

Appendix A: Self-assessment Guide for Communities

Many communities have done BR&E visitation programs. Some communities have had more success with their BR&E visitation programs than others. This self-assessment guide will help you decide whether your community already has participated in an effective BR&E visitation program. It also will help you decide whether you should revitalize your BR&E efforts.

If this guide is used at a local meeting, give each person a copy of this page and ask the attendees to circle answers to the questions independently. Then ask the group members to compare answers and discuss whether the community needs to revitalize BR&E efforts.

In our earlier BR&E visitation program, we (*circle one per line*):

	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
1. Visited at least 30 firms	A	D	N
2. Organized a local task force from a variety of backgrounds, including leaders from government, education, business and professional developers	A	D	N
3. Had survey results analyzed by an independent analyst	A	D	N
4. Had a research report with action plans for programs to help existing firms	A	D	N
5. The task force decided on the projects in the report	A	D	N
6. Established an effective procedure for handling immediate business concerns	A	D	N
7. Had a written report that listed the names of at least two to three local leaders responsible for leading implementation of each strategy	A	D	N
8. The local task force met at least quarterly for a year after the community meeting as part of the implementation effort	A	D	N

If your community does not answer “A” to each of the above questions, then this program is different than your earlier program.

Appendix B:

Tips for Using the DVD – Segment 1, Retaining and Expanding Business in Your Community, University of Minnesota Extension

DVDs are similar to books, fact sheets, PowerPoints or other teaching aids. They can help a group understand the program, but they seldom can do the job all by themselves. Every group has unique concerns and questions that need to be addressed. Here are a few tips on using DVDs more effectively.

Why Show the Sample Program?

Here are four reasons for showing Segment 1 of the University of Minnesota Extension or other sample program DVD. If you a DVD of a sample program, it will:

1. Demonstrate that the program has been done by people just like the viewers
2. Show the importance of involving people from a wide variety of organizations (private businesses, city government, county government, regional development commissions, economic development professionals, Extension educators and individual citizens)
3. Give a picture of the organization and goals of the program
4. Provide testimonials on the program's effectiveness (The leadership team can say these things, but the message is much more effective if coming from third parties in the DVD.)

Introducing the DVD

Three points must be covered to introduce the DVD effectively. They are:

1. Has your community done the BR&E visitation program before? If so, when and how?
2. Is your community similar or dissimilar to the sample community shown?
3. Identify the key points the group should look for in the show.

Communities With Prior BR&E Programs

If your community completed a BR&E visitation program, some local leaders might be skeptical of redoing this program. If the earlier program was identical to this one and done recently, they would be right. But was it the same? The "Self-assessment Guide" found in the Community Information Meeting Section can help your local group decide whether prior BR&E visitation programs were the same as this one. In most cases, earlier programs probably were much different than this one. After this 10-minute exercise, your visitors will realize the differences and be more likely to watch the DVD carefully.

Areas Dissimilar to Sample Programs

If your community seems different than the one shown in the sample DVD, you have two options:

First, see if your neighboring state or province has a documentary that covers the basic structure of a BR&E visitation program that you might use. Second, consider doing what North Dakota did when it first started its program. It used Minnesota's DVD. When North Dakota officials introduced it, they would say: "This DVD is for Minnesota, which, of course, is much different than North Dakota. Much of this DVD probably fits our situation, but some of it doesn't. Rather than spending \$20,000 to develop our own DVD, we decided to use this, and then after we watch it, we can talk about what parts fit and what parts don't."

continued

Suggest Key Issues in DVD

The old adage, “Tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them and then tell them what you told them,” fits here. Ask the viewers to look for the answers to the following questions as they watch the DVD:

- Does the program focus on concerns of the area’s existing businesses?
- Is the program action-oriented?
- Are local leaders from business, educational, local governmental and professional development agencies actively involved as task force members and visitors (if using a volunteer-led model)?
- Are survey results analyzed?
- Who makes the decisions on priority projects after the survey and research is complete?

Is a key part of the process an implementation of the projects?

Does Your Equipment Work?

Test your equipment before the meeting. Testing the equipment will help you identify any bugs, make sure the DVD is properly cued to the right segment and avoid potential embarrassment if you aren’t familiar with the equipment.

