

**BUSINESS
RETENTION
&
EXPANSION
Strategies
Program**



YELLOW MEDICINE COUNTY

Business Retention and Expansion Summary Report

January 2009

Sponsors:



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
EXTENSION

Chapter II provided by:

positively Department of Employment
and Economic Development
Minnesota

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
EXTENSION

Yellow Medicine County

Business Retention and Expansion Strategies Program

Summary Report
January 2009

Written by:

Brigid Tuck
University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality

For more information about the Yellow Medicine County BR&E
Program contact:

Ryan Krosch
Yellow Medicine County Administrator
(320) 564-5841
ryan.krosch@co.yellow-medicine.mn.us

Neil Linscheid
Extension Educator in Community Economics
University of Minnesota Extension
507-337-2814
lins0041@umn.edu

Yellow Medicine County Business Retention and Expansion Program

Communities recognize that helping existing businesses to survive and grow is a vital economic development strategy. The Yellow Medicine County Business Retention and Expansion Program (BR&E) is designed to allow communities within the county assist local businesses in thriving and expanding in the county. While the attraction of new businesses and new business start-ups are important components of any economic development strategy, research has shown that forty to eighty percent of new jobs are created by existing businesses rather than by businesses new to the community.

The Yellow Medicine County BR&E Program is a comprehensive and coordinated approach to assisting existing businesses. Visiting current businesses and learning their concerns is only one component of the process. The BR&E program builds awareness in the community of issues that face businesses and builds capacity for the community to address these issues. The program assists local leaders and community members in working together to provide solutions to business concerns.

Objectives

The Yellow Medicine County BR&E Program has seven objectives:

1. To demonstrate support for local businesses;
2. To help solve immediate business concerns;
3. To increase local businesses' ability to compete in the global economy;
4. To establish and implement a comprehensive and coordinated

plan for economic development that serves all geographic areas of Yellow Medicine County (cities, townships and county) with Economic Development Authority (EDA) powers;

5. To build community capacity to sustain growth and development;
6. To promote and establish public/private partnerships on economic development projects;
7. Encourage the Yellow Medicine County EDA to establish their role and effort in partnering and complementing the economic development effort in the area.

Sponsorship

This program is sponsored locally by Yellow Medicine County and the Yellow Medicine County Economic Development Authority.

BR&E History

The Yellow Medicine County Economic Development Authority approved entering into the Business Retention and Expansion Program after being accepted into the program by University of Minnesota Extension. The first Leadership Team meeting took place in early 2008.

Business Visits

A total of 72 businesses were visited by volunteers during the business visitation phase. The Leadership Team and Task Force specifically attempted to identify and visit as many businesses in the county as possible. Non-profit and home-based businesses were not actively targeted.

During the months of June, July and August of 2008, the Leadership Team,

Task Force and Volunteer Visitors conducted the business visits. The teams had initially identified 102 businesses for visitation. Thus, the survey had a strong 71 percent response rate.

Prior to the visits, the Leadership Team sent copies of the survey to the businesses. Visitors worked in teams of two and took responsibility for arranging and conducting the interviews.

Warning Flag Review

After the surveys were completed and returned, the Task Force met to review each survey and decide how to handle the immediate follow-up. The Warning Flag review is designed to identify and deal with immediate issues or problems discovered during the survey process, without the need to wait for formal analysis of the survey data. Prompt attention to issues raised, even when the issues may be intractable, creates a positive response from survey participants and builds good will.

Research Report Development

The BR&E Leadership Team sent copies of the surveys to the University of Minnesota for tabulation and analysis. A summary of the data was prepared for the September 26, 2008 state research review meeting, where a team of twelve individuals (listed later in this report) reviewed the results and suggested projects that might respond to the businesses' needs. Brigid Tuck then prepared the Research Report based on the input of the state research review panel as well as her economic development expertise.

