



Regional Director Manual

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Purpose

The purpose of this manual is to provide the Lead Center policies and procedures, deadlines, and other requirements that pertain to America's SBDC Iowa Regional Directors. This manual is not intended to replace the duties required in the annual subcontracts with the host institutions. A printed copy of this manual will be given to each new Regional Director during new employee orientation.

This handbook has been written to serve as the guide for the Lead Center/Regional Center relationship. Please keep in mind, this manual contains only general information and guidelines. It is not intended to be comprehensive or to address all the possible situations and scenarios that may be encountered by a Regional Director. If questions do arise, please contact the Lead Center to clarify and help understand how to resolve an issue. This manual does not confer any contractual right, either expressed or implied, to remain a Regional Director of America's SBDC Iowa.

The procedures, practices and policies described may be modified or discontinued from time to time. Efforts will be made to ensure this document is updated in a timely manner and to inform the Regional Directors that an update has been made.

Administrative

New Employee Orientation

When a new SBDC Regional Director starts, he/she will be contacted by the SBDC State Director to set up an orientation schedule. As part of the orientation the State Director will assign a team of existing SBDC personnel to mentor the new Regional Director.

During the orientation, the new Regional Director will be introduced to the resources available and best practices that have been established. These resources will provide a basis for counseling and working with clients. A copy of this manual will be provided as part of the resources.

Lead Center staff will schedule a site visit after the new Regional Director has had a chance to go through the resources and get acclimated to their center. Staff will provide additional information on budgeting, financials and data entry.

Regional Director Certification

Every new Regional Director must complete the University of Toledo Certified Business Advisor (CBA) Program within one year of starting employment.

The Associate State Director initiates the registration process by informing the University of Ohio, Toledo of the new Regional Director and his/her contact information. The Regional Director will then receive an email with the registration form from Toledo. The Regional Director completes the registration form and submits it to Toledo along with payment for the course.

After the registration process is completed, the Regional Director submits an invoice and a copy of the registration form to the Accountant (Duane Johnson, duanej@iastate.edu) at the Lead Center for reimbursement of the registration fee.

The Lead Center will reimburse the initial registration fee for the program. If the Regional Director does not pass one of the program modules, the Regional Director must pay from his/her own budget to retake the exam.

Continuing Education Requirements

Continuing education for the Certified Business Advisor Program starts October 1st of the federal fiscal year after graduation. Each continuing education year is considered individually and no carry forward hours are allowed. Twenty hours of continuing education is required per federal fiscal year. Guidelines for continuing education and the reporting form can be found in *Appendix A*.

The following items are required to receive credit for continuing education and must be submitted to the Program Assistant (Deb Duncan, dduncan@iastate.edu) by October 5th of each year for the preceding year:

- Ohio CBA Training Report Transcript.

- An agenda for each class or meeting attended and number of hours for the class or meeting. (Lunch hours and breaks cannot be included in total hours).
- For the annual conference, the code given out by the instructor at the end of the class must be included on the agenda or the certificate from the class can be submitted.

Subcontracts

Iowa State University subcontracts with the Regional Director's Host Institution on an annual basis. Subcontracts are issued based on the source of funds and performance requirements of the prime agreement that Iowa State University has with the federal or state agency. The Regional Director is required to read the subcontract annually and become familiar with the terms of the subcontract. The main subcontract issued to every Regional Center is the SBA Cooperative Agreement.

Counseling Forms

New Regional Director

The following forms are required to be completed and submitted to the Associate State Director (Tricia Janes, triciaj@iastate.edu) before an individual begins counseling.

1. Conflict of Interest - Standards of Conduct Form
2. Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, Ineligibility and Voluntary Exclusion – Lower Tier Covered Transactions

New Counselor

Before any counselor can counsel SBDC clients and be added to the Neoserra system, they must be given a copy of the Counselor Guidelines and complete the following forms. A new counselor checklist is included in Appendix B to make sure all items have been discussed with the counselor. The signed forms need to be submitted to the Associate State Director (Tricia Janes, triciaj@iastate.edu).

1. Conflict of Interest – Standards of Conduct Form
2. Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, Ineligibility and Voluntary Exclusion – Lower Tier Covered Transactions
3. Counselor Information Sheet
4. Counselor Agreement Form (Make sure to include the compensation rate on the form and update the form any time the compensation rate is changed.)

See Appendix B for forms mentioned above.

Conflict of Interest – Standards of Conduct Form

All America's SBDC Iowa employees, counselors and administrators who have any contact with clients or access to client files, including Neoserra, must sign the Conflict of Interest – Standards of Conduct Form annually.

Local Advisory Boards

Each Regional Center must establish and utilize a local advisory board. The following guideline documents have been developed for the Local Advisory Boards.

- Local Advisory Board Requirements
- Local Advisory Board Bylaws Guidelines
- Local Advisory Board Member Roles
- Local Advisory Board List Template

A list of the local advisory members in the prescribed Excel template must be updated on a yearly basis or sooner if changes are made and emailed to the Program Assistant (Deb Duncan – dduncan@iastate.edu) in the Lead Center.

