibility

- Create a simple directory or map of participating businesses and key partners so firms can more easily find and contact each other.
- Use email updates or briefings to share opportunities (training, grants, procurement) and highlight examples of successful collaboration.

#### **Inclusive regional collaboration**

- Make a point to include underrepresented and smaller firms in visits and events so they are fully part of the network.
- Work with chambers, workforce boards, and other regional groups so your BR&E program becomes a hub that ties existing networks together.

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## **Response 6**

### **Relationship Building**

- Plant Manager Roundtables
- HR Luncheons
- Rotary/Lions Club Industry Speakers

### **Workforce Pipeline Development**

- College AMIT (Advanced Manufacturing & Industrial Technology) Partnership
  - Partner with our local college to bring together local employers to provide skilled workers and retain top tier employees
- Career Day Participation
  - Enlist employers to participate in middle and high school level Career Days
- Big Tech Tours
  - Allows other employers and public to tour participating employers' places of business and possibly fill vacant roles. At KEDC we always serve as tour guides during this tour.

### **Community Awareness & Employer Visibility**

- Industry Month Spotlights
    - Feature stories on companies posted to socials and on website
  - Public Facility Tours
  - Civic Presentations
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## Response 7

Social capital is the glue in relationship building within a business community; without it, relationships fall flat. Trust is enhanced when there is collaboration between public officials and leaders in the business community. When the community voice drives local initiatives, there is greater probability of success.

### Local Context:

In Jackson, I believe we have a blend of progressive and strong ecosystems. Currently, there is momentum toward a community vision as determined by County wide survey. The Jackson County Chamber of Commerce, Accelerate Jackson (EDO), and Jackson Community Foundation worked together to hire, survey, and adopt Drive Jackson (a 20-year strategic master plan). Within the plan, strategic goals are outlined for economic development. Jackson County Commissioners have officially acknowledged the survey but have not changed policy to reflect the goals. Additionally, the City of Jackson is currently beginning the same process as they hired the same MP company to work with them. Additionally, the Jackson Community Foundation and Jackson Collaborative Network survey and publish community assessment data with overall community conditions. Combining Drive Jackson's strategic goals for what residents want with the collaborative community assessment and shared measurement system gives a unique opportunity to determine the overall success of the plan. The Chamber of Commerce has a growth fellow through CEDAM who also works with organizations, including Accelerate Jackson. Additionally, the community foundation is woven into economic development through an impact investing fellow. Unfortunately, public policymakers have not always supported the business community. We have visionaries and real potential but at the end of the day, that potential will be silenced if policy makers do not respond to the needs of the community. There is a deep distrust of the people and systems in place.

Studying the local context to the extent that I have been able to has both been frustrating and inspiring. The visionaries and momentum are there. It is very important that now, more than ever, community leaders come together to bridge capacity and trust. There is strong collaboration between many of the big players. Local leaders who already partner include, but are not limited to, The Chamber President, Community Foundation President, EDO President, Experience Jackson (tourism), Jackson Area Manufacturing Association, Jackson College and Foundation, Michigan Works, Credit Unions, real estate agencies, Jackson College and Career Center, Village and Townships outside the City itself, incubators, Consumers Energy and Foundation, United Way, DDA, and a myriad of other business partners and collaborators. In a way, it feels very much like an old system holding on for dear life and a new system desperate. Jackson has a long history and perception contributing to the complexity of our current shrinking state.

A BR&E program would strengthen the current business ecosystem. As many cities do in a desperate effort to revitalize, there is a drive to attract new business. The current environment has some well-established businesses that have been declining in numbers. The social capital within certain sectors is also well established but bridging to cross-sector relationships and increasing dependency awareness would strengthen the ecosystem. We need to address the health of the current ecosystem, so when we bring in new partners they are integrated into a positive and productive social capital network. We can't bring in new partners into an unhealthy ecosystem and expect the ecosystem to change. Also, policy makers need to listen to and work with current businesses so that some of the overall and underlying issues can be addressed or the likelihood of securing business attraction is diminished.

