

NebraskaEDGE



Results of the Biennial Business
and
Program Survey 2004

About the Participants

A total of 156 participants returned completed surveys.

Fifty-nine percent of the participants had an existing business when they enrolled in the EDGE program. Of those businesses, 26 percent have been operating for at least 20 years. Twenty-four percent have started their business during the last five years.

Forty-one percent of the participants had an idea for an existing business. Of the participants with a business idea, 42 percent opened that business or anticipate opening it in the near future. Of those participants, 64 percent had already done so, while 36 percent (8 participants) anticipate opening their business in the near future. Five of those participants anticipate opening their business yet this year. Nine percent of the participants with a business idea did not open that particular business, but pursued another idea. Forty-nine percent did not open their original business idea or any other. Over one-half (52%) of those participants said they did not open it because it was not feasible as planned.

The average age of the participants is 47.5 years. Fifty-five percent are under the age of 50. Two-thirds (66%) are females and 94 percent report their race as caucasian (white, non-hispanic). Eighty-five percent are married and 26 percent are the sole earner in their household. Ninety-nine percent have at least a high school diploma, with 49 percent having a bachelors or graduate degree. Counting themselves and their children, the participants have an average of 3.3 persons living with them and sharing income or expenses. Forty-one percent have 4 or more persons living with them and sharing expenses or income. Fifty-eight percent report having a total household income of \$40,000 or more. Seventeen percent have household incomes of \$80,000 or more.

About the Businesses

The following results describe the 113 participants who are operating a business.

Sixty-one percent of the participants started the business themselves and/or with partners. Fifteen percent purchased an existing business. The majority of these businesses are still operating. Eighty-three percent of the businesses enrolled in the EDGE program were still operating in 2003. Seventeen percent (18 businesses) had closed.

Twenty-six percent of the businesses are in the agriculture industry. Twenty percent are involved in retail trade. Twenty-three percent listed another primary industry and 10 percent are in professional, scientific and technical services. One-third (34%) of the participants said their primary business type or industry has changed since they participated in the EDGE program.

When asked what types of customers accounted for 10% or more of the business's total sales of goods/services during 2003, almost two-thirds (65%) said household consumers and individual

users. Thirty-five percent have customers that are other businesses and/or organizations while 14 percent serve state and local government. Over one-half (57%) of the businesses are sole proprietorships. Twenty-two percent are privately held corporations and 12 percent are partnerships or limited liability companies (LLC).

The majority of the participants are actively involved in their business. Eighty percent say they manage the day-to-day operations and 72 percent have financial control with the authority to sign loans, leases and contracts. Also, 62 percent produce the business's goods or services. Over one-half (65%) work full-time for their business. Twenty-four percent work part-time, 10 percent work seasonally at the business and only 1 percent (1 participant) work no hours at the business.

The businesses employ an average of 2.3 part-time, year round employees (not counting the participant); 1.96 full-time, year round employees; 0.6 part-time, seasonal employees and 0.3 full-time, seasonal employees. Over one-half of the businesses did not employ any full-time (56%) or part-time (53%) year round workers.

When the business started, 36 percent were located in commercial or manufacturing space. Thirty-two percent were on a farm or ranch and 28 percent were located in a home or garage (non-farm). Currently, 43 percent of the businesses are located in commercial or manufacturing space, with 32 percent located on a farm or ranch and 21 percent in a non-farm home or garage. When asked where they anticipate the business being located in five years, 40 percent expect to be in a commercial or manufacturing space, 33 percent on a farm or ranch and 20 percent at a non-farm home or garage. Of the businesses that changed locations, over one-half (59%) did so because of business growth (additional business space needed). Twenty-four percent changed locations to be closer to customers or retail outlets.

The businesses have changed in other ways too. Over one-half have increased their business volume (71%) and increased the types of products sold or services rendered to customers (55%) since participating in the EDGE program. Other changes since participation in the EDGE program include: increased number of employees (33%), increased hours of operation (31%) and increased number of locations (17%).

At start-up, many of the businesses were financed through personal/family savings of owner/s (68%) and business loans from a bank or financial institution (49%). Other means of financing the businesses at start-up included: personal/family assets other than savings or owner/s (20%); personal/business credit card of owner/s (19%); business loan from federal, state or local government (5%); business equity (5%); government-guaranteed business loan from a bank or financial institution (4%), outside investor (4%); business loan from a micro enterprise lender (1%); and none needed (1%). To finance subsequent expansions of the business, many used business loans from a bank or financial institution (57%), personal/family savings of owner/s (46%) and personal/business credit cards (22%). Other sources of funding for expansion include: personal/family assets other than savings (13%); business equity (7%); government-guaranteed

business loan from a bank or financial institution (6%); outside investor (4%); none needed (4%); business loan from a micro enterprise lender (3%); and business loan from federal, state or local government (2%).