The Research Report identifies four overarching strategies that Yellow Medicine County could adopt to address general issues reported by the businesses. The Research Report then

provides under each of these strategies a list of potential projects. The potential projects are only suggestions for the community to consider. The Task Force has the knowledge of the community and what projects are suited locally. Therefore, at the retreat, the Task Force adopted potential projects, modified potential projects, and created an entirely new potential project.

Task Force Retreat

A five-hour Task Force retreat was held on November 20, 2008 in Clarkfield, Minnesota. At this retreat, the Task Force was presented the Research Report. The presentation included an overview of the Yellow Medicine County economy and demographic changes, the composite results of the business surveys, and the four strategies.

The Task Force reviewed and discussed the potential projects and developed new projects. In the end, the Task Force established and adapted five priority projects. These priority projects are featured in this report. If you have ideas, time, or other talents to contribute to these projects, then please contact one of the people listed.

People in the Yellow Medicine County BR&E Program

Leadership Team

Ryan Krosch, Overall Coordinator and Co-Visitation Coordinator
Amy Redepenning, Meeting Coordinator
Scott Tedrick, Media Coordinator
Diane Miller, Co-Visitation Coordinator
Dennis Van Hoof, Co-Visitation Coordinator
David Biermaier, Co-Visitation Coordinator
Cecilia Alvarez, Co-Business Resources Coordinator

Jacki Anderson, Co-Business
Resources Coordinator
Ruth Ann Karty, Co-Business
Resources Coordinator
Julie Redepenning, Co-Business
Resources Coordinator

Yellow Medicine County BR&E Task Force

Many community leaders participated as Task Force members. This group addressed warning flag issues, set priorities for action and will assist in implementing the chosen projects. Task Force members (listed below) also participated in business visits.

Cecilia Alvarez, Entrepreneur's
Assistance Network
Jacki Anderson, Upper Minnesota
Valley Regional Development
Commission
Ron Antony, Yellow Medicine County,
Commissioner
Brian Barber, Granite Falls community
leader
David Biermaier, City of Clarkfield,
Council Member
Roselyn Biermaier, University of
Minnesota Extension
Richard Blackwelder, City of Canby,
Mayor
Elroy Burgeson, Granite Falls
community leader
Joe Fagnano, Granite Falls community
leader
Loren Hacker, Canby Public Schools
Richard Hagen, City of Hanley Falls,
Mayor
Robin Henderson, Granite Falls
community leader
Ian Hodge, Clarkfield community leader
Jerome Hoffman, Clarkfield community
leader
Ruth Ann Karty, Small Business
Development Center
Kathy Kittelson, City of Clarkfield
Administrator
Ryan Krosch, Yellow Medicine County
Administrator

Angela Leppke, Canby community
leader
Paul Luitjens, Clarkfield community
leader
Diane Miller, City of Canby –
Administrator
Andrea Mills, Minnesota West
Community and Technical College
Brenda Ohlson, Clarkfield community
leader
Jan Pederson, Canby community leader
Amy Redepenning, Yellow Medicine
County Administrative Secretary
Julie K. Redepenning, Business
Services – Department of Employment
and Economic Development
Evelyn Regnier, Canby community
leader
Jane Remiger, Yellow Medicine County,
Commissioner
Nicole Richter, Granite Falls Chamber of
Commerce – Director
Patty Savoie, City of Hanley Falls
Dave Smiglewski, City of Granite Falls,
Mayor
Karin Tank, Upper Minnesota Valley
Regional Development Commission
Scott Tedrick, Advocate Tribune
Dennis Van Hoof, City of Granite Falls,
Economic Development Director
John Virnig, Granite Falls Bank -
President
Rebecca Weber, Canby community
leader
Sherman Winson, Clarkfield community
leader

Businesses Visited

Seventy-two businesses were visited. The community greatly appreciates their willingness to help the community understand their needs. Their survey responses are confidential yet it is important to credit their participation by listing their names here.

