

BR+E in Ontario: Past and Present

A select number of municipalities in Ontario, particularly large urban municipalities with financial and human resources available, implement some form of a business visitation program. Smaller municipalities on the other hand, have generally not had the resources or the staff to initiate such an economic development strategy.

In 1997, the Rural Programs Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs took steps to develop business retention and expansion (BR+E) resources (survey, database, implementation manual, promotion and training resources) for use by rural communities. Ten communities representing a broad cross-section of rural communities in northern and southern Ontario agreed to participate in this BR+E pilot program. The successful pilot program has encouraged other municipalities to engage in this strategy.

Almost 100 community BR+E projects have been implemented utilizing the BR+E resources. The following represent examples of BR+E outcomes and impacts at the community level.

Economic impacts from 9 BR+E projects

Actions taken to assist in the expansion of existing businesses and prevent the closure and/or relocation of existing businesses

- 1090 jobs saved & 100 new jobs created
- \$45 million in wages & salaries
- + 600 jobs projected to be saved in future

Wide range of specific actions implemented to support the business sector

- Improved municipal approval processes
- Workforce and skills development programs
- Customer service training
- Tourism marketing
- Targeted business counselling services
- Export development and import replacement programs
- Infrastructure development
- Health care facility development
- Improved business climate

The Future of BR+E in Ontario

Community response to the BR+E web-based application has been extremely positive. It is anticipated that upper and lower tier municipalities, Community Future Development Corporations and economic development organizations will avail themselves of this economic development resource.