In 2013, the Detroit Business Support Network (DBSN), launched the Detroit BizGrid, an infographic that presents the small business resources available to entrepreneurs at various stages of development. The finished product was made available electronically and in print. The project had three initial goals:

- Inform network organizations of partner services, allowing them to make targeted referrals and better serve clients;
- Promote the resources available to Detroit’s entrepreneurs and small business owners; and,
- Provide a broad view of assets and gaps in the service network, thus assisting future program development and funding decisions.

To meet these objectives, a committee of representatives from five DBSN member organizations met to establish guiding principles:

- Entrepreneurs, particularly those in early stages of ideation or business, would be the target audience.
- The information in this tool must be accurate and easily understood and must provide value.
- The tool would get entrepreneurs into the system, but they would have to do some work themselves. No tool can provide answers to every question.

When the committee was confident the result of their work would meet the original project goals, a draft was presented to philanthropic partner, New Economy Initiative for Southeast Michigan (NEI), and to a local corporate sponsor, Fathead. Fathead donated extra-large BizGrid wall decals to each DBSN member organization. NEI helped cover the cost of printing tear pads of the infographics as well as the ongoing development of an interactive web tool (www.detroitbizgrid.com).

While formal metrics are still being collected, the tool has proven to be incredibly popular. Another Network partner, Wayne State University, recently held BizGrid Live!, a networking and educational event, that attracted 39 BizGrid organizations and nearly 300 area entrepreneurs. Partners and businesses have already asked for a 2014 event. Organizations from the region continually express interest in being added to the infographic, and cities from across the state have requested help creating a similar tool.

Establish a Small Business Resource Center

Another approach many cities take is to create a business resource center that serves as a hub of information for entrepreneurs and the local small business community. These centers are typically staffed with experts who serve as mentors and liaisons to businesses in need of support or information. The
resources, information sessions, and one-on-one consultations provided at business resource centers are typically free of charge and aimed at supporting the success and longevity of locally owned neighborhood shops and service providers. An added benefit is that the center staff is able to stay on top of trends, forge valuable relationships with owners, and proactively respond to issues.

**Kansas City – KCBizcare**

The Kansas City Business Customer Service Center or “KCBizcare” opened June 1, 2009 and was established as a separate entity under the City Manager’s Office to provide enhanced services to the small business community.

KCBizcare currently has a staff of three and provides the following services:

- Business-specific “roadmaps” for opening a business
- Public access to city computers to look up property and zoning information, access city records, and submit applications on-line
- Referrals to city departments, agencies, and partner organizations involved in regulation or business assistance
- Guidance and assistance in navigating the city’s licensing, permitting, and approval processes

Since KCBizcare opened its doors, the center has assisted 6,664 customers and has made 14,235 referrals to resource partners. Center staff also attended 442 events in the business community. More information on KCBizcare is available at: http://kcmo.gov/citymanagersoffice/bizcare/

“Bizcare represents precisely what local government should be and that’s a bridge between city services and the small business owners and entrepreneurs of our community. I’m proud of our local government for making customer service a focus and appreciate the staff at Bizcare who are the on the front lines of the customer experience.”

- Kansas City Mayor Sly James

**Proactively Engage the Local Business Community**

While cities are able to create small business programs and improve city processes, small businesses often need additional, on-the-ground support to meet their potential. City leaders should partner with local business leaders that are more familiar with their communities and can provide a deeper level of support to small businesses. Neighborhood chambers of commerce are an excellent resource that can support the small business ecosystem in a city.

The city of Chicago recently launched a comprehensive Neighborhood Small Business Strategy that utilizes strategic partnerships with the city’s neighborhood chambers of commerce to bring business support services to the community. It enables neighborhood chambers of commerce to provide high quality business planning support, to assist with city processes, to help entrepreneurs network and