1st Security Bank
A New Leaf
Advocate Tribune
Bailey's Print Wear

Blackjack Express
 Bootlegger's Supper Club
 Bruflat Plumbing
 Canby Builders Supply
 Canby Home Bakery
 Canby Print Shop
 Canby Theater
 Casey's General Store
 Casualty Assurance
 Clarkfield Care Center
 Clarkfield Enterprises
 Clarkfield Hardware Hank
 Consumer Coop Oil Co.
 Co-Op Credit Union
 Cottonwood Co-Op Oil Co.
 Dairy Queen
 DeToy's Family Restaurant, Canby
 DeToy's Family Restaurant, Granite Falls
 Economart
 EPCOS
 Equity Elevator Trading Co.
 F & M Agency
 F & M Bank
 Family Foods
 Farmer's Co-Op Association
 Farmer's Co-op Elevator, Echo
 Farmer's Co-op Elevator, Hanley Falls
 Filling Station
 First Minnesota Realty
 Friendship Café
 Granite Falls Energy
 Granite Fluid Power
 Hoffco Inc.
 Jim's Market
 Korthis Jewelry
 Loe Lettering
 M2K H2O, Inc.
 Marr Valve Company
 Martin Marietta Aggregates
 Midway Café
 Minnesota Feed Distributors
 MVTW Wireless
 Outland Renewable Energy
 P.K Egans
 Par Piping
 Pichts Auto Body
 Prairie Grain Partners
 Rainbow Day Care
 REM
 Renew Styling Parlor

Runnings
 Sanford (Sioux Valley)
 Sight Sound & Body
 Specialty Systems
 Sunsource Inc.
 Super Motel of Granite Falls
 Taking Care of Business Consulting
 The Ink Spot
 The Pizza Place
 The Sawmill Builder's Supply
 Tjosvold Equipment Inc
 United Petroleum
 Uptown Glamour
 Valhalla Apartments
 Valley Troll
 Velde Sanitation
 Vlaminck Electric
 Willie's Corner Store

Consultant

David Nelson, University of Minnesota Extension, served as the BR&E consultant for the Yellow Medicine County BR&E program. This included coaching and advising the local Leadership Team, conducting Volunteer Visitor training with the Task Force, assisting the Leadership Team in business selection, facilitating the Warning Flag review meetings, and participating in the State Review Panel. As the project moves into the implementation phase, Neil Linscheid, University of Minnesota Extension will be assuming the role of consultant.

State Research Review Panel

The panel reviewed the tabulated survey results and suggested potential actions that might be taken by Yellow Medicine County leaders in response to local firm concerns. The participants of the September 26, 2008 meeting were:

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development:

- Erik Aamoth
- Rachel Hillman
- Lisa Hughes

University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality:

- John Bennett
- Michael Darger
- Laura Kalambokidis, PhD
- Neil Linscheid
- Elton Mykerezi, PhD
- David Nelson
- Liz Templin
- Brigid Tuck

Yellow Medicine County Task Force:

- Ryan Krosch

Yellow Medicine County's Economic and Demographic Profile

A profile of Yellow Medicine County's economy and demographics was prepared for the Research Report and presented at the Task Force retreat on November 20th. The profile was created and written by Cameron Macht of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. The profile contains statistics on population, employment, income, commuting and labor sheds, occupations and educational attainment.

A full copy of the profile can be viewed in the Research Report which is available from the Yellow Medicine County Administrator and on the Yellow Medicine County website at www.yellowmedicine.govoffice.com.

Yellow Medicine County BR&E Survey Results

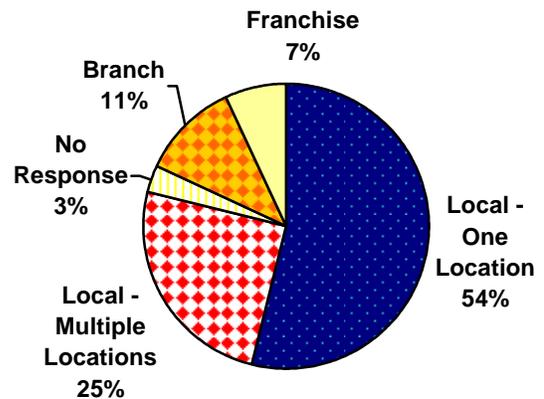
Following are the results of the survey of the 72 businesses visited. The

businesses' characteristics are summarized first followed by priority projects selected by the Task Force. Survey results related to those projects are included in this summary. Additional survey results including four strategic themes are in the Research Report.

