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Staff Paper P14-8 **August 2014**

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Using Focus Groups for Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) at the Community Level: Detailed Notes about the Columbus, Minnesota BR&E Program

by
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APPLIED
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Using Focus Groups for Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) at the Community Level: Detailed Notes about the Columbus, Minnesota BR&E Program

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Abstract

1) This paper provides a synopsis of the Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) program conducted in Columbus, MN in 2013-2014, undertaken by the University of Minnesota Extension in partnership with the City of Columbus, This includes a detailed description of the when, where, why, who, how, and the results/"findings" of using focus groups (FG), a novel approach, for BR&E.

2) It also examines the FG BR&E in Columbus as a case study and includes a section targeted to those considering BR&E in their community, with the aim of helping communities determine if focus groups may be appropriate. A list of helpful hints and suggestions for undertaking FG BR&E is provided. The paper closes with a series of appendices, including the focus group protocol and interview guide, summaries of each focus group session stripped of any identifying information, and a more detailed description of the city of Columbus.

Table of Contents

I. Overview 3-5

II. Detailed Notes About the Columbus Focus Group BR&E Initiative 5-13

1. Origin and reasoning for utilizing Focus Groups for BR&E 5-6
2. Initiating this process 6-8
3. Conducting the Focus Groups 8-11
4. Understanding the Focus Groups: Synthesizing and Analyzing the Data 11-13
5. Presentation of the FG data & its Use in the Community 13

III. For those considering BR&E 14-16

1. Basic requirements for focus group BR&E and major prep work required 14-15
2. Recommended techniques those considering a Focus Group BR&E 15-16

IV. Appendices 17-35

1. Description of Columbus 18
2. Proposal for BR&E Focus Group Program in Columbus, Minnesota 19-20
3. Business Recruitment for Focus Groups 21
4. Columbus BR&E Focus Group Protocol and Interview Guide 22-26
5. Community Services Question Handout used in Focus Groups 27
6. Key Quotes for Major Themes in the Focus Groups 28-29
7. Focus Group Summary (one example from one of four focus groups) 30-31
8. Clicker Polling (Quantitative Data) – Overview and Question Set 32-34
9. Bibliography 35

I. Overview

This document serves two purposes:

Section II provides: an overview of the focus group (FG) BR&E project in Columbus, including: rationale for the use of focus groups; an examination of some major strengths and weaknesses of this methodology; resources required; and a layout of basic requirements for undertaking focus group BR&E. Section III presents the project in Columbus MN as a case study to help determine if focus group BR&E may be appropriate for the reader's situation and to provide suggestions based on this experience.

Summary of the Columbus Focus Group BR&E Project

Rationale for Use of Focus Groups for BR&E in Communities

There are limited situations in which focus groups might be used instead of the customary approach of sending BR&E visitors to the place of business. In a volunteer-driven BR&E program the BR&E data is typically collected by volunteers from the local community, recruited by city staff or project leaders. These volunteers visit local business owners/managers to interview them face-to-face at their business. The volunteers generally follow a provided interview guide, but may ask more details or additional questions as appropriate. This information is then collected, stripped of identifying information, and tabulated for summary and analysis. (For more information on traditional BR&E at the U of M see pp. 13-14). All or some of the following factors may be conducive to pointing a community in the direction of an FG approach.

1. When not enough volunteers or paid staff are available to make in-person visits to businesses.
2. When someone from the community with skills and credibility is available to recruit businesses to participate in focus groups.
3. When suitable community facilities are available for confidential focus group meetings.
4. When there is a need to gather data on relatively few, yet important topics.
5. When individual community responses to business are less critical than the need for overall economic development planning.
6. When skilled focus group practitioners are available to assist the community. Note that this may require funding partners.

Pros, Cons, Strengths, Weaknesses of Focus Groups for BR&E

The use of focus groups for data collection has a number of tradeoffs as a tool for BR&E data

collection. Below is a list of some of the inherent strengths and weaknesses of focus group research. It is not, by any means, an exhaustive list. However, it provides a broad-brush overview for those who are familiar with quantitative data collection for BR&E.

Strengths of focus groups include:

- The ability to collect large amounts of information in a limited number of sessions using limited numbers of staff
- The ability to explore big ideas, themes, or concepts
- The flexibility to explore topics in depth as they naturally arise
- The ability to obtain vivid and in-depth, rather than superficial or very basic, answers
- The ability to examine how participants react to one another
- focus group sessions provide opportunities for business-to-business networking

Weaknesses of focus groups include:

- Time constraints limit the number of topics covered
- Focus groups do not yield quantitative information as do BR&E surveys
- Aggregated data that is easily digestible by city staff is difficult to provide. This is due to the confidential and qualitative nature of focus groups and these qualitative data do not allow simple statistical summaries
- They are reliant on group interaction and may be dominated by one or two individuals, meaning some are not heard as much
- They can result in the collection of some irrelevant or off-topic data
- Data analysis of lengthy transcripts is very time consuming

Some of the inherent challenges of focus groups can be minimized with prudent planning and a skilled moderator. City staff in Columbus helped foster dialogue amongst participants in the sessions by insuring that the composition of each of the focus groups was balanced. Each group was composed of roughly equal numbers of home-based businesses, small and large businesses, locally owned businesses, and both newer arrivals and business that had been in the community for substantial periods of time. City staff explained the goals of the project to the business owner/managers prior to their participation, and many participants expressed their belief in the merits of the effort.

Additionally, the moderator of the Columbus focus group sessions was able to guide the participants back to relevant topics when necessary and to ensure that the views of less outspoken participants were respectfully heard and considered. Although the focus group transcripts are confidential and participant privacy must be protected, Extension researchers can provide the city with summaries of the major topics of each of the focus groups and a selection of direct quotes which are not identifiable to the business or to the employee. This

can provide the city with tangible information to reference in their ongoing decision-making.

To offset some of the inherent limitations of focus groups, supplemental quantitative research was undertaken at the end of the focus group discussions in Columbus. Following three sessions, focus group participants were asked quantitative questions and responded via handheld "clicker" technology. This allowed for data collection on topics ill-suited for non-confidential response in the focus group conversation and also allowed for limited comparison with historical Extension benchmark data previously collected in visitation-based BR&E initiatives.

II. Detailed Notes About the Columbus[1] Focus Group Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) Initiative

This section chronologically recounts and describes the Columbus Focus Group BR&E initiative from Columbus officials' initial desire to undertake a BR&E project, through Columbus' use of the results and findings in planning out their upcoming Economic Development Plan. It is an attempt to comprehensively address the who, what, where, when, and why regarding the Columbus Focus Group BR&E Initiative in 2013-2014.