Just over one-quarter (26%) of the participants used their business plan completed during the EDGE program to apply for financing. Of those, 93 percent were successful in obtaining a loan. The average loan amount was just over \$157,000 with amounts ranging from \$4800 to \$1,250,000.

Sixty-two percent of the businesses filed an IRS Schedule C or business tax forms for 2002. Fourteen percent said they did not file these forms and 24 percent did not answer the question. Sixty percent plan to file or have filed these forms for 2003. Fourteen percent did not and 25 percent did not answer the question.

The average gross annual sales for 2003 was just over \$500,000. However, over one-third of the participants did not give an answer for this question. The answers ranged from \$500 to \$11,000,000. One-half of those answering gave responses greater than \$130,000, with 16 percent reporting gross annual sales of \$500,000 or more. Fifty-three percent said this was an increase from 2002, 20 percent said their gross annual sales had stayed the same and 27 percent reported a decline from 2002. When asked to project their gross annual sales for 2004, the average given was approximately \$588,000. Again, one-third of the participants did not answer this question. The answers ranged from \$1000 to \$12,500,000. Twenty percent of those answering anticipate gross annual sales of \$500,000 or more.

Forty-six percent say the change in sales can be attributed to their participation in the EDGE program. Thirty percent say the changes cannot be attributed to their participation and 25 percent answered "not applicable." Of the businesses that increased their gross annual sales from 2002 to 2003, 69 percent say this change can be attributed to their participation in the EDGE program.

The participants who did attribute the change to the EDGE program were asked how much the course impacted their sales. Forty-two percent said "a great deal." Thirty-five percent said the course impacted their sales a little and 23 percent attributed about half of the changes to the program.

The participants said their businesses, on average, provide 48 percent of their total household income. Eighteen percent said the business provided none of their total household income and 21 percent said all of their household income comes from the business. Fifty-two percent said the business provides at least 50 percent of their total household income. When asked if this had changed from 2002, 66 percent said it had stayed the same. Twenty-three percent said the percentage had increased and 11 percent said it had decreased.

The participants were also asked the current dollar value of their total business assets. The average given was over \$322,000. Again, many participants did not answer this question (41%).

The answers given ranged from \$1000 to \$4,500,000. Fifty-two percent said this value represented an increase from 2002. Forty percent said it had remained the same and 9 percent said it had declined from 2002.

Forty-six percent believe their business provides them with a higher standard of living since they took the EDGE course.

Course Evaluation

Seventy-one percent of the participants had taken the NxLevel Entrepreneurs course, 16 percent took Tilling the Soil of Opportunity and 13 percent took the Business Start-up course.

When asked their goals for participating in the EDGE program, the top ones given were: enhance business skills (85%), increase self-confidence in business (52%), increase networking opportunities (33%) and increase products/services to community (33%). They were then asked if that goal was met. The goals with the highest proportion saying they were met include: enhance business skills (96%), increase dedication to business (94%), increase self-confidence in business (94%), become better employee (92%) and increase networking opportunities (90%). Only two goals had less than 70 percent saying they were met: develop primary income source (49%) and develop secondary income source (41%).

Participants also reported increasing their knowledge of various components of business planning and management as a result of their participation in the EDGE course. Eighty-six percent of the participants reported increasing their knowledge of how to prepare a business plan for their business and 83 percent increased their knowledge of the importance of business planning. The proportions that increased their knowledge of other components were as follows: how to develop goals and objectives for my business (75%), how to target my customers (67%), how to prepare and analyze my budgets (66%), how to conduct industry research for my business (64%), the importance of risk management and how risk can affect my business (63%), how to best market and distribute my product (62%), how to manage my cash flow (61%) and the different types of regulations that may affect my business (50%). In addition, 88 percent of the participants rated the EDGE course as either being a high or very high benefit to their business.