Characteristics of Businesses Visited

Seventy-nine percent of the visited businesses are locally owned and operated. Of those, 25 percent have more than one location. The majority of those other locations are in Minnesota. Eleven percent of the businesses are a branch location of a regional, national or international company. Finally, 7 percent of the businesses are franchises. This breakdown is illustrated in Figure 1.

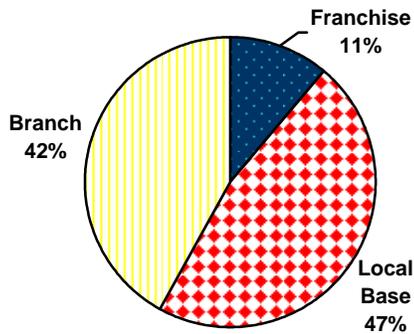
Figure 1: Business Ownership



The surveyed businesses employ a total of 1,091 full-time employees and 543 part-time employees. The average number of full-time employees per business is up from three years ago, while the average number of part-time employees is down. Seasonal employment on average is up from three years ago. Businesses indicated that those seasonal workers are employed during busy times of spring and fall.

Of the 1,091 full-time employees in Yellow Medicine County, 42 percent are employed by businesses that indicated they are a branch location of a regional, national, or international company as shown in Figure 2. Further, 27 percent of part-time workers are employed by these branch locations. Firms with a local base, meanwhile, employ 47 percent of full-time workers and 52 percent of part-time workers.

Figure 2: Full-Time Employment by Ownership



Businesses in Yellow Medicine County are planning on change as shown in Table 1. Forty-two percent of businesses are planning to expand, either at the current location or at another location. Thirteen percent of businesses are planning to sell. Only three percent of businesses are planning to close.

Table 1: Are You Currently Considering? (Select All)

Option	Percent
Not Considering Any Changes	42%
Expanding at This Location	28%
Expanding at Another Location	14%
Selling	13%
Merging with or Acquiring Another Business	7%
Other Changes to Business Plan	6%
Closing	3%
Moving	1%
Downsizing	1%

Overview of BR&E Projects for Yellow Medicine County

Profits are the key to the retention and expansion of firms. While the owners of a business might be attracted to a place because it is a nice place to live or raise a family, a business can only survive if it makes a profit. The same is the case for businesses that start in the community. The owners may be loyal to the community, but if they cannot make their business profitable they will close or move it; they do not have a choice.

In a market economy, making a profit is the responsibility of the firm management and its employees, not community groups, local or state governments. However, the actions of these groups can sometimes help businesses become slightly more profitable. The priority projects outlined below are aimed at helping firms become more profitable and thus be able to survive and grow in the community.

Yellow Medicine County BR&E Priority Projects

The following five priority projects were selected at the Task Force retreat held in Clarkfield on November 20th, 2008.

1. Increase technology development and adaption.
2. Launch an export initiative.
3. Improve labor force availability and productivity through recruitment and training.
4. Develop a Yellow Medicine County Business Retention and Expansion Workshop Initiative.
5. Collaborate on a Minnesota West National Center for Renewable Energy Training.

