

A Comprehensive Review of the NebraskaEDGE Program Years 2002-2007

Examining Individual and Business Impacts

Prepared by:

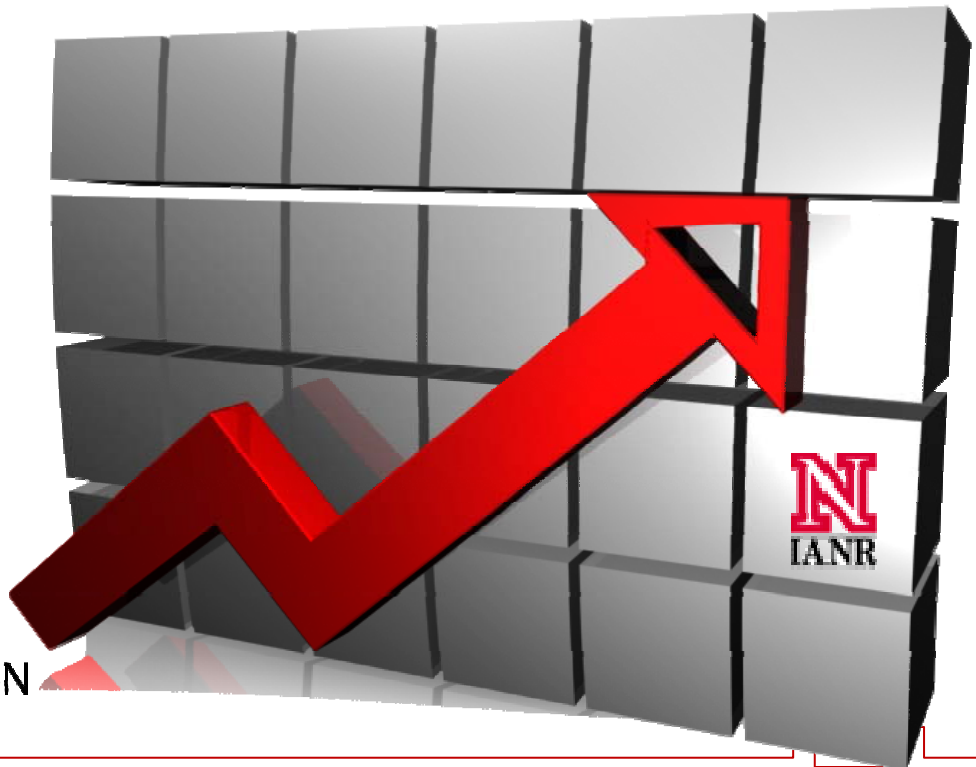
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Executive Summary

In 2008, the Center for Applied Rural Innovation conducted a comprehensive five-year study of the NebraskaEDGE program and its participating businesses. As a University of Nebraska extension education program, EDGE works with communities to host entrepreneurial training courses for local new and existing business owners. The results of the program are due to the combined efforts of many community organizations, private business owners, volunteers and the University of Nebraska.

As a community-based program, EDGE receives funding through the generous sponsorships and donations from community-level business owners and organizations that are matched with state and federal grant dollars. A breakout of EDGE funding sources are detailed below.

NebraskaEDGE Funding Sources, Five-year Composite

Year	Community Support*	Nebraska Dept. of Econ. Dev.±	Nebraska Enterprise Fund†	University of Nebraska	USDA Funds
2003-04	\$29,820	\$24,000	\$28,000	\$26,340	\$73,650
2004-05	\$36,275	\$0	\$25,500	\$0	\$22,486
2005-06	\$53,280	\$30,000	\$40,000	\$25,401	\$8,601
2006-07	\$66,465	\$30,000	\$44,100	\$49,216	\$0
2007-08	\$66,290	\$0	\$137,368	\$47,655	\$23,568
4 yr. totals	\$252,130	\$84,000	\$274,968	\$148,612	\$128,305

*Funds generated by community coalition for local course support. Amounts include cash and in-kind donations.

±NDED training job program support for instructional costs of each training course.

†NEF grant funds support state administration and local training efforts.

To date, nearly 2,500 individuals from 328 different Nebraska communities have enrolled in the training program. Training courses have been hosted by 55 different regional communities. The results of the survey used a subset of individuals who participated in the program between fall 2002 and spring 2007. A total of 794 individuals were asked to participate in the study.

Participant Survey Highlights

- **Participants give EDGE a rating of high quality educational programming.** Ninety-eight percent (98%) of the 298 Participant survey respondents rated the quality of

the overall course at least moderate in quality. *Thirty-three percent (33%) rated it as very high quality, with an additional 50% rating it as high quality,* page 36.