Seventy percent of the participants had completed their business plan upon graduation of the course. Seven percent finished the plan after completing the course and 22 percent did not complete their business plan. Many of the participants who did not complete their business plan said the reason they didn't is because they never started the business or realized it was not feasible. Another common reason given was lack of time. Twenty-six percent have updated their business plan since participating in the course. Many reported doing this annually. Twenty-two percent say they are interested in attending a retreat for updating business plans and an additional 45 percent indicated they might be interested.

Twenty-nine percent of the participants used their business plan to assist them in deciding to expand their business. Twenty-three percent used it to decide not to start a business and 16 percent used it to start a business. Twenty-five percent used it for another reason.

Participants were next asked how various items had changed as a result of attending the EDGE course. Sixty-eight percent said their understanding of their business climate had increased as a result of the course. Sixty percent felt their opportunities to meet other local business owners had increased. The proportions that felt the other items listed had increased were as follows: your knowledge of local resources available to assist your business (56%), your support of other business owners (54%), your use of local resources for your business (i.e., banks, attorneys, etc.) (47%), your involvement in community organizations (38%), your involvement in community development activities (35%), your involvement in local business organizations (33%), your leadership in community development activities (32%) and your financial contributions for community projects (29%).

Sixty-nine percent of the participants have helped promote the EDGE program in their community or region. However, only 17 percent have participated in the local community EDGE coalition. But, 24 percent of those not currently involved expressed interest in participating. And, 28 percent are willing to donate to the program.

Ninety-nine percent of the participants feel the EDGE program should continue to provide business and management educational services to Nebraska's small business owners.

Open Ended Responses

Do you have any suggestions for improving the course? Is there anything you would like to see added to the course instruction?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A little more targeting of specific businesses and their needs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considering it has been 6 years.....It was helpful to have the support to go through the steps of start up.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critique participants' products or business pitch
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent course
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent course. More real life examples of analyzing financial decisions. Example- Leasing office space vs buying a building
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial analysis- in depth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow up classes, refresher course.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For rural community, you must add more on online/web resources and development of business websites.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get more bankers involved in all aspects.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel like networking was a big part and would suggest keeping that a vital part and developing more on it, but I can't think of specifics.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I felt the course was more geared toward retail.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think the business planning and financial aspect was very helpful, but we could also use assistance with inventory and marketing aspects- maybe in a follow-up course?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would have enjoyed meeting other small business owners – or just having one come to class and speak especially about start-up concerns including financing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would like to see follow-up courses to help update business plan from year to year.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would like to see some follow up and refresher type info.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor was excellent- well prepared and easy to talk to and listen to! Course was a handful- took 10X more work than I first thought.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was too daunting a task to do the business plan- too many "fuzzy" variables in the early weeks that prevented the necessary calculations later on. Perhaps some 1 on 1 or entrepreneur consultants to get the numbers in line early.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was very complete.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's been a benefit to refer potential businesses to take EDGE training.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just keep having the courses!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make simpler and less homework and notes complicated. I mostly learn by listening.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maybe grant writing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maybe more insight on market research.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More bookkeeping and taxes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More emphasis on marketing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More entrepreneurs interviewed as what worked and what to watch out for, these could be done by video. The terms are not everyday to us just starting a glossary of business terms.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More follow up information once you are done. I would like to refer people to the EDGE program, but I haven't had information on upcoming classes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More on marketing and delegation. Finding good employees or getting them to do what you ask.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More sole proprietorship type people to visit EDGE class and give lecture and answer questions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time for discussions and separate one-on-one help.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time for in depth study.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtaining grant money- how to find the appropriate grant for your business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer it in this area again, I'd love a refresher!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Split the ones that own a business from the ones that don't at the beginning 'til the ones that don't have a business get a plan together then bring them all together for different parts of the course.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher encouraged ideas and said this was a temporary fad. Before completion of class a store opened for this purpose. We took the class in 2000 and this other business has since moved and expanded 2X. Suggestion- don't discourage ideas!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EDGE program exceeded my expectations. Would recommend to anyone.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The instructors were extremely helpful.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ups and downs of working relations- I leased a building from a brother in law- not good- he was too hard to get along with.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They did a great job trying to work around people's schedules and by meeting in area towns, asking questions and variety of guest speakers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tilling the Soil wasn't available at the time, but probably would've been more helpful to me.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time to think about course to course.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To me it was so intense. I was so sick of it by the time I got it done I never wanted to see it again. I had never used Excel & messed up the sheet. I needed training in using that. My computer was having problems & I lost some of it & had to do it again.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Touch on personal issues. Alternative sources.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use more speakers such as accountants, legal, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very intense.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We needed to take this class 13 years ago. If we were just starting up- it would be essential to take this course.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where to obtain start up money-including grants which is a complicated area. Providing sample business plans with actual cash flows.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You are doing great!