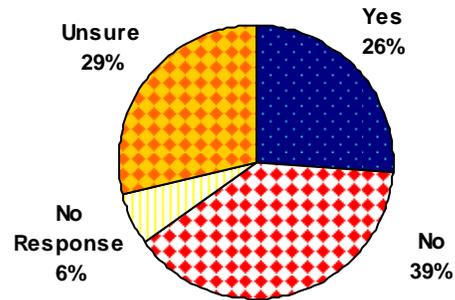
Priority Project #1: Increase Technology Development and Adaption

Technological change, development, and adaption is a challenge for many rural communities. Yellow Medicine County is no exception to this problem. Technology can help to increase productivity and decrease costs, making businesses more profitable. In order to capitalize on this, businesses must be able to recognize trends in technology and have the resources and availability to adopt these new technologies. The Task Force has chosen to respond to this issue by collaborating together to increase technology development and adaption.

Related Survey Results

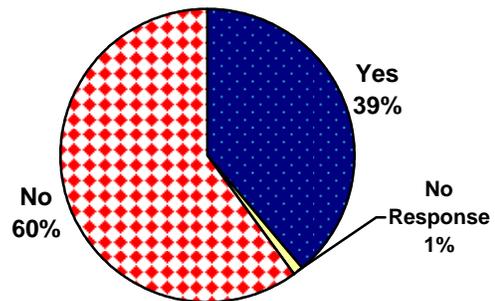
Businesses in Yellow Medicine County were asked if they anticipated any technological changes for their industry. Figure 3 shows their responses to this question. Over a quarter of all surveyed businesses are expecting technological changes to affect their industry. Almost forty percent responded that no changes were ahead. Another twenty-nine percent were unsure of any future changes. These results indicate that over half of the businesses could use some assistance in tracking technological change and in formulating plans to take advantage of those changes.

Figure 3: Technological Changes Ahead?



Businesses were also asked about their overall use and satisfaction with general technology, such as the internet and cell phones. Ten percent of businesses responded that their business does not use the internet. Of those that do use the internet, 10 percent are unsatisfied with their current internet service. Cell phone coverage is also a problem. Nearly forty percent of businesses reported cell phone reception as an issue; see Figure 4.

Figure 4: Is Cell Phone Reception an Issue for You?



Project Plans from the Committee:

In an increasingly global economy, the internet is becoming a key to success for small businesses and small towns. To implement this priority project, the committee will:

1. Work to increase the availability of the internet;
2. Assist local businesses in becoming more internet savvy.

To address the issue of internet availability, the committee will make their case to cell phone and internet providers by attempting to identify areas where cell phone coverage and high-speed internet is lacking. A joint meeting of the committee, cell phone and internet provider representatives, local, state and elected officials and business owners will be held to identify problem areas and ways to work together to resolve the coverage issues.

The committee's task to make business owners more internet savvy and teach them ways to use the internet to improve their business will be accomplished by using University of Minnesota Extension to conduct its Access eCommunity program (www.extension.umn.edu/AccessE). A countywide telecommunications initiative will also be pursued by the committee through the Blandin telecommunication program. Finally, the committee will work with University of Minnesota Extension and the Small Business Development Center to have workshops conducted on specific internet and technology topics. These topics will be selected based on periodically conducted surveys and on feedback gathered from the Access eCommunity or Blandin programs.

This committee will be led by Ryan Krosch. Committee members include: Dennis Van Hoof, Joe Fagnano, Evelyn

Regnier, and staff from the Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission. This committee will meet three to four times a year to implement this project. If you are interested in this project, please contact one of the committee members for more information.

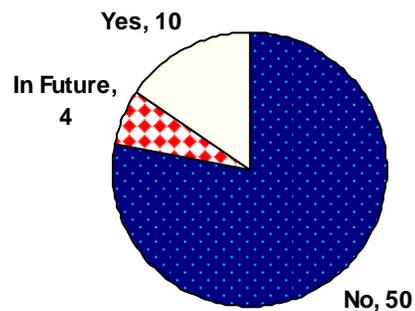
Priority Project #2: Launch an Export Initiative

The survey revealed that a small fraction of Yellow Medicine County businesses are currently exporting in this global economy. Many of the businesses indicated that they did not export due to reasons that could be directly addressed through education and training. The Task Force identified encouraging local businesses to begin exporting as an important project.

