



ALASKA DCCED BRE SYSTEM

In Connect Alaska's original grant application, the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development (DCCED) was included as a sub-recipient of Application Usage and Development funds intending to implement specific e-government applications that drive the demand for broadband. As a result of change in leadership at the state, the originally anticipated sub-award agreement and work never began. However, in early 2014, DCCED and Connect Alaska executed a sub-award agreement for the purpose of providing resources to help its existing businesses—especially rural businesses—and become strong, stay strong, and grow. The implementation of a Business Retention and Expansion program resulted in the integration of essential state of Alaska government databases, communications, collaboration, and analytical tools within a web-based, user-friendly interface. Initial success of the Alaska BRE program allow DCCED to connect to communities across the state via broadband Internet and work with communities that would otherwise not have had sufficient funding to take part in the BRE program.

DCCED staff identified and engaged stakeholder groups wanting to implement BRE programs. Division of Economic Development (DED) staff coordinated with the University of Alaska Center for Economic Development (UACED) staff to facilitate 10 trainings during the sub-award period. These trainings were delivered to Fairbanks; Haines; Juneau; Kenai Peninsula, including Soldotna and Kenai; Ketchikan; Kodiak; Kodiak Area Native Association; Nome; Seward; and the Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference. The partner/stakeholder organizations that participated in this process included Alaska Regional Development Organizations (ARDORs), municipalities, boroughs, chamber of commerce chapters, Alaska Small Business Development Center staff, tribal organizations, economic development councils and corporations, and small business owners.

UACED created curriculum for a 2.5-day course, which could be modified and replicated to fit the schedule and needs of individual communities. Each participant was provided a binder that included notes from the presentation, example documents, and case studies from established BRE programs. Participants were also led through an online demo and overview of the Executive Pulse content management system. DCCED and UACED staff performed follow-up assistance to communities in regard to Executive Pulse help, meetings with leadership teams, and strategy/implementation facilitation with communities and the state of Alaska.

Lessons learned:

- In many communities, BRE is offering many stakeholders a common project and an opportunity for collaboration. In at least 50% of the communities that participated in the training, stakeholder groups were not currently collaborating.
- The most active BRE programs to date have allocated funds for a part-time, full-time, or contract position to initiate BRE efforts.

- Businesses that have participated in the survey engagement have been open and willing to share information.
- BRE implementation is different in every community that is actively implementing the program.
- Broadband Internet was necessary to the success of the BRE program on a statewide level. Since many of the communities implementing BRE programs are located in rural and remote areas which are only accessible by plane, broadband provides an electronic road system to connect communities that would otherwise have a hard time getting BRE support from the state.

The Connect Alaska program provided BRE the capacity to purchase the ExecutivePulse⁹ software, which was paramount to a statewide BRE program. This Customer Relation Management (CRM) system serves as a shared organizational tool, allowing communities throughout the state to connect via broadband Internet in order to organize BRE efforts, record and manage BRE surveys, track business assistance services provided, and network with others in the Alaska BRE program.

The ExecutivePulse software tool will continue to be used to track and analyze the activities and successes of the BRE program on statewide and local levels, in order to determine how communities can best foster and support economic growth. In many communities, BRE offers stakeholders a common project and opportunity for collaboration. And through the use of broadband technology, communities in rural and remote areas were afforded the electronic road system to connect with other communities and receive support from the state. Prior to the implementation of this project stakeholder groups were not currently collaborating in at least 50% of the communities that participated in the training. Businesses that have participated in the engagement have been open and willing to share information.

⁹ ExecutivePulse software provides customer-focused technology, training, and support for business retention and expansion, business recruitment, entrepreneurial development, and workforce initiatives. The software integrates essential database, communication, collaboration, and analytical tools—all within a seamless user-friendly interface.