Use Small Groups to Generate Questions

After showing the DVD, break into small groups of three people. Ask each group to take time to prepare three or four questions on the BR&E visitation program. Point out that any question on the BR&E visitation program is OK.

If you skip this small-group discussion step, your group’s questions will not be as penetrating, tough or beneficial to the task force. Consequently, your group won’t

learn as much about the program and whether it fits your community. This means you are less likely to sell the program. And if the group’s questions result in it deciding the program doesn’t fit, deciding this is better for everyone now than after you have put more resources into the program.

Allow about five to eight minutes for small-group discussion. This process will go faster if you designate who is in each small group.

Appendix C:

Question-and-answer Session With Experienced Local Leader (Optional)

For the question-and-answer session, have your group interview a local leader from a community that already has participated in a BR&E visitation program. This will make the responses much more tangible than if you or a program sponsor answers the questions. Encourage each group to ask questions. No questions related to the BR&E visitation program should be out of bounds. To give every group a chance to participate, the moderator should solicit one question per group until all groups have been able to ask a question. Repeat this procedure as long as time permits. If this program is new in your state or province, you might contact Business Retention and Expansion International at (www.brei.org).

Tips for Finding an Experienced BR&E Visitation Leader

What follows are some answers to commonly asked questions about finding a resource person to help you introduce the program to your community.

Question

If we have a program nearby, what type of person should we select to speak?

Answer

If your group is primarily business people, select a business person. If they are farmers, select a farmer. Groups like to talk directly to their peers. Avoid Extension educators or government agency personnel who work directly with the BR&E program. They are expected to be enthusiastic about the program, so they are not as credible as a peer of the audience.

Question

If the resource person has to travel a long way and we can't afford to cover his/her travel, do we have another option?

Answer

You bet!!! Many groups have used a speakerphone successfully for the question-and-answer session. With a speakerphone, the entire group can hear the experienced BR&E visitation leader at the same time. Initially, many groups are afraid to use this method. However, we have used this often, and it is well-accepted once groups try it. It won't work, however, if you don't have small groups generate

questions. If you really want to enhance the speakerphone, get a few slides of the person before the meeting so people can see his/her picture. But 99 percent of the time, we just use the speakerphone.

Question

How will you know if the outside speaker will do a good job?

Answer

The only way to know is by calling the person in advance and asking lots of questions. If the person does a good job, then issue an interview invitation.

Question

Would you use the above approach (introduction, show DVD, small groups, and telephone question and answer) all four times when Segment 1 is used?

Answer

You bet!!! It has been in all four cases (general awareness, leadership team orientation, first task force meeting and training firm visitors). People always have questions. If you don't let them ask questions in the meeting, they will ask them later when no one with direct experience is available to answer them.

Appendix D: Sample News Releases

News Release: Training Firm Visitors

(number of participants) community leaders met at the *(name of meeting site)* on *(day of week or date)* to prepare for the community's economic future. The two-hour meeting was the formal kick-off of a local business retention and expansion visitation program sponsored by *(name of the sponsor(s))*.

This program is receiving technical and research support from the *(name of organization)*. The *(day of week)* night's orientation program was led by *(name of consultant)*, a certified business retention and expansion program coordinator, certified by Business Retention and Expansion International.

"Existing firms are the best sources of growth," said *(name of coordinator)*, coordinator of the local program. "We want to find out how we can help them grow in our community. We have an excellent team in place to work on this and expect excellent results."

The program is designed to stimulate economic development by assisting existing industry, according to *(name and title)*. *(same name)* pointed out that to assist industry, a community first must identify industries' needs and problems and then address those concerns to improve the local business climate.

The firm visitors will be visiting *(number)* local manufacturers between now and *(final target date)*. During each visit, each team of two visitors will use a 10-page questionnaire to gather information about each business. The two training sessions last night were held to help prepare the firm visitors for their interviews.

("Quote from a visitor about what he/she learned from the training sessions or his/her opinion of the program after the training or about his/her participation in the project,") said *(name)*, one of the firm visitors.

