Call for Abstracts
Business Retention & Expansion
Special Issue of Community Development
(Journal of the Community Development Society)

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Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) has existed as a central activity and priority for economic development practitioners for more than a generation. A wide variety of public and private organizations in communities, regions and states/provinces in North America and beyond have incorporated BRE programming into their community economic development programs. A 2009 national survey found that 62% of cities and counties were doing BRE surveys with their businesses and 82% were partnering with chambers of commerce or others on BRE (N=709). Business Retention and Expansion International (BREI) has existed as a BRE-specific association for over 20 years in order to promote best practices and build capacity through quality educational opportunities. The International Economic Development Council (IEDC) also offers BRE training and finds that “business retention programs have become the most popular economic development efforts of communities nation-wide”. There is an opportunity to explore the collective impact of BRE and share what has been learned about this important component of community economic development.

Despite its emergence as a pre-eminent concern for community development practitioners, relatively little has been published in recent literature. What innovation is happening in BRE visitation programs? How do other data gathering methods contribute to economic developers’ understanding of the businesses and economies in their sphere of influence? What are the results at the community, regional and state/provincial levels? How does BRE intersect with economic development techniques and strategies?

Seeking to build on advances in community economic development strategies, we are soliciting abstracts for papers to be published in a special issue of Community Development in 2017. The intent of this special issue is to provide a collection of high quality articles on various aspects of using this approach to inform and induce economic development with a goal of helping readers to learn about innovative procedures and approaches in conducting a BRE process. While BRE might be regarded as relatively mature with regard to a developmental continuum, both scholars and practitioners can make significant contributions to the literature by sharing research and practices from case studies, process evaluations, larger scale studies, and analysis of benchmarked data time series.

Submission of topics and abstracts is open and topics of special interest include, but are not limited to:

- Intersection between BRE and other economic development strategies: entrepreneurship, business recruitment, technology-intensive, creative economy, etc.
- Public policy implications of BRE from local to state/provincial scale
- Measuring BRE results: metrics and methods
- Case studies of BRE results over time

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• Benchmarking BRE data for trends and program development.
• Implications of face-to-face visitation vs. other primary data collection methods like focus groups, electronic surveying, mixed methods, and other techniques
• Accomplishing relationship building with businesses
• Quality data collection while using technology: considerations and tradeoffs
• Innovations and evolution in data collection from secondary sources
• Moving from BRE data analysis to systemic action
• Building broad-based partnerships for BRE
• The process of BRE in its various forms (volunteer visitor, continuous, electronic survey, etc.). What are the implications for urban, suburban, rural, regional, and state/provincial BRE programs
• Using volunteer visitors vs. professional economic developers for BRE program implementation
• BRE training and capacity building for economic development professionals, board members and volunteer participants.
• Retaining baby boomer businesses in communities as the boomers transition to retirement

The abstracts should be written for both practitioners and academics and provide generalizable results that can contribute to the body of knowledge on Business Retention and Expansion rather than, for example, only reporting a case study. However, local experiences can document the findings or test the results. The final accepted papers will be written in a professional style including literature review, documented outcomes and references. The emphasis should focus on the manner in which the BRE effort was applied, essential ingredients in success, what has been learned from the process, and outcomes and impacts achieved.

Those interested in contributing to this special issue, please send an abstract, not longer than 500 words, outlining the topics addressed, organization and/or methodologies used, and how the paper will contribute to the BRE topic to: Michael Darger (darger@umn.edu) by January 29, 2016.

When submitting, include BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION ABSTRACT in the memo subject line. Authors will be notified by March 1, 2016 regarding invitations to prepare a full paper.

Final paper submission will be expected by July 15, 2016 using standard Community Development format requirements. Papers will be submitted through the usual refereeing process.

It is expected that an economic development topic will be offered in the 2016 Community Development Society (CDS) International Association of Community Development (IACD) conference and authors are encouraged to submit their paper to the conference call for presentations as well. However, conference submission is not required. An invitation to prepare a full paper for the Journal does not imply invitation to a presentation opportunity at the conference, nor vice versa. However, both the Journal and the CDS IACD conference are excellent opportunities to advance knowledge on BRE.

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