

IMPACT



Valley County Extension, 108 W Pine St., Box 510, Cascade, ID 83611; 208-382-7190; Fax: 208-382-7189

Entrepreneurship Courses Benefit Current and Potential Business Owners in Valley County

The Situation

Valley County is not unlike many rural counties in Idaho, with a shrinking natural resource-based economy and isolation factors that make industry development difficult. In the spring of 2002, Boise Cascade closed its last commercial sawmill in the county and put 80 residents out of work. Some of those workers relocated to mills in other towns and other states, yet others chose to stay in the county and find what work they could, or go back to school to learn new skills. The community and the economy have settled some, but what remains is the realization that the jobs lost when the mill closed have not been replaced by equal jobs. High wages and benefits have been replaced by low paying service jobs, indicative of a recreation-based economy now replacing the old natural resource economy. As people look to find ways to make a good living and remain in Valley County, many are considering going into business for themselves. Some have experience and can move forward quickly, but a majority of folks need help through the process of planning and decision-making that must take place prior to starting a business. The logical first step is to start with a business plan, however, most people don't know where to start or where to go for help. In Valley County, they have three options, the Small Business Development Center, Upper Payette River Economic Development, or the University of Idaho Cooperative Extension Office.



Our Response

Knowing the need for training in this important area, the local Extension Educator partnered with the Small Business Development Centers in Boise and McCall to provide a course in business planning. Two multi-week courses, one 6 weeks long and one 10 weeks long, were offered in the spring of 2004. The first course had 10 completers and the second course had 9 completers. The course took participants through the process of conducting industry research, market research, financial statements and planning, risk management, legal issues, human resource issues, financing options and more. Each class consisted of a formal presentation, an invited guest speaker who was an expert in each classes particular subject matter, and then informal discussions, questions, and work time where

participants spent time completing assignments or gaining information to complete assignments. Each class had a mix of current business owners and those considering the idea of going into business. This made for a good source of participant led discussion and exchange of ideas.

Program Outcomes

The most immediate outcome was 19 program completers who have the knowledge and resources to write their own business plan. Another outcome that may seem almost opposite of the course objectives, was that a few participants decided that now was not the time to invest the family savings into a business idea. This outcome has merit as family's finances saved means a stronger financial future for that family and the companies they do business with who may have been at a loss had the business failed. One early major success of this program was one participant who, along with her husband, was already in business as owners of an auto repair shop. They knew they were going to need financing and would have to write a business plan for a lender. With knowledge learned from the course and help from the Small Business Development Center, they completed their plan quickly and were approved for financing on the first try, a difficult task especially for rural small businesses. With this financing they will be able to add one full time mechanics job and one part time mechanics job in the next few months. These are the types of jobs that will pay well enough to help stabilize the local economy.

The Future

More courses for business planning are planned for the future, starting again in the fall of 2004. Additionally, the Extension Educators in Idaho who are teaching this particular course, known as NxLevel, are planning to write a curriculum to provide additional educational opportunities for participants who have finished the first course and would like more advanced training on topics such as marketing and financial management.

For More Information

Steven L. Hines, Extension Educator
University of Idaho Extension—Valley County
108 W. Pine St., Box 510
Cascade, ID 83611
208-382-7190
Fax: 208-382-7189
Email: shines@uidaho.edu

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