Amongst other things, this section will describe the rationale for using focus group methodology, how the project was funded, who was involved, how recruitment was undertaken, and how the data was collected and examined.

1. Origin and reasoning for utilizing Focus Groups for the Columbus BR&E

In fall 2012, Connexus Energy and the University of Minnesota Extension approached officials in the city of Columbus, Minnesota about the possibility of sponsoring a Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) project. Volunteer-driven BR&E initiatives require a significant number of volunteers to undertake business visits in their community. In 2013, city staff determined that securing the number of volunteers necessary to undertake these visits and obtain data via face-to-face interviews would not be feasible. Yet, Columbus city staff still wanted to take full advantage of the opportunity afforded by Connexus Energy, which was willing to help pay Extension's program fee. After careful consideration and a series of meetings in person and via conference call, the City of Columbus, the Extension, and Connexus agreed that the use of focus

[1] For a detailed description of the city of Columbus, see Appendix 1, page 18

groups could serve as a means to obtain relevant and useful data from local businesses and that this could serve as a solution. This focus group experiment was beneficial to Extension's BR&E team as it seeks to discover new and improved methods for community business retention and expansion. A project proposal (Appendix 2, page 19) was agreed to and the process began to move beyond the conception stage.

2. Initiating this process

From here the groundwork for the focus groups was laid along two parallel tracks: 1) activities by Columbus city officials, such as recruitment of representatives from local businesses and scheduling of the focus group sessions, and 2) activities by Extension, such as hiring a graduate student to assist on the project and drafting the questions for the focus group sessions.

Columbus staff:

Recruitment of the participating businesses was done by Elizabeth Mursko, Columbus City Administrator. Mursko identified and reached out to businesses in Columbus, setting up four focus group sessions with six to seven participants each. A total of 26 business owners or managers representing 21 different businesses took part in the focus groups. Businesses from commercially/industrially zoned locations as well as home-based locations were included, with about a 75%/25% mix. Considering approximately 100 businesses are known to be in Columbus, this is a significant cross-section of the city's business community.

Mursko estimates that recruitment activity took approximately 40 hours in the fall. Although this is a significant use of a key administrator's time, it is likely that the participation rate by businesses would not have been nearly as strong without her name recognition and her determined efforts to make this project a success. Unlike many focus group research projects, none of the participants were offered any remuneration or incentives, such as gift cards, by the city of Columbus to participants in the focus groups.

University of Minnesota Extension:

Michael Darger and University of Minnesota Extension (Extension) concluded that in order for the focus groups to be appropriately conducted, and for Darger's schedule to allow taking on the project, a team of two would be necessary for the project. A graduate student with previous experience with focus groups, Joshua Hill, was brought on early in September to assist Darger with the project, working approximately ten hours a week for much of the project.

Darger and Hill met with the Columbus BR&E Task Force between 8 and 10 AM on September 11, 2013, in order to discuss the project, develop a common understanding, and move forward with next steps for the project. Immediately following this meeting, the Extension team

created a shared “Process Notes,” or field notes, document in order to collect, document, and reflect on steps of the process itself that otherwise may have been lost or not fully documented. These “Process Notes” were used throughout the project and served as a valuable repository of information.

The next steps for the Extension team included the development of an interview guide and protocol (Appendix 4, pp. 20-26) for the focus group sessions. Additionally a series of supplemental quantitative questions were developed. These questions (Appendix 6, pp. 32-34) were to be answered by focus group participants via the use of handheld “clicker” technology immediately following each of the focus group sessions.

As mentioned, Extension’s major experience in BR&E centers on community volunteers interviewing businesses using an extensive question set (survey). The majority of the “clicker” questions were modeled off questions from the survey. The use of the “clicker” questions following the focus group sessions allowed for questioning on topics ill-suited for non-confidential response in the focus group sessions and also provided select quantitative data to supplement the qualitative data obtained via the focus groups. This quantitative data allowed for limited comparison against the historical Extension benchmark data collected via visitation-based BR&E projects.

During this time, Hill spent several hours installing and becoming familiar with Turning Point, the software required for the “clicker” technology, as well as physically testing the clickers themselves. This was necessary to gain the required familiarity and proficiency with the software and its features, as well as with the hardware itself. The “clicker” questions were then converted to Microsoft PowerPoint, as required by Turning Point, and formatted for clarity and appearance.

Drafts of both the interview guide and the supplemental “clicker” questions were sent to city staff and the Columbus BR&E Task Force for feedback. The Extension staff amended the interview guide and moved on to test them with a live audience. While ideally the guide would be tested on a live audience of business owners from a comparable community, a number of factors precluded this. Instead, the guide was tested with two sets of two staff members from Extension. This provided an opportunity to observe the sequencing and structure of questions and garner feedback from others knowledgeable on community vitality. It also provided an opportunity to field test audio recording equipment and clicker technology, and provided Darger, who would serve as moderator for the focus groups in Columbus, a dry run to gain greater comfort and familiarity with the interview guide and process.

Small changes were made to the interview guide at this point, and a supplemental list of community services (Appendix 5, page 27) was created. One topic of the focus groups was on

the quality and availability of community services. While at first the Extension team allowed for natural response, a list of community services was subsequently provided to participants, as sometimes a common definition of community service was not evident.

3. Conducting the Focus Groups

Process summary: The four focus groups took place between October and December 2013 at Columbus City Hall. There were a total of 26 people representing 21 businesses and the sessions lasted between 71 to 97 minutes (Table 1, page 10). Meals were served because the meetings were conducted during breakfast or dinner time slots and food always serves as an additional incentive to attend. Mursko estimates that the work involved with the meal organizing and meeting planning took her and other city staff members approximately 40 hours.

The focus groups generally followed the same pattern, with aberrations discussed further below. The participants would trickle in starting about 15 minutes before the session and would talk amongst themselves and with Mursko and the Extension team. This networking amongst local businesses was also seen immediately following sessions and seemed to be a positive result of using this methodology that was not fully anticipated prior to the project. After helping themselves to the continental style meal and beverages, participants would be seated around a rectangular table, with the Extension team sitting across from each other at one end of the table. A circular table would have been preferred, but using a long table did not seem to negatively impact any of the focus group sessions. The sessions would begin with Mursko providing a brief, approximately 5-minute introduction and thank you on behalf of the city. Mursko would then leave the focus group meeting room for the duration, as it was felt that the presence of city officials in the room during the focus group would restrict or otherwise impact the responses of participants.