During the training, firm visitors viewed a DVD documentary about a community that has completed the BR&E visitation program. They also asked questions of *(name)*, coordinator of *(county)* County's BR&E program via teleconference and reviewed the questionnaire in detail.

(coordinator) emphasized that the information gathered through the surveys will be strictly confidential.

("Quote from coordinator about the his/her expectations of the program or the results and recommendations at the end,") *(name)* said.

Appendix D: Sample News Releases (continued)

News Release: Visiting Local Businesses

Beginning this week, *(number)* county industries will be given the opportunity to voice their opinions about the local economy and local state government as *(sponsor)* starts an economic development program.

The *(name of area)* business retention and expansion program officially begins this week as trained firm visitors meet with local industries to identify their needs and concerns, ask their opinions about local and state government, and determine in what ways the local business climate can be improved.

“The visits we are doing with local firms have four purposes,” said *(name of local leader)*. “First, we want to show our local businesses that we really appreciate the contributions they are making to our local community. Second, we want to see if they have any local concerns, and if so, if there are any ways we can help. Third, we will be offering to help our local firms take better advantage of state and federal business programs. Finally, we want the businesses to help us set priorities on future directions of local economic development efforts.”

The *(local sponsor)* is the local sponsor, while the *(name of organization)* is the state sponsor.

(“Quote from the coordinator about the purpose of the interviews, or the importance of industries cooperating to make the program successful,”) (name) said.

More than 25 states, several Canadian provinces and many other countries have developed programs similar to this one. Business Retention and Expansion International, an association for the advancement of business retention and expansion, was established in 1994 to encourage communities to work with their existing businesses. The *(name of state organization providing technical assistance/research support to BR&E)* has helped *(number)* of communities develop programs in *(name of your state)*.

Appendix E: Sample Confidentiality Statement

Confidentiality Statement

I, _____ (*name*), understand the significance of confidentiality concerning the business expansion and retention program in the community of _____ (*insert community name*)

I promise to keep any information received in the course of my duties with this project confidential.

I understand that the information collected from the businesses is to be treated as confidential and is not to be disclosed to others except in the context of the purpose for which it was collected.

Signature

Print name

Witness

Date

Appendix F: Follow-up Suggestions and Red Flags

Firm ID # _____

Visitors _____

Please complete as team immediately following your interview.

1. Rank the urgency of a follow-up on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being the most urgent. Red flag issues (for example, business plans to leave) require immediate attention and would rank a 5, while a firm with no concerns or requests could be ranked low or 1.

Urgency of follow-up: _____

2. List any urgent issues that require immediate attention, such as relocation, closing, employee layoffs or problems with expansion.

3. List the key concerns of the business.

4. List requests for information or needs.

Source: B.E.A.R Volunteer Handbook, Peter Kenyon, "Bank of I.D.E.A.S." Australia

Appendix G: Report on Practice Visits

What firms did you visit in your practice visit?

Firm name _____ City _____ Date _____

Firm name _____ City _____ Date _____

How long did the visit take?

Firm #1 name _____ Minutes _____

Firm #2 name _____ Minutes _____

How were you welcomed by the firm (circle)

	Very cool reception	Cool reception	Skeptical	Warm reception	Very warm reception
Firm #1	1	2	3	4	5
Firm #2	1	2	3	4	5

What do you see as the benefits of collecting the data through personal visits?

Which three of the “Guidelines for Visitors” do you feel should be stressed the most in the visitor training? Why?

Attach copy of surveys completed.

Appendix H:

Sample Letter for Recruiting Visitors

[Note: This letter is sent only to individuals who already have been contacted personally by a task force member and have agreed to participate. As coordinator or assistant coordinator, you'll have to design your own response card. Fill in the information inside the (____).]

(date)

(name)

(organization)

(address)

(city, state, ZIP)

Dear *(name of firm visitor)*:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the *(name)* business retention and expansion *(BR&E)* program. As a firm visitor, you are a critical element in this project, sponsored by *(local sponsor)*, the *(state)* University Extension Service and *(state)* development department. The BR&E visitation program has been used in *(number)* counties. It is a nationally recognized program that has been adapted to 25 other states.

