

2010 Annual Awards Program
Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

Deadline for Nominations: March 12, 2010

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- ☐ Community Health and Safety
- ☐ Community Partnership
- ☒ Community Sustainability
- ☐ Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program Small Business Development Program
being nominated:

Jurisdiction(s) where City of Austin, Texas
program originated:

Jurisdiction 774,037
population(s):

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented by or before January 31, 2009, to be eligible. The start date should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: January Year: 2009

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in San José, California, October 2010. (Each individual listed **MUST** be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: Marc Ott

Title: City Manager Jurisdiction: City of Austin, TX

Name: _____

Title: _____ Jurisdiction: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____

Jurisdiction: _____

SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator / Primary Contact

Name of contact: Patricia Fraga

Title: Program Manager

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2010 ICMA Program Excellence Awards: Community Sustainability City of Austin, Texas Small Business Development Program

Small business is booming in Austin, Texas. In January, 2010, *Profile.com*, a property of *Business Journals*, named Austin as the number one place to launch a small business in the United States. This ranking was not accidental; many factors make the Texas capitol exceptional for entrepreneurs. The ranking took into account the number of small businesses per thousand residents, the one year change in that population, one year growth rates for small businesses and private-sector employment and five-year rates for population and employment. For the purpose of the *Profile.com* ranking, small business is defined as any small business with 99 or fewer employees.

Problem Assessment

In the City of Austin, 94% of Austin businesses employ fewer than 50 people, compared to 86% nationally. Small business is vital to the success of Austin and the Central Texas region. In February 2000, the City of Austin created the Small Business Development Program (SBDP). This tremendous resource, fully funded by the City of Austin, is a division of the Economic Growth and Redevelopment Services Office and offers many technology resources to local entrepreneurs. Needs assessment studies conducted by the SBDP in 2002 and in 2009 both show the primary need of small business owners to be a need for information and the secondary need is access to capital. Austin City Manager Marc Ott and Mayor and City Council are very supportive of small business and fully fund the Small Business Development Program.

Program Implementation and Costs

The City of Austin's Small Business Development Program offers resources for entrepreneurs to expand their existing businesses, or to help those with dreams of business ownership to realize their visions. The Small Business Development Program has become a portal of information for Austin entrepreneurs to get the tools they need to be successful in our

changing economy. The SBDP's annual budget for FY 2008/2009 is just over \$1.8 million, and includes technology, real estate, staff, contracted services, marketing/outreach, and operations.

Located in downtown Austin to offer access to the greatest number of entrepreneurs, the SBDP has many different resources for small businesses owners and the great majority of these services are offered at no cost to the small business owner.

BizAid Business Development begins with a free weekly business orientation and is followed by personal coaching in writing or reviewing new or existing business plans and marketing plans at no cost to the entrepreneur.

After completing the business and marketing plans, *BizAid Accessing Capital* offers free credit reviews for business owners, identification of appropriate lenders, assistance with filling out loan applications and help with understanding business finances.

BizAid Business Education conducts low-cost classes on a wide range of business topics. Contracted service providers implement the one-on-one coaching, assistance to capital and business education. Instructors for the business education courses are contracted through the University of Texas Professional Development Center, thus ensuring quality instruction for all of these low-cost classes.

SBDP's *Business Solutions Center* (BSC) is a technology resource center which includes web subscriptions to research bid opportunities in construction or construction-related business and business sales opportunities with the government, a nationwide commercial real estate database, business to business research web subscriptions, industry trend analyses, business form templates, demographics technology and business plan software. The BSC houses business office equipment ideal for Austin entrepreneurs. The BSC is free to access and has minimal fees for printing, copying and faxing. The Center is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in order to help the maximum number of customers.

BizOpen is offered to business owners who need guidance in the land development process. An orientation is held each month to educate entrepreneurs in City commercial zoning and permitting requirements. If an entrepreneur needs more personalized assistance, staff are ready to help with direct counseling.

Information and Referral is offered to help entrepreneurs locate local business-focused non-profit organizations that may be helpful to their businesses. SBDP offers free self-referral directories to business networking organizations, non-profit business service providers and a women and ethnic-minority professional associations. SBDP collaborates with these organizations to provide mutual communication to the entrepreneurs of Austin.

In December 2008 SBDP launched the Small Business Mapping project www.ExploreLocalAustin.org which highlights small businesses in many business districts. This web site helps visitors or residents to learn what small businesses are in each area by categorizing and giving contact information including available websites. Many of these small business owners previously had other web presence. ExploreLocalAustin.org helps encourage buying locally, which in turn helps our local economy, creates jobs and generates tax revenues.

Annual special Events are offered to the community through SBDP. *Meet the Lender* brings 40 or more lenders to a large exhibit center where any small business owner can discuss financing opportunities in a casual, non-intimidating setting. In August 2008 and 2009 more than 1500 individuals attended the program. *Getting Connected* helps entrepreneurs access dozens of non-profit service providers and business networking groups at this information fair. This annual affair is held in the Spring and brought together more than 500 entrepreneurs in March 2008.

The *Ups and Downs of a Second Location* helps business owners recognize the opportunities and challenges in opening a second location through a panel of multi-site entrepreneurs who share their lessons learned.

Tangible Results

SBDP has won many awards over the last few years. The *Meet the Lender* program was a City Showcase at the National League of Cities Conference in November, 2009. *The Business Solutions Center* received the Center for Digital Government's "Best of Texas Award" in the category "Excellence in Technology Promoting Economic Development" in November 2008. The award recognized the achievements of the *Business Solutions Center* and SBDP's outreach to small business owners. The SBDP was honored to win the SBA "San Antonio District Director's Alliance Award" in May 2008 and in October 2005 was also awarded the *Austin City Employee Award* in the category of "Gutsy". Gutsy is defined as "honoring the public trust by conducting ourselves with integrity and doing what it takes to get the job done right".

In Fiscal Year 2008/2009 alone, SBDP provided:

- 11,259 referrals for business development services to 2,341 unduplicated referral customers.
- 54 Business Start-up Orientation Sessions that attracted 1,393 participants and achieved 96% overall satisfaction rating.
- 4,507 customer visits from 707 unduplicated customers totaling 6,955 hours in the Business Solutions Center.
- Contracted technical assistance service provided 1,746 hours of assistance to 1,430 unduplicated customers resulting in 27 new business start ups reported, the creation of 68 new jobs reported and the award of \$1.3 million in loans to small business owners.
- SBDP provided 5,365 direct training hours taught by SBDP staff to 2,287 participants.
- 226 unduplicated customers received one-on-one coaching with development, zoning and permitting related issues and received 100% satisfaction rating. Eight presentations of the *BizOpen* Orientation was made to 120 clients and achieved a satisfaction rating of 97%.
- Several business information events that attracted 1,756 visitors.

Other municipalities would benefit from using the best practices conducted by the City of Austin Small Business Development Program. These practices can be adjusted for the needs of any community that supports small business.

Lessons Learned

The Small Business Development Program has always been guided by its commitment to excellent customer service and to deliver needs-based services to the community. SBDP bi-annually surveys its customers and monitors satisfaction in different aspects of the program and requests suggestions for improvement from the public. SBDP listens to its customers and manages for results. One of the reasons SBDP has been so successful in helping Austin small business owners is that the program tracks results through monthly performance measures and analyzes the results of these performance measures. Good data collection practices are in place and that data guides the decision processes. The SBDP makes no assumptions about “what the customer wants” but rather seeks measurable, solid data. Finally, SBDP is successful because of the strategic planning in marketing and outreach to the public to inform them of the wealth of resources available to them.