TO: Martha Barberio, Director of Economic Development
Sheri Pierce, City Clerk for distribution to:
Members of the Economic Diversification Commission

RE: Valdez Project Report Wrap

Date: May 30, 2018

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to stakeholders on the outcome of the project between the Alaska Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and the City of Valdez. The Alaska SBDC was contracted to provide a series of business related workshops over a 12-month period to improve and diversify small businesses in Valdez.

February 7, 2017 - A survey was developed to gauge interest and need in the community. A link to the survey was sent via email to Valdez businesses and the link was also published in the Valdez Star.

February 8 - March 3, 2017 - The survey link was originally emailed to 174 Valdez businesses and community contacts. There were 69 responses to the survey; 55 responses from the email invitation and 14 responses from the link in the newspaper ad. Alaska SBDC used the results from the survey to plan the initial workshop offerings, schedule and calendar. Survey results indicated:

- Primary interest in financial related workshops/classes, such as tax planning and QuickBooks. The interest in tax planning was likely due to the upcoming tax return filing deadline as the survey was conducted in the middle of tax season. This produced a fall workshop.
- Secondary interest in marketing related workshops and classes: website design, social media, marketing plans, and other topics were identified as priorities.
- Other interests included business funding, exit strategy, understanding financials, buying and selling a business, and starting a business classes.
- Over 65%of the respondents were “most likely to attend a workshop/class on weekdays in the afternoon”.
- Over 80% of respondents were “least likely to attend a workshop in May, June, July, August”. It was decided that workshops would not be held during these months.

Workshops/Classes offered between April 2017 – March 2018:

- April 5, 2017 - Introduction to QuickBooks workshop; 11 attendees.
- April 5, 2017 - Kickoff Presentation and SBDC introduction; 10 attendees.
- April 26, 2017 - Getting Started with QuickBooks Online; 12 attendees.
- September 22, 2017 - Designing and Developing a Brilliant Website-Day 1; six attendees.

- September 23, 2017 - Designing and Developing a Brilliant Website-Day 2; six attendees.
- September 22, 2017- Marketing with Social Media and Guerilla Marketing Techniques; seven attendees.
- October 18, 2017 - Introduction to Government Contracting; two attendees.
- October 18, 2017 - Developing Your Business Marketing Plan; eight attendees.
- November 15, 2017 – Year End Tax Planning. Conducted by video conference from Fairbanks due to inclement weather; two attendees.
- January 30, 2018 - 10 Things You Need to Know about Your Search Engine Optimization; by webinar from Anchorage; one attendee.
- January 30, 2018 - Things to Consider when Buying or Selling a Business; zero attendees.
- February 16, 2018 - What Business Owners Should Know about the Tax Law Changes; five attendees.
- February 20 - Hot Business Trends for 2018. Canceled due to zero registrations 24 hours before
- February 21 - Getting Started with QuickBooks Online; seven attendees.
- March 23, 2018 - Getting your E-Commerce Ready for the summer Season; three attendees.
- March 23, 2018 - Setting the Right Expectations for your Facebook Ad Campaign; two attendees

Project summary:

A total of 12 workshops were conducted from April 2017 – March 2019 with a total of 82 attendees.

Alaska SBDC advisors also conducted one-to-one business advising with Valdez businesses between 4/1/17 - 4/30/18 that resulted in:

- Total clients advised = 8
- New clients = 6
- Advising hours = 32.75
- New businesses = 1
- New jobs = 1
- Capital infusion into Valdez businesses = $72,000

“Russ Talvi & the AKSBDC have been influential in helping us understand our partnership agreements and operating agreements as well as helping provide us with information to form proper agreements. The resources they have provided through their end of the year tax planning class has helped us with both our restaurant business and my own personal bookkeeping business. Alaska SBDC is an amazing resource that helps make small business ownership a little bit easier by providing classes and invaluable insight to the business world here in Alaska.” -Lindsay Haase & Jereme Wesely, Old Town Diner & Lindsay's Bookkeeping

Some lessons learned from the program:

The program was launched in April 2017 with considerable interest from businesses in the community and strong workshop attendance. Interest and attendance numbers decreased in the fall and winter. Fall and winter may not have been optimal times for seasonal businesses because of travel and being closed. At the inception of the program the City of Valdez elected to waive fees for class registration. Not charging even a small fee likely contributed to the significant number of businesses and individuals registering, but not showing up on the day of the class. It has been the experience of the Alaska SBDC that “free” workshops and classes often produce a higher no-show rate, as there is no personal investment compelling attendees to attend.

Another factor affecting attendance for the fall and winter workshop offerings was the transition of two primary contacts for the program at The City of Valdez over the summer. In the spring of 2017 the City of Valdez took the lead in promoting and advertising the workshops/ and classes to the community according to our agreement. After the original staff involved in the program left, the Alaska SBDC primarily relied on the original email contact list that grew to 286 plus business and community contacts to do outreach and promotion of events.

The facilities provided by the City of Valdez in partnership with Prince William Sound College (PWSC) were exceptional. Our thanks to College Director, Dr. Dan O’Connor and Mo Radotich, Assistant to the Director of Administrative Services for scheduling the facilities and supporting the workshops/classes.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to work with the business owners and community of Valdez.

Sincerely,

Russell Talvi, Fairbanks Director
Alaska Small Business Development Center - Fairbanks