Regional centers must provide a representative to the State Advisory Board from their local advisory board; this representative will serve a three-year term on the State Advisory Board. The State Advisory Board meets four times per year; two meetings are in-person meetings and two are conference call meetings. The Regional Center's State Advisory Board representative's name and contact information must be sent to the Program Assistant at the Lead Center. A copy of the minutes of the local advisory board meetings also needs to be sent to the Program Assistant within 30 days of the meeting date.

See Appendix G for forms mentioned above.

Directors Meetings

Regional Directors are required to attend Quarterly Directors Meetings. Some meetings are held as videoconferences. A two-day in-person meeting is held in the spring and fall. Meeting dates for the upcoming year are set at the final meeting of the previous calendar year. A tentative agenda is sent out one week before each meeting. Each Regional Director may miss one meeting a year but the Regional Director should contact the Lead Center in advance to make arrangements. If missing a meeting is due to an event or training, a summary report must be filled out and submitted to the Lead Center.

Extended Leave Time

The Regional Director must email the State Director (Lisa Shimkat, lshimkat@iastate.edu) at the Lead Center prior to taking extended vacation or sick leave time so that the Lead Center is aware that the Regional Director will be absent. The Lead Center may request the Host to appoint an Interim Regional Director for some extended leave instances.

Programmatic and Financial Reviews

The SBA requires that the Lead Center perform periodic programmatic and financial reviews on each Regional Center at least every other year. The State Director and/or the Associate State Director will perform the review. If there is a particular concern with a Regional Center, a review may be performed annually until the concern is resolved.

The Regional Director will be notified by the Associate State Director approximately 4 weeks prior to the review to confirm the date and time and to request programmatic and financial data.

See Appendix F for America's SBDC Iowa Center Review Template.

Time and Effort Reports

Federal regulations require that time spent on a federal project, along with any cost share, be documented by the Regional Center's host institution. All employees who are paid by federal funds or pledged, as cost share on the project, must provide a time and effort report.

See Appendix L for Time and Effort Report Template.

Document Retention and Access

Retention

The SBA Notice of Award requires that "financial records, supporting documents, statistical records and other records must be retained by the recipient for a period of three years from submission of the final financial report. Exceptions include records related to audits, appeals, litigation or the settlement of claims started before the end of the three year period will be retained until such audits, appeals, litigation or claims have been resolved and final action taken."

As a best practice, the Lead Center advises the keeping of current fiscal year records and the previous four fiscal years. If the host institution has document retention requirements, please follow whichever requirement is longer.

Access

Access to client files, notes, financial information, business, etc. are to remain confidential. Computers containing access to client records are to be password protected. Client document files are to be kept in files with locks accessible only by authorized personnel.

Financial

SBA Cooperative Agreement

SBA Cooperative Agreement subcontracts are based on the current fiscal year state and federal appropriations. These subcontracts are issued each federal fiscal year after the federal Notice of Award (NOA) is received by Iowa State University. The subcontracts follow the current year SBA program announcement and the following costs principles and OMB Uniform Administrative Requirements:

- 2 CFR Part 220-Cost principles for Educational Institutions, See http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/fedreg/2005/083105_a21.pdf
- 2 CFR Part 215-Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and other Non-Profit Organizations, See http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/fedreg/2005/083105_a21.pdf
- OMB Circular-A-133-Audits of States, Local Governments, and Other Non-Profit Orgs., See http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/fedreg/2005/083105_a21.pdf

Annual Budget Process

Each year at the end of May or beginning of June (exact dates depend upon state and federal deadlines), the State Director and Associate State Director determine the amount of the allocations to each Regional Center. The Regional Director will be notified via email of the amount of allocation for their state/federal dollars and any other funds.

The Lead Center will send out a budget template for the state/federal funds, a Cooperative Agreement Worksheet, and a Cash Match Certification form. These forms must be completed by the Regional Director and signed by both the Regional Director and the Host Institution representative. Instructions for the completion of the templates and Cash Match Certification form are listed on the Cooperative Agreement Worksheet.

See Appendix C for forms listed above.

Financial Reports

Financial reports are required to be submitted to the Lead Center by the 10th of the month for the previous month's expenses. The final reports are to be submitted to the Accountant (Duane Johnson, duanej@iastate.edu) by October 10th. Please refer to the subcontract applicable to the funds for exact dates and reporting requirements.

Exhibit D

This is the form sent to obtain reimbursement for funds spent each month. The following paragraphs will explain the columns on the form. A list of category definitions is included with the forms.

See Appendix D for forms and category definitions

Contract Funds

- Funds that have been expended and are requesting reimbursement for the time period stated above on the report.
- Must be supported by the Host Institution ledger and are generally supported by annual contract (for salaries and benefits), vendor invoices, consulting agreements, etc.
- Must be accounted for in an account separate from other SBDC funds.

