

Situation:

During a fall 2009 marketing workshop for Cody business owners, a presenter asked how many of the 30-plus individuals had a business plan. Only two hands were raised. Alarmed by the absence of such a critical business document among a large number of entrepreneurs in our community, several individuals began discussing what could be done to address this identified need.

The University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service community development educator, Forward Cody executive director, Wyoming Business Council regional director, Wyoming Small Business Development Center regional director, Northwest College Center for Training and Development coordinator, Park County School District No. 6 Entrepreneurship Program instructor, Cody Country Chamber of Commerce assistant director, and the Department of Workforce Services director began meeting twice monthly. The group created a list of topics, developed a multi-session course outline, brainstormed possible instructors and instructional methods, established evaluation criteria, and created publicity items to market the course. Each member committed to facilitating at least one of the course sessions.

Cody Business Boot Camp was designed as an eight-session program. Topics included a wide array of entrepreneurship-

Business Boot Camp bolsters entrepreneurial skills

related topics appropriate for new and existing business owners developing a business plan, including "Are You Ready to Be In Business?," "Business Intelligence," "Business Operations," "Finances," "Marketing," "Profit 101," and "Business Structures."

Thirty-two individuals representing 28 businesses enrolled. Several owned or managed established businesses in the Cody community. Others were at various stages of beginning a business; some entrepreneurs were near launching their ventures, while others were at the early "thought" stage exploring entrepreneurship possibilities.

Impact:

Of the 32 individuals in the course, 24 attended at least six of the eight sessions. Upon conclusion, each completed a class evaluation offering feedback and sharing ideas to improve the program. Some key comments are:

- *"I found the class to be very useful, in that it gave me an opportunity to organize various aspects of planning and implementing my idea."*
- *"It helped me think about the things I may have overlooked."*
- *"I enjoyed learning how supportive this community is to see business entrepreneurs succeed and how available they are if you are out there trying."*
- *"This class has set us up quite nicely with all the resources we need; it is now up to us to utilize and take advantage of the help."*

A pre/post assessment on the first and last nights of class assessed participants' readiness and basic understanding of entrepreneurial topics.

| Question | Pre-class "YES" Response | Post-class "YES" Response |
|--|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Do you think you are ready to start a business? | 72% | 93% |
| Do you know and understand the components of a business plan? | 40% | 100% |
| Do you know why some consider business planning to be the most important factor in determining business success? | 52% | 100% |
| Do you know how to prepare a marketing strategy for your business? | 12% | 93% |

Key to the success of the Business Boot Camp was the strong team-oriented approach in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of the program. Each individual on the team represented a different organization and brought a variety of resources and knowledge. The collegiality of the group, coupled with the relevance of the topic and the enthusiasm of participants, combined to create an excellent learning environment.

Tara Kuipers
 University Extension Educator
 Northwest Area/Big Horn, Fremont, Hot
 Springs, Park, and Washakie counties and
 the Wind River Indian Reservation
 (307) 527-8560
 e-mail: tkuipers@parkcounty.us

