

Connecting businesses and community



Helping local businesses succeed

“Menahga is a more positive place to live, work and play as a result of the partnership with Extension’s BRE program. Over 52 businesses were surveyed in our city of 1,300. Community stakeholders took the information from surveys and created working teams that brought more affordable housing, entertainment, an awareness of our business community, and opportunities for our youth. Menahga now has a concerted effort to help businesses grow and prosper.”

— Liz Olson, Menahga business retention and expansion leadership team

Extension's connecting businesses and community program helps communities understand — and respond to — local business needs. This knowledge better informs your community decisions and helps businesses stay, grow and become more committed to your town.

Benefits to your community

Short-term, your community will:

- Show local businesses you want them to succeed
- Help local businesses solve immediate concerns

Long-term, your community will:

- Create and carry out an economic development plan
- Support businesses so they can better compete in the global economy

Ready to get started?

For more information, contact [Michael Darger](#) or a [community economics educator](#).

Process for working with your community

Extension's program takes a year or two to complete and follows a three-step process. View the below video for more details.

We can provide **coaching and training** to help your community through the connecting businesses and community initiative.

Learn more about who — and what — is involved in each part of the program below.

Who is involved?

- **Extension educators and specialists**, who help you design your community-driven program. They provide:
 - Interview guides
 - Data analysis
 - A meeting to review findings with University of Minnesota faculty and other experts
 - An in-depth report of findings and possible projects
 - A community retreat to prepare you ready to move forward
- **A leadership team** in your community that engages the community, coordinates the task force and organizes the initiative.
- **A local task force** that engages local leaders — including representatives of economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, business, government and educational institutions.
- **Business visitation teams** that include leaders from the task force and the community.

Three-step process

Step 1 — Research

- Inform community about BRE
- Organize leadership team
- Organize task force
- Practice visiting businesses
- Finalize interview guide
- Train visitors
- Visit businesses
- Tabulate interview data

Step 2 — Prioritize

- Review warning flags
- Respond to individual concerns
- Analyze interview data
- Write research report
- Plan retreat to set priorities on systemic issues
- Design priority projects
- Write summary report
- Commence to implementation

Step 3 — Implement

- Work on project teams (continuous)
- Sustain leadership team
- Update on projects — 1st quarter task force
- Update on projects — 2nd quarter task force
- Update on projects and plan to sustain BRE — 3rd quarter task force
- Evaluate results
- Distribute results
- Update on projects — 4th quarter task force
- Sustain or conclude BRE

Available programs and cost

Our connecting businesses and community program maximizes Extension support, community organization, and applied research to support the business community. We offer three packages to communities. See details on what each package includes and costs below:

Package features

Complete research package

- A survey instrument
- Data tabulation/analysis
- Campus research review meeting that gathers University faculty and other experts to suggest projects that meet business concerns
- Two reports:
 - Seven–chapter research report with narrative and graphs
 - Summary report
- Planning retreat to “Set Priorities and Take Action”

Standard package

- Complete research package features
- In–person consulting throughout the three major steps of business retention and expansion
- Quarterly meetings in the first year of implementation

Premium package

- Standard package features
- Customized assistance (i.e. custom survey instrument or advanced analysis)

Note: Extension consulting is not included in this package.

Costs and financing

Costs and financing

Extension's connecting businesses and community program costs \$7,000 – \$15,000, depending on location and complexity of the program. Our fees help alleviate the costs to Extension for providing technical assistance and research services. We absorb part of this cost to make the program affordable for Minnesota communities.

Urban/suburban programs typically are more complex, requiring more team–building, complex sampling to obtain representative sample sizes, and other specialized efforts. For this reason, prices are as follows:

Program costs

Package	Location	Pricing
Complete Research	Urban/Suburban/Rural	\$7,000
Standard	Rural	\$9,500
Standard	Urban/Suburban	\$12,000
Premium	Rural	\$12,000
Premium	Urban/Suburban	\$15,000

Participating communities have received help from a variety of sources, including electric utilities, foundations and industry organizations. We can help your community explore options to help finance the program.

Communities must complete an application for acceptance into the program.

Prefer a do-it-yourself option?

Do you enjoy handling projects and tasks on your own? [Take a course](#) or use [our online tools](#) to get started and learn as you go.

Consult with us

Community economics • Leadership and civic engagement • Tourism

Extension educators work in communities with partners throughout Minnesota. Contact us for consultation, guidance and conversation about your community.

[Find an educator](#)

Connect with Community Vitality

[Contact us](#)

Building a stronger Minnesota

University of Minnesota Extension discovers science-based solutions, delivers practical education, and engages Minnesotans to build a better future.