

## 2009 VEDA Award Application

### York County BIZ



#### 1. Program Description

The business community is an important component of the social and economic environment in York County. Our businesses generate jobs, provide economic livelihood to thousands of residents, and provide unique and distinctive services and goods for County residents and visitors.

Many business owners and potential entrepreneurs are unclear about the ways that York County can provide assistance to their businesses. Given the current economic challenges that many businesses face, it is more important than ever to communicate the assistance opportunities that the County can provide to existing businesses or those wishing to open a new business. In addition, there are many other excellent community resources which are dedicated to providing small business assistance, such as business planning, networking, marketing, consulting services, procurement assistance, and financing.

The Office of Economic Development (OED) & Department of Environmental & Development Services (EDS) recently banded together to provide a "One-Stop Shop" for our businesses for all of their business assistance needs... and so York BIZ was developed.

The York County Business Improvement Zone (BIZ) is a new and comprehensive outreach program designed to provide new and existing businesses with the information and resources they need to succeed, thrive, and grow. The program strives to capitalize on existing business resources available via the County and other local, state, and private organizations by creating better business linkages to them.

The program includes many elements, but most important are: the new web page that contains a comprehensive list of valuable resources, forms, and contacts for new and expanding York County businesses; an expanded business visitation program; monthly roundtable meetings with OED staff, a representative from the York County Board of Supervisors, and officers of the York County Chamber of Commerce to discuss current business concerns and ideas; and a new Development Facilitator on staff within the Department of Environmental & Development Services to explain and facilitate the planning, permitting, and inspection processes for local businesses.

Each of the program's elements are listed and described in detail below.

- ✓ Develop an easy-to-read tri-fold brochure on how to start a business in York County. (January 2008)
- ✓ Provide an easy to use Business Resource Guide, containing resources and contacts for business plans, permit requirements, financing, marketing, advertising, workforce development, grand openings, local chambers of commerce, and more. (Spring 2007)
- ✓ Develop a comprehensive Commercial Development Guide to assist businesses with the ordinances, policies, procedures, and fees associated with the development and/or redevelopment of commercial property in York County. (August 2008)
- ✓ Provide a grand opening guide to assist businesses with the proper format for official ribbon cutting and grand opening events. The guide contains invitee information for appropriate local, state, and marketing contacts. (Spring 2007)
- ✓ Develop a tri-fold brochure detailing the regulations, processes, and fees associated with business signage in the County. Information will be included on permanent signs (wall mounted and freestanding) and temporary signs. (Spring 2009)
- ✓ Update and Promote York County Site Selector, a website that provides a comprehensive database of all available commercial buildings and property in the County. Site Selector can be viewed at [www.yorkcountysites.com](http://www.yorkcountysites.com) (Ongoing)
- ✓ Provide an updated and completely overhauled Economic Development website, which can be viewed at [www.yesorkcounty.com](http://www.yesorkcounty.com), which is easier to navigate and provides additional business resources. (Fall 2007)
- ✓ Utilize and promote the new Development Facilitator position to explain and facilitate the planning, permitting, and inspection processes for local businesses. (October 2008)
- ✓ Maintain and continually improve the Business Retention & Expansion Program. (Biennial, Ongoing) This program is designed to:
  - Learn about the local business community's perceptions of York County and the advantages and disadvantages of operating a business here.
  - Identify "red flag" situations, companies that are at risk of closing or relocating.
  - Respond to the needs of "red flag" businesses with a variety of services, from providing information on financing and marketing to acting as a liaison to County/State agencies.
- ✓ Continue to expand the Business Visitation program to include all new businesses, top employers, top taxpayers, and all businesses located in the County's industrial parks. (Ongoing)
- ✓ Communicate and advocate for current and proposed County policies, processes, and ordinances to enhance the viability of our business community. (Ongoing)
- ✓ Promote local business success stories via the new Economic Development website. (Ongoing)
- ✓ Coordinate with the County's Purchasing department to promote opportunities to do business with the County and state & federal government. (Ongoing)
- ✓ Create partnerships with various local, state, and private business resource organizations to better promote them to York County businesses. (Ongoing)
- ✓ Utilize local colleges and universities for business services and resources. (Ongoing)
- ✓ Continue to work closely with the area's three Chambers of Commerce to provide educational seminars, networking opportunities, and the Community Forum Monthly Meeting with Board of Supervisors Representative (Ongoing)

Additional information on the York BIZ can be accessed at [www.yesorkcounty.com](http://www.yesorkcounty.com).

## 2. Innovativeness

The York BIZ program is the first business outreach program of its kind to include both a Development Facilitator position to directly and continually assist developers and businesses through the entire commercial development process, and a monthly Community Forum meeting to connect government officials and staff with local chamber officials and local business leaders.

The Community Forum facilitates communication between local government and the business community and has resulted in significant improvements like the Development Facilitator position. This open dialogue between government and business has also resulted in various zoning ordinance improvements and business grant programs in targeted commercial corridors.

Because of its comprehensive nature, the program is both proactive and reactive to the needs of York's businesses. Although it is sometimes difficult to be proactive with over 5,000 businesses, the York BIZ program and the support of County officials and leaders allows us to be just that.

## 3. Transferability

The York BIZ program is completely and readily transferrable for use in other communities. Each of the elements can be easily adapted and implemented to fit the needs of similar communities. Some of the elements require a dedicated staff member, some require additional allocated funds, and the entire program requires elected officials who are fully supportive of local businesses in order to be successful. With these necessary items in place, the program can be implemented almost anywhere.

## 4. Community Commitment & Leverage

York County staff and elected officials have pledged complete support and commitment to bettering the business climate in York County via the new York BIZ program. The BIZ program is focused on individual business assistance as well as improving the overall business environment.

There are many excellent community resources that are dedicated to providing small business assistance, such as business planning, networking, marketing, consulting services, procurement assistance, and financing. One of the main functions of the program is to capitalize on and leverage existing business resources available via the County and other local, state, and private organizations by creating better business linkages to them. York BIZ creates partnerships with these various organizations to better promote them to York County businesses so they can take full advantage of them.

## 5. Measured Objectives

The York BIZ program addresses the specific community development issue of the disconnect that sometimes occurs between business owners or potential entrepreneurs and

their local government. In many cases, business owners are not aware of the resources available to them through local government. In York County, many existing and potential business owners did not recognize the connections that could be made through the County's Economic Development Office. In addition, entrepreneurs are often confused and frustrated by lengthy ordinances and application processes and specific building regulations. York BIZ addresses these common development concerns and many more by creating a need-specific resource for all business owners, thereby simplifying the process of developing and maintaining a local business. York BIZ has made it much easier and faster for business owners to start or expand their businesses. The sooner a business opens or expands, the sooner they begin contributing to the localities' tax base, which is certainly an important and measurable statistic.

York BIZ was officially introduced in December of 2008, so annual statistics on the program are not yet available. However, since its inception, the York BIZ web page has had 1,777 page views in less than two months, each with an average visit time of over three minutes. The Development Facilitator has already directly assisted 46 business owners/developers and corresponded with potential developers 127 times.

## 6. Secondary Benefits

The ancillary benefits of York BIZ are that both businesses and jobs are created and/or retained in York County and, therefore, additional monetary investment is created in the community.