If you did not complete the business plan for which you participated in the EDGE program, why not?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost completed! At the point we knew we weren't going to pursue the business we did not complete the plan.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change of mind for now.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changed career objectives.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decided not to pursue the business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For other business that was not started.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For various reasons, one being health, and thru exploration process of the new venture it became unfeasible.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I completed most of my research, but family and business priorities limited the time available to package my plan.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I didn't start a business.

• Info- financial.
• Lack of time.
• Lack of time due to major occupation (farming).
• Left out one section and otherwise completed.
• Mostly completed. During later stages of course realized business idea was not going to be feasible.
• My partner moved away and I could not proceed on my own- at my age I do not want the full time responsibility.
• Never turned in business plan- Instructor moved away.
• Not enough time- will do it in 2008.
• Not feasible.
• Not required at time (1997-98).
• Only a small part was completed. I did not understand how to get the rest done.
• Plan was for my use only- not necessary to finish it- the class served my needs without finishing the plan.
• Plan was not finalized, but was used as a working document.
• This probably stemmed from lack of confidence from my husband, so he couldn't commit the time to give me figures to use. Too mixed up with the farm numbers and couldn't separate.
• Time and amount of work involved.
• Time consuming, no computer skills and my dad died at the last month of the course.
• Toward the end of it, it was clear the business was not feasible.
• Very difficult with an already complicated retail store financial set up.
• Was not feasible- health reasons.
• We have yet to complete the full plan for expansion because we have put expansion on hold.
• Went a different direction in business.

What was the one thing about the course that you think will have the greatest impact on your business?

• A better understanding of the financial reports.
• Analyzing cash flow and understanding budgeting.
• Attention to detail in all aspects!
• Availability of qualified technicians.
• Awareness of the importance of planning.
• Banking info and financial.
• Being able to analyze the business.
• Being able to understand and use our financial statements.
• Better planning.
• Budgeting and marketing.
• Budgeting, business plan.
• Budgeting, do I want to grow or not?
• Budgets, cash flow.
• Business plan.
• Business Plan- constant update.
• Cash flow and pricing.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash flow management.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating with the banks. Analyzing trends in markets. Using the budget to figure out how many units need to be sold.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completing the business plan and having it reviewed to prepare for presentation in a loan request.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completing the business plan and knowing that I had a baseline by which to make financial comparisons - all helped me feel more confident. I had a benchmark by which to do some measuring of our financial success.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence and value of planning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confident about researching and writing out a business plan.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a plan and helping to recognize the importance of more effective marketing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing the business plan.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing the entire plan.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Didn't start business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different types of regulations, insurances, analyze budgets, and importance of business planning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doing the steps for the business plan and completing the plan.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financials are very tough so get someone who loves them to help you.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding needs for business in community. How to involve financial, legal and accounting people in establishing business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forced me to really "think" about my business in an unemotional way.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gave me idea for a new business and how to proceed with that new business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gave me the confidence to persevere!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gave us the business knowledge needed to run a successful dental practice. No business classes are offered in dental school.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting a plan together and continuing to use that plan to keep our business up to date and growing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting it on paper and knowing how to read what I see.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting my ideas down on paper- kicking the idea off the dream stage.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guest speakers, Networking with participants.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helped me understand financials better and can be used in analyzing future expansions. Created more awareness in necessity of good marketing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How careful planning can affect your own perception of the potential for the business and how it should be structured. Being led to drill down through every aspect of a business concept in the course of developing a plan ensures that the concept is valid with good prospects for success.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How it taught me to look outside the box.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How not to make a mistake in a market that won't support a new business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to set goals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am retired.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do not have a business. This class helped me decide that.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have a BS in business and am involved in my community and while I think my EDGE experience was positive, in my case no single aspect of it has had a great impact directly on my business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I understand the importance of numbers. I understand what a good banker looks for and now I