Center Match

- Funds that have been expended for the time period stated above on the report.
- Must be supported by the Host Institution ledger and supported in the same manner as contract funds.
- Must be reported monthly.
- Can be from the Host Institution or other local sources.
- Must be accounted for in an account separate from other SBDC funds. The account must contain only cash match for the SBA project.
- Cannot be from program income or other federal sources.

Program Income Match

- Funds that are used from program income to provide for operating expenses not covered by the contract funds or values funds budget. This is not a required match, but a budgeting tool for program income used for normal operating expenses.
- Cannot be used for any type of cash match.

Exhibit E

This form is used to report program income. The following paragraphs explain the categories on the form.

See Appendix E for form

Income

Training (workshops)

Tuition receipts received from workshops sponsored or given by the Regional SBDC.

Sale of Books, etc.

Receipts from the sale of books, publications, etc.

Other

Receipts that are not included in one of the categories above, such as non-tuition receipts received for workshop presentations, and other. These receipts must be explained and/or described.

Expenditures

Personnel

Salary expenses for personnel not covered under the normal operating budget.

Fringe

Fringe benefits for salary listed in above category.

Professional Services (consult)

Expenses for consultants not covered under the normal operating budget.

Travel

Travel expenses for staff not included under the normal operating budget.

Supplies

Expenses not included in the contract budget for Center supplies.

Other

Expenses not included in any of the above categories. These expenses must be explained and/or described.

Marketing

Marketing Materials

All America's SBDC Iowa Regional Centers must adhere to the America's SBDC Brand Standards Guide and the America's SBDC Iowa Publications Requirements when designing marketing materials. The Brand Standards Guide indicates how all marketing materials should be designed, including layout specifications, colors and fonts. The Publications Requirements file details what acknowledgments, disclaimers, statements and copyrights are required to be on all America's SBDC Iowa marketing materials. Both documents can be found on our SBDC website and on the Resource Flash Drive.

A variety of marketing materials have already been designed by the Lead Center and are available for use by the Regional Centers. They can be obtained by contacting the Lead Center.

America's SBDC Iowa Logo and Fonts

The America's SBDC Iowa logo must be prominently displayed in all electronic and print communications, including, but not limited to, websites, brochures, flyers, training materials, pamphlets, business cards, stationery items, ads, etc. There are several different versions of the logo available and none should be altered (see Brand Standards Guide). Different JPEG versions of our logo are available on the Resource Flash Drive. If a higher-resolution, vectored logo file (.eps) is needed, please contact the Lead Center.

The America's SBDC Iowa logo must be surrounded on all sides by, at minimum, a half-inch (1/2") space.

Email Signatures

Each center is required to comply with the email signature requirements, which include Calibri font in sizes 10 and 12, our specific Red and Blue pantone font colors, and the logo in a pre-determined layout. Earned certifications and designations, along with social media sites and blog links may be added to the signature, as long as they are kept in the same font and colors as the rest of the signature block. An example email signature is also available on the Resource Flash Drive.

Signature Example:

Tricia Janes | *Associate State Director*

America's SBDC Iowa

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1805 Collaboration Place, Suite 1340
Ames, IA 50010-9166
P: 515 294-0021
F: 515 294-6522
www.iowasbdc.org



Acknowledgements/Disclaimers/Copyright

All SBDC marketing materials and publications that are about programs funded with SBA funds must include the specific SBA disclaimer(s). All America's SBDC Iowa programs, regardless of funding, must contain the ISU non-discrimination statement. Both of these are outlined in the SBDC Publications Requirements file on our SBDC website and on the Resource Flash Drive. The wording on all of these acknowledgments/disclaimers cannot be changed, except for the last SBA acknowledgment where the Regional Center's local contact information should be entered.

America's SBDC Iowa Logo and Disclaimers

There are three possible SBA disclaimers that could be used on marketing materials; however, all three are not normally used on the same marketing piece.

1. The SBA logo and the first, most important, SBA acknowledgment (shown in italics) must be used on all marketing materials, except on materials with severe space constraints like ads, signs or banners.

Funded in part through a Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration.

2. Another SBA acknowledgment (shown in italics) must be used on certain marketing/training materials. This is to be used only on materials that contain editorial content, like manuals or books.

Funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration. All opinions, conclusions or recommendations expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the SBA.

3. The final SBA acknowledgement (shown in italics) must be used on any marketing materials printed to promote, or be used at, workshops and seminars.

Reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities will be made if requested at least two weeks in advance. Contact [Insert here the name and phone number of the regional center person who will make the arrangements].

Iowa State University (ISU) Non-Discrimination Statement

ISU's non-discrimination statement must be used on all marketing materials except those with severe space constraints, like small ads, and it may not be altered in any way.

