Strategic Planning Groups

Below are brief descriptions of the five strategic planning groups along with an initial draft SWOT analysis of each of the issue areas. This is a dynamic document that will be revised and edited throughout the ongoing planning process.

New Tools and Technology

New Tools and Technology; Focusing on what is out there and available for Centers to use including "tools and products". The initial effort is to identify a consistent product that can be used as a client assessment tool. (Some states, including Michigan, Missouri and others currently have one). Additionally, research into web based training, education and other tools and resources will be conducted. Suggested programs to review include SmallBizU, Ed2go, research tools and others.

DCEO Staff*:* Mark Enstrom Mark.Enstrom@illinois.gov
Darryl Thomas Darryl.Thomas@illinois.gov

Members

Harriet Parker	SBDC	Waubonsee CC	hparker@waubonsee.edu
Jan Bauer	SBDC	College of Lake County	JBauer@CLCILLINOIS.EDU
Pam Schallhorn	SBDC	Rock Valley College	p.schallhorn@rockvalleycollege.edu
Jorge Phillips	SBDC	Elgin Community College	jphillips@elgin.edu
Don Brozek	SBDC	Governors State Univ.	d-brozek@govst.edu
Michael O'Brien	SBDC	Danville Area CC	mobrien@dacc.edu
Beatriz Poloney	SBDC	Bradley University	bpoloney@bradley.edu
Barney Brumfiel	SBDC	Illinois Eastern CCs	brumfielb@iecc.edu

Strengths

1. **Knowledgebase System** allows online inquirers to access to a comprehensive database of business permit, license, certification and assistance program information on a self serve bases.
2. **Partner Locator** connects online inquirers to their nearest network resource center.
3. **ProfitCents®** analyzes financial statement data into easy-to-understand narrative text reports.
4. **Constant Contact®** is an online resource that allows email marketing, event marketing, online surveys, social media and more.
5. **SurveyMonkey®** is an electronic survey tool that allows us to gather information from local centers and clients.
6. **Starting Your Business In Illinois Pre-business workshops** provide a general overview to potential business owners of what it will take to start a small business.
7. **Profit Mastery®** a program of Business Resource Services, it aligns with needs of the SBDC to ensure the SBDC networks' deliverables and obligations are met.
8. **FastTrac®** a program of the Kauffman Foundation serves existing and aspiring entrepreneurs as they pursue their dreams.
9. **NxLeveL®** entrepreneurial training programs are practical, hands-on business development courses designed to help entrepreneurs advance their skills in starting, growing, and managing their business.
10. **New Ground Publications®** online Business Management Guides available via DCEO's web site.

Weaknesses

1. Lack of a consistent client assessment tool.

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2. Lack of a comprehensive list of resources available inside and outside of network to assist in serving clients.
3. Lack of system to accurately identify where a client can get assistance for a specific need.
4. Lack of Web based training tool that allow clients to take courses at a place and time that best fits their schedule.
5. Lack of JJ Hill Resource Library.

Opportunities

1. Utilizing technology to consistently and accurately assess a client's need.
2. Utilizing technology to refer clients to the most appropriate center to serve their need.
3. Utilizing technology to provide uniform presentations and webinars.
4. Utilizing technology to provide Web based training session to client such as SmallBizU, Ed2go, and others.
5. Utilizing technology to leverage resources available throughout the network include (SCORE, local chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, educational institutions and other groups) especially for clients with advance needs.

Threats

1. Consistent cuts in State funding can deter efforts to procure new tools and technology.
2. Reduction in lead center staff and network personnel changes can hinder the implementation of new tools and technology.
3. Network personal that resist change may not embrace new tools or technology.

Network Positioning

Network Positioning; This group will look into how we promote ourselves both in the marketplace and to our clients. It includes what we call ourselves, such as "Strategic Growth Partner" as an example. The basis for much of this work will come from the results of the Center Market Focus Survey.

