

Big Lake BR&E Visitation Program Case Study

Project: Creation of a Business Roundtable Group

Background

In 2006, the Big Lake BR&E Task Force interviewed 40 local businesses to survey their perception on the community's strength and weaknesses. Four priority projects were identified to address the issues learned during the interviews:

1. Pursue workforce development strategies that a) retain and motivate young potential employees in Big Lake, and b) inform businesses of workforce attributes to aid recruitment
2. Form a Business Roundtable
3. Improve cultural and recreational opportunities by creating a "Passport" program for area residents and visitors
4. Strive to serve as a resource to the City of Big Lake Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Committee

This case study focuses on priority project #2: Creation of a Business Roundtable Group.

The Project:

- The BR&E business surveys conducted in 2007 revealed that there were common issues across diverse business sectors that would benefit from collaborative and integrated initiatives.
- In the surveys businesses indicated key rankings for locating businesses in Big Lake were:
 - Transportation accessibility
 - Availability of commercial and industrial land
 - Relative cost of commercial and industrial land
 - Availability of labor and workforce stabilityBusinesses also indicated they would benefit from more information on:
 - Alternative financing programs
 - Information on business plan development
 - Marketing strategies
- The Business Roundtable was established in response to these topic areas, as an informal peer-to-peer roundtable to meet on a regular basis for the purpose of dialoguing and developing business "needs/response" strategies driven by the topics identified in the surveys to benefit existing and new businesses of all sizes.

Meetings

- The agenda is informal and spontaneous.
- Focus on business owners interaction.
- The meetings function as a form to develop strategic responses regarding mutual business issues.
- No membership fees. Attendees pay for their own breakfast.
- Funds for speakers/activities are raised on an “as needed” basis.

The Challenges

- To date, there have not been any significant challenges.
- Attendance has been from 12 – 15 people which has worked well for the monthly format.
- In addition to the informal monthly meetings, more formal quarterly meetings are intended. There was a decision not to host the larger quarterly meetings over the summer months, but they will resume 4th quarter 2008.

Resources

- The Roundtable has partnered with the Big Lake Chamber of Commerce, EDA, MN Workforce Center and has plans to include other partners such as MN Initiative Fund, Small Business Development Center, and SCORE.

Results

- The kickoff meeting of the Business Roundtable was held on March 19, 2008. Teri Kohler, founder of “Ignite” was the guest speaker presenting solution to maximize marketing potential for businesses. The Business Roundtable has been meeting since that time on the third Thursday of each month at 7:30am at Lake Café in Big Lake. Anyone is invited to attend.
- Topics to date have included Zoning & Planning, Signage, Customer Service, North Star Rail & Transportation, and Marketing.

Additional Information

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