Iowa State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, age, ethnicity, religion, national origin, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, sex, marital status, disability, or status as a U.S. veteran. Inquiries regarding non-discrimination policies may be directed to the Office of Equal Opportunity, 3410 Beardshear Hall, 515 Morrill Road, Ames, Iowa 50011, Tel. 515-294-7612, email eooffice@iastate.edu.

New or Revised Marketing Materials

Brochures, flyers, pamphlets, posters, newspaper advertisements, class/training brochures or listings, power points, etc. should be designed to match the America's SBDC Brand Standards Guide. Any new or revised items should be sent to the Lead Center for review and to develop a catalog of materials.

SBDC Stationery, Brochures, Folders, and Business Cards

Business cards, letterhead stationery and letterhead envelopes are printed by the Lead Center for all centers at no cost to the regional center. Stationery items take approximately 3 weeks once ordered before mailed. The basic SBDC Professional Services Brochure, Market Research Brochure, Pocket Folders and Note Cards are also available for each center to order at no cost.

Marketing Success Stories

Marketing Success Stories will be handled at the Lead Center. Regional Centers will need to provide client information and a signed publicity release to start the process. When speaking with clients about Success Stories, let them know that someone from the Lead Center will be contacting them to learn more about their business, how the SBDC helped them, and what impact the help received has had on their business. Explain to the client how the Success Story will be used to help tell the story of the SBDC and how the services and resources provided positively impact small businesses. A copy of the story will be sent to the client for final approval.

Additionally, press releases will be sent out for each new business start for our clients. When there is a new business start, please send the information to the Lead Center along with a publicity release, so the Lead Center can send out a press release about the new business start. *See Appendix H for Publicity Release*

America's SBDC Iowa Annual Special Entrepreneur Awards

All regional centers must actively participate in the America's SBDC Iowa annual special entrepreneur awards programs by submitting nominations of eligible entrepreneurs each year. These awards are the Deb Dalziel Woman Entrepreneur Achievement Award and the Neal Smith Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

- **Deb Dalziel Woman Entrepreneur Achievement Award Program**

This special award program, named in memory of former Regional Director Deb Dalziel who died in 1999, honors the accomplishments of a female entrepreneur who has significantly changed or improved her own life and the lives of those around her.

- **Neal Smith Entrepreneur of the Year Award**

This special award program was established in October 2006 to honor former Congressman Neal Smith and highlight the accomplishments of entrepreneurs in Iowa.

Nominations for these awards are due November 10th of each year. See *Appendix I* for the Special Entrepreneur Award Programs Process and the nomination form.

America's SBDC Iowa Website

The official state website is located at <http://www.iowasbdc.org>. Each Regional Center has a page on the website that includes their picture, contact information, general information about the center, success stories, workshop events, testimonials, useful links, and a Director's Corner. Regional Centers should send information into the Lead Center to customize the Useful Links and Director's Corner of their center's page.

Director Resources

Forms and templates can be found on the Director Resources page on the America's SBDC Iowa website.

Center Management

America's SBDC Iowa uses the Neoserra database to collect and track client data, counseling information and milestones. All activity that occurs is tracked through Neoserra. America's SBDC Iowa has developed resources and procedures to help ensure the accurate collection of client data. The following is an overview of those resources and procedures.

SBA Form 641 – Client Request for Counseling

This form is what a client fills out to request counseling services. Each client must have a signed 641 before counseling begins. Each counselor should go over the form with the client to ensure accurate information. This form identifies the area in which assistance is requested and protects the SBDC, SBA and your host institution from liability. A signed Request for Counseling or electronic signature must be on file for each client and available for review by the Lead Center or the SBA. The Lead Center will provide the most current version of the form. *See Form 641 in Appendix J.*

Either way the client fills out the requesting for counseling information, the counselor should make every attempt to verify the client's information.

As a best practice, an updated 641 should be acquired approximately every 12 months. If the client originally signed up electronically, the counselor should either print out a copy of the client information and verify it with the client or go over the information with the client during the counseling session. This is also a good opportunity to discover possible milestones and impact.

Intake Requests in Neoserra

This is an electronic way for the client to fill out a 641 form. A client must fill out all sections in order for the request to go through, ensuring the necessary information is collected. A client provides an electronic signature during the process and this can be used instead of a paper 641 with a signature. Centers are notified via email when a client has completed an electronic intake request.

Counseling Activity and Session Notes

After each counseling session, the counselor records the session notes in Neoserra. These notes are a narrative of the session and should be comprehensive enough for any other counselor to understand the dynamics of the case, including what the client and counselor learned during the session. Appropriate documentation of contact, preparation and travel time must be included for each session. The following information should be addressed in the counseling session notes.

- *Background – History of the client and/or business*
- *Summary – Overview of the topics covered during the session*

- *Findings – By the counselor and the client*
- *Action Plan – Describe the roles and time frames of the action plan*

Accurate records of all time spent with a client should be maintained as an indication of the amount and quality of time spent with the client. The SBA Project Officer and the America's SBDC Iowa Lead Center analyze these records during on-site reviews and also by the America's SBDC Accreditation Review Team. While the session notes are a confidential record of what occurred in the session, the notes should be objective and thorough enough to share with the client, if requested, or presentable in a court of law.