The overall purpose of the BR&E program is to assist our existing industry. To do this, we have asked local leaders such as you to visit several firms with a survey to gather information about their needs, concerns and opinions of *(list community)* as a place to do business. This information will help us improve our local business climate to better meet the needs of our existing and future businesses.

To tell you more about the program and your role in it, we are holding two training sessions for all *(number)* visitors. You need to attend only one of these sessions, which last 2½ hours. These sessions are:

- *(place, date, and time of session 1)*
- *(place, date, and time of session 2)*

Please complete the enclosed response card and send it to me at your earliest convenience. If you are at all unsure about participating, please attend one of these sessions anyway. After the meeting, you can make your decision.

We greatly appreciate your cooperation in this county/communitywide effort. Your participation as a firm visitor is critical to the success of the program because we would be unable to implement this program without the help of our local leaders. If you have questions about the program, please call me.

Sincerely,

(name)

BR&E Coordinator

(agency)

enclosure: BR&E Visitors Brochure

Appendix I: Sample Letter to Firm

Business Retention and Expansion Serving the Communities of Holland County

(NOTE: This letter is sent to the firms, with a copy of the survey, about two to three days before the firm visitor training. Fill in the information inside the (____).]

(date)

(firm's name)

(organization)

(address)

(city, state, zip)

Dear *(name)*,

The economic well-being of the cities and towns of Holland County depends on the well-being of our existing industries. The Holland County Business Retention and Expansion Partnership believes that manufacturing and retail businesses are a vital part of our economic base. To assist existing businesses and improve the local business climate, we are sponsoring a business retention and expansion (BR&E) visitation program.

The BR&E visitation program is a joint effort by citizens living in Holland County communities. A number of local organizations have joined in sponsoring the effort.

Economic development groups and city councils throughout the county have been informed of the program and endorse the collaborative effort. The program involves local leaders visiting businesses to identify business concerns and needs. The visits involve surveys to gather the information. Specifically, the objectives of using the survey are to:

- Understand local business viewpoints on the economy
- Understand your business relationship to the local economy
- Identify your business concerns related to economic development
- Provide local businesses with information about current state development program
- Establish or maintain a channel of communications between your business and local leaders

Enclosed please find the survey that the firms will be using during the interviews. Firm visitors will be contacting you within 10 days to schedule an appointment to conduct the interview. The interviews usually last about one hour. Let me emphasize that all the information shared during the interviews is strictly confidential.

I would greatly appreciate your cooperation with this community effort. If you have any questions regarding this program, please call me at your convenience at 546-3421 or contact one of the other leadership team members listed on this stationery.

Sincerely,

Nancy Norton,
Holland County Extension Agent
BR&E Visitation Coordinator
enclosure: BR&E Survey

Appendix J: Firm Visitor Checklist

(Complete the following checklist as you proceed through the visitation program)

Activity to be completed	When	Firm 1	Firm 2	Firm 3	Firm 4
1. Review volunteer visitor handout.	As needed				
2. With your partner, decide who will call and schedule business visits.	Immediately after the training				
3. With your partner, decide who will ask the questions and who will record answers.	Immediately after the training				
4. Call to schedule the business visits.	Between _____ and _____, schedule visits ASAP				
5. Contact the visitation coordinator if the business refuses to participate.	Immediately after trying to schedule. Call _____ at _____				
6. Contact the visitation coordinator with the scheduled time and business contact once all your firms are contacted and confirmed.	When all visits are scheduled contact _____ at _____				
7. Confirm the visitation time with the business contact.	The day before the visit				
8. Review the volunteer visitation package.	The day before the visit				
9. Complete all business visits.	No later than _____ (date)				
10. Review the survey for immediate concerns, clarity of responses, etc. Note these on survey.	Immediately following the visit				
11. Contact the visitation coordinator if you were unable to complete the business visit.	Immediately following the visit. Call _____ at _____				
12. Return the completed survey to the location specified on the survey envelope.	Immediately following the visit				

Appendix K:

Guidelines for Firm Visitors

Purpose of guidelines:

To ensure that the visitors and firms enjoy doing the program and that good-quality data are collected, leading to the retention and expansion of local firms and jobs.

Tips on Scheduling the Firm Visits

Who schedules the visits?