Darger, the Extension moderator, would then provide an introduction of Extension and the team and a brief explanation of the focus groups, as well as their aims and means. Darger also would use this time to set the tone for a productive, comfortable, natural, and open discussion, where all viewpoints and experiences would be valued. The desired atmosphere was that of a family meal where no dominant figure controls the conversation.

Audio recording would begin at this point. This was undertaken for each of the sessions for the sake of transcription and data analysis. Two recording devices were always used for the sake of redundancy in case of technological failure, loss of device power, or other unforeseen error. Darger would then moderate the focus group discussion, which would last approximately 1 to 1.5 hours. Hill took detailed notes throughout and would occasionally ask follow-up questions. Both Darger and Hill would generally add 1-2 questions at the end of the session based on what

had transpired or been mentioned during the session.

Immediately following the focus group session, Darger would explain the purpose of the "clicker" questions, as well as showing the "clickers" to the participants and explaining how to use them. During this time, Hill would set up the Turning Point program, distribute clickers to the participants, and project the questions onto the wall. Following each question, the aggregated responses to each question would be shown in graph form, with responses non-identifiable to individuals. The goal was to make the process interactive and more engaging for the participants as well as to garner more thoughtful responses than expected from a post-focus group individual paper survey. It seemed like a success according to these criteria.

After each session

Following each focus group session, the Extension team would spend 15-30 minutes discussing their immediate reactions as to what struck them as informative or interesting and what the central themes of each session seemed to be. The team would compare what seemed to mesh with or reinforce data from other focus groups and what conflicting responses arose compared to other focus group sessions. Out of this recap session, a summary was created for each of the focus groups (Appendix 7, pp. 30-31). City staff drafted individual thank you notes to each business following their participation in the focus groups.

Recapping each session immediately after its conclusion was the best way to ensure the major themes and big ideas of each session were captured. The research team was able to consider how the session did or did not align with other sessions, which was crucial as each session was unique and had distinct focuses. The summaries provided the Extension team reference points that would be impossible to recreate weeks or months following the session. It reduced the risk of forgetting certain data that may appear less relevant when examining the data at a later date, and ensured the emergence of certain topics were noted.

The review sessions also allowed the researchers to compare their individual understandings of the session. This helped each team member to see the session and its data from the other researcher's point of view, and this was critical to maintaining a coherent common understanding. Also, since this was a new approach to BR&E, the team learned from the first focus group experience and tweaked the interview script as a result of what came up. These summaries were created to aid the researchers. They also served a bit like *very* simplified tabulated data.

In the week following each session, Hill would type up the summary and a compilation of the Extension team's notes for clarity of the project. These and all other files were saved in a

manner that both team members always had access and the ability to edit. The files of the audio recordings for the session were sent electronically to an outside transcriptionist who created Microsoft Word transcriptions of the audio for each of the sessions. The cost of the transcriptionist across all of the sessions totaled approximately $413, with the transcriptionist charging $15/hr and taking between six and seven hours per focus group.

Table 1: Basic Focus Group Breakdowns

	FG 1	**FG 2**	**FG 3**	**FG 4**	**Summary**
Date Held	October 30, 2013	November 7, 2013	November 19, 2013	December 2, 2013	Between Oct. and Dec. 2013
Approximate Length	71 minutes	94 minutes	97 minutes	77 minutes	Average: ~85 minutes
# of Participants	7	7	6	6	Total: 26
# of Businesses Represented	5	6	6	5	Total: 21*
Clickers	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	3 out of 4 groups

*One business-owning married couple had each partner attend a different session; hence, the total number of businesses represented is 21, not 22

Inconsistencies, etc. (Not discussed in the general summary)

Although the summary provides an overall picture of the focus groups process, there were inevitably some inconsistencies that merit mention.

Following the first focus group, minor edits to the focus group interview guide and protocol were made. Some rearranging of questions was done in an attempt to facilitate a natural and open conversation, and a couple of questions were added. These additional questions were asked by the Extension team at the close of the first session, and were therefore included in the transcription (i.e. they were not missed during the first session). They were deemed important enough that they should be added to all later sessions.

Additionally, formatting changes were made to the Turning Point (i.e. the clicker technology) questions in order to make them more visually appealing and easier to read, but the content remained the same. On this point, it is necessary to mention that, due to a technical problem,

the clicker questions were not able to be posed to the third focus group. The contingency of bringing paper copies had not been planned for and therefore the Extension team was unable to gather the "clicker" data from this group.

Further highlighting the importance of redundancy, Extension always brought two recording devices. During one session, this proved to be necessary as one of the recording devices did not record the entire session. Practically speaking, having two recordings also gave the transcriptionist two options to work with if one section of a recording was unclear at any particular point in time. The transcription of the first two sessions was not received until November 23-24, 2014. This slowed down initial review and data analysis somewhat, but the turnaround for the final two focus groups was much quicker.

There was one focus group participant who did not show up for the scheduled and agreed upon focus group. Having only one "no show" across four focus groups is a very positive and impressive achievement. This speaks to the city administrator's recruiting skill and standing within the community and should not be taken for granted by other communities considering a focus group BR&E.

4. Understanding the Focus Groups: Synthesizing and Analyzing the Data

After reviewing the focus group summaries and notes for the first and second focus groups session, the Extension team created an initial draft list of recurring themes that arose during these focus groups. This list was added to and significantly refined following the week of November 19-23, after Extension received the first two focus group transcripts and the third focus group had been held.

In addition to creating the summaries, being present during all focus group sessions, and reviewing the transcripts, the Extension team utilized qualitative data analysis software as a tool to facilitate analysis. NVivo 10 software was selected and Hill spent several hours installing the software and obtaining the necessary licensing for the product from Extension technical support.

The initial three focus group transcripts were then entered into NVivo and categories of themes or topics (known as nodes in NVivo) were created within the software. Hill then began "coding" the focus group transcripts. Coding is the process of carefully reviewing the transcripts and designating which pieces of text should be associated with certain themes or topics. Completion of coding allows for review of a single theme or topic at one time. For example, all areas of focus group discussion around the "sense of community amongst businesses" in Columbus could be viewed in one place, and any section of text could be clicked on in order to

view it in larger context within the transcript.

After the fourth focus group was conducted and the final transcript was completed and entered into NVivo, comprehensive analysis across and between focus groups was possible. This was undertaken in greater depth using NVivo, as well as review of the summaries of the focus groups, and the Extension team's reflection and analysis from observing the sessions. It is again important to note that this was the first time either focus groups or NVivo had been used by Extension for its BR&E program, though other program areas of Extension have familiarity with these methods.