SBA Form 888 - Management Training Form

This form is used to record information regarding trainings and workshops. The form tracks the attendees, the demographics of the attendees and any fees that were collected. The information must be recorded in Neoserra. In addition to entry into Neoserra, each Regional Center is required to keep the following information for each workshop on file for audit purposes. If any of these items are missing, please include a note in the file as to why they are missing.

- Completed 888
- Attendees list
- Any marketing/promotional items used to promoted the workshop
- Surveys used to evaluate the workshop or a summary of surveys needs to be kept on file

Recording Advocacy and Outreach

Advocacy and Outreach activities are a vital part of America's SBDC Iowa program. In order to track and report these activities, Regional Directors and Counselors need to record this information in Neoserra. Examples of such activities are listed below.

- Economic Development Meetings
- Presentations as schools and civic groups
- Regional Director Meetings
- Venture School
- Webinars/Trainings

Continuing Education sessions related to the CBA should be recorded in Neoserra and the appropriate documentation uploaded.

All Advocacy, Outreach, and Continuing Education information is recorded under Professional Development in Neoserra and is to be entered by the 10th of the month for the previous month.

Economic Impact and Milestones

Our cooperative agreement with the SBA requires a certain level of in-depth advising activity. Therefore, SBDC resources are balanced between providing a public service and generating economic impact. Impact can be defined as quantitative and qualitative (see below). The areas of emphasis include job creation and retention, business startup and expansion, capital formation (loans, equity financing, and owner injection), along with increased sales.

America's SBDC Iowa will be collecting economic impact through the Client Impact Form. This document is the method to track the progress of each client and collecting updated financing, job creation, job retention and sales increases. The Client Impact Form will also be used to provide attribution and verification of all milestones.

Approved wording in email format provided by the Lead Center may also be used to gather economic impact. *See Appendix M.*

The Client Impact Sheet includes the following language that a client needs to understand and agree to:

“The information you provide allows us to assess the impact of our services as well as receive program funding. All information will be kept confidential and only combined total amounts will be reported.”

“America's SBDC Iowa played an important role in our business achieving the impact stated above.”

Once a client has signed off on a client impact form or sent back confirmation by email, the Regional Center will forward the information to the Lead Center for input into Neoserra. Only milestones entered by the Lead Center will be counted toward yearly goals.

Each Regional Director is ultimately responsible for reviewing and approving all client impact information.

Counseling Guidelines

America's SBDC Iowa (SBDC) provides high quality business and economic development assistance to small businesses and pre-venture entrepreneurs. The assistance provided helps our clients start their business, grow their business, expand their business and positively impact their communities.

The network of America's SBDC Iowa provides no fee, confidential, customized, professional business advice and counseling to entrepreneurs and businesses. Affordable workshops are also provided to help teach practical skills and techniques for small businesses. America's SBDC Iowa is the only nationally-accredited entrepreneurial development program in the state.

America's SBDC Iowa can help unlock the potential of any business by providing business expertise normally reserved for large, established companies. The services provided by the SBDC focus on specific business needs.

State and federal legislatures and universities have increased pressure for service delivery programs such as the Small Business Development Center to be more accountable to the taxpayers. Through the Government Performance Results Act, the federal government mandated that SBA and its resource partners have to be accountable and outcome-driven if they expect to receive continued Congressional and taxpayer support.

One-on-one counseling is a process of two-way communication between the counselor and the client. Counseling is an educational process to help the client better manage their business, improve performance and increase their skills and confidence.

The information and tools provided to the client should be substantive in nature to each client's needs. One way of helping to determine the substance of the counseling session is to think about if a paid consultant would have charged for the client interaction. America's SBDC Iowa does not compete with the private sector, but this helps make sure the session is valuable to the client.

America's SBDC Iowa is committed to providing the best services possible for each client. We want to every client's experience to be positive and for the relationship to continue over the years. This is the foundation for counseling sessions along with the benefits the client receives. Counseling sessions should focus on what is in the best interest of the client and their business and not what the counselor feels is most important.

