

Business Expansion and Retention (B.E.A.R.) Program

One characteristic of a vibrant local community is visible appreciation, understanding and support for its existing business base. Existing local businesses represent the engine for continuing economic activity and new jobs in any local economy.

Evidence shows that they are responsible for –

- creating between 60-80% of new jobs
- providing most of the investment for new community economic initiatives and infrastructure
- generating ideas about possible new businesses
- often acting as an attraction for outside businesses to relocate or establish within the community.

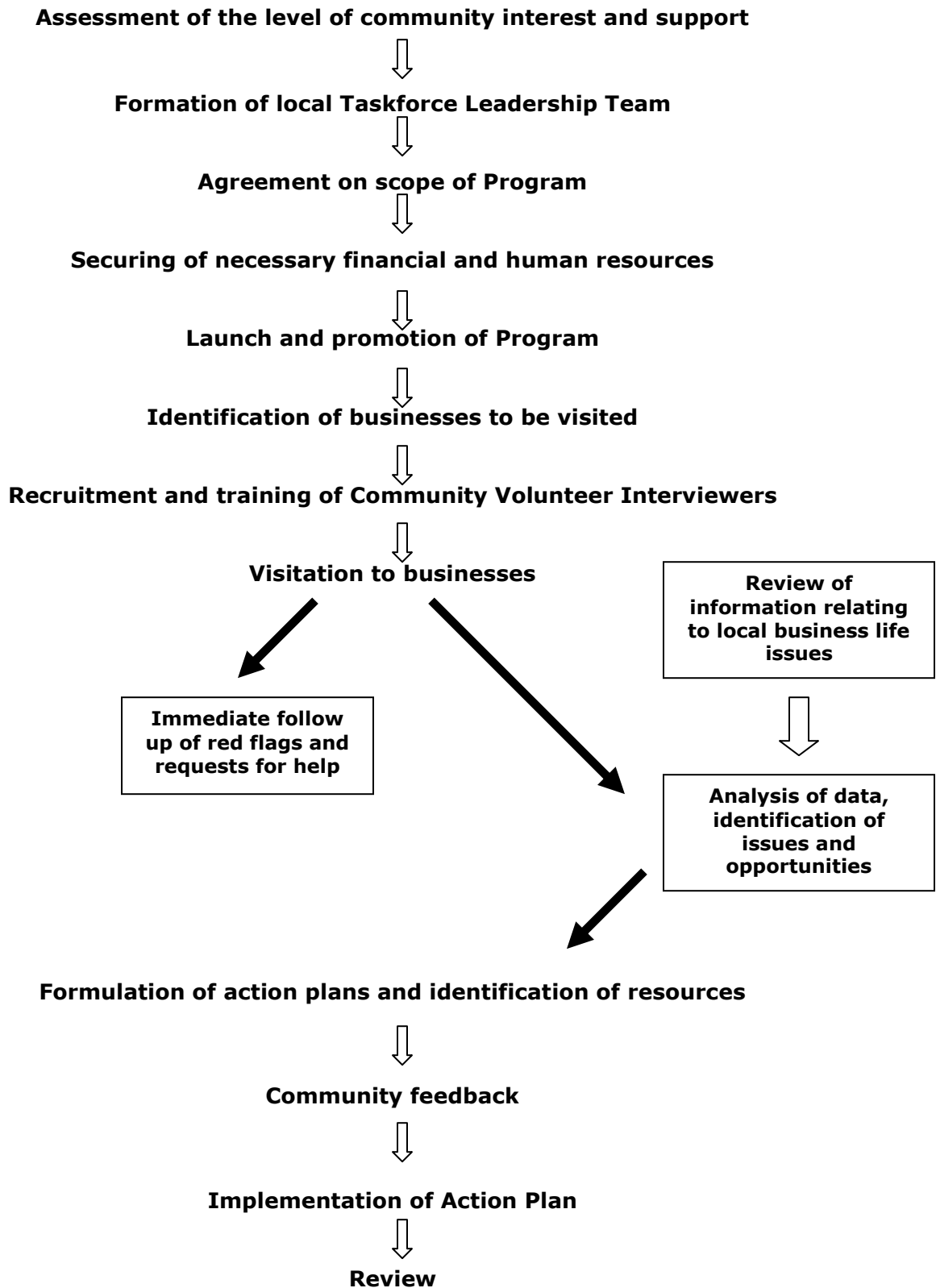
It is vital to have community initiatives that focus on listening to, and helping existing businesses to remain and grow within the local community. The Business Expansion and Retention (B.E.A.R.) Program is an excellent tool and resource for achieving this.

Program Description:

The B.E.A.R. Program is simply a community wide dialogue with owners and operators of local businesses about what helps and hinders their community activities, and what ideas they have to improve the local business environment. It involves the mobilization and training of local community volunteers who visit local businesses and engage in conversation through the use of a structured questionnaire. The information generated through those conversations then becomes the basis for invaluable community response to any requests for assistance by businesses and the design and implementation of community and economic development strategies.

The flow diagram on the following page summarises the steps of what is generally a 3-6 month process.

The B.E.A.R Program Process (3 – 6 months):



Potential of the B.E.A.R. Program:

The potential of the B.E.A.R. Program allows the possible discovery of –

- a picture of local business health
- local business needs and concerns
- perceptions by local businesses about what prevents expansion
- identification of any businesses considering relocation outside this community and their reasons
- perceptions about government actions and what helps and hinders
- opportunities for matchmaking and collaboration between local businesses
- current and future labour market needs
- small businesses training and information needs
- opportunities for collaboration between businesses and community and civic groups
- new ideas for improving the local economy and the business environment
- new volunteers and community leadership.

B.E.A.R. Resources:

Through the support of the Municipal Association of Victoria, a B.E.A.R. Resource Kit containing a Facilitator Handbook, Community Volunteers Handbook, visitation questionnaire and promotional DVD are available.

Information, consultation support and certified training is provided by the Bank of I.D.E.A.S. is also available.

For more information:

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