can explain any "red flag" number changes. I swear I am more knowledgeable about my financial reports than my current banker. That's why I am shopping for a new bank (with my updated business plan)!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you fail to plan, plan to fail.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In depth planning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase networking opportunities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can help out business skills in farming.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is like a math problem. You can go over it and over it and still be confused, until you put the facts all down on paper. When the problem is drawn out it makes more sense. Business decisions are similar in that they may seem confusing until drawn out.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It made me realize all that went into owning a operating a small business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It proved it will work if proper steps are taken now.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It showed me the potential my business had and what was needed for expansion.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It will probably make me more dedicated to a "contracting" type of production business as opposed to an open market business. From talking to other participants the income levels and population and other demographics show that this area (geographic) is not a very fertile area for business start up.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just analyzing your business thoroughly through the business plan has helped in running our business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just makes you rethink everything and explore new avenues.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing the expanding market for advertising.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge on running the business end.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of marketing research.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning about accounting principles, becoming comfortable with balance sheets, etc. Allows me to walk to lenders with much greater confidence.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning how to plan and measure the business status with cash flow charts.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning how to prepare and read financial statements. Our business has been a small scale break even business for years. Now I know where the leaks were and have changed stuff so we work less and make more!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning how to put the business plan together in order to present it to a loan officer. Learning all the components.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal aspects, more serious about business, not just "hobby".
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal stuff.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking into history- a new angle. New resources.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market research and financials.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market research, marketing skills learned.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing and advertising.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money/Financial Management- Financial reports and Projects. Overall organization of the business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My instructor was very good. His ideas had an impact on my business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking with the others- hearing about what others had done or will do.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing a business plan with emphasis on detail.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall informational value.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and flexibility.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reality. Bummer.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizing valuable/positive points about the business and focusing commitment to enhancing those points further.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking and sharing with others.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to organize and focus on the issues that need to be addressed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to plan and focus.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The budget and cash flow preparation, it always takes more money then you think.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The business plan was very helpful.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The comprehensive overview of business structure.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The confidence it gave me- to know I was successful- the business relationships I had and developed- the respect I earned as a business person- and the knowledge that I did the best I could do to provide the best service possible.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The course really made me think about exactly what I wanted to do and pursue.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of the business plan has been very beneficial in determining if my husband's farming operation is able to expand and what we can expect in the future.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The detailed analysis and financial process will be beneficial in any business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of planning and setting goals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The networking that was accomplished through the students in the class, the instructors and directors, and the new business leaders I met during the class and during my research.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The over all program was very worthwhile- no one things comes to mind. The instructor did a great job and for the most part the speakers had a lot of good information.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The realization that at this point in our lives we are unable to commit the time and resources (financially) to owning a business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The value is in putting plans in writing. The value in networking with other business owners.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The very fact that a business plan is an absolute necessity in getting a clearly defined direction identified. Gives a guideline that incorporates well-thought out goals and objectives. The business plan forces you to ask the hard questions that are too easy to ignore, but are essential to be addressed for the success of the enterprise.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The whole class was great for a start up business. I don't know how you would start a business without some sort of class like this. The business plan helped me understand what I was getting into before I got started.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The whole course.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The whole course was amazing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time and effort and emotional support needed to start a business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To expand to my fullest ability.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the importance for businesses to develop a well thought out, thorough business plan.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the numbers better.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have gone too long without a plan- it makes us realize why we are having a problem with the financial areas.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When I do start my business, I will have a better understanding of how it should be run.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether or not I have the ability for a full-time business or just a hobby.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working thru the process of writing the complete business plan. Organizing and selling the product.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing a business plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing the business plan-which was very difficult for me even with the wonderful software helping me. The software was helpful b/c it gave example of business plans. I really struggled with projecting what monthly costs might be e.g. electric bills, merchant processing... The class helped me realize some fears I had and think them through and come to the conclusion that I had a good idea.

Why or why not the Nebraska EDGE program should continue to provide business and management educational services to Nebraska’s small business owners.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wealth of resources and skills are learned and presented through EDGE.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absolutely essential.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absolutely essential in a new business. Very beneficial as to new ideas, practices and management of current decisions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All business owners should take the EDGE course.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternate ways to make a living will help our rural area stay alive and continue to improve.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any business owner should be looking for ways to improve that business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any time you can get together with others will help.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business planning is an important step in determining whether or not to open a business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EDGE is a great service. I do not have the money to help yet.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EDGE is a tool small business has available to help them survive. It is a fundamental need in the small business community.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education is always good.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Especially good for new business owners.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extremely valuable.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For some people it is their only training in writing a business plan and preparing a budget- this training is important for building solid, successful businesses and we all benefit from the stability of small businesses.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For someone starting a new business or just a refresher some business owners.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give an understanding of the business before going in to it. know what it will take financially research the market
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great way University can be visible in our area and benefit our community.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having been the owner of several businesses over the last 20 years, I didn't think I would receive much benefit from participating in the EDGE program- was I ever wrong!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help more businesses stay in business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help more people to understand the process of a business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help people understand the ins and outs of their business. It is so helpful for someone who has never been in a manager position or someone who has never seen the financial side of a business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I believe any small business should have all the knowledge they can get in order to have a successful business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I believe the program helped me.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't believe it is valuable enough, just an 800 # would work fine, or internet site for