Attitude/Culture

- Provide an upbeat, positive atmosphere and attitude
- Stay positive and look for ways to accomplish what the client is communicating
- Put the client at ease. Say, "Welcome, thank you for coming in today."
- For most service requests, confirm with the client that, "we can help you with that" or "let me see what I can find out for you."
- Keep your client meeting space inviting, open and neat

Engagement Process and Expectations

- Let the client know that you are looking forward to working with them
- Every attempt is made to respond to web requests, emails, and phone messages within 24 hours
- Every attempt is made to schedule appointments within 5-7 days
- Clients outside of the place of the office should be offered phone, web or satellite office options for counseling and resources
- Every attempt is to be made to have clients complete the online request for counseling through the eCenter, using the paper form only when necessary

Pre-venture clients are looking for resources and assistance in their dream of starting a company. Existing businesses, oftentimes, are looking for assistance with a specific issue or help with business strategies. It is very important to take the time to understand what

the client is trying to accomplish. Each entrepreneur and idea deserves your full attention and enthusiasm to create a positive experience. Individuals are looking for help and a direct way to success. Entrepreneurs are often short on time and resources and are looking to the Iowa SBDC to provide guidance in finding the right tools and resources to make their business a success. The goal is to provide each individual and business the services and resources that match their needs.

Understand Before Being Understood

- Welcome the client and start an introductory conversation. Ask questions such as, “What brings you in today?” “What’s new?” “What would you like to work on today?” “What’s your idea?”
- Listen
- Listen
- Listen
- Ask follow-up questions to gain a better understanding of what the client is trying to accomplish
- Acknowledge what you have heard, provide a positive feedback when appropriate and make sure they know you understand their position
- Let the client know that you have ideas on how to help them or will work on finding them the information they may need to make a better informed decision
- Confirm with the client that we can help with the business needs and resources
- Make sure the expectations are clear for both yourself and the client

Working with the Client

Once you have an understanding and confirm the needs of the client, it is time to start working on a plan. While an important and vital component is to teach and provide a learning environment for small businesses, do not confuse this with the desire/need to talk and lecture. Concrete objectives along with a plan and timeline help show you are committed to the client and their business.

- Try to create some type of document/note with action items or To-Do’s. Share this list with your client.
- When talking about numbers/budget, write them down. Try to provide a quick-high level calculation of startup costs, cost of goods sold, margins, market size, revenues, etc., so the client has an example. Make sure the notes and numbers are legible.
- Ask questions of the client. How many clients do you need? What do you think the average sale will be? Where will you source your products? At what cost? Who is your client? Do you need a loan? How does this compare to the industry or what are the current trend/numbers in your region?

- Offer solid comments and direction when appropriate. If you have experience or expertise that is relevant, be brief and to the point.
- Share experiences that have worked for you or other clients in the past.
- Be careful to only use negative statements when absolutely necessary to try to prevent negative outcomes.
- Lead, Show How, and Encourage.
- Remember, ultimately, the business belongs to the owner and they make the final decisions.

Client Reporting

Counseling Case: By SBA definition, a completed “counseling” case is composed of a substantive problem, issue or question presented by the small business client, which requires individual or group advice, guidance or instruction to resolve. The issues presented by the SBDC client must be substantive in nature and require assistance from a resource partner in the formation, management, financing or operation of a small business enterprise. A case may be presented by an individual or more than one individual in one-to-one sessions or through electronic communication, including telephone contact or computer email.

Note: A client will only have ONE initial session during the course of their involvement with America’s SBDC Iowa. Any session after the initial session should be marked as a follow-up session, even if seen by a different counselor or a significant amount of time has elapsed.

Explanations

- An advising session includes all time spent by SBDC Business Counselors when conveying advice, guidance or instructions to individuals or business entities concerning the formation, management, financing and operation of small business enterprises. Such sessions may be conducted on a person-to-person basis or by electronic communications (video or teleconferencing, telephone or email). Research and preparation for sessions includes review of relevant correspondence, research of related questions or problems, and time spent with a client on phone or computer email to gather additional information for preparation of service.
- A case may include email advising sessions. To count email toward SBDC goals, the email advising must conform to the same quality standards as person-to-person advising. As such, email advising must be substantive in nature and require assistance from the SBDC in the formation, management, financing or operation of a small business enterprise.
- To be counted as a session, the advice given should be of sufficient value as to have resulted in a billable client service offered by a paid consultant. The session would include all time spent by SBDC staff in researching, preparing and imparting substantive advice, advising or instructions on the management,

financing and operation of a small business concern. An account of the time spent advising a client must be recorded in Neoserra.

- Indicators other than time may measure an impact for a client. Just as a time log is used to record hours of advising provided, a written statement from the SBDC client may be used to demonstrate an output of the efforts provided. The America's SBDC Iowa network requires a client-signed **Client Impact Sheet** to document the client's perception of the impact of the SBDC services received. Copies of the form are to be uploaded to Neoserra for quarterly review by the Lead Center.

Exceptions (The following are examples of when not to report a client interaction for purposes of client reporting.)

- When the SBDC Business Advisor contacts a client to schedule a meeting and the conversation does not meet the definition of a session. This includes an advisor simply leaving a message for the client.
- When the SBDC Business Advisor provides the client with non-business information (e.g., directions, office hours, activities, or referral to another resource).

Contact is defined as two-way communication between the client and any SBDC Business Counselor. This involves a "live" meeting (conducted in person at the Center, at the place of business or other site, or perhaps via broadcast Internet session) or a telephone conversation. Advising that is limited to email communication is acceptable if the documentation requirements are met.