Since 1990, University of Minnesota Extension BR&E has collected large amounts of business data via in-person interviews conducted by volunteers who visit community businesses. For each community BR&E, this data is compiled and summarized and a research review session is held at the University of Minnesota St. Paul campus. The research review session is comprised of a group of Extension staff, staff and volunteers from the community conducting the BR&E, University of Minnesota faculty experts from fields such as economics, and additional economic development experts from government and other entities. These people examine the summarized data both individually and in small groups to comprehensively analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis) as well as to ideate potential project ideas for the community.

These ideas are then reviewed by Darger and Extension staff and many of them are included, or inform ideas that are included, into the BR&E research report that is created for the community. These project ideas are non-binding and it is then up to the discretion and judgment of the community, based on numerous factors including budgeting and economic climate, as to which ideas they will adopt for implementation. A community may choose to not accept any of the ideas, to choose a few of them, or to adopt multiple projects across different time horizons as part of their long term strategic plan. Of course, they are encouraged to modify the ideas, or create entirely new project ideas to fit their unique situation.

Due to the nature of focus group research, a campus research review-style meeting was deemed inappropriate insofar as it is very difficult, if not impossible, to objectively summarize focus group data into a short and accurate summary. In contrast, with objective survey questions, the analyst can issue a summary of the aggregated statistics for each question. Instead the Extension team came up with an initial list of project suggestions based on previous BR&E experience and their familiarity with the Columbus focus groups. The project suggestions were compiled by Darger and Hill, but neither a feasibility analysis nor a benefit-cost analysis was undertaken for the suggested ideas.

It is important to note that in order to maintain the confidentiality of the focus group participants, the audio recordings and transcripts of the focus groups were neither made public nor provided to Columbus staff. Instead, Columbus staff was provided with a report-style document including summaries of the focus groups, a selection of quotes representing major themes or topics and the suggestions of Extension. Columbus staff responded with their own list of proposed projects. Many of their suggestions, but not all, were similar to Extension suggestions or had support from the data. Extension included these suggestions in the final report for Columbus in a separate section of the report. The report was for the use and benefit of Columbus.

5. Presentation of the FG data & its use in the Community

In addition to delivering the research report to the City of Columbus, Extension also presented its data and findings at the annual ColumBiz business recognition and appreciation event. This event was held April 3, 2014 at one of the keystone businesses in Columbus, Running Aces Harness Park. The event was attended by about 60 representatives from the business community (including several focus group participants), City officials, and representatives from Anoka County.

On April 16, 2014, the Extension team also attended a joint review and consensus-building meeting of the Columbus City Council, Planning Commission and Economic Development Authority. Some members of the EDA were also part of the BR&E Task Force, but additional Task Force members were also in attendance. The Extension team presented their findings and then took a hands-off role while the city planner facilitated the Columbus stakeholders as they discussed the pros and cons of each project idea and decided on next steps. It is worth noting that most of what the Extension team found through the focus group research did not come as a major surprise for many present at the meeting, but did serve as a means of rationalizing certain projects.

The Columbus BR&E Focus Group project was undertaken with the possibility of serving as a pilot test for future community BR&E projects. This possibility remains open, but is contingent upon additional communities taking part in focus group BR&E in the future. Lacking additional experience in using focus group BR&E methods with other communities, it is difficult to judge the overall merit of using focus groups for BR&E. The Extension team hopes the project and resulting documentation contribute to the knowledge base of the economic development community.

III. For those considering BR&E

This section is for readers interested in implementing a FG BR&E program. It provides an additional list of helpful hints and suggestions in list form. These are divided into two categories based on perceived level of importance.

1. Basic requirements for focus group BR&E and major preparation work required
2. Recommended techniques

Basic Requirements or Determinants for Focus Group BR&E and Major Prep Work Required

1. Similar to a visitation-based BR&E, focus group BR&E requires **funding**. Possible funding sources include local utilities, chambers of commerce (local, regional, or state), economic development entities, city governments, and county governments, among others.
2. A **dedicated city administrator** (or similar individual or possibly individuals, i.e. a credible, trusted, and widely-known local official) is required to **recruit** local businesses, **set the schedules** for the focus groups, and **ensure that businesses honor their commitment to attend**. This requires city administrator time and is facilitated depending on their level of connection and influence with local businesses. (see page 6). Without this person(s), focus group BR&E is not recommended
3. **A lack of volunteers** in sufficient numbers required to undertake interview/survey based BR&E. **This is not a requirement**, rather it is a major reason to undertake focus group BR&E
4. A **team of two** to undertake the focus group BR&E project, conducting the focus group sessions and analyzing the data. It is **incredibly important** that both individuals have at least some **previous focus group and/or interviewing experience and skills, as well as data analysis skills**. One of these two will take the role of lead interviewer, while the other will serve as primary note taker
    a. **If undertaken by a University-based Extension program**, it is recommended that **one** of these two be a **professional with prior experience in visitation-based BR&E** and **the other be a research assistant** (master's level preferred).
5. A **draft protocol and interview guide must be developed** and the **draft protocol and interview guide must be tested and refined** (Appendix 4, pp. 20-26).
6. **Each of the focus groups should be transcribed for in-depth analysis**
7. **Analysis of the data (transcripts)** from the focus group sessions must be conducted. **Qualitative data analysis software**, such as **NVivo** 10, is **highly recommended**. **Previous knowledge of this software**, by at least one of two team members, **is highly recommended**. Doing this analysis without software assistance would be possible, but

is more time consuming.

8. **Supplemental quantitative data collection is recommended**. This allows for **limited benchmarking** and comparison against your previous BR&E project data. It allows for exploration of topics ill-suited to being asked in a group setting, and adds depth to the strictly qualitative data yielded via the focus groups. This was accomplished through the use of confidential **handheld clicker technology and Turning Point software** (Appendix 8, pp. 32-34). Other options would be to use online/smartphone programs for audience response or passing out paper surveys to individuals. The latter option would be less interactive and individuals may rush through, be less thoughtful on their responses, or decline to participate.