Related Survey Results

Only ten businesses that answered the question indicated that they are currently exporting, see Figure 5. The majority of the exporting businesses (70 percent) are manufacturers. These exports account for only 2 percent of gross sales.

Figure 5: Is Your Business Currently Exporting?



Many of the reasons for not exporting (such as concerns about payment and lack of knowledge) can be addressed through training and education. Reasons for not exporting are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: What Prevents You From Exporting Your Product?

Reason	Percent of Businesses
Business Designed to Serve Specific Area	31%
Business is Too Small	19%
Other Reason	17%
Never Considered It Before	11%
Concerns About Receiving Payment	6%
Language Barrier	4%
Costs/Risks Too High	4%
Lack of Knowledge of Foreign Countries/Markets	3%
Lack of Specific Export Knowledge	3%
Tough Competition	3%
Restrictive State/Federal Regulations	0%

Project Plans from the Committee:

This committee will work with Chambers of Commerce, the county, local economic development authorities, and other local groups to launch a campaign to think globally. The committee will work with the Department of Employment and Economic Development to develop a series of workshops that will inform Yellow Medicine County businesses of export practices and tools. The committee will look at options for making these workshops easily accessible to all businesses by providing the workshops in a number of formats. Workshop formats include traditional presentations given directly to businesses as well as video taping workshops and making them available online/webcast or by direct mailing of the workshops on CDs to businesses.

This committee will be led by Julie Redepenning. Committee members include: Ryan Krosch, staff from the Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission, and staff from the Small Business Development Center. The committee intends to work closely with the Minnesota Trade Office on this project. If you are interested in this priority project, please feel free to contact one of the committee members.

Priority Project #3: Improve Labor Force Availability and Productivity through Recruitment and Training

Labor force availability was a recurrent theme throughout the surveys. Businesses consistently reported difficulties in recruiting, training, and retaining employees. Demographic and labor force statistics indicate the potential for a workforce shortage in the region. Overall population, and therefore the size of the labor force, has been decreasing over the past few decades. At the same time, the number of jobs in the county has been increasing. To ease a workforce shortage, employees with the proper set of skills and education are going to need to be available in the area.

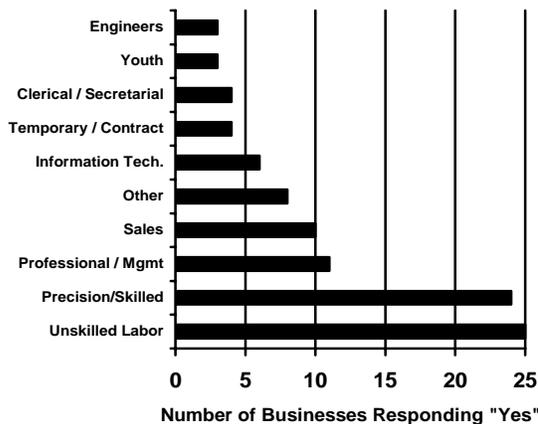
The Task Force has acknowledged these difficulties by creating a priority project aimed at finding and implementing solutions to assist businesses in finding and keeping employees and to assist employees in obtaining the training and education needed to find employment.

Related Survey Results

When businesses were asked to list community-related factors that were the greatest weakness for their business, the most popular answer was availability of skilled labor. Skilled labor is not the only source of recruiting difficulties for

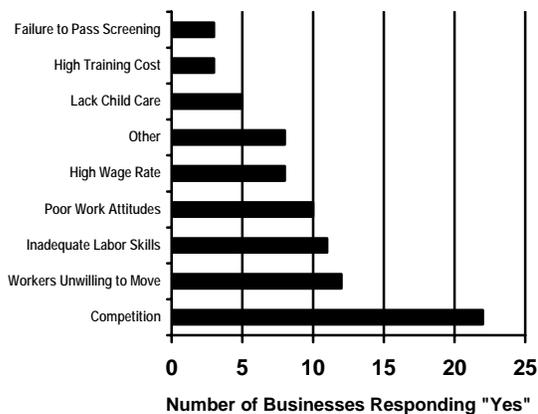
businesses, as even unskilled labor presents a challenge, see Figure 6. Businesses reported problems recruiting unskilled labor, precision/skilled labor, professional and management positions, and sales. Businesses also indicated that they will be hiring in those same job classifications in the next three years.

