

CREATE BRIDGES (Celebrating RETail, Accommodations, Tourism, and Entertainment by Building Rural Innovations and Developing Growth Economies) is an economic development initiative that raises awareness of the role retail, accommodations, tourism, and entertainment industries play in the local economy; examines current support and issues for these businesses and their workforce; and develops and implements strategies to strengthen these sectors within a multi-county region.

Retaining and expanding local businesses is a central component of CREATE BRIDGES. The Business Retention & Expansion process engages local businesses to assess the strengths and challenges of running a business, and inform strategies to address issues that may affect critical business activities.

Business Retention and Expansion Roundtable/Interview Questions

Business Name: _____

Type of business (retail, accommodations, tourism, entertainment):

Address: _____

Person Interviewed: _____

Job title: _____

Date of visit: _____

Email: _____

Interviewer: _____

Recorder: _____

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Labor Force:

1. How many workers (including yourself) are employed...
 - a. Full time

 - b. Part time

 - c. Seasonal

 - d. Temp

2. What are your hours of operation? Do these change seasonally?

3. Has the number of employees changed from three years ago? If so, how?

4. Does your rate of employee turnover create a barrier for your business?
 - a. If yes, what do you see as reasons for turnover?

5. What are some barriers you face when recruiting quality employees?

6. Are there particular types of jobs that are hard to fill? If so, what type of jobs?

i. Why do you believe they are hard to fill?

ii. How do you recruit for these positions?

7. What is the average starting wage or salary provided to your employees?

8. Do you offer benefits to your employees?

a. If so, describe?

b. If not, why?

9. What skills would you prefer your employees have to execute their job responsibilities?

a. Soft skills

- i. Face to face communications
- ii. Phone etiquette
- iii. Team work
- iv. Being to work on time
- v. Appropriate dress
- vi. Customer service
- vii. Time management

b. Educational skills

- i. Basic math
- ii. Reading and writing
- iii. Ability to understand, speak and write in English

c. Technical skills

- i. Basic accounting
- ii. Specialized equipment operations
- iii. Word processing
- iv. Spreadsheets
- v. Database management
- vi. Marketing
- vii. Sales
- viii. Inventory Control
- ix. Cash Handling
- x. Record Keeping

d. Other. Please specify:

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10. Do you provide a formal employee orientation or onboarding process? If so, what does it entail?

11. Do you provide training beyond orientation?

- a. To address changes in technology, policy, trends?
- b. To provide opportunities for cross training, leadership, or career advancement?
- c. How is the training delivered?
- d. Is it optional or mandatory?
- e. Do you pay for your employees to participate in training?

12. How do the following factors impact your employees' ability to work?

- a. Transportation availability
- b. Housing availability
- c. Broadband access
- d. Healthcare access
- e. Child or elder care
- f. Other:

Customers:

13. Please estimate the percent of your gross sales generated from the following locations:

- a. Within the region? Outside the region? Outside the US?

14. Is your business currently selling online?

- a. If yes, are you facing any obstacles selling online?
- b. Is there a dedicated person managing the online store?

15. How do you advertise your business, if at all?

Changes:

16. How does existing or emerging technology affect your business?

- a. What are some strategies you have implemented to incorporate these technological changes?

17. How do you see your business changing over the next three years?

- a. Are you considering expanding to new locations? Adding new equipment? Renovating? Going online? Downsizing? Moving? Closing?
- b. Is your client base changing? Preferences, age, ethnicity, income, etc.

18. Which of the following would you like to know more about to help position your business for success?

- a. Creating/updating my business plan
- b. Selling my business or transitioning it to new ownership
- c. Market research to identify existing or new customer base
- d. Available economic incentives
- e. Energy efficiency upgrades
- f. Support in hiring employees
- g. Identifying financing options
- h. Disaster relief support
- i. Other. Please specify:

19. Does your business have a transition plan for new ownership, leadership, or both? If yes, provide a brief summary of plans. If not, what do you believe will happen to your business in 10-20 years?

Community Factors:

20. How has the region's business climate for retail, accommodations, tourism and entertainment changed in the past three years?

- f. Utilities
 - i. Water
 - ii. Sewer
 - iii. Street and sidewalk cleaning
 - iv. Solid waste disposal
 - v. Gas service
 - vi. Internet service
 - vii. Telephone service
 - viii. Cell service
- g. Government and Regulation
- h. Property taxes
- i. Business insurance costs

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j. Cost of benefits

k. Other:

22. How do the following affect your business:

a. Local business support

i. Local elected leadership

ii. Chamber of Commerce

iii. Other Economic Development Organizations

iv. Main Street Program

- v. Are there other programs from which your business has received assistance?

b. Quality of life

- i. Quality of education

- ii. Quality of healthcare

- iii. Recreation

- iv. Other:

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23. In what ways is the community supportive of your business?

24. What are some specific ways the community can be more supportive of your business?

Travel and tourism:

25. Do you feel your business could benefit from regional branding or promotion?

26. Do you see yourself as part of the tourism economy or actively promoting tourism in your region? If so, how?

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Misc:

27. What percentage of profits do you reinvest in your business?

28. What is the one thing that can be accomplished by the Create Bridges project that would benefit your business?

Thank you for participating in our Business Retention and Expansion Program. We appreciate the time you've given us and the contribution your business is making to our local economy.

We cannot promise to solve all the concerns you mentioned, but we promise to try. If we can help you in the future, please call:

Howard County

- Jean Ince: (870) 845-7500 Ext 9

Little River County

- Bethany Barney: (870) 898-7224
- Vickie Williamson: (870) 584-1488

Sevier County

- Janet Cantrell: (870) 584-3013
- Lisa Taylor: (870) 584-1184
- Suzanne Babb: (870) 584-3225

Create Bridges Project Leads

- Julianne Dunn: (501) 671-2158, jbdunn@uaex.edu
- Dr. Stacey McCullough: (501) 671-2078, smccullough@uaex.edu

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Immediate Action

If we have found an issue together through this process in which a certain individual or individuals may be able to respond to your concern in a beneficial way, do you authorize us to release your survey information to them?

(Circle Either Yes Or No)

(Yes) Your contact information will be shared with the resource person to aid them in understanding your company and the concern. Please sign here to authorize release of your survey information to the appropriate, selected resources:

(Signature/Date)

Issues that you would like to focus on with resource person:

(No) We will provide you information about the resources available to assist you, and you will make the first contact with the resource. The resource person will not have access to your survey but will have access to the summary report based on the entire business retention and expansion process.