

Ten Ways to Assist Your Local Businesses

There are many different ways your economic development organization can help foster success in your local business community. Here are a few with a focus on active listening, partnering, and building awareness.

1. Identify and understand the barriers facing your local businesses using a survey or one-on-one interviews. Focus on actionable items and use the information to develop or refine your business retention and expansion initiative.
2. Be a one-stop source of information on business assistance programs offered by federal, provincial /state, or local agencies, local electric and gas utilities, and others. Include programs on:
 - Export development and promotion
 - Financing
 - Skills development and training
 - Reducing energy use
 - Entrepreneurship and small business training
 - Education and skills upgrading
 - Business planning
3. If one doesn't already exist, collaborate with your local Chamber of Commerce and/or business associations to assemble a database of local companies. Detail their products and services, key contacts, market focus, and areas where they seek collaboration, business partners, etc. Use the database to profile your business community's strengths and to facilitate business networking and collaborations.
4. Benchmark your community against comparable-sized centres to identify and understand key weaknesses and strategic advantages. Important areas to review include:
 - Services available to businesses and residents
 - Customer service skills in the retail and service sectors
 - Available labour pool and skill sets
 - Permitting requirements and times
 - Availability and cost of utilities
 - Transportation infrastructure and linkages
 - Business friendliness
 - Overall business costs
5. Help build the relationship between local education and training institutions and your business community to facilitate:
 - Employee training and upgrading
 - Summer student and co-op student placement
 - Business mentoring
 - Satellite campuses / outreach programs
6. Sponsor or co-sponsor how-to seminars for small businesses and entrepreneurship.
7. Review your municipal by-laws concerning home-based businesses. Do they accommodate or hinder what is often the first step to launching a successful full-time business?
8. Initiate an annual business awards program to reward and encourage excellence and success in your local business community.

9. Have ten compelling reasons why businesses should locate in your community. Support these with research, success stories, and testimonials.

10. Review how many of your local businesses have a presence on the Internet. If below average (from your benchmark study), consider a program to cost share the development of websites for local companies. Include resources to train business owners on how to market, maintain, and monitor their sites.

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