

Keeping and Growing N.H. Businesses

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Business retention is an economic development strategy. Community leaders put efforts into retaining and growing their existing businesses. It is understood that the majority of jobs are created (about 80%) by existing businesses. Business retention is a good option for smaller, rural communities who do not have the capacity or resources to compete for new businesses through coordinated attraction efforts. Communities understand that existing businesses are an asset. Businesses have already committed to the community, pay taxes, provide jobs and add vitality and vibrancy to Main street. Business owners and employers provide leadership on local boards, volunteer for causes and support local events. Addressing business retention can be done by local staff, business organizations and volunteers. In addition to ensuring that local businesses thrive and grow, a business retention effort results in strong community engagement, networking, strengthening the social fabric and leadership development.



Business Retention and Engagement Program

UNH Cooperative Extension has focused its economic development programming and teaching on business retention. This is a complement to other regional and state initiatives to grow the NH economy. UNH Extension uses a community lens in its programming by working with local leaders and volunteers who then in turn engage with the business community. The UNH Extension Business Retention and Engagement Program assists communities to develop, maintain and grow a thriving local economy by connecting with businesses/organizations to understand and address their needs, challenges and opportunities. This approach to community economic development assumes community participation in the effort to strengthen assets – people, places and natural resources – for economic opportunity.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED: 2014-2018

404 Businesses/
 organizations surveyed
 or interviewed

About the Businesses/Organizations

- **85%** locally owned
- Primarily small (< 200 employees)
- Started in their town
- On main street and beyond
- Many interested in expansion in their town or county

Engagement by Volunteers

Over **200** community volunteers trained and conducted surveys and interviews

Participating Communities

1 large city: Portsmouth
4 large towns: Exeter, Hooksett, Amherst, Milford
6 small towns: Northfield, Bethlehem, North Hampton, Hillsborough, Wilton, Wolfeboro

Key Findings

1 Workforce

- Growing demand means need for more employees
- Hard to recruit and compete for employees
- Skilled and unskilled training needs
- Aging population and loss of young people

2 Housing

- A need for quality housing that is affordable
- Has a relationship to transportation and commuting

3 Quality of Life

- Value working and living in New Hampshire
- Natural resources and recreation are important to owners, employees and visitors

Challenges to Consider

- About 50% of businesses/organizations surveyed don't have a succession plan
- Exporting is not a priority
- Each community has businesses that would like to expand within their town or county
- Land, water and sewer are issues in expansion
- Broadband is a challenge in some locations
- Most businesses want to stay engaged with other businesses, community leaders, their municipality and the community
- Businesses would like the municipal review process to be easy to navigate

UNH faculty and NH economic development professionals have provided guidance on challenges and recommendations for business retention in each participating community.

Recommendations for Communities and their Businesses



- Develop a town identity and marketing plan
- Grow tourism
- Link with natural resources and recreation
- Develop improved online presence for business and community
- Continue to bolster a strong business climate
- Connect with resources such as UNH and community colleges for employee training and recruitment

For more information:

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