DCEO	Mark Enstrom	Mark.Enstrom@illinois.gov
Staff	Derick Cheek	Derick.Cheek@illinos.gov

Members	Mary M. Maule	SBDC	McHenry County	mmaule@mchenry.edu
	David Gay	SBDC	College of DuPage	gaydav@cod.edu
	Beverly Malooley	SBDC	Illinois Valley C. C.	bev_malooley@ivcc.edu
	Amy Murphy	SBDC	Joliet Junior College	amurphy@jjc.edu
	John DiGiacomo	PTAC	Rock Valley College	j.digiacomo@RockValleyCollege.edu
	Hilary Burkinshaw	SBDC	Governors State U.	h-burkinshaw@govst.edu
	Mark Salefski	SBDC	Lincoln Land C.C.	mark.salefski@llcc.edu
	Jim Ryan	SBDC ITC	Bradley University	jryan@bradley.edu
	Curt Roeschley	SBDC	Hull House	croeschley@hullhouse.org
	Ken Crite	SBDC	Kankakee C.C.	Kcrite@kcc.edu

Strengths

1. Reliable data available to document the positive economic impact of the program.
2. Return on investment of the program is impressive and verifiable.
3. Inventory of Education, Experience and Expertise of all Business Advisors from recent survey.
4. Center Market Focus survey results to better serve client needs on a statewide basis.

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5. High quality of Center Directors and Business Advisors through their education and experience.
6. Statewide presence in all areas of the state.
7. Existing infrastructure to link businesses to new markets through exporting and government contracting.

Weaknesses

1. Not well known by potential clients who could benefit by our services.
2. Inaccurate perception that we just help "start ups".
3. Misconception that we are "just another government program" with minimal value.

Opportunities

1. Ability to proactively create a more accurate reputation as a business growth partner
2. Obtain the "T" designation through ASBDC to add even greater value to our Network positioning
3. During difficult economic times, demand for SBDC services will only increase.

Threats

1. Must be sure that all branding efforts are in compliance with ASBDC Accreditation Standards.
2. Available funding from both the federal and state levels to further the outreach effort.
3. SBA lack of marketing of the SBDC Program as their premier business assistance partner.

Client Services Group

Client Services Group: It was agreed that a team-based approach could be an effective way to provide focused client assistance. This group will focus on the benefits of a team approach and explore the best way it can be implemented; regional vs. statewide approach, operational guidelines, etc. One critical issue is to determine how to ensure that all participating centers advising a client get proper credit for their role.

Staff	Kathleen Bishop	Kathleen.bishop@illinois.gov
	Tom Becker	tom.becker@illinois.gov

Members

Tony Cambas	ITC	SIU-Carbondale	sbdc@siu.edu
Steve Groner	SBDC	Kaskaskia College	sgroner@kaskaskia.edu
Chad Hoffman	ITC	NORBIC	choffman@illinoismanufacturing.org
Ken Klotz	SBDC	Bradley University	kenk@bumail.bradley.edu
Vicki Miller	PTAC	Black Hawk College	millerv@bhc.edu
Bonita Richter	SBDC	Harper College	brichter@harpercollege.edu

Strengths

1. Advisor expertise
2. Advisor experience
3. Generalist & more specific business knowledge available in network
4. Host institution support
5. Advisor flexibility to travel & use technology for client meetings
6. High client satisfaction reflected in surveys
7. Tools & support from state & national SBDC network
8. Available technology for conferencing, research, communication, marketing

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9. SBDC Center expertise & experience database

Weaknesses

1. Lack of network wide policy concerning team approach to advising
2. Lack of a standardized client assessment
3. Lack of system to accurately track client hours when served by multiple SBDC's
4. Large SBDC geographic coverage responsibilities

Opportunities

1. Utilizing experience & expertise in IL SBDC Network
2. Utilizing technology to better serve clients state wide
3. Use of SBDC Expertise survey to identify assistance teams
4. Utilizing WebCATS more effectively to share information
5. Utilizing SCORE, local chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, educational institutions and other groups to improve client services

