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/](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
identify resources, and to run promotional programs for local businesses. The first year of the program already resulted in several success stories including: new neighborhood festivals driving sales for local businesses, new businesses brought to vacant sites in the community, and more collaboration between agencies working to improve Chicago’s economic vitality.

### Chicago: Neighborhood Small Business Strategy

The backbone of Chicago’s economic prosperity has always been small businesses. Responsible for half of the city’s workforce, small businesses are what drive success and opportunity across Chicago.

The Neighborhood Small Business Strategy is the first comprehensive strategy to better support small businesses in Chicago’s diverse neighborhoods. The strategy has four objectives: empower local chambers of commerce to deliver customized business counseling, foster neighborhood engagement with the local business community, drive neighborhood economic vitality by attracting businesses to targeted locations, and enlist small businesses in making their neighborhoods safer for business. These reflect input from Chicago’s small businesses and staff at the city’s Small Business Center.

The key to implementing this strategy was greater collaboration with the city’s 80+ business delegate agencies (local chambers of commerce). To support these local chambers, the Small Business Center (SBC) provided training on topics including permitting, licensing, zoning, and inspections. Furthermore, the City enhanced its Chamber Leadership Academy (CLA), a boot camp training program that builds new skills for agency leaders and facilitates sharing of best practices.

In addition to training, the SBC provides tools to help these delegate agencies deliver better service to businesses. Working with World Business Chicago (WBC), the city’s main economic development agency, the SBC expanded and extended the Site Selector tool to help entrepreneurs find available properties. The SBC continues strengthening its delegate agencies by providing new tools and new capability building programs. In 2014, the delegate agencies have opportunities to learn how to run more successful neighborhood events and how to introduce sustainability principles to businesses in their community.

The city invests over $3 million annually in the delegate agency program, which is a core component of the Neighborhood Small Business Strategy. For more information, visit [www.cityofchicago.org/BACP](http://www.cityofchicago.org/BACP).

Another benefit of being out in the community is that city leaders will be able to intervene more quickly when a business needs help, or even before an issue escalates to a real problem. It’s a win-win situation when problems, such as zoning or funding issues, can be addressed quickly so businesses have more time to focus their energy on products, marketing, and sales.

In the city of Seattle, the Office of Economic Development’s Business Retention and Expansion Program (BREP) has one central goal – to retain and grow early-stage and existing Seattle businesses through their proactive outreach initiatives. Staffers leading the BREP initiative aim to meet with 500 individual businesses per year to assist with their goals of expanding.
Seattle: Business Retention and Expansion Program (BREP)

In 2009, Seattle’s Office of Economic Development (OED) faced serious challenges. The office suffered from a lack of balance between policy work and direct services to Seattle’s small business community. The contracts with industry sector partners were siloed and did not come together to form a cohesive strategy. In the face of a City Council proposal to eliminate the department, there was a need to reinvent core services, measure impact and do a better job of telling the story of the work and the value to the business community. Out of this crisis, OED’s Business Retention and Expansion Program (BREP) was created.

Economic development research shows that retaining and growing early-stage and existing businesses is the most effective way of supporting entrepreneurs and economic growth. To achieve the goal of growing Seattle-based companies, OED prioritized direct support to individual companies to help them access capital, expand into new markets, and navigate government. The program is focused on businesses with 5 – 100 employees and $1 million - $10 million in revenues, because companies of this size were the most likely to have the capacity for expansion and would most benefit from the kinds of services that OED could offer.

OED’s Business Retention and Expansion Program (BREP) targets meeting with 500 businesses annually, and providing 250 businesses with follow-up business services, including connecting them with opportunities to expand their markets, advice and referrals on financial and management challenges, navigating the regulatory environment, and assistance with site location. The business services portal, www.growseattle.com, has information for business owners whether they are looking to start, grow, or green their business. Targeted sectors include: manufacturing, logistics, maritime and shipbuilding, clean technology/energy and life sciences/ global health, retail, professional services, and information technology. Through a competitive process, OED selected partners with expertise and relationships in these target sectors. OED used this opportunity to refocus their existing relationships with outcomes that supported broader mission and goals.

Since the program’s inception 3 ½ years ago, the team has visited over 1,500 companies. 69% of the visits resulted in some sort of action - connecting a business with resources or assisting them to navigate government. Of those items, 89% were successfully resolved. The program has three full-time staff dedicated to this work in our office, and invests $300,000 in contracts with industry sector partners for additional services.

More information available at: www.growseattle.com

“It’s amazing how much my business has grown in a short time. When I started, West Seattle Produce Company was the only location selling Doolie’s Hot Sauce, and now I am selling in 22 locations. The staff [in Seattle] are like team members, there to give me feedback and help, and they are rooting for my success. I am excited to keep growing my business and continuing to explore new opportunities, like participating in the Bite of Seattle this year.”

Abdul “Doolie” Mohamud, Founder and Owner, Doolie’s Hot Sauce

Advocate for Small Businesses with Small Business Councils or Committees

Another helpful mechanism is to form a council or committee of small business owners, entrepreneurs, and other community stakeholders that advises the city council and mayor on small business issues.