Recommended Techniques (for Focus Group BR&E)

a. There is always the **possibility of no-shows to focus groups by participants**. If your goal is 5-8 individuals per focus group, try to get commitments from 7-8 people per group. It may be better to aim for 4 slightly larger groups instead of 5 smaller ones that may not be as successful if there are 1-2 no-shows. We only had one no-show, but no-shows are a frequently cited problem when using focus groups.
b. It is highly recommended to **create and use a shared "Process notes document"** (a.k.a. field notes) from the outset of the project to log the amount of work done by the client community official (i.e. city administrator or other), any notes on networking amongst businesses occurring outside allotted FG times, and anything pertinent occurring outside the bounds of the recorded focus group itself. This document should be **easily accessible to both team members**, stored, for example, on a shared network or a shared Google Doc.
c. **Always have a backup!**
    i. When **audio recording focus groups sessions, always use two devices**. iPhone or Android smartphones can serve well as a backup recording device. Be sure to **test both devices beforehand** and make sure both are **charged and/or have extra batteries**.
    ii. For Turning Point/clicker technology, **print a hard copy set of quantitative questions** (1-2 more than your maximum participant count), and bring them to each session in case the technology does not cooperate. We had one FG session unable to complete the supplemental quantitative questions due to technology issues.
d. **Do a 15-minute recap of the session as a team** immediately following each focus group session,

i. Create a short (1-2 pg) bullet point summary highlighting the major themes, general areas that lined up with previous FG responses, areas that differed from previous groups, areas that emerged that should be examined (probing questions) more in the future, etc.

e. Transcription

i. If feasible, it is **recommended that the research assistant transcribe**, if they have prior experience and time available, and do it in a timely manner following each focus group. The advantage is that the research assistant was present at the session, has notes, noted non-verbal cues, can ensure a quick turnaround, raises no further confidentiality issues as when hiring an outside transcriptionist, and is further immersed in the data. This will aid and improve the analysis.

IV. Appendices

1. Description of Columbus
2. Proposal for BR&E Focus Group Program in Columbus, Minnesota
3. Business Recruitment for Focus Groups
4. Columbus BR&E Focus Group Protocol and Interview Guide (as used in four focus groups)
5. Handout used in Focus Groups with the Community Services Question
6. Key Quotes for Major Themes in the Focus Groups
7. Focus Group Summary (this is one example from one of the four focus groups)
8. Clicker Polling – Overview
9. Bibliography

Appendix 1. Description of Columbus (Demographics, Location)

Columbus is an ex-urban community in the outer northern suburbs of Minneapolis, Minnesota. It is located in the eastern part of Anoka County, which is in East-Central Minnesota. Neighboring cities include: Forest Lake, Hugo, Blaine, Lino Lakes, Ham Lake, East Bethel, and Wyoming. Interstate 35 forks into 35E and 35W in the southeast corner of Columbus. Columbus was a township until it incorporated as a city in the fall of 2006.

Columbus has an economic development authority. The city administrator and contract city planner serve as the staff for economic development programming. City Hall is located at 16319 Kettle River Blvd.

Lake Drive (County Road 23) and the Freeway District are the prominent business areas. Prominent and well-known establishments include Running Aces Harness Track, Gander Mountain, Waldoch, and Cemstone.

The population was 3,914 as of 2010 with a population density of 87.1 inhabitants per square mile. Median age in the city was 45.3 years, with 22.3% of residents under the age 18. Only one school (elementary school) is within its borders.

The city has a total area of 47.76 square miles, of which 44.92 square miles are land and 2.84 square miles are water. Watersheds located in Columbus include: Rice Creek Watershed, Coon Creek Watershed, and Sunrise River Watershed.

The City adopted the slogan “Rural Nature. Urban Access” to highlight its natural beauty and tout the benefits of easy and relatively quick and easy access to Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Appendix 2. Proposal for BR&E Focus Group Program in Columbus, Minnesota
(A project description prepared in advance of the project for Extension and Columbus)
Final draft by Michael Darger, Oct. 28, 2013

To promote the retention and expansion of Columbus business (BR&E), this project will conduct four mixed sector focus group Breakfast or Dinner Meetings (approx. 8:00-10:00 a.m. or 6:00-8:00 p.m.) at the Columbus Senior Center at approximately monthly (3-4 weeks) intervals. The focus groups will be professionally facilitated and orchestrated by University of Minnesota Extension. Probable big topics to select from include: City services, business needs, anticipated business expansion/relocation or other changes and/or "other" (i.e. it's own topic). Of course, only a few of these topics can be researched with focus groups, which is a key difference from survey research. By definition, *focus* group research forces a much more narrow definition of topics for examination. The discussions will be traditional focus groups where the facilitators are there essentially to guide a discussion among the participating businesses (with 6-10 business participants per meeting with an ideal of 7 individuals). However, an innovative twist is that several BR&E questions will be posed to the participants for anonymous answer via remote clicker technology at the end of each session.

The research will be sponsored and designed by a BR&E Task Force of several individuals from the City, EDA, County, area businesses, Connexus Energy, and Columbus Elementary School. City staff Elizabeth Mursko and Dean Johnson will be the overall leaders of the project and work with Michael Darger, of the University of Minnesota Extension, on a detailed plan. The leaders will present an initial concept plan to the Task Force at a summer meeting (August 6). The leaders will take the Task Force responses and ideas to reformulate and finalize the concept for consideration at a second meeting of the Task Force (Sept. 10). Then, the BR&E Focus Group Program will be launched in October with the research being completed this fall. Focus group participants will be recruited by City staff from the key sectors (the bait is food and contributing to their local economy): retail & entertainment, contractors, service, manufacturers, and home-based enterprises.

A comprehensive BR&E plan will be created and presented to the businesses at the April, 2014 annual "ColumBiz" business appreciation event at Running Aces. The Task Force (with facilitation by Extension) will oversee and contribute to the BR&E plan in February-March, 2014 based on the research results. Extension will deliver the analyzed focus group results to the Task Force (February), input will be received and themes identified. Then, Mursko and Johnson will create a draft plan that the Task Force will consider and respond to so that it can be finalized by the end of March.

This project is an ambitious and innovative approach to BR&E (a focus group approach to BR&E

planning is unprecedented, at least to the knowledge of Michael Darger, the BR&E specialist for Extension). Therefore, there is no guarantee of success and both the City and Extension need to be prepared for surprises along the way. However, this is an opportunity for the City to move forward on a BR&E study even though it does not have an identified volunteer base, which it would need to use the traditional volunteer visitation approach to BR&E. For Extension, it represents an opportunity to explore a method that may be of use to other Minnesota communities. For business participants, this project offers a chance to meet and get to know other Columbus business people. This last part potentially offers the prospect of positive "unintended consequences" to occur since there is great potential when local businesses increase their business networks.

Extension is offering its services to this project for the fee of $5,000. This amount will not fully cover its costs for the project. However, since this is a research opportunity for the Extension BR&E Program, the partial cost recovery will be sufficient. Extension has already received the $5,000 fee from Connexus Energy (received January, 2013). The total cost of the project is estimated at $8,000. The City and the EDA will contribute $1,500 total with the remainder coming from a $1,500 contribution from Xcel Energy. Note: this budget does not include the cost of implementing any identified BR&E action projects.