BR&E implementation:

A local BR&E program has a daunting task but could be transformative if social capital is prioritized. Bridging communication between the old and new through visitation and task-oriented activity will connect these diverse leaders into flexible networks. Formation of a well-developed and diverse social capital task force will include 20-40 members and contain a mix of business leaders, economic developers, local government officials (City and County), education officials, and other community leaders. This task force must extend beyond the visionaries and intentionally represent the stakeholders necessary to facilitate in the breakdown of silos through task oriented communication and interaction. Ultimately, the task force members will collaborate on specific goals, aligning their efforts for the common good of the community. The potential for the Drive Jackson plan goals to be implemented increases when the goals become mutually supported.

Pairing a policy maker and private sector representative during face-to-face visitations facilitates trust and collaboration between the two. If the businesses truly feel unappreciated and unheard, and the policy makers engage with intent to listen (without problem solving or agenda), they foster a starting point for bridging social capital. Creating an environment where all voices are heard may require training on active listening before any meetings are set. Public officials must participate by engaging in the process and digesting data to grow social capital. Presenting specific, raw, and honest data about the current business trends provides a neutral platform for policy makers to address necessary policy changes to meet the needs of the community; it removes political pressures around alignment and change. This purposeful intention of building social fabric in the ecosystem through listening, collaboration, problem solving, and an action plan with steps that include follow through, can result in the social capital necessary for the community to solve current and future problems.

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## Response 8

Social capital definitely leads to more economic development, especially when the development will also bring many jobs to the area. Social capital is the fabric that attracts new people and retains current people in the community. I see social capital as green spaces (parks, trails, etc.); wrap around community services (autism societies, family resource centres, daycares, etc.); and, sports, recreation and hobbies. Employees might move to/stay in a community for a job, but their quality of life is what will retain those employees as engaged citizens over the long-term.

Assuming I had all the resources necessary, I would do two things:

1. I would invite our major employers to a forum to understand their barriers to growth through a future state visioning exercise. Once the barriers are identified, I would ask the businesses to join the discussion table talking about the priority of most interest or most impactful if resolved. Assuming workforce is identified as a barrier (I would be shocked if it isn't as it's a common theme that arises in our BR&E discussions and we have a department supporting in this space), the table questions would dive deeper into the issue – why are skilled employees leaving? Why are skilled employees not taking the job? This would narrow in on the cause leading to identifying the crux of the issues thus identifying opportunities to build social capital to support economic development.
2. I would work with businesses our organization has a relationship with to survey their employees or bring the employees together in a focus group. This will help identify the social capital that

exists that should be maintained or enhanced, or social capital that needs to be developed to recruit or retain staff.

Once I have this data, I would establish several working groups – one for each of the social capital areas that need attention. Each social capital area being addressed would have the right stakeholders to address the issue. For example, if parental care is an issue that surfaced as a barrier, is there an opportunity to work with a local YMCA to create an adult/senior day program?

Monitoring the success of each initiatives will be ongoing and reported back to the employers and employees who participated in providing feedback.

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## **Response 9**

### **Building Social Capital in a BR&E Program**

One of the most effective ways to strengthen social capital through a Business Retention & Expansion (BR&E) program is by building trust-based relationships between businesses, local leadership, and community partners. The Halifax Partnership BRE Program Manual emphasizes the BRE is not simply about collecting data or making referrals but about creating meaningful and ongoing connections that help businesses feel valued and supported within the community.

A key practice I would implement is consistent one-on-one business visitation focused on active listening rather than simply administering a survey. The manual stresses that conversations should be relationship-driven and allow businesses to openly discuss the issues most important to them. This approach strengthens social capital because it demonstrates that local organizations are genuinely interested in understanding business concerns and helping solve problems collaboratively.

