

The Business Retention & Expansion (BR + E) Visitation Program

A. Description of the BR + E Visitation Program

The BR & E Visitation Program is an exciting community based economic development initiative, used extensively throughout USA, Canada and a number of European countries. Since 1998, it has emerged as an economic and employment development strategy in four states of Australia.

The BR & E Visitation Program represents a practical response to the importance of local business base in any community. They are usually responsible for –

- between 60 – 80% of all job creation;
- most investment for new community economic initiatives and infrastructure;
- generation of many new ideas about new local business opportunities; and
- acting as an attraction for outside businesses to establish themselves in the community.

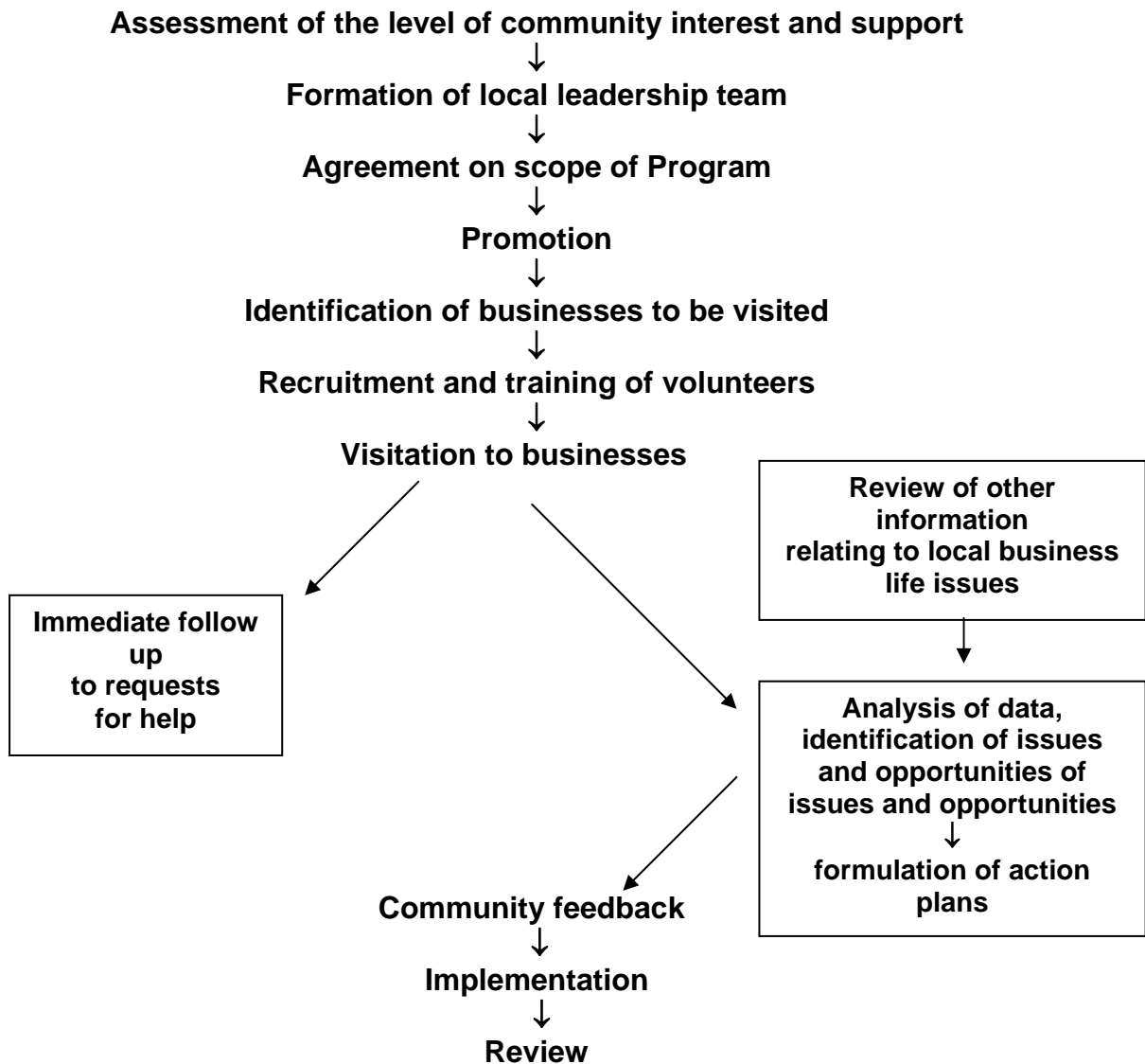
A BR & E Visitation Program allows a community to demonstrate pro-business support for existing local businesses through a systematic or regular business visitation program. Simply the purpose of the visitation program is to identify how local business operators feel about running a business in their local community – what helps, what hinders and their ideas for improving the business environment.

The BR & E Visitation Program utilises a structured interview process by involving community volunteers in the discovery of:

- local business needs and concerns;
- local economic development priorities;
- perceptions by local businesses that prevent expansion;
- identification of any business considering relocation outside the community and their reasons;
- perceptions about local government actions – what helps and hinders;
- opportunities for matchmaking among local businesses;
- current and future labour market practices and needs; and
- good ideas people have for improving the local community economy and the business environment.

B. Steps Involved in a BR + E Visitation Program

The following flow diagram simply outlines the usual stages that communities undertake.



C. Key Players Involved in a BR + E Visitation Program

Experience has shown that the success of the BR & E visitation program depends upon the identification, involvement and performance of certain key players, namely:

- Project sponsor – responsible to provide or arrange funding, establish a Taskforce, provide administrative support and assist with promotion.
- Taskforce – the local leadership action team responsible for introducing, promoting and implementing the BR & E Visitation Program.
- Project Coordinator – responsible for managing the overall coordination of the project.
- Community Volunteer Interview Teams – they undertake the survey interviews.
- BR & E Facilitator – an outside resource person able to assist a community design, promote and implement the project. Often the facilitator will assist in promotion efforts, volunteering training, compilation and analysis of data, preparation of findings and recommendations, and implementation of action plans.

Strengths of the BR & E Visitation Program

The growing international and national adoption of the BR & E Visitation Program is due to its unique set of strengths as a community and economic development tool. Its popularity is due to the fact that the program:

- focuses on support for existing local business, demonstrates community concern and partnership
- raises the profile of businesses within the local community
- works with perceptions of the local business community
- encourages innovative responses to concerns and opportunities
- plans for action to happen
- provides a strategic framework for action both immediate and long term
- stimulates the wider community awareness of, and involvement in economic development
- builds community involvement and social capital.

D. Facilitator Training

The Bank of I.D.E.A.S. regularly undertakes the BR & E Visitation Program Facilitator Training:

A one-day program that incorporates the following –

- Program overview
- Key players and responsibilities
- Taskforce formation and responsibilities
- Community volunteer training
- Survey instruments
- Practice business visits
- Red flag follow-up

- Action plan formulation
- Lessons from elsewhere (Australia and overseas)
- Accreditation requirements
- BR & E Resources

Participation in such training results in:

- facilitation skills development;
- in-depth awareness of the program; and
- access to a copy of a comprehensive BR & E Visitation Program Kit (Facilitator Manual, Volunteer Handbook, survey forms, BR & E case studies, volunteer recruitment publication and a customised database for survey analysis and reporting).

E. For Further Information

Contact

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The Golden Rule

‘Business stays & expands where it is well treated and appreciated.’

(Peter Drucker)

‘The best way to predict the future is to create it.’

(Peter Drucker)