Draft Timeline

1. Summer. Initial focus group protocol, question scripts, anonymous question script, survey of business participant time preferences and Task Force recruiting
2. Task Force Meeting 1, Aug. 6th, 8-10 a.m. over breakfast
3. Refine and adjust the plan based on input from Task Force
4. Task Force Meeting 2, Sept. 11th, 8-10 a.m. over breakfast
5. Final preparation and City recruits participants
6. Focus Group Meetings 1-4, Oct.-Dec. over breakfast or dinner. Extension facilitates, records, and observes the participants through the guided conversation.
7. Tabulation and analysis by Extension, December-January
8. Task Force Meeting 3, February 4 to receive analyzed data
9. Preparation of draft BR&E plan for Columbus by City staff
10. Task Force Meeting 4, March 12 to receive and respond to draft plan
11. Finalize BR&E plan
12. ColumBiz Business Appreciation event to announce and present the BR&E plan to Columbus officials and businesses. April 3???

Appendix 3. Business Recruitment

Recruiting of the participating businesses was done by Elizabeth Mursko, Columbus City Administrator. She estimates that this activity took approximately 40 hours in the fall, 2013. Although this is a significant use of a key administrator's time, it is likely that the participation rate by businesses would not have been nearly as strong without Elizabeth's name recognition and her determined efforts to make this project a success. Unlike many consumer focus group research projects, none of the participants were offered any kind of gift or nominal token of appreciation for participating. However, meals were served since the meetings were conducted during breakfast or dinner time slots. Elizabeth estimates that the work involved with the meal organizing and meeting planning took her and city staff members an additional 40 hours. City staff drafted individual Thank You's to each business following their participation in the focus groups.

Appendix 4. Columbus BR&E Focus Group Protocol and Interview Guide (as used in four focus groups)

Instructions

[Moderator exact words are in *italics*]
[Instructions are in brackets]
[Key points are underlined]
[Section information is **bolded**]

[If question is nominal, it is noted in brackets. Nominal questioning will occasionally be used to ensure that each participant answers a question; participants answer in a circular fashion.]

Purpose of the focus group - 7 minutes

- *Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in today's discussion.*
- Who we are: *I'm* [name and title]*, and I'll be moderating the discussion today while* [name and title] *takes notes. We are from the University of Minnesota Extension Program.*
- Sponsors*: The program is locally sponsored by*
    - *the City of Columbus Economic Development Authority (or EDA),*
    - *the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality*
    - *Connexus Energy,*
    - *Xcel Energy.*

We believe our existing businesses are our best prospects for future growth. The purpose of the Columbus Business Retention & Expansion program is to see how we can help these businesses thrive and grow.
The long-term program goals are

- *to demonstrate support for local businesses,*
- *increase businesses' abilities to compete in the global economy,*
- *the establishment and implementation of a strategic plan for economic development in Columbus,*
- *and the strengthening of community capacity to sustain economic development.*

As local business managers and owners we value your input as we seek to understand the experience of local businesses in Columbus, to learn what about Columbus affects business both positively or negatively, and to learn areas in which the business environment can be improved.

We appreciate your time and effort in helping to strengthen the business community in Columbus.

Process & Ground Rules

Throughout the discussion today it is important that you express yourself openly as there are no

right or wrong answers. Please speak up if your business has a different opinion or experience from that being expressed by others. We hope to hear from everyone on each question, but there is no such thing as "your turn." You do not need to answer in a circular manner.

Please think of this as a guided conversation and not as a direct question and answer. We want you to respond to each others' input, opinions, and experience, and I am here simply to guide and moderate the discussion.

We are audio recording the session to ensure accuracy in writing up our report. However, your responses will not be directly linked with your name or the name of your business. The group will be identified as a group of owners and managers of businesses in Columbus. Individual responses will be kept confidential and only group information will be released.

If you have any questions, concerns, or opinions to discuss after today, you may contact our team. [Hand out information cards/provide email info on board] or the members of the Columbus BR&E Task Force [provide list of members]. The results of these focus groups and the Columbus Business Retention & Expansion Plan will be presented at the ColumBiz business appreciation event in April.

Because we are taping and taking notes, I may remind you occasionally to speak up so that we can hear you clearly. Please feel free to ask me to repeat or clarify a question if you need. Please make this an active discussion amongst each other. Thank you for your time and agreeing to participate!

Finally, at the end of the focus group we are going to spend a few minutes having you answer some "clicker" questions in order to quickly get some more information. It will be anonymous and kind of fun to see the group's answers to these questions while providing some more useful information for the BR&E Task Force and the Columbus Economic Development Authority.

Icebreaker - 10 minutes

So, let's get started. [Sit back after asking questions to allow conversation to flow].

- *Please tell us your name and the name of your business.*

- *How long has your business been in Columbus?]*
  - [Follow-up*: Did your business begin in Columbus or move here?*]

- *What is your role, and how long have you been in your role there?*

Participant Perceptions - 20 minutes

I'd like to hear a bit more about your perception of Columbus as a place to do business.

- *Please describe the attitude of the community in Columbus towards business.*

- *If a friend or colleague was considering starting a business or expanding their business, how would you describe Columbus as a location for business?*
  - [Follow-up: *Why (or why not) choose Columbus?*]
  - [Follow-up: *Would you recommend it as a business locale?]*
  - [Follow-up: *How does it compare to other locations?]*

- *What do you see as the critical needs facing your business in the next three years?*

Strengths and Weaknesses of Columbus as a business locale - 10 minutes

I'd like to hear more about your experiences with Columbus as a location for a business.

- *What aspect of doing business in Columbus contributes most to your business success?*
  - [Probe*: How does this help your business? Is this a local or regional issue? Is it particular to Columbus? How does this factor compare to other locations? Does anyone else have other experiences or opinions?*]

- *Please describe the most important aspect of Columbus that detracts from or limits your success as a business.*
  - [Probe: *How does this limit or reduce your business? How does it compare to other locations? Are these local or regional issues? Are they particular to Columbus? Does anyone else have other experiences or opinions?*]

- *Is there anything Columbus could do to help address your business needs or improve your business success?*
  - [Follow-up: *Are there barriers to your success that the City should remove?*]

Community Services questions - 10 minutes

I'm interested in hearing more about the Community Services in Columbus and how this impacts business.

