

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE - NOVEMBER 4, 2002

VAUGHAN BUSINESS ENTERPRISE CENTRE (VBEC): STATUS REPORT FOR PERIOD APRIL 1, 2002 – SEPTEMBER 30, 2002

Recommendation

The Commissioner of Economic/Technology Development and Communications recommends that this report be received.

Purpose

The purpose is to provide a semi-annual status report for the period April 1, 2002 to September 30, 2002 on the Vaughan Business Enterprise Centre.

Background - Analysis and Options

VBEC receives inquiries primarily from two key groups: entrepreneurs who seek basic information regarding starting a business, and small business owners looking for specific information and/or expertise that will help them deal with day-to-day challenges and grow their business. To serve these clients, the VBEC team is led by 2 experienced Senior Small Business Consultants. One coaches start-up businesses and the other specifically provides one-on-one consulting with existing small business owners wishing to expand and diversify.

VBEC also delivers a service, funded through Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), aimed at assisting with Labour Market Adjustment issues in Vaughan and York Region. Through this service, VBEC is able to offer specific reintegration coaching to residents who have been subjected to displacement in their workplace, and who now seek to become entrepreneurs. The service offers support and guidance, in a group setting, on a variety of topics relevant to small business. VBEC has a team in place to deliver this service, consisting of a Consultant/Business Coach, a Workshop Coordinator and Administrative support.

Seminars, business name registrations, referrals to appropriate agencies, one-on-one consultants, networking opportunities and business plan reviews are some of VBEC's activities. Initiatives include a Business Plan Challenge for York Region high school students, as well as joint seminars with private sector partners.

Current Activity:

Statistics for the Period April to September 2002 (April – September 2001 in brackets)

New businesses registered	518	(391)
Total inquiries (via telephone, email, walk-in)	5,548	(1,548)
Seminar/Workshop Attendees	255	(79)
Client Consultations (new or existing business)	662	(482)

New Programs and Activities at VBEC

From April to September 2002, VBEC coordinated an MEOI program called Summer Company, which targets young 'would-be' entrepreneurs. In its first summer in York Region, Summer Company saw 7 young people receive start-up grants to begin and then operate a "live" business. The program included entrepreneurial training for these award winners, along with mentoring from assorted Vaughan area business professionals. Several of these Summer Company owners have indicated they will be continuing to operate their businesses during the school year or in summers to come.

VBEC hosted its first *Bridges to Better Business* event on October 30, 2002. This half-day conference consisted of a trade show, luncheon with keynote speaker and round table discussions. The target audience was existing businesses, interested in seeking specific contacts, information and resources to continue growing their firms. A new federal government partner, Industry Canada, and MEOI partially funded this activity.

VBEC has been successful in the execution of its mandate, as demonstrated in the above comparative figures. The statistics confirm that VBEC has served a consistently higher number of clients each activity period. The success, however, is not only in the number of clients but also in the survival rate of its clients' businesses. Repeat coaching and assistance to VBEC clients has become more evident in recent months, strengthening VBEC's relationships within Vaughan's business community. Based upon client requests and input, VBEC has enhanced the services it delivers adding more in-depth information on taxation, on financing options and on developing new markets. Furthermore, VBEC has a network of outside resources that enhance service delivery to each of our clients.

Supporting Local Partners

- 1) Vaughan Chamber of Commerce: Provides event support, client referrals, Community awareness about services available at VBEC. Marketing vehicle for VBEC (exposure to Vaughan's small business community); opportunity to build financial sponsorships from Corporate community; new contacts can be offered as "business-to-business" services available to VBEC clients.
- 2) Vaughan Public Library Network: Provides Information Outlets as support for entrepreneurs in Vaughan community; Resource cross-referencing; Joint seminars/information sessions. Universal access to information about entrepreneurship, government programs and services for small business and goodwill enhancement within Vaughan community.
- 3) York Region District Boards of Education: VBEC provides support to teachers and students enrolled in Business Students components of the high school curriculum. Preliminary efforts have centered on providing classroom speakers on small business topics, offering high school students an opportunity to participate in Summer Company program (in partnership with MEOI), and establishing a Business Plan Competition 2003 (also in conjunction with MEOI).
- 4) York Region Community Service Delivery Network: Provides Labour Market Adjustment programs and services to displaced workers in York Region. This offers continuous professional development of VBEC team through networking with agencies with similar objectives and clients.
- 5) MEOI-Funded Agency Network: Provides continuous professional development of VBEC's Senior Small Business Consultants. MEOI provides opportunities for program development, and revenue enhancement, for VBEC through continuous exposure to their policy development process (our input helps shape future revenue-generating, provincially-funded projects).
- 6) Private Sector Alliances: Offer a competitive advantage to VBEC clients. Upcoming presenters will speak on new topics such as website and internet marketing, time management and customer service. The local media provides free copies of newspapers for VBEC clients.

Conclusion

The choice of Beaverbrook House has been very effective, given its high visibility, its easy access to public transit and its proximity to the Vaughan Civic Centre. Clients and visitors alike are pleased with the level of services and resources that VBEC has to offer. Moreover, the increasing number of clients served, is a testament to the value of a structure such as Vaughan Business Enterprise Centre within Vaughan and York Region.

As VBEC continues to build its reputation for excellence, referrals from our community partnerships are frequent and diverse. Local financial institutions and business professionals, City of Vaughan offices, Vaughan Public Libraries, constituency offices of federal and provincial representatives, as well as recent clients each contribute to VBEC's growing client base, to its expanding resource library and to its diversified range of services.

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Respectfully submitted,

Frank Miele
Commissioner of Economic/Technology Development and Communications