- **Participants increase interaction with other businesses and community economic development efforts.** Participant respondents indicated their interaction level changed in community networks and professional relationships. *Fifty-eight percent (58%) of the respondents increased their interaction with other local business owners and 48% increased their support to other business owners,* page 20.
- **Participants are completing their business plans.** Participant Survey respondents indicated that 71% had completed the business plan for their business. . Another 15% indicated that their business plans were still in progress at the time of the survey. *Of the individuals that were still in business at the time of the survey, 88% stated that they completed their business plan,* page 17.
- **Participants start and expand businesses.** Eighteen percent (18%) of the 298 respondents indicated that they established, acquired or purchased a business as a result of the EDGE program. Thirty-five percent (35%) of the respondents indicated they expanded their businesses. *Over one-half (54%) of the existing businesses and 46% of the start-up businesses expanded their businesses,* page 19.

Greatest Impact—
“Writing of a business plan made us think through many of our operations and get policies in place.”
--Existing Business Owner

Business Survey Highlights

- **Businesses increase employment.** Fifty-three percent (53%) of the 120 Business survey respondents indicated they had full-time or part-time employees during the past year. Of the 64 businesses reporting employees, there was an increase from prior to EDGE or during first year of operation to the time of the survey. *Average part-time employment rose by an average of 1.0 employee, full-time was 1.14 and seasonal part-time was 0.45 employees,* page 21.
- **Businesses increase business assets.** Business respondents indicated their current business assets in comparison to prior to participating in EDGE. *Average business assets rose from \$189,729 prior to EDGE to current assets of \$316,748,* page 21.
- **Business owners change their choice of funding.** Business survey respondents indicated changes in the types of funding use for their business. *Existing business owners that used personal or family savings decreased from 68% to 62% as did the use of personal or business credit cards which decreased from 51% to 44%. Alternatively, business owners increased their access of a bank or financial institution for a loan from 41% to 54% or used their business equity more often, as indicated by an increase from 8% to 21%,* page 30.

1 - NebraskaEDGE Program Overview and Survey Methodology

Introduction

This section covers two topics, a brief history of the NebraskaEDGE Program, its mission and objectives; and an overview of the survey methodology used for both the Participant and Business surveys.

History of the NebraskaEDGE Program

The NebraskaEDGE Program was first organized as the Nebraska FastTrac Program in 1993 and later changed their name to reflect a growing mission. The NebraskaEDGE (Enhancing, Developing and Growing Entrepreneurs) reorganized in 1996 with the mission:

Communities that participate and partner with the NebraskaEDGE Program experience economic growth through added employment, increased revenues and enhanced community participation.

Greatest Impact—

“A realization of the risk involved in starting a business – that success is not a given.”

--Idea Business

The NebraskaEDGE (EDGE) is a program within the Center for Applied Rural Innovation, part of the Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Nebraska-Lincoln. EDGE is also a program within the University’s Extension programming efforts.

To date, nearly 2,500 individuals from 328 different Nebraska communities have enrolled in the training program. Training courses have been hosted by 55 different regional communities.

The NebraskaEDGE (EDGE) currently uses curricula published by the NxLevel Education Foundation. Included in the study is a curriculum authored by the Kauffman Foundation, which EDGE piloted for one course.

- Kauffman Foundation, Planning the Entrepreneurial Venture (PEV)
- NxLevel Guide for Entrepreneurs and NxLevel Business Plan Workbook & Resources Guide for Entrepreneurs
- Tilling the Soil of Opportunity: NxLevel Guide for Agricultural Entrepreneurs

The majority (94%) of the survey participants enrolled in the NxLevel Entrepreneurs training course. The curriculum covers 12 different topics over 12 weeks. The course is specifically designed for the small business owner who wants to expand an existing business or develop a new business but needs the necessary skills to ensure success. The 12-week course outline is as follows:

- Week 1: Introduction, Overview and Entrepreneurship
- Week 2: Planning & Research – Entrepreneurial Essentials
- Week 3: Organizational Matters: Management & Legal Structure
- Week 4: Marketing “Behind the Scenes” – Analysis & Understanding
- Week 5: Marketing “On Stage” – Strategies, Tactics & Implementation
- Week 6: Financial Overview – Books, Records & Controls
- Week 7: Managing Your Money – Financial Planning, Budgets & Assumptions
- Week 8: Managing Your Money – Developing & Using Cash Flow Projections
- Week 9: Understanding & Using Your Financial Statements
- Week 10: Financing Your Business – Alternative Sources of Money
- Week 11: The Deal Making Process – Negotiating in the Real World
- Week 12: Your Business Future – Managing Growth & Plan Completion

Survey participants also enrolled in the NxLevel Tilling the Soil of Opportunity course. Five percent of the respondents participated in a ten-week course specifically designed to assist agricultural producers move product into the consumer-driven markets. The ten-week course outline is as follows:

- Week 1: Take Stock of Your Resources
- Week 2: Basic Equipment Required: Planning and Research
- Week 2: The Legal Terrain
- Week 4: Manage from the Group Up
- Week 5: Plant It, Grow It, MARKET It!
- Week 6: Reap the Benefits – Marketing Strategies
- Week 7: Get Your Budgets in Line
- Week 8: Analyze THESE: Cash Flow and Financial Statements
- Week 9: Cultivate Your Money Resources
- Week 10: Harvest Your Future

A commissioned study conducted by the University of Calgary in 2000 on NxLevel Education Foundation concluded that nationwide, 40% of NxLevel participants start their businesses within one year of graduation, and 93% of all new and existing businesses remain in business three years after graduation from NxLevel. On average an existing business, within one year of graduation, will experience 32% increase in gross sales and create 1.3 new jobs.

Methodology of the Study

This study was conducted in 2008 and is the combined results from two surveys sent to former NebraskaEDGE training participants who enrolled in the EDGE training courses between fall 2002 and spring 2007.

The self-administered Participant Survey was mailed in June 2008 to 794 past EDGE participants. The 12-page survey included questions pertaining to current business status, changes in skill development and knowledge, community involvement, course evaluation and preference for future trainings. A 37.5% response rate was achieved.

In August 2008, a second self-administered survey was mailed to 453 individuals who represented businesses that had enrolled in the NebraskaEDGE Program between fall 2002 and spring 2007. To qualify, individuals must have completed the training course by attending the majority of course sessions or completed a business plan. Only one person per an enrolled business was asked to complete the survey. The 14-page survey included questions pertaining to changes in business management and marketing practices; measurements of business growth, and use of local services. A 40% response rate was achieved.

For both surveys, evaluators used the total design survey methodology (Dillman, 1978). The sequence of steps used follow:

1. A pre-notification letter was sent requesting participation in the study.
2. The survey was mailed with an informal letter and a small cash incentive of \$2 for the Participant Survey and \$5 for the Business Survey seven days later. Individuals were notified of an available online survey option.
3. A reminder postcard was sent to the entire sample approximately seven days after the survey had been sent.
4. Those who had not yet responded within approximately 14 days of the original mailing were sent a replacement survey.

Demographics of Participant Survey Respondents

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of individuals who responded to the **Participant survey**. The average age of the participants was 48 years. Forty-nine percent (49%) were under the age of 50. Just over one-half (55%) are females and 98% report their race as Caucasian (white, non-Hispanic). Only 1% reported their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino. Eighty-one percent (81%) are married and 25% are the sole earners in their household. Ninety-nine percent (99%) have at least a high school diploma, with 39% having a bachelors or graduate degree.

Counting themselves and their children, the participants have an average of three persons living with them and sharing income or expenses. Thirty-three percent (33%) have four or more persons living with them and sharing expenses or income. Seventy-five percent (75%) report having a total household income of \$40,000 or more. Twenty-three percent (23%) have household incomes of \$80,000 or more.

Using U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2008 Low Income (80%) Limits, 60 EDGE participants, qualify as low income households. Another 33 participants, likely qualify as low income households. In the survey, their household income categories were split by the low income limit numbers.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participant Survey Respondents

	Survey Results
Age:	
20-34	12%
35-44	22%
45-54	34%
55-64	28%
65+	3%
Gender:	
Female	55%
Male	45%
Education:	
Less than high school graduate	1%
High school graduate – Diploma or GED	14%
Some college, no degree	24%
Associate’s Degree	22%
Bachelor’s Degree	27%
Master’s Degree or Professional Degree	13%
Household Income:	
Less than \$10,000	0%*
\$10,000 - \$19,999	5%
\$20,000 - \$29,999	7%
\$30,000 - \$39,999	13%
\$40,000 - \$59,999	35%
\$60,000 - \$79,999	18%
\$80,000 - \$99,999	11%
\$100,000 or above	11%
Marital Status:	
Married	81%
Never married	5%
Divorced/separated	12%
Widowed/widower	2%
Household Size (living together and sharing expenses):	
1-2 individuals	48%
3-4 individuals	39%
5+ individuals	13%

N=298; 0%* = Less than 1 percent

Demographics of Business Survey Respondents

Tables 2 and 3 provide a quick overview of the demographic profile of the businesses that responded to the EDGE **Business survey**. Table 2 indicates the business status of all **Business survey** respondents at the time of enrollment in EDGE. Table 3 highlights

information from the respondents who were operating a business at the time of the survey.

Table 2: Profile of Business at Course Enrollment

	Survey Results
Business status at EDGE enrollment	
Existing business	42%
Start-up business (less than 1 year old)	17%
Idea for a business	41%
Established, purchased or acquired business enrolled in EDGE	
Yes	60%
No, still plan to do so in the future	15%
No, established, purchased or acquired another business	4%
No, business will not be opened	7%
No, not applicable to situation	14%
N=182	

Individuals that established, purchased or acquired a business and were still in operation in 2007 were asked to continue the remainder of the survey. The **Business survey** analysis is based off the subset of 120 respondents.