- *Has your business had any problems with local community services in the last 5 years?*

[First provide time for answers to arise organically. If examples are not forthcoming, give each person a handout listing Community Services. Give them a moment to peruse the list]

  - [Probe: *When did these problems occur? Are they still a problem?]*
  - [Follow-up: *Have you been impacted by City Code Enforcement?*]
  - [Prompt: *Do Columbus fire and building inspections impact your business? How so?]*

- *Do any aspects of the services provided by utility companies for telephone, internet, and energy services in Columbus impact your business?*
  - [Probe: *Are there issues of quality, reliability, cost, or availability?*]

- *Do these problems affect the likelihood of your business remaining or expanding in Columbus?*
  - [Prompt: *Can you give me an example of when and how they impacted this decision?*]
  - [Probe: *Has Columbus, over time, become an easier or more difficult place to do business?*

Economic Development Priorities - 5 minutes

The city is examining its economic development plan and will use these focus groups as one input into the decision-making and planning process.

- *What are your thoughts on what Columbus should be doing for economic development?*
  - [Follow-up: *Are there tools or forms of assistance for retaining or expanding your business that the City could provide?]*
  - [Follow-up: *Is there anything specific the City is doing that is causing barriers to or restricting you from remaining or expanding in Columbus?*]

- *Where should Columbus go from here and how should it invest its limited resources for economic development?*
  - [Follow-up: *Should Columbus focus on attracting new businesses? Helping existing businesses expand? Assisting in expanding workforce skills? Providing help to entrepreneurs? Do something else?*

Final Thoughts - Final 10 minutes (maybe go to 15)

Now, I'd like to ask a couple more questions before we conclude the focus group.

- [Nominal]: *Considering everything we discussed today, what is most important to your business and why?*

- *Is there anything else you want to share or discuss? Have we missed anything?*

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the focus group and offer your unique insights!

Clicker Survey - 10 minutes

We will now spend 10 minutes taking a brief survey using clicker technology.

Purpose*: The results of the brief survey will serve two main purposes: (1) they will enrich the focus group results by providing direct responses to some questions that may not be ideally suited for group discussion; (2) they will allow Extension to compare certain trends and results to those obtained in similar programs Extension has undertaken across Minnesota.*

Instructions:

[Demonstrate the use of the clicker.]

Appendix 5: Handout used in Focus Groups with the Community Services Question

The City of Columbus provides the following services:

- Fire (Joint Fire with City of Forest Lake)
- Police (Anoka County Sheriff's Department Contract)
- Street Maintenance (Grading, Graveling, Crack-filling, Sealcoating, etc.)
- Snow Plowing
- Building Department (Questions, Permits, & Inspections)
- Public Utilities (Water & Sewer)
- Administration (Planning & Zoning; Recycling; Licensing)
- Elections
- Forestry
- Parks

Other services provided within the community (not by the City of Columbus):

- Xcel Energy – Electric
- Connexus Energy – Gas / Electric
- CenterPoint Energy – Gas
- Midcontinent Communications – Internet
- CenturyLink – Internet

Appendix 6: Key Quotes for Major Themes in the Focus Groups

Note: These quotes are representative of the major themes which emerged during the focus groups and were intentionally selected by the Extension team, but a caveat is in order: these are meant to be representative of the ***perceptions*** *we heard being stated and addressed by participants. While perceptions and reality are not always identical, perceptions remain incredibly powerful and important.*

Zoning - "away from freeway corridor and off Lake Drive nice things are popping up for sure but lots of clean up needs to be done of the areas in between. This is a major concern for any businesses considering moving in." "business, business, shitty old house"

Community Identity - "when people ask me where I'm from, I just say Forest Lake or Lino Lakes. Nobody knows where Columbus is." "…if I put Columbus down, no one knows where in the state of Minnesota I am." "It would be nice to have a city center or town square…but reality is people aren't going to do it. It's just so desolate. There's just not a population around."

Businesses' Interaction with the City - "…we have the best staff of all. They're very personable, they're knowledgeable. If they don't have an answer, they'll flat out tell you…I'll call you back when I have an answer, so I would say our staff is one of our strengths." "I think that communication is better from the city with the business owners now too…Elizabeth, she spearheaded a lot of this communication." "My opinion is that Columbus recently is much, much more welcoming to businesses."

Economic Development Priorities – "…trying to promote new business should always be a constant thing, because…there aren't a lot of areas that are this close to the city that could provide for a bigger businesses, or industrial so, get that word out would be my suggestion." "Well I think they should always be looking for new business. And I think they should help the businesses that are here. That should just be constant. And the promotion of the businesses within the community, to buy…from local businesses."

Location and Geography – "…it is a great location as far as the freeway access no matter which direction you're going…" "We really face a tough geographic layout. We don't have any crossroads to work with…you really have nothing to work with as far as place to put businesses and corners and stoplights..." "If you need traffic, I wouldn't move here." "It's a challenge...the watershed…you typically have to do 150 or 200% replacement. And so ultimately (you) can't do it on three acres, and so those are the parcels available. That's a real limiting factor…"

Sense of community amongst business - "…the Lake Drive district, I don't think we really ever coexist with our other business people so if there's some way to maybe get us together so we

could be more helpful to the city…if all the business got together…we probably could help..." "20 years ago we started this all-business thing for Columbus. It used to be once a week, or once a month, and that was pretty good…"

Critical Needs & Problems – "that freeway corridor is the main corridor for Columbus and our properties could flourish at some point but not without traffic control, and not without looking at the zoning issues that we have." "Phone and internet are horrendous." "(I) got the false alarm on the security system...It took me…about 40 minutes to get there, and he (the police officer) comes strolling in 35 minutes later. I mean they could have hauled it all out…all the computers and everything."

Unknowns/lack of clarity - "you've got to get that interchange real estate access fixed…Right now…not knowing where the road's going to go and the traffic patterns, no one is going to invest." "What comes first? The interchange and the improvements, or the business?…that has to get squared away so that people can make decisions…they're going to have a hard time advancing economic development without having things a little more defined." "I think consistency in…the permits and all of that needs to be really across the board." "If somebody were to come up to here and ask Columbus, can you show me that vision, what do you see is changing, happening? …Because, if none of us have actually seen this, what are they going to show some guy that walks in the door?"

Participant Suggestions for Improvement - "It (the freeway bridge) is the link to the rest of the metro…if it's really done right that will really give you the doorstep or the calling card for the community." "I liked (the) idea of getting someone in there to sell the community. That downtown corridor or freeway corridor…but I do think that same person does have to watch the Lake Drive thing as well." "…streamline (the) permitting process and when people go in they know they have one list…and get the word out that Columbus is…strict but easy to work with…"

Need to attract keystone/big name businesses – "Get some kind of a signature business in here that everybody knows..." "We need businesses with some horsepower, maybe money behind them. Those are welcoming businesses."