Figure 6: Does Your Business Have Trouble Recruiting?
(Select All)



Businesses report a variety of reasons for the difficulties in recruiting. The most common reason cited was competition, as illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Most Important Reasons For Recruiting Problems
(Select All)



The most commonly reported recruiting methods were: word of mouth, referrals from existing employees, ads in the local papers, and walk-ins. The most commonly used training methods include: in-house training, self-taught training, workshops, and distance learning. Task Force members identified opportunities for new and creative thinking and approaches in the recruitment and training of employees.

Project Plans from the Committee:

This committee will have two primary focuses:

1. Workforce recruitment and training for the current needs of businesses (example, posting job openings on the internet, etc);
2. Strengthening the relationships between high schools, technical colleges, and local businesses to meet the future needs of businesses.

The committee will coordinate planning meetings over a one-year period to identify efforts that could be undertaken to fulfill the objectives of this priority project. In addition to the committee members identified below, the following partners should be included in this project: local workforce counsel staff, private industry council staff, all Yellow Medicine County school districts, and the Granite Falls and Canby campuses of Minnesota West Community and Technical College.

This committee will be led by Julie Redepenny. Committee members will include: Ryan Krosch, Roselyn Biermaier, staff from the Entrepreneur's Assistance Network and staff from the Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission. If you are interested in this project, please contact one of the committee members for more information.

Priority Project #4: Develop a Yellow Medicine County Business Retention and Expansion Workshop Initiative

In order to survive, businesses must find ways to increase profitability and lower their costs. While communities cannot make those decisions, communities can help businesses to acquire the skills that they need to make sound decisions. Communities can also provide businesses with the tools that they can use to make their businesses more profitable. One way for communities to accomplish these goals is by offering training and educational workshops. These workshops can cover any number of subjects, but are aimed at assisting businesses with problems that were identified in the survey.

Related Survey Results

The survey results indicated several problems that workshops could address. First, the survey identified that business succession is a problem and is likely a growing problem. Eighteen percent of the surveyed businesses indicated that they are considering downsizing, selling, moving, or closing. When asked to indicate why they were making this move, six percent indicated it was for retirement. Another four percent responded that they were trying to sell, but were unsuccessful. See Table 3. Demographic trends indicate that the population in the county will continue to age. As this happens, it seems likely more and more business owners will want to pass their business on the next generation. If resources for planning business succession exist, the county may be successful in keeping those businesses alive and thriving in the region. If not, the county risks losing valuable businesses.

Table 3: Why are You Considering Downsizing, Selling, Moving, or Closing? (Circle All that Apply)

Reason	Percent of Businesses
Retiring	6%
Trying to Sell Business, but Unsuccessful	4%
Other	4%
Changing Market Conditions	3%
Rigid Code Enforcement	3%
Insufficient Labor Supply	3%
Another Business Opportunity	3%
Better Location	1%

Second, businesses indicated a need for customer service training. Forty percent of businesses (172 individual employees) could use this training.

Project Plans from the Committee:

This committee will work to see that a series of workshops on succession planning and customer service skills are provided. The Small Business Development Center will be utilized to provide workshops on both of these topics. The Department of Employment and Economic Development’s annual “Lunch N Learn” training sessions will also be promoted. As with the export workshops identified in Priority Project #2, efforts will be taken to make these workshops easily accessible to all business owners and workers. These efforts include using the internet to distribute the workshops countywide.