questions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel it would be very helpful for people wanting to start a new business, because of all the information they would gather.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I found it helpful.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I gained a lot of knowledge on how to plan and how to use resources.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think it provides benefits to those who are serious about starting their own business. It isn't easy and it take so much self discipline.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think it really would help someone interested in starting a new business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a must.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If it proves beneficial the profits from their own business should support it.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If someone is wanting to start a new business or help an existing one- it is very helpful to know if it will or can be profitable.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals need the student direction gained in the class before starting a new business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It benefits rural development and encourages business owners to utilize their resources to the fullest.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can be enough of an incentive to get started or give up.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It helps to have a network of other's businesses and other to bounce ideas off of. Good support system.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a great resource of very useful information.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a great tool to meet people and expand ideas.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a tremendously valuable program to decide direction for start up or existing business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a very effective way to impact the economy of rural areas. Strengthening existing businesses gets more results then bringing in new businesses.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a very good informative resource. This class really "opens your eyes" to what a person gets into before or after starting a business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is helpful knowledge.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is really difficult for adults to gather all the information offered in this course on their own. Having a single source for this type of education is invaluable.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is very beneficial for some more than others. Especially on a start up business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It looked like everyone else in my class was getting it. I saw one of the businesses from my class had started.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It makes you think about all aspects of owning a business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It offers a place to start and resources to follow up.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It think it's a good course but did not help me that much due to the nature of my business. I was not able to get the specific help that I need.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was a wonderful class that might help weed out people who are not serious about starting a business!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was an excellent tool for anyone opening or expanding a business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was beneficial to me and would be to others as well.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was very informative.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's a good program. I moved from the area and "changed direction". That's why I didn't continue to participate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's a great start up tool.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's an excellent program. We learned by "hard knocks" in the first 5 years. I wish we would have known about it sooner.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's critically important to understand the need for a business plan.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's fantastic and reasonably priced for the amount of info you get!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know how much it helped us.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning about the commitment is important to decisions to pursue project.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less small businesses would come and go. Closing a business causes stress to not just the family but the community.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainly due to the pitfalls and shortcomings of new business owner, this class offers a chance to develop on paper vs. losing lots of money and time.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maybe if interest there- but I think it needs to be downscaled and easier or else I'm just a slow learner.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nebraskan's have a high work ethic so
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nebraskans must learn to create businesses not expect businesses to move into our state. Nebraska isn't an easy state to bring a business into financially! Those who are already here have a high stake investment in Nebraska.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to add internet info.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No one should start a business without it.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People need to find out things for themselves.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People need to know how to get a plan and business in order. See if it is worth their livelihood.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to opening a business the business plan is essential.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides education. May help rural communities and rural businesses survive.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides info on resources and how to do financial ratios, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Nebraska has very few employment opportunities but has lots of opportunities for entrepreneurs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small business owners or potential owners need all of the help available.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small businesses are crucial to our economy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small businesses need better business planning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small businesses need major if competing to other business like Menards, Walmart, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small communities need every opportunity to increase chances for local business to develop and be encouraged.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small community businesses can really benefit from the information and analysis of their business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So many need the skills and info EDGE has.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some people need help.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The course covers every detail of business. It should not be voluntary...it should be mandatory.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EDGE Class was very beneficial for thinking through my business idea and was available at a reasonable price. All small business owners should take this course.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EDGE Program benefits all who participate by evaluating business skills and personal skills.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to develop small business us the most important objective.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program has a lot to offer small business owners who are always looking for good information to help improve their business- or just get one started.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program teaches people how to operate a business, I know how to do my line of work but I didn't know how to run a business.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are people with the desire and the ideas but lack business skills which could make or break them- rural areas are already depressed by lack of "jobs".
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are very informative and depending on the type of business very networkable.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This program may help young and new small business owners.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To determine the value of their services/products was a real benefit to justify price increases.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unless the course has changed since I attended ('98 or '99) I think the same material is probably available in an SCC course at less cost.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very beneficial information and assistance.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need all the job opportunities we can get in rural areas.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need all the resources to develop small businesses that we can get.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need this program to help people who want to start or expand a small business. This helps our communities grow.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to educate small business owners.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes it gives valuable information and tools to sustain any business.