You or your partner

Suggested conversations when you telephone the firms assigned to you:

“Good morning, my name is _____.

Recently you received a letter about a business retention and expansion program from _____. This is an effort to see what can be done to improve the business climate for our local businesses and to help them improve their profitability.

Part of the program involves visitors like me visiting with business owners or managers to get their opinions on these questions and to review the survey in that letter.

My partner, _____, and I would like to schedule a visit with you next week. What would be a convenient time for you?”

When?

Telephone within one week

Visit within two weeks

Who should be visited?

Owner or operator of the business

Where?

At the firm’s office or home of the person you are interviewing

How long does it take?

45 to 60 minutes

Tips on Introducing Yourself During the Firm Visit

- Break the ice and express thanks for the firm’s economic contribution to the community.
- Give the firm owner an extra copy of the survey if the person doesn’t have one.
- Cover the two important survey ground rules (confidentiality of results and the skip-it rule: If they don’t want to answer a particular question, they can just say, “I’d like to skip that one.”)

Tips for Person Asking Questions

Ask every question

Ask the question exactly as worded No matter how bad the question seems, don't change it. However, if you ask additional questions to the ones on the survey, just write down the new questions and answers.

Listen carefully As a visitor, your job is to listen to the opinions of the firms. They really like that (if necessary, count to 10 silently).

Repeat the question if necessary Never suggest answers. Even if you are positive you know the correct one, don't prompt the person you're interviewing.

You may probe for answers This is OK. For example,, "Could you tell us a little more about that?"

Do not take offense at opinions If you start debating their points, some owners will stop sharing them.

Do not promise any solutions The BR&E task force has no formal authority and budget with which to solve problems. However, it often can help firms look into these problems.

Tips for Person Taking the Notes

Always circle (never check) responses

Notes must tell the full story The local task force and coordinators can't read your mind. If the notes are incomplete, the firms might not be helped.

List visitors' names on the cover If the task force has questions about your visit, you can be contacted.

Write clearly

Tips for After the Visit

With your partner, discuss whether you found urgent "red flag" issues
(for example, firms considering moving, closing or expanding)

Note urgent concerns or "red flags" on back cover

Return the surveys as soon as possible

Contact Information

Name of person to call if you have problems _____
(typically the visitation director)

Phone number _____

Appendix L:

Using Segment 6, *Retaining and Expanding Business in Your Community: Role Playing for BR&E Business Visits*, University of Minnesota Extension Service

This segment of the DVD is used only for training the leadership team for its practice visits and during firm visitor training.

This section has a more specific job, so it doesn't require as much introduction as Segment 1. Consequently, we suggest the following:

Introduce the DVD

Introduce Segment 6 and emphasize the following:

- The reason for visiting firms is to obtain their opinions.
- Obtaining high-quality information is critical for helping firms.
- Visiting firms is fun.

Obtain Firm Opinions

The reason for doing a BR&E visitation program is to build an awareness of local business problems to help firms address problems and help communities retain and expand their existing firms. Consequently, obtaining managers' and owners' opinions on the local business climate is important. Firm visitors must not influence those opinions while gathering data during the firm visits.

High-quality Data

Stress the importance of obtaining high-quality data for the development of a good action plan. If a lot of items are missing, or if the note taker writes sloppily or doesn't provide a clear description of the problems, your local task force won't be able to respond as well to the needs of the firms visited.

Visits are Fun

Also point out how much fun visiting firms can be. Emphasize that the DVD will prepare visitors so they will have fun while visiting the firms.

Give Visitors a Copy of "Guidelines for Firm Visitors" (Appendix B)

A copy of the survey used in the DVD is provided in Appendix F. You may wish to distribute this so people can follow the dialogue more easily. Make sure people realize that this survey was shortened for the DVD illustration.

Show Segment 6

Don't forget to check your equipment before the meeting starts!

Group Discussion of Role Playing

- Ask the group to point out what the person asking the questions did correctly and incorrectly.
- Ask the group to point out what the person taking the notes did correctly and incorrectly.

Handling Immediate Follow-up Issues

Outline the process for reviewing immediate business concerns.

