

REGIONAL SOLUTIONS FOR ENTREPRENEUR AND SMALL BUSINESS SUCCESS

A Systems Approach to Supporting Entrepreneurs and Businesses

FACT SHEET



The Project

The “Regional Solutions for Entrepreneur and Small Business Success” project builds upon the success of a multi-county effort that has stimulated the development of 40 micro-businesses over the last two years targeted on a discrete sector of the population of Manistee and Benzie Counties.

This project will identify existing assets and resources that can be aligned and deployed to support entrepreneurs and businesses, and identify best practices that should be considered in the design of a system of support for those operating businesses and those with a product idea or desire to launch a new business.

The final phases of this project will involve a collaborative process to design the business support system and test the feasibility of the system to refine the design prior to a more complete system implementation.

Why is this Project Important?

Entrepreneurial activity, small businesses and “micro-businesses” are steadily growing as contributors toward total employment. This project recognizes the importance of developing a regional system to accelerate and sustain these employment opportunities in order to:

- Reduce unemployment
- Reduce poverty
- Diversify the economic mix
- Reduce the region’s dependence upon a seasonal economy
- Reverse the downward trend in year-round population and school enrollment by keeping more people in northern, rural Michigan
- Recognize the value of leveraging resources and assets in a regional system to support business and job development

Why is a System to Support Entrepreneurs and Businesses Needed?

Across the nation and Michigan there are hundreds, even thousands, of organizations and programs that exist to support business development. Unfortunately many of the programs are focused on funder goals, rather than the goals and problems of the entrepreneurs they serve. This problem is compounded by the fact that organizations are often rewarded for client counts, rather than quality and outcomes of their service. This provides a barrier to collaboration and a barrier to referral of clients to more qualified providers. When these institutional barriers are not an issue, often there is a simple lack of information and knowledge of the other available resources and assets that could make a measurable effect for the entrepreneur. A region that develops an effective system that has 1) access to and leverages all available resources, 2) neutralizes existing issues and 3) utilizes continual evaluation and improvement, will be a region that becomes known for superior service to

entrepreneurs and as a result will begin to naturally attract these creative, risk-takers.

What Has Been Accomplished So Far?

Phase 1 – Expand & Extend Existing Program

The first phase of this project was to extend and add services to the existing Manistee-Benzie Micro-Business program. This has been accomplished by 1) extending services to micro-business entrepreneurs that the Alliance for Economic Success had previously been supporting, 2) providing service offerings to support additional clients, 3) Providing train-the-trainer services to other organizations with missions that include job/business support and 4) completing a professional evaluation of the Manistee-Benzie Micro-Business program.

These goals have been met. The program evaluation determined great value and service was provided through the existing Micro-Business program and the evaluation identified several linkages to national Micro-Business best practices. This information provides a solid foundation to help build the broader entrepreneur and business support delivery system.

Phase 2 – Resource Inventory

The second phase of this project involves the completion of national best practice research of existing entrepreneur and business delivery systems and the completion of an inventory of all available assets and resources that provide support to entrepreneurs and small businesses. The best practice research has been completed and the asset and resource inventory is underway (approximately 60% complete).

What Are the Next Steps?

Phase 3 – Program Design

Based upon the results and findings of Phase 2, a team will be formed to design the *Delivery System*. The team will consist of diverse representation from service and program providers, system users and organizations that may be needed to provide or build infrastructure to design and implement the system.

The design process will:

- Be outcome based, meaning the desired outcomes will be defined and work plans will be developed with specific goals in mind
- Determine options for development of programs and services needed to fill gaps in support that is determined necessary to achieve desired outcomes
- Assess and recommend options for integrating existing resources and programs inventoried into the support system
- Develop a 3-5 year business plan needed to support system implementation, including an assessment of sources and uses of funding
- Recommend processes for system evaluation and continuous improvement
- Establish the purpose, scope and evaluation measures for a feasibility study to test the system

What Are the Next Steps?

Phase 4 – Feasibility Study

Utilizing the feasibility study parameters identified during the Program Design Phase, the Feasibility Study will:

- Test the delivery system as recommended by the design phase.
- Serve as a basis to request and secure funding from public and private sources identified in the design phase to implement the program.

How Can I Get Involved?

We are interviewing entrepreneurs, business leaders and those who provide business development services. If you would like to participate in these interviews, we would like to talk with you!

We are documenting all business development services available in the Benzie, Manistee and Mason County region. If you or your organization provides these types of services in this region, we want to be sure to include your information in our resource database.

Contact Us!

If you would like more information or would like to be involved in this project, contact the Alliance for Economic Success via email at info@allianceforeconomicsuccess.com or by phone at (231) 723-4325.