Networking amongst the businesses during Focus Groups – "(there are) new lines everywhere so maybe that's the new Midcontinent? I better make a phone call then, I didn't know it was even an option." "Me neither. I'll be checking though."

Appendix 7: Focus Group Summary (this is one example from one of the four focus groups)

- Perceptions: City is proactive; forward thinking; and seeking expansion of the tax base.
- "Old guard": Issue of people wanting to keep rural, 5 acres is a problem.
    - Residents speaking out against my business even though they lived in another part of city. "Residents stand for resistance."
    - Tipping point needs to be reached for Lake Drive to shift from mixed to businesses
- Getting employees is a huge challenge; skilled jobs are hard to fill, unskilled aren't. Losing some to the Bakken in North Dakota but many move back
- Location and Geography:
    - Columbus has been great as a location for "destination businesses," as customers and employees can easily get there and they avoid traffic snags
    - Business owners would recommend Columbus as a place to do business, but only for certain types of business, such as "destination business" (i.e. construction, storage, and warehousing)
- Services:
    - Policing was much more of an issue than in other groups and was a serious concern. Poor response time is huge issue and multiple owners say they have responded to their own alarm systems, arriving 30-40 minutes later and still beating the police by 30 minutes. Some participants with these complaints still say the level of crime in Columbus is much better than other locations in which they have had businesses. The idea of Columbus sharing police services (tri-city) instead of using the County was suggested as a means to improve response times
    - Landline issue: old lines in ground an issue as people lose service.
    - Internet used to be a major problem and complaint. Most participants have solved this issue and are now mostly satisfied. It was mentioned that significant financial resources and sometimes even personal connections were required by the businesses to address this issue.
- Economic Development:
    - We need "More business period", therefore recruitment and expansion and entrepreneurship are all necessary.
    - TIF could be beneficial in Lake Drive.
    - Aesthetics of freeway interchange - geometry and appearance of I-35/97 interchange. Freeway district and interchange are pressing needs requiring planning and clarity. It was mentioned Columbus cannot do this alone and it will take County and possibly State involvement to help with the vision and the funding.
    - City needs to help develop property; this is a bottleneck now.
    - Proposed solutions to the lack of clarity on what usage the City will accept for a given piece of property ranged from strictly informational (hold educational sessions) to more active (hire a specialist).
        - Create materials and provide learning sessions that explain what will fly, what won't on commercial or industrial siting. Perhaps create a

continuum of examples of development proposals from ‘sure thing” to “probably” to “maybe” to “no way”.

        - Hire a professional to serve as a one-stop shop person with a contractor-like mentality to walk businesses through the steps of the process, who to contact and who to deal with along the way. It was specifically mentioned that while Elizabeth does a wonderful job, this is too large of an additional burden for her to take on herself.
- Overall concerns:
    - Make commercial and industrial district be widened out or follow property line. Be consistent and clear about it (Lake Drive issue mostly?)
    - Be proactive in working with business: not just say “no, no, no”
    - Business perspective is not being heard by the city. Only residents come to the meetings. Years ago there was a business group in Columbus but not now.

Appendix 8. Clicker Polling – Overview

Overview

Due to the nature of focus groups, it was more appropriate to ask participants a certain series of questions using a more confidential method. Following the focus group sessions, a short series of questions was projected using PowerPoint, and participants submitted their responses via electronic audience response devices with 1-10/A-J options (i.e. clickers). Software (Turning Point 5) instantly collected individual responses and aggregated them, making them not identifiable to either the participant or their business. The results enrich the focus group results by providing direct responses to some questions that may not be ideally suited for group discussion and allow Extension to compare certain trends and results to those obtained in survey programs Extension has undertaken across Minnesota.

A total number of 19 people (N=19) took the poll. ***A problem with the technology meant that one of the four focus groups was not able to participate in the clicker survey.*** In some cases the number of responses exceeds 19 because participants could choose multiple responses to a single question. In other cases, some people didn't respond because the question wasn't applicable to them, and therefore N may equal a number less than 19. Percentages in each chart were rounded and therefore percentages on some charts may not equal exactly 100%.

An initial test question was provided to ensure that each participant was able to respond and understood the technology. Below the results of the other clicker survey questions are examined and benchmark questions are compared to previous BR&E results.

List of clicker questions asked with possible answers:

1. Test Question: What is your favorite Minnesota sport team? (Click ONE option) (Multiple Choice)

- 9 options provided

2. Are you currently considering? (Click ALL that apply) (Multiple Choice - Multiple Response)

- Downsizing
- Selling
- Merging with or acquiring another business
- Moving
- Closing
- Expanding - at this location
- Expanding - adding another location

- Other changes to business plans
- No change

3a. If you said in Question 2 that you are considering downsizing, selling, moving or closing

- Changing market conditions
- Overcrowded building
- No land for expansion
- Transportation problems
- Crime/vandalism
- Low work productivity
- Environmental concerns
- Rigid code enforcement (including ordinances & building codes)
- High local taxes

3b. If you said in Question 2 that you are considering downsizing, selling, moving or closing,

- High state taxes
- Lease expiration
- Poor telecommunications/internet
- Insufficient labor supply
- Retiring
- Another business opportunity
- Business incentives from another jurisdiction
- Trying to sell business but unable to sell
- Other

4. If moving or expanding at another location, where are you considering? (Click ALL that apply) (Multiple Choice - Multiple Response)

- Columbus
- Another city in Anoka County
- Another county in Minnesota
- Another state
- Outside of the United States
- No current plans to move or expand

5. What overall rating would you give the community as a place to conduct business? (Click ONE answer) (Multiple Choice)

- Poor -1
- 2
- 3
- 4

- Excellent - 5

6. What overall grade would you give the community as a place to live? (Click ONE answer) (Multiple Choice)

- Poor -1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- Excellent - 5

7. In the last year, did the community's business climate get stronger, weaker, or stay the same? (Click ONE answer) (Multiple Choice)

- Weaker -1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- Stronger- 5

8. If the business climate got weaker or stronger, what 1 or 2 factors are most attributable? (Click ONE or TWO answers) (Multiple Choice - Multiple Response)

- Columbus
- The Twin Cities Metropolitan region
- Minnesota
- The United States
- Global trends

9. How do you rate the City's efforts to promote business retention and expansion through this exercise? (Click ALL that apply) (Multiple Choice - Multiple Response)

- A waste of time
- Not very helpful
- On the the wrong track
- Too soon to tell
- I appreciate the City's efforts
- The City needs to do more
- Very helpful

Appendix 9: Bibliography

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