

BizLaunch Memo PAPA 6514

Joshua Lanier

Whitney Meyerhoeffer

Neil Burke

Executive Summary

A reliable data collection and measurement plan is essential to the long-term success of BizLaunch. This plan will ensure that the accurate capture and utilization of appropriate data from small businesses that have participated in a BizLaunch event in Arlington. This data will help to improve the overall processes and functions of AED and provide critical output data for the program. BizLaunch has stated the difficulties in keeping track of clients after their exit from the program, and to resolve this issue, we propose the creation, using tools already available in SalesForce, of a Bizlaunch Alumni Association (BAA). The central goals of the BAA are to, 1) increase local business community cohesiveness by maintaining accurate client contact information, 2) appeal to clients by marketing the benefits of being part of such an organization, and 3) establish a bond between clients past and present by providing critical mentorship opportunities and experience-based learning. Creation of the BAA will simultaneously elevate the profile of BizLaunch and benefit the AED overall by establishing a prestigious network of BizLaunch alumni who will propel the organization forward into the future by drawing on lessons learned from their past, and imparting that wisdom upon current clients.

Background

BizLaunch has acknowledged the difficulties associated with keeping track of their clients after their exit from the program. There is also a legitimate desire for business owners in Arlington to be part of a “team” concept, where ideas and information are exchanged freely. According to the AED Business Study Report (2016), 43% of business leader respondents would like to be more involved in the Arlington County business community (Arlington Economic Business Study Report, 2016). Further analysis of the commentary from the survey respondents, which consists of local business owners in Arlington, reveals a strong need for business owners to feel valued and included within the community and amongst each

other. Below are a few of the responses provided to Arlington County when they asked local the local business community if they could do anything to encourage them to be more involved in the community:

· *“They need to communicate more with ... businesses. Outside of a few communications, the only communication we received is our tax form.”*

· *“ASK ME! Why not send me a welcome/informational letter along with my business license? Don't just take my money and offer me nothing.”*

Clearly, a void exists within the Arlington business community. That void can be filled with the creation and implementation of the BAA.

Analysis

A central issue mentioned by BizLaunch was the difficulties in collecting long-term success data, particularly during the crucial first five years of a business. BizLaunch receives data from those who participate in their programs through surveys just after their events. Ongoing data collection of those who have participated in the BizLaunch programs is not happening. Currently, BizLaunch does not collect such data because there are fewer opportunities offered to engage with business owners after they have begun their business. By offering more engagement opportunities for current business owners BizLaunch will be able to track those who have been through their program as well as including business owners in the larger Arlington community.

Options

Our proposed option is the creation of the BizLaunch Alumni Association program in order to increase engagement and long-term data collection opportunities for case study data and success rates.

Challenges

The professionals who work with AED and BizLaunch are stretched in both time and fiscal capacity running the introductory BizLaunch program. The creation of the BAA would add another element to their work. To mitigate this, our proposal is to incorporate many of the benefits and perks of alumni membership into the existing BizLaunch program to minimize duplication of efforts. Ultimately, data work showing the long-term success of the program will be key in garnering more resources.

Recommendations/Strategy

Membership in this program will be automatic and “opt-out” rather than “opt-in” to encourage participation. Upon completion of the BizLaunch program, participants will be reclassified in Salesforce as Alumni. Some of the benefits of such a program could include:

- Regularly invite alumni to speak to ongoing BizLaunch courses both for professional advice and as motivators.
- Create quarterly newsletter about BizLaunch alumni news and successes.
- Offer the opportunity for BizLaunch Alumni to re-take courses as a “refresher” or send their junior management staff/employees to courses for professional development.
- Work with nonprofit, and business partners to offer discounted advertising or sponsorship or advertising rates to BizLaunch Alumni for their first five years.
- Send surveys to those who have been members of the alumni program for six months and one year

The quarterly newsletter provides an excellent vehicle to collect case study data. By asking business to share their success stories, BizLaunch is now engaging with members to collect more anecdotal examples than survey answers. An ideal example of this already being implemented is the recent article in ARLnow about the success of Leaseably (Morales, 2017). Connections such as this with local publications will be key to selling the benefits of participation in the BizLaunch Alumni Association with members.

Conclusion

This plan seeks to position BizLaunch to become the leading program for small business owners throughout the region. Continually engaging with small business owners that have been involved with BizLaunch ensures data collection beyond the surveys completed at the time of the event and helps build a sense of community within the small business community, ultimately leading to more trackable long-term outcomes.

Works Cited

AED (2016) Arlington Economic Development Business Study (Rep.) Retrieved from [https://www.arlingtoneconomicdevelopment.com/index.cfm?LinkServID=17122E76-941F-CF06-B88F4D1EE62D6862\\$showMeta-0](https://www.arlingtoneconomicdevelopment.com/index.cfm?LinkServID=17122E76-941F-CF06-B88F4D1EE62D6862$showMeta-0)

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