Table 3: Current Business Demographics

	Survey Results
Primary Industry:	
Retail trade	23%
Other services (inc. repair, personal service)	12%
Accommodation and food service	11%
Agricultural production	9%
Construction	8%
Agricultural services	5%
Manufacturing – durable goods	5%
Art, entertainment, and recreation	5%
Type of Business Ownership:	
Sole proprietorship	28%
Partnership or Limited Liability Company (LLC)	23%
Husband and wife jointly owned business	19%
Privately held corporation	16%
Level of Business Activity:	
Full-time business	64%
Part-time business	36%
Sales Categories:	
Household consumers and individual users (non exports)	76%
Other businesses and/or organizations (non exports)	45%
State and local government	16%
Export sales of goods/services	3%

Location of Primary Sales or Delivery of Products or Services:	
Within the region	28%
Within the state	22%
Within the county/metro area	16%
Within the city	15%
Throughout the country	12%
Globally	4%

N=120

2 - Program Outcomes

Program Goals

To enhance the opportunity for economic vitality, NebraskaEDGE focuses on the economic status of the community as well as the individual. Combined, these two foci help expand the economic tax base of the host community, increase individual skill levels, and increase the success rate of participating businesses.

The NebraskaEDGE program works with communities to deliver high-quality entrepreneurial training courses for new and existing business participants. Comprehensive educational courses are provided to increase management skills that lead to new, expanding and profitable businesses, increased personal wealth, improved community business networks and an expanded community economic base.

Community Objectives

Objectives are measured for both the community and participants. Although the Participant and Business Surveys measured only participant impacts, community activities over the same time period provide insights into the level of community commitment to the business owners and the NebraskaEDGE Program. A separate survey will be conducted to further analyze the community impacts and EDGE's efforts toward meeting these objectives.

1. *Communities will build resources to successfully organize and conduct a training course for area nascent and existing business owners.*

- During fall 2002 – spring 2007, 27 communities held 50 classes in which 868 individuals participated. The map below indicates locations of courses held.

Fig. 1: Location of 2002-2007 EDGE Courses

*“This was an excellent course.
I highly recommend it to
anyone contemplating (or
already in) a business.”*

- Survey Response

2. Communities will increase business networking and cooperation between organizations and private sector.

- Community coalitions were organized to host, coordinate and finance local EDGE training courses. Organizations and businesses that participated in the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 EDGE courses are listed below:

Adams Bank & Trust, North Platte	Heritage Bank
Alliance Technology Center	Holdrege Area Chamber of Commerce
Allmand Bros., Inc.	Home Federal Savings & Loan, Lexington
AmFirst, NA, McCook	Kearney County Economic Dev. Agency
Auburn Economic Development	KTCH – Wayne
Aurora Area Chamber & Development Corporation	Lexington Clipper-Herald
Aurora Mall	McCook National Bank
Bank of Bertrand	Mid-Plains Community College
Bank of Hartington	Minden Chamber of Commerce
Bank of Marquette	Minden Exchange Bank and Trust Co.
Cedar County News	Nebraska College of Technical Assistance, Curtis
Central Community College, Holdrege	Nebraska Workforce Development
City of Hartington	NebraskaLand National Bank
City of Tecumseh Economic Development	North Central Dev. Center, Ainsworth
Cline, Williams, Wright, Johnson & Oldfather, LLP	North Platte Chamber of Commerce
Community Development Resources	Northeast Community College
Community Hospital, McCook	Phelps County Development Corporation
Consolidated Telephone	Pinnacle Bank, Lexington
Cornerstone Bank	Plum Creek Bank, Lexington
Cozad State Bank & Trust Company	Ponca Economic Development Corporation
Curtis State Bank	Principal Financial Group
Dawson Area Development	Five Country Economic Development Corporation
Development Corporation of North Platte	Runza
Equitable Bank, North Platte	Rural Enterprise Assistance Project
Farmers and Merchants State Bank	Security First Bank, Overton
Farnam Bank	Security National Bank
First Bank & Trust Company, Cozad	Senator Don Pederson
First Bank and Trust Co., Minden	South Central Economic Development District
First Central Bank, McCook	South Central Nebraska RC&D
First National Bank of Holdrege	Southeast Nebraska EDGE Coalition
First National Bank, North Platte	Sun & Matt's Baking & Catering
First State Bank & Trust, Fremont	The Gothenburg Times
First State Bank, Gothenburg	TierOne Bank
FirsTier Bank, Holdrege	TierOne Bank, Lexington
Five Points Bank, Sumner	Wayne Area Economic Development
Furnas/Harlan Partnