

In an effort to better understand the needs of Red Lake Nation business owners, project leaders within the community worked with UMN Extension's Community Economics staff to modify the Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) Strategies Program.

Implementing the program changes, our goals were to:

- Pilot a second version of the focus group format of BR&E with a community with Minnesota
- Collect data that could be used by community partners to address the development need of local businesses

Background on earlier modifications to the BR&E Strategies Program to meet the needs of Minnesota communities:

The BR&E tradition is to conduct face-to-face (F2F) interviews at the place of business.

Problems: F2F requires many volunteers and considerable community organizing.

Therefore we innovated with a focus group approach (once) to:

1. Reduce volunteer needs
2. Keep the richness and depth of face-to-face data collection

Mixed Methods used in the Red Lake Nation BR&E Project:

- Artistic modification of the BR&E Program Milestones Model
- Focus group approach instead of F2F business interviews
- End-of-session, one-page surveys to develop baseline metrics concerning the local business environment
- Qualitative analysis of focus group transcripts
- Quantitative analysis of survey responses

Value of program changes to the community and to educators:

Community Economics staff gained greater insight into the integrated nature of economic development issues within the Red Lake Nation community

Community participants found the BR&E Program a novel and engaging approach by UMN Extension to explore and listen to their needs as business professionals.

Implication for BR&E Program—focus groups are more resource intensive for the applied research, yet for some situations, they may be the way to go. They may be especially appropriate in Indian Country.