Threats

1. Funding issues
2. Personnel Changes
3. Changing host institution priorities

Core Services

Core Services; ensuring that we core/baseline services are delivered at each Center is the focus of this group. This group will identify a menu of core services that each Illinois SBDC is expected to offer. The ASBDC Core Competencies Committee findings that were recently distributed will be reviewed and considered by the group. That report will be the base information for this groups work along with information from the specialty programs. *DCEO Staff: Rodney.Hollenstine@illinois.gov and Sheri.Ericson@illinois.gov*

Staff - Rod Hollenstine and Sheri Ericson

Members	Joel Youngs	SBDC	Black Hawk College
	Steve DeBretto	SBDC/ITC	Industrial Council NW C.
	Ross Miller	SBDC	Bradley University
	Barney Brumfiel	SBDC	Illinois Eastern

Strengths

1. The Illinois SBDC already has a very diverse Network with specific areas of expertise.
2. Illinois SBDC has an annual Professional Development Conference in the spring that can serve as a catalyst to increasing our Advisors knowledge base along with other media forms.
3. Illinois SBDC has a Certified Business Specialist (CBS) program that all Advisors are expected to complete.

Weaknesses

1. Advisor and Director Turnover
2. Lack of resources to provided market competitive compensation

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Opportunities

1. On the National level the Association of Small Business Development Centers has adopted the following Core Competencies by the Consultants/Counselors providing direct client services:.
    a. Business Planning, including Strategic Planning and Business Plan Development
    b. Financial Analysis
    c. Accounting
    d. Marketing
    e. Assistance with Access to Capital
2. The National level is looking into to an actual Advisor/counselor Certification process. We are represented on the committee and the hope to have a draft proposal put together by the fall of this year.

Threats

1. Lack of Resources for Professional development for Advisors and DCEO staff
2. Lack of flexibility in any Certification program.

Strategic Issues

Strategic Issues; This will include our forward thinkers and those who are creative strategists. They will be tasked with reviewing trends and reports about future impacts on businesses, such as the Intuit Report. Helping to identify those areas that our clients will need to be prepared for in the future and brainstorm ideas on how we can help them meet those needs is their goal. Areas will include technology, communications, marketing and others.

Staff: *Mark.Petrill@illinois.gov* *and* *Richard.Alton@illinois.gov*

Members

Luanne Mayorga	SBDC/ITC	College of DuPage
Michele S. Dorvil	SBDC	University of Illinois - Chicago
Emily Carter	SBDC	SIU - Carbondale
Kevin Lust	SBDC	Lincoln Land C. C.
Hilary Burkinshaw	SBDC	Governors State Univ.
Denise Ching	SBDC	Industrial Council NW Chicago
Marc Violante	PTAC	College of Lake County
Jim Foley	SBDC	Bradley University

Strengths

1. Strong results-focused network with experienced, dedicated professionals
2. Strong infrastructure with good state and local host support
3. Diverse partners
4. Strong statewide coverage
5. Using sophisticated software to assist clients and track client data
6. Outreach Systems "Web CATS"

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7. Proxity
8. ProfitCents
9. Constant Contact
10. Survey Monkey
11. Mostly tech-savvy, experienced Directors

Weaknesses

1. Need for longer term strategic focus
2. Scope of services may be too broad
3. Potential funding challenges for partner organizations - lack of match
4. Unable to this point to cohesively utilize existing tools consistently throughout the network
5. Not taking advantage of newer tools
6. Few alternative funding sources
7. Lack of flexibility

Opportunities

1. Use or more extensive use of social media (social media marketing)
    a. Facebook
    b. Twitter
    c. Linkedin
    d. Youtube
2. Professional development for the above
3. Technology Accreditation
4. Sharpen focus of services
5. Increase awareness for potential clients

Threats

1. Potential Funding Reductions
2. Failure to keep current as electronic media evolves
3. Potential to become irrelevant to new clients
4. Failure to keep current with the use of electronic hardware (Tablets, Smartphones, etc)
5. Failure to keep up with the multiple and varied means of communications