Additional Comments

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1. Overall- I learned. 2. Our instructor was good. 3. But seems like a lot of things got repeated between instruction and special guests. 4. It was good to be among other small business owners and relate. 5. It was just a little over my head and complicated and time consuming. I really learned more just listening.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a part time employee retired from a high profile position, I found the course very informative and confirmed my previous education..... goals, plan and commitment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both husband and wife took the course.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not get me landscaping trees and Christmas tree business started. Has been so terribly dry I'm glad I didn't. Hope to be able to in the next few years. Was a very interesting and learning class. Thanks!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each year North Platte/Lincoln County EDGE graduates a class of mostly new, but some old entrepreneurs. These business people, whether they start a new business or decide not to start a new business, have been provided an opportunity to make an educated decision because of the EDGE program. It is essential (EDGE) to western Nebraska to help grow and nurture the business climate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoyed taking the class. I especially liked the guest speakers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent course! We have greatly benefited by taking the EDGE Program and have recommended it to many people.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find small business- Medical, dental insurance.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am dedicated to the Nebraska EDGE program. I believe it is vital to keeping our smaller towns alive. I believe strongly in small independent businesses- they are the backbone of America.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am less involved in the business then ever because I've become a mother and that is my first priority. I will most likely be even less involved this year so I'm probably not the best resource for your survey.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am not responding to this survey because I am not and have not been in business for the last two years because of family obligations. The EDGE program is a great program and hope it continues.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am ranching and have always wanted to do this. I am excited to know more about the business world and look forward to advancing in the project as I get older.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I closed my business in Feb 2004- The class was helpful but I am no longer in business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do own another business and have been able to apply some things to my other business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I enjoyed the EDGE program, the other participants, and the challenge provided. Maybe more one on one is needed for more professional and personal touches for certain types of businesses. Also, more scholarships, the prices are still expensive.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel like the program is good, but there is a gap between services provided by the state and what I personally really needed help with. Specifically, developing (researching, etc.) a functional marketing plan. Maybe my expectations are unrealistic.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel we could have used more time to develop the plan- so much was "ok" it's your plan. But I didn't have any idea if I was really on the right track.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I felt we got very little out of the class. We are strictly production agriculture. I though if a person wanted to start up a business the class would be helpful but we were told by the instructor and coordinator that this course was for our type of agriculture. Which in my opinion it is not.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have been in business 10 mo. now and think the class should have stressed more personal compromise and sacrifice concerning personal spending. It was touched upon lightly but I have really had to tighten my belt. I understand now that bringing my lunch everyday, rarely going out to dinner – cutting out anything “extra” is really important. Trust me—I was never a big spender—but even I have had to really watch every penny. I still wait tables at ___ on Saturday nights to help buy dog food and occasionally go to a movie. At this point I have no idea how I compare to other small businesses at 10 months. I project that I have at least 2 more years of being this poor. I still would have opened my store having understood the daily sacrifice—but lots of people might not.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I loved the program and was so grateful for the enormous participation of our instructor, Terry Keown. He remains actively involved in all our businesses even though the class is over!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I serve on a local economic group. I personally attended the class to fully understand how I could promote it. I gained confidence and learned so much info and how to deal with influential people. I am a farmer and the development of a business plan further helped me. It was a great learning experience.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I started this class at the request of a group of individuals associated with business start up. Having 20+ years of business experience I quickly came to realize that their business structure wasn't comfortable for me so I resigned from the board. Meanwhile my husband and I began thinking of expanding one of our businesses. The EDGE program was extremely helpful in giving me the tools to compile a business plan for our expansion. I have received nothing but extremely complimentary comments concerning my plan. One being from a really large bank in Omaha whom the President said, “I haven’t seen such a complete detailed business plan in years.”!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think that the TAX BURDEN in the state of NE is the single largest issue facing us and will continue to squash small businesses out of existence until the only places that a business can survive are regions within a 20 minute proximity of 30,000 or more people.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I thoroughly enjoyed the EDGE program. Many changes have taken place in my life that have forced me to change priorities and therefore, I did not proceed with the business plan I had intended.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I understand that the class has really improved since the inception. Due to that fact alone as

<p>long as each class continues to benefit from the overall program continue to offer and improve those businesses to be a make the ones that exist better.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I wish there was a support group for EDGE graduates. A person feels a lone in making major decisions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would like to have assistance in writing a grant to put some repairs on my rental houses. If you know of anyone available please have them contact me. (Address provided)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would still like to open my own business. I will use the information to help me start. I let two people I know use my book to put a plan together. One has owned his business for two years now and the other bought a business and redesigned it. Goes to show even if it did not work for me it does work. I guess I just wasn't ready. It is a great program!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If this is a confidential survey, why is it numbered?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was an excellent program. It helped me realize in the rural area I lived in, it would not support the business I was wanting to start. It saved me a lot of time and "money" by researching first.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was too long.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was well worth my time and investment. Not only did I see my thought on paper, I got to see if it would work and what it would take to make it work better! Invaluable. Thank you.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My husband and I own a service station business and a tank wagon that hauls fuel to area farmers. Between the drought and the taxation of fuel and our business, we find it difficult to maintain a profitable margin, or maybe I should say we choose not to hire additional people to work for us, leaving us with a heavy workload. While we have been able to make a living, I'm not sure I could stand in front of an EDGE class and encourage them to start a business in rural Nebraska. Long house, no health benefits, and a heavy regulated industry isn't always easy to adjust to.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My original business plans were put on hold but I have developed another very prosperous enterprise. With this, I was able to utilize much of what I learned in the EDGE program. I also have plans to develop a new small business in the next couple of years that will complement my existing enterprise.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to spend more time on everything. Do more in depth studies on most subjects. Need more sources to get financing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLEASE take me off your mailing list. I'm sure you've surveyed me before and it was too long ago for me to recall anything that would be of help to you.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program- the EDGE Course was very beneficial in growing and expanding our current established trucking business. The course has definitely made an impact on the growth of our business. The decrease in 2003 receipts over 2002 was not due to business but medically related to one of the owners.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tenBensel Farm/Fresh Produce has since changed to Prairie Sunset Farm, Inc. due to incorporation in Jan. 2004.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank you!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The class was good, the teacher was great. Our industry has been slow.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The course was beneficial, we have just really been struggling trying to grow the business, keep decent help, bring down overhead and yet somehow market for more jobs. This year has been a tough one. The balancing act has still not been learned, but we try to apply the course to the areas that come up and need changing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EDGE program showed me if I wished to expand my business, there was a need for catering without a big outlay. It also showed me that my customers age was over 50 and I

should advertise for their attention.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EDGE program was a great experience for me.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program needs to continue.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This business plan was based on processed beef sold by the quarter or one side- 8 butchers- due to a higher price per lb. of hanging weight the return was good. But without completing the class and writing the business plan the end result would not have been so clear. I need continued help in the accounting, our product is limited. Purebred Angus, corn fed, aged, hormone free, prime beef is the product. Question: can you give me one days worth of individual help with accounting on the computer? (name withheld).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a great program.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a wonderful program- I hope it continues. I also would like to see the "updating business plan" courses begin.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This operation is a combination grain farm with a small pasture poultry operation. The business plan concentrates on pasture poultry direct market business but covers the entire operation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This was a great class. My first business plan indicated that what I was hoping to do was not going to work. I am now working on a second business plan. My accountant is helping me with the figures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We certainly appreciated all that we learned while participating in the EDGE course- Thank you for offering it and we trust that others will be able to benefit as well in the future.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We didn't have a lot of time to do surveys and probably didn't place a lot of emphasis on completing them anyway, due to fact we get several requests a week. This class is educational and worth the time we spent in it. We can always go back on the written info we obtained and call if we need additional assistance. As far as keeping classes going, hopefully the EDGE program is able to keep above water in financial picture, to keep them going.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We don't have a business. We farm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We may attend the course in the future if it is offered.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We sold our business. Please do not send any more surveys.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We wish we would have had the opportunity to have taken this course prior to starting our business. There are many things we are working on to improve the foundations of our business so that we can grow.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-constructed survey! I'll look forward to the analyses and results.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is it so hard for someone with a "beneficial" business plan so hard to receive a business loan? Even if their credit has been improving for the best? It's hard getting started with your own money when you're basically on a budget.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would like to send my daughter, who runs a business.