A healthy, vibrant local economy depends largely on the strength of a community’s existing businesses. Community leaders can help local businesses survive and grow by implementing effective business retention and expansion (BR&E) strategies. But how do you make that happen?

The next offering of the Business Retention and Expansion Online course begins in September 2016. The course will cover the fundamentals of BR&E in a convenient online learning environment. It is designed for economic and community development professionals, as well as other community leaders who want to learn how to implement a community-led BR&E effort.

**COURSE COST**

The BR&E course begins September 28th and concludes on November 23rd. The cost of the course is $500, and registration closes September 19th. There are also community team pricing options (details available at [http://z.umn.edu/brecourse](http://z.umn.edu/brecourse)).

**A PROVEN APPROACH**

Economic development efforts rely on action from many community players. Without community buy-in, economic development stalls. Extension’s BR&E Strategies Program, established in 1990, is a proven approach for involving the community and building consensus to move forward. Our online BR&E course was redesigned in 2016 and is grounded in the community economic development principles of the BR&E Strategies Program approach. We also offer a traditional face-to-face version of the course; the next offering will be in January 2017. Many professionals from Minnesota and beyond have taken our BR&E courses and moved forward with BR&E initiatives in their communities.

After completing the BR&E course, **you will be able to**: understand the three major elements of the BR&E process, access BR&E resources and networks as needed, plan a BR&E initiative that fits your community, and organize a community to implement BR&E strategies.

**WHAT YOU SHOULD EXPECT**

The course takes 2-3 hours per week over an 8-week period. Although you can work at times convenient for your schedule, you need to stay involved on a weekly basis. There are a few videos or readings each week plus learning activities and discussion forums. The course “capstone” project is planning your community BR&E initiative via a written paper, video, or voice recording.
QUESTIONS AND REGISTRATION

For more information, visit http://z.umn.edu/brecourse. To register for the course, contact Michael Darger, University of Minnesota BR&E Director, at 612-625-6246 or darger@umn.edu. You will receive instructions for logging in to the course site as part of the registration process.

BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION ONLINE

The following table lists course content as of August 24, 2016. This schedule is subject to change before the course begins, but general topics will remain the same.

| Week 1 | • Introducing the course technology, materials, instructors, and participants  
• Economic development and BRE  
• The community development model for BR&E |
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| Week 2 | • Setting goals:  
  o How many businesses & volunteers?  
  o Timeline?  
  o Considerations for volunteer or professional visitation  
• Build on existing group or create a new team?  
• Local vs. regional – scaling your BR&E efforts |
| Week 3 | • Planning the work  
• Communications – internal, external  
• Selecting businesses – mixed sector or sector specific? |
| Week 4 | • Building partnerships for BR&E  
• People  
  o The core team roles  
  o Task force and volunteer visitors  
  o Volunteers – recruiting, training, retaining, and recognizing |
| Week 5 | • BR&E technical issues  
  o Interview guides & survey  
  o Branding your BRE  
  o Urban, suburban, and rural considerations  
  o Focus groups, mixed methods research |
| Week 6 | • Conducting quality visits for both relationship building and good data  
  o How to train volunteers  
  o Doing your own practice BR&E visit with a real business  
• Responding to individual business issues (aka “warning flags”) |
| Week 7 | • Finding the big picture -- data tabulation & analysis  
• BR&E reports  
• Determining priority projects and moving into action  
  o Research Review  
  o Action Planning Retreat  
  o Commencement Meeting |
| Week 8 | • Building credibility; avoiding pitfalls.  
• Creating the right BR&E for your situation  
• Sustaining BRE momentum  
• Using Ripple Effect Mapping to evaluate BR&E results |