When the client spends time in an SBDC resource library, only the direct contact time between the client and advisor (such as when the advisor answers questions or spends time instructing the client) can be counted. Such interaction should be noted in the session write-up. For example: "Client is interested in locating industry associations. Showed Ms. Smith how to use the Encyclopedia of Associations and the Business Startup Guides." Even if the client was in the library for 2 hours, only the time actually spent with the client showing the client how to use or discussing the resources can be counted as contact time.

Single –Year Long-Term Clients: Clients with 5 or more hours of CONTACT and PREP time within the current fiscal year.

Preparation is defined as management and/or technical assistance other than contact time that contributes to the overall assistance provided to the client. Examples include market research, development of materials (financial, marketing, technical, etc.) needed by the client. Examples include:

- "Adjusted client cash flows downward by 15% to reflect a more conservative revenue stream for presentation to ABC Bank".
- "Discussed owner injection requirements with the SBA District Office on behalf of the client."
- "Analyzed client chart of accounts for automation of manual bookkeeping system using QuickBooks. Recommended the attached format."

- “Received and synthesized SBDCNet GIS study in support of feasibility analysis.”

Administrative time associated with creating and maintaining client file information must be a conservative reflection of professional staff time spent on the client case file.

Advisors are encouraged to work efficiently and log actual efforts. The standard time allowed is 15 minutes (.25 hour prep). Administrative assistance provided by clerical staff, such as typing, photocopying or data entry, cannot be counted. Only Prep time performed by the following parties can be counted:

- Any SBDC counselor in the America’s SBDC Iowa network.
- SBDC specific resources such as, SBDCNet research, interns, students, etc.

Travel is the time spent on a trip to meet with a client to discuss the client’s business endeavors. In the case of circuit riding (advising clients in a community outside of the city where the Center is located), the round trip travel time is to be divided by the number of clients advised. For example, the advisor travels 1 hour to a rural chamber of commerce and visits with 4 clients that day: 2 hours (round trip)/4 clients = .50 hours travel per client. Travel time does not count for SBA reporting, but should still be logged in Neoserra.

Team Advising: Session involving two or more advisors simultaneously should occur only in limited circumstances, such as during cross training and when the case merits the presence of two advisors at the same time. Advisor specialization is encouraged, particularly in larger Centers, in areas such as finance, marketing, procurement, and other small business disciplines, as well as when clients are shared between field and specialty Centers.

The recommended procedure for documenting team advising sessions would involve an advisor with a particular specialization handling a specific client need/project as the primary advisor and a second advisor handling the other client need/project separately. Only advisors who actually contribute to the session may count their contact and/or prep time. In order to count the effort:

- (1) The primary advisor facilitates entry of 641, session narrative, and possibly additional session(s).
- (2) If the need arises for expertise beyond the capability of the primary advisor or in a geographic location other than that of the first advisor/Center, the client should be referred to a second advisor for subsequent advising, who handles that specific need/project and enters the Session Notes as follow-up sessions, even if the follow-up session was the first session with the client for your Center.
- (3) **IF THE CONTACT TIME WITH 2 OR MORE ADVISORS WAS SIMULTANEOUS**, the primary advisor should write the narrative and record the “clock” time that elapsed with the client. The primary advisor should additionally select the name of the additional advisor so that the other counselor will receive credit for their contact time when Neoserra reports “By Counselor” are run. If both contribute prep time, then each advisor who contributed the prep work must write their own, additional write-up to reflect their preparatory efforts.

(4) When needed, the client returns to the appropriate advisor for further assistance. All advisors can view all sessions of every client in the SBDC network.

Case closures: The SBA no longer requires that clients who have not received assistance for 90 days be “closed out” in Neoserra.

Non-Profit Organizations: The SBA provides the following guideline for working with non-profit organizations. “Where a significant portion of a non-profit organization’s activities involve providing aid to small business concerns, we believe it would be permissible for a grant program office to allow its grant recipients to provide counseling or training to such non-profits. Such an action would still result in the provision of technical assistance to small business concerns, albeit in an indirect rather than a direct manner. There is no express statutory restriction against grant recipients providing indirect assistance to small business concerns in the manner described above. As such, we believe it would be consistent with the terms of the Small Business Act to permit grant recipients to provide technical assistance to small business concerns in the traditional, direct manner as well as by indirectly extending such assistance through means of a ‘train the trainers’ type of approach involving non-profit organizations.”