This committee will be led by staff from the Southwest Minnesota Small Business Development Center. Committee members include: Julie Redepinning, Ryan Krosch, Jerome Hoffman, and staff from the Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission. For more information or to offer assistance,

please contact one of the committee members.

Priority Project #5: Collaborate on a Minnesota West National Center for Renewable Energy Training

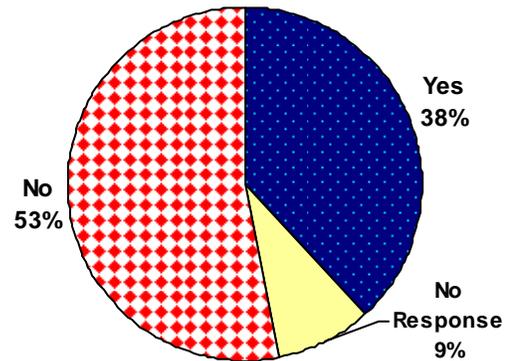
Several themes from the survey results were woven together to arrive at this priority project. There is a need to be on the forefront of technological change. This is an opportunity for existing businesses in the county to take advantage of a technological trend and increase profits. There is also a need to develop and strengthen the relationships between educational institutions and businesses in the county. The Task Force recognizes the opportunity that renewable energy provides businesses in the county and the need to strengthen relationships. The Task Force has decided to pursue this project as a way to accomplish these goals.

Related Survey Results

Technological change is on the horizon for businesses. Over one-quarter of surveyed businesses indicated that technological changes are ahead for their industry. When asked to list the types of changes they see coming, the list included wind energy, electric cars, and solar generators.

Technical colleges can provide training and assistance for current businesses looking to adopt new technologies. Yet, only thirty-eight percent of businesses have used the Granite Falls or Canby campuses of Minnesota West Community and Technical College. High schools prepare and educate young people who are the labor force of the future. Businesses should have strong ties and relationships with these institutions.

Figure 8: Have you used Minnesota West Community and Technical College for Continuing Education, Workshops, Seminars, or Customized Training?



Project Plans from the Committee:

This committee will seek funds to hire a wind education facilitator. This position will focus on building lasting connections between high school teachers and wind technician training programs. The facilitator will build relationships within the wind industry with the goal of obtaining donated equipment for both secondary and post-secondary schools. The facilitator will also develop a long range action plan to develop and promote the region as a national center for wind education and training.

A WIRED grant application to fund this project will be prepared by the committee. The committee can apply to the 'Renewable Energy Marketplace – An Alliance for Talent Development' initiative. It is one of thirty-nine regional projects throughout the country funded through the United States Department of Labor's Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) Initiative. The intent of this initiative is to identify and disseminate career and skill information to senior

high school students. The development of personal relationships between employees of technical training centers and educators will increase the integration of the K-12 and post-secondary education system with the activities of businesses engaged in the wind industry.

This initiative will have a positive impact on the recruitment of students into the wind energy industry. Besides encouraging student interaction through site visits, a major portion of this relationship building will occur on-line. This will be through the promotion of on-line courses to regional high schools. It will also provide a connection dialogue to develop customer designed customized training for renewable energy companies. These training opportunities will help firms build worker skills and help retain successful employees. The on-line recruitment will create a strong opportunity for the region to be competitive both nationally and throughout the global marketplace in the training of wind industry technicians.

This committee will be led by Loren Hacker. Other committee members include: Gene Bies, Evelyn Regnier, Ryan Krosch, local wind energy representatives, and staff from the Granite Falls and Canby campuses of Minnesota West Community and Technical College. If you would like to learn more about this project or become involved, please contact one of the committee members.



The Task Force selected the priority projects. This summary report was written by Brigid Tuck, University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality, Community Economics. Editorial assistance was provided by Liz Templin and Michael

Darger of University of Minnesota Extension. Task Force members also contributed to this report. This publication is available in alternative formats upon request. Please contact Brigid Tuck at 507-389-6979 or email at tuckb@umn.edu.

The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer.