

+ The BRN: Supporting Regional Businesses in a Turbulent Economy

These are tough times.

And in tough times, it's more important than ever to reach out to and provide as much support as possible to local businesses as they work hard to ride out the storm.

Since its kickoff a few months back, The Business Resource Network – a nationally-unique collaboration of 35 regional chambers of commerce, colleges and universities, workforce training organizations, local governments and government agencies in Mahoning, Trumbull and Columbiana Counties – has taken a whole new approach to helping business survive and grow.

For years, policymakers have been pushing the idea that economic development and workforce groups should work more closely together to provide more coherent and customer-responsive solutions to the businesses they serve.

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Bert Cene, Director of the Mahoning & Columbiana Training Association

Everyone has seen that, all too often, organizations that offer some kind of business service – literally everything from tax incentives to childcare – operate in their own independent silos, requiring the business to figure out which organizations they need to reach to get help – assuming they even know such services are available.

“That kind of go-it-alone approach to delivering business services doesn't work well even in good times,” said Bert Cene, director of the Mahoning & Columbiana Training Association (MCTA) and a leader in The Business Resource Network.

“In tough times, when time and the need to bring the best group thinking to business problem-solving are even more critical to business survival, we knew we had to make regional collaboration and one-stop-shopping more than just lofty goals,” Cene added. *“We knew we had to create a whole new working model for how you deliver critical services to business.”*

A few months in, The Business Resource Network model is working well and getting national attention.

The Business Resource Network model basically works like this:

- **Step 1: Target and Prioritize** – Using Dun & Bradstreet data and other lists, BRN Partners target and prioritize businesses facing tough economic challenges or fast growth. With this as a starting point, the Partners further focus on regional sector priorities – in this case, manufacturing and healthcare.
- **Step 2: Collect Critical Data** – The partner serving as “Account Executive” for a targeted business schedules a meeting with a high-ranking company official to conduct a comprehensive interview using the proven *Synchronist Business Information System*

to determine the precise challenges and opportunities facing that business.

- **Step 3: Use the Data to Create a Strategy** – The Account Executive, using specially-developed online technology, shares the insights from the interview process with other Business Resource Network partners to get ideas on programs and services that can help the business solve problems and take advantage of opportunities. This is a chance for BRN Partners to think creatively and leverage one partner's service or program against another for the most possible impact.
- **Step 4: Develop a Workplan and Relationship** – These ideas and programs become part of a comprehensive proposal to the business, with the Account Executive serving as the long-term intermediary between the business and the participating BRN Partners. Once the business clients determine which services they'd like to pursue or receive, the Account Executive manages the process.
- **Step 5: Build on the Relationship** – Members of the business client team of participating BRN Partners continue to work to identify new ways to meet the client's needs over time and build on the collaborative model.

“Our goal,” according to Bert Cene, *“is to do everything possible to retain businesses in the region and help them grow by packaging, leveraging and delivering economic development incentives, technical assistance consulting, workforce training and other key services with as little hassle and bureaucracy as possible.”*

That apparently was what Lt. Governor Lee Fisher saw when he took part in the BRN kickoff event a few months back. Fisher, who also served as director of the Ohio Department of Development, had this to say: *“I can honestly say this is one of the most exciting announcements I've had the opportunity to participate in.”* He predicted it would become a “state and national model” for successful business retention programs.

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Lt. Governor Lee Fisher

With interviews complete, proposals delivered and working relationships established between BRN Partners and the region's businesses, the early indicators are that the Lieutenant Governor's early assessment was right.

+ Accessing the Network

To learn more about The Business Resource Network contact Bert Cene, Mahoning & Columbiana Training Association and Co-Chair of The BRN Steering Committee, at 330/747-5639 Ext. 126 or bcene@mctaworkforce.org.



+ The BRN Model

The BRN is here to help regional businesses survive, thrive and keep and create jobs by bringing an unparalleled strategic and collaborative approach to solving their problems and expanding their opportunities. This client-centered approach transcends individual programs, service silos and bureaucracies to focus on meeting the complete business service needs of the client and delivering measurable results to our clients and communities.

+ BRN Partners

This growing list of Business Resource Network Partners is committed to working collaboratively to help Mahoning, Trumbull and Columbiana County businesses succeed and grow.

If your organization would like to become a part of the Business Resource Network, click [here](#).

- Area Health Education Network
- Burdman Group Inc.
- Choffin Career & Technical Center
- City of Warren
- City of Youngstown
- Columbiana County Board of Commissioners
- Columbiana County Career & Technical Center
- Columbiana County Office of Economic Development
- Congressman Charles Wilson
- Congressman Tim Ryan
- Eastgate Regional Council of Governments
- East Liverpool Chamber of Commerce
- Family Recovery Center
- Kent State University Salem & East Liverpool Campus
- Kent State University Trumbull Campus
- Main Street Warren
- Mahoning & Columbiana Training Association
- Mahoning County Career & Technical Center
- Mahoning County Department of Job & Family Services
- Mahoning Valley Economic Development Corporation
- NEO HealthForce
- Ohio Apprenticeship
- Ohio Department of Development – Region 10
- Ohio Department of Development – Region 12
- Ohio Rehabilitation Services
- Ohio Treasurer of State
- Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 396
- Salem Area Chamber of Commerce
- SCORE
- The Regional Chamber
- Trumbull Career & Technical Center
- Trumbull County Department of Job & Family Services
- Village of Lowellville
- Youngstown State University Metro College
- Youngstown State University Public Services Institute

Learn More about The Business Resource Network and our approach to helping your business grow and succeed by clicking [here](#) to download our brochure.