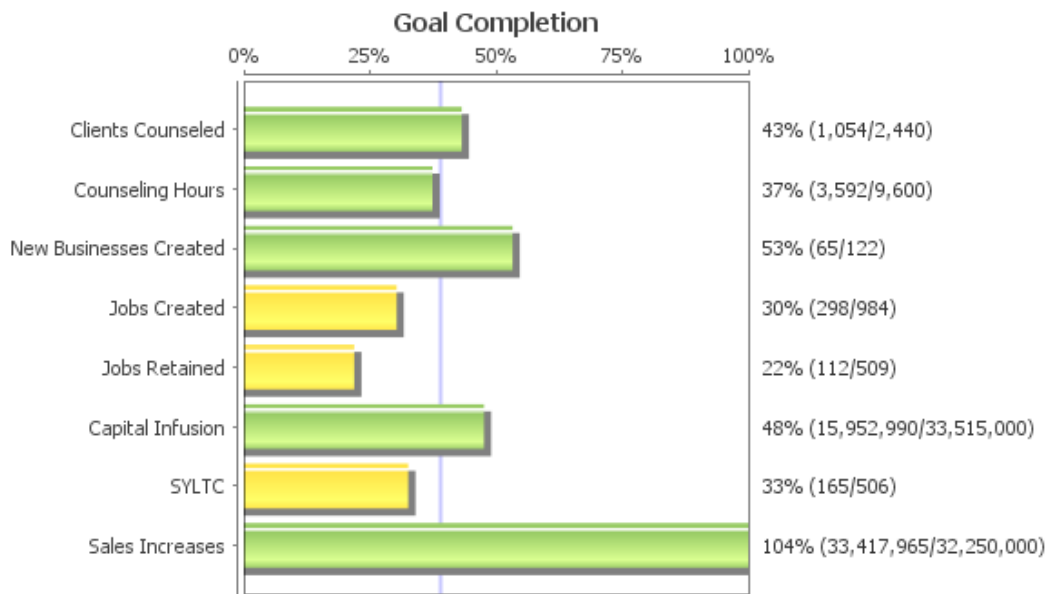
Referrals to the Private Sector: As federally required, SBDC is not to directly compete with the private sector. Clients should be referred to the private sector when the client desires someone to produce or perform some aspect of business management on a consistent basis for them. Examples of such cases are when an accountant, lawyer, or insurance provider is needed or when the client desires someone to write a business plan for them versus being taught those skills. Each SBDC advisor must annually sign a “Conflict Of Interest” form upon employment that ensures no recommendations will be made as to the purchase of goods or services from any individual or firm which SBDC staff or its resources have any financial, familial, or personal interest.

Neoserra

Neoserra is the user interface and client data collection system used by the Iowa SBDC. It is accessed via a web browser (preferred browsers include Chrome, FireFox and Safari) at: <https://iowasbdc.neoserra.com>. An account will be set up and the Associate State Director will issue a user name and password.

The Associate State Director will provide training for Neoserra. The training will teach how to enter client data, counseling activity, training events, milestones, and an overview of how the database works.

Neoserra provides a dashboard when you log in to show how the Center is performing in relation to the milestone goals. A report showing more detailed information on each center’s clients is also sent once a month to provide information on the types of clients being seen. Below are examples of the dashboard and the scorecard.



Data Elements	Current Period	Cumulative to Date	Goal (Cumulative)	% Goal Reached
1. Clients Counseled	815	2,378	2,440	97%
2. Counseling Hours	2,428	9,831	9,600	102%
3. New Businesses Created	61	199	122	163%
4. Jobs Created - Full-Time	271	663	984	67%
5. Jobs Created - Part-Time	67	234	0	*
6. Jobs Retained	46	241	509	47%
7. Capital Infusion	\$4,585,290.00	\$37,761,625.61	\$33,515,000.00	113%
8. SYLTC	275	553	506	109%
9. Sales Increases	15,526,312	36,649,011	35,000,000	105%

Data Integrity

Each Regional Director must monitor the data entry to ensure data integrity. The Lead Center will also monitor the database to help ensure the integrity of the data. Various reports or questions will be sent to the Regional Directors as issues or problems are identified.

Client Surveys

The SBA requires America's SBDC Iowa to send a satisfaction survey to every client. The Lead Center will generate a client satisfaction survey to be sent to every client four months after his or her initial session. An email will be sent to the clients that includes a link to the survey on the eCenter website. The responses to the survey will be captured in Neoserra. Lead Center staff will review the surveys and handle any negative ones they feel are necessary. *See Appendix N.*

Market Research

Regional Directors have access to free market research services for their SBDC clients. Market research can be requested by completing the Market Research Request Form. *See Appendix O.* Counselors need to complete the form to provide information on the type of business, information that is needed and how it is to be used and send it to the Associate State Director. The requests are responded to in the order in which they are received and are typically returned within a week.

Semi-Annual and Annual Report Narratives

America's SBDC Iowa must submit semi-annual and annual reports to the SBA as part of the Cooperative Agreement. These reports summarize activities that are going on throughout the network as well as information on best practices. Information on the activities in the Center needs to be broken into the SBA categories. Specific information and definitions for all categories will be sent to the Regional Centers each year. All information needs to be submitted to the Associate State Director by April 10th for the semi-annual report and October 10th for the annual report.

Appendices