

The Business Resource Network: Keeping Our Businesses and Helping Them Grow



Perhaps you are a large employer with hundreds of employees. Or maybe you are a homemaker dreaming of starting a business selling homemade preserves at farmers' markets. Perhaps you are a non-profit company. Perhaps you have shareholders to please. Are you are thinking of expanding an existing business? Or starting a new venture? Whatever your situation, The Business Resource Network is ready to assist you in making your goals a reality – and all at no charge!

The Business Resource Network (BRN) came into being in 2008 thanks to a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. The program initially was targeted to serve businesses in Stark, Trumbull and Mahoning counties. After operating successfully in those counties, the Department of Labor allowed the program to expand into a total of 16 Ohio counties. Belmont, Harrison, Jefferson, and Carroll counties are one area where BRN is focusing its attention.

Angie Peters, Manager for this four county area, explains, "There are not a lot of business services in our area. We exist to help connect business owners with resources that can help them stay in business or help grow the business. We cut through the red tape and connect businesses with the resources that will help."

BRN is a collaborative group made up of regional Chambers of Commerce, economic and workforce development organizations, schools, colleges, universities, and government agencies that all have services helpful to business. These entities along with the BRN staff work together to provide businesses with the information and assistance they need.

The process starts with a face-to-face interview. BRN staff meet with business owners and executives at the location and time most convenient. BRN uses the Synchronist Business Information system to analyze where a particular business is and where it wishes to go – obtaining an overview of the challenges and opportunities for that particular business. This information is shared with the network partnership who respond back to the Area Manager with any resources, services or assistance that will be helpful to the business. A comprehensive proposal of services is delivered back to the business by the Account Executive, the initial and single point of contact to the business.

What sort of resources might businesses need? Businesses can be helped to connect with financial resources such as loans, grants, and tax breaks. Information about obtaining government contracts can be provided. Marketing strategies can be developed. A potential entrepreneur can be linked with experts who assist with the development of a business plan. Issues with utilities and energy efficiency can be

resolved. Businesses may not know about the government resources available to help them locate and even pay for new workers. Angie explains, "Many businesses are not aware of programs available through the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services. For example, Learn to Earn is a program that connects unemployed workers with businesses they wish to hire. It then allows the business the opportunity to train them in how they would like the job to be done at 24 hours/week for 6 weeks. The wages and Workers Compensation is provided by the State of Ohio during this try out period".

Brad Jenkins, Marianne Shaw, and Nancy Grim are the Account Representatives serving in Harrison County. However, Brad reports, "We are rarely in the office, because we travel to the businesses – and don't make them come to us."

The BRN area serving Belmont, Harrison, Jefferson, and Carroll Counties has been operational since January 2013. Since then they have almost met their 3 year goal of assisting 130 businesses. According to the Account Executives, "We've helped a variety of businesses: carry-outs, automotive shops, farms, a welding shop, a day care, and retail businesses." Angie added, "We saved one business from going bankrupt, helped a business owner who fell ill find funding to make her business more physically accessible for her, helped another business boost its international sales, helped link a business with a college and students who needed marketing internships, helped a business get utility lines relocated, and helped businesses learn how to obtain government contracts. No issue is too big or too small." The BRN team reports they have leveraged over \$2 million so far in direct financial assistance to businesses in the sixteen county BRN areas.

The BRN staff emphasize that all their communications with a business are kept confidential, and that there is no charge for their services. Angie reports they see significant positive attributes in Harrison County. "We really appreciate the hometown atmosphere here, and yet this is a community able to embrace change. There are a lot of new start-ups in the area, and the community is accepting and supportive of these new initiatives. Our goal is to help this region sustain its population and workforce. We want people coming into the area and helping it grow!"

Check out The Business Resource Network's website at www.TheBRN.net. For a free consultation, the BRN team can be reached at the following phone number or e-mails: Angie Peters: 740-282-0971 Ext. 141 or apeters_brn@hotmail.com; Brad Jenkins: bjenkins_brn@hotmail.com; Marianne Shaw: mshaw_brn@hotmail.com; and Nancy Grim: ngrim_brn@hotmail.com.