Appendix M:

Notes to Accompany Firm Visitor Role Playing

Survey Used in DVD – Role Playing for Firm Visitors

(Note: This survey was shortened for purposes of the DVD. Most programs use one-hour surveys.)

Cover Sheet

Name of firm being visited _____

Address of firm _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Name of person being interviewed _____

Date of interview ____/____/____

People doing visit _____

The program is sponsored locally by the Fergus Falls Chamber of Commerce, city of Fergus Falls, Fergus Falls Community College and Otter Tail County Extension office. We are getting technical assistance from the University of Minnesota and Minnesota Extension Service.

Our project has three major objectives:

1. Demonstrate the community's willingness to help our existing businesses
2. Identify needs/concerns of our existing businesses so we can help them retain/expand their employment
3. Develop long-range economic development plans for helping existing businesses

The **confidentiality rule**: Your individual answers to this survey are confidential. Your response will be summarized with those of other firms and reported as percentages or averages.

The **skip-it rule**: If you want to skip questions, we will do that. Just let us know. You do not need to explain your reasons for skipping a question.

Is all the information on the cover sheet correct? (Circle one) Yes No
[If the answer is no, please correct it.]

When did your firm begin its operation here? _____ (year)

What are your firm's major products? _____

What are your expectations for the demand of your products during the next three years? (Circle one)

Increase Stay the same Decrease

We want to encourage other firms to use development programs that are useful. For those programs you have used, which ones you would recommend to other firms? (Circle one response per program)

Would Recommend?

Minnesota Extension Service	Yes	Maybe	No
Minnesota Technology Program	Yes	Maybe	No
Department of Development	Yes	Maybe	No
Economic Security Department	Yes	Maybe	No
Environmental Protection Agency	Yes	Maybe	No
Other _____	Yes	Maybe	No

How would you rate the quality of the following public services? (Circle one on each line)

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor
Water system	1	2	3	4	5
Elementary/secondary schools	1	2	3	4	5
Fire protection	1	2	3	4	5
Emergency medical service	1	2	3	4	5
Police protection	1	2	3	4	5

Considering everything, how would you rate this community as a place to do business? (Circle one)

Excellent Good Fair Poor Very Poor

Evaluation of the Firm Visitors in the Role Playing Segment 6

Give the following introduction and ask these questions:

Introduction: Liz Templin (person asking questions) and Kent Gustafson (person taking notes) intentionally did some things correctly and incorrectly while role playing. In small groups, we want you to discuss the following two questions. When you are finished, we'll talk about these as a group.

What did Liz Templin (person asking questions) do correctly and incorrectly during the role playing?

Points done correctly.

- Liz reviewed background, objectives, sponsorship and ground rules for the survey. (Note that this only took one minute and avoids many problems).
- Liz covered all of the questions on the survey. (If some people skip questions, the quality of the survey data is diminished greatly and you will not be able to help your firms as well.)

Points done incorrectly.

- On question six, she didn't read the question exactly as written. (If each visitor asks questions in a different way, the survey results will be impossible to understand. The results will be apples and oranges.)

What did Kent Gustafson (person taking notes) do correctly and incorrectly during the role playing?

Points done correctly.

- Kent asked if the business owner received a copy of the survey. (All of the firms should have received a survey in the mail, but some firm owners misplace them.)
- Kent asked the business owner to repeat the name when he didn't get it. (This happens fairly often. Don't be afraid to ask for time to complete notes.)
- Kent wrote notes clearly. (The BR&E program can't help the firm if those analyzing the data can't read your notes.)

Points done incorrectly.

- Kent didn't wait for an answer on question five on why the business owner expected sales to increase but jumped in and offered his own answer. (This defeats the purpose of going on the visits; you want only the firm's opinions.)
- When the business owner rates the quality of fire protection poorly, Kent promises to get this corrected. (He doesn't have the authority to do this. He could promise to bring it to the attention of the city but not to get it corrected.)
- Kent objected to Ms. Yoho's opinion that the EMS service was very slow and became argumentative. (This could cause the firm owner to stop offering opinions, which reduces the quality of the data.)
- Kent checked some of the questions rather than circling them. (Sometimes checking answers causes the computer coder trouble in understanding the response, leading to errors in the results.)