Another important strategy would be maintaining a strong local “Action Team” made up of organizations that can respond quickly to business concerns, such as the chamber of commerce, workforce organizations, local government departments, utility providers, educational institutions, and groups like the Anderson County Workforce Development Council. The Council was created to provide a forum for identifying workforce challenges and generating collaborative solutions to local workforce needs. An added benefit has been the increased opportunities for Economic Development staff to regularly engage with employers across a range of industries, helping build stronger communication, familiarity, and trust. Many of the same organizations that would participate in a BR&E Action Team are already connected through the Workforce Development Council, which strengthens existing relationships and builds social capital before issues even arise. Regional and state partners can also be engaged when issues require broader resources or specialized support. By encouraging regular meetings and communication among these partners, the program can foster stronger networks, increase familiarity between organizations, and create a culture of shared responsibility for local economic success.

The manual highlights that recurring concerns identified through BRE visits can reveal larger community-wide challenges. Sharing aggregated findings with stakeholders and bringing partners together to

address workforce shortages, infrastructure concerns, or permitting issues can help businesses see that collaboration leads to action. This creates stronger confidence in the local economic development ecosystem and encourages continued participation.

Regular communication through social media platforms also play an important role in building social capital. By consistently sharing relevant information about workforce programs, grants, training opportunities, infrastructure updates, and business resources, economic development organizations can position themselves as trusted and reliable sources of information. This ongoing communication helps businesses stay connected and reinforces the idea that local organizations are actively working to support their success.

Follow-up communication is another simple but powerful way to build social capital. The manual notes that timely follow-up helps businesses feel connected to the community and reinforces the idea that their success matters – equally important when there is an urgent or minor issue. Even simple gestures such as thank-you notes, check-ins, or recognition through social media can strengthen goodwill and long-term engagement.

Overall, a successful BR&E program strengthens social capital by building relationships, increasing trust, improving communication, and creating stronger networks between businesses and community organizations. When businesses feel heard, supported, and connected, they are more likely to invest in the community and participate in its long-term success.

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## **Response 10**

We are looking forward to adopting the continuous model, where the primary focus is on building lasting relationships and trust rather than information sharing. There were some basic examples presented in Halifax's manual that will contribute to building social capital. These were the simple gestures like thanking the business for existing, and doing business in our community, when finishing up a meeting with them. Another example was being timely with responses – recommending that within 48 hours demonstrates commitment to them.

We often report on the activities we've delivered but rarely on the actual impact of those activities. The continuous BRE model being recommended includes a follow-up component to measure success or reevaluate and support. Supporting a business through a recommendation or referral will serve to nurture the relationship. However, it also requires the BRE program administrators to be more precise and thoughtful with the recommendations that are shared with the business. This is why, above all else, we will become listeners. Thoroughly understanding their needs will allow us to connect them to the right partner within our 'Action Team'.

A crucial part of our program design will be to build out our 'Action Team' to include members of our 'economic development ecosystem'. Here in Pictou County, we meet regularly with Ignite Atlantic (Local incubator / business accelerator), our Chamber of Commerce, Invest Nova Scotia representative, CBDC NOBL (Community Business Development Corporation) and our tourism dept, Coastal NS. We recognize that in a rural region we're often competing for calendar space with the same audiences and are currently working on ways to combine events or collaborate on delivery. Our business community likes

to see us working together and it puts to rest questions or confusion around duplication. It has also forced us to look at our own 'lane' and define the how we serve the region directly and how we support others in the same space. Through these relationship building initiatives, we have agreed to work on a regional strategy for AI Adoption, as well as succession planning.

These thoughtful interactions are also serving to keep us informed of each other's programs and services, again, strengthening our referrals and ultimately social capital in this space.

Finally, we are also taking a holistic approach to support economic development in a complex but rural environment. We recognize that community vitality requires strong volunteer and not for profit organizations. We are dedicating some of our resources to serve this area and piloting some projects that make it easier for organizations to thrive and serve our community. We also want to build a regional culture and make it easier for residents to live without barriers between towns. Hopefully, Our community and business community view these as actions that strengthen our attractiveness compared to more urban areas and this ultimately contributes to our social capital as well.

In summary – being seen as delivering value in our community will strengthen our networking and make our partners more accessible to us. Listening and making strong connections rather than solutions will build trust and our business community will know they can trust us to help navigate growth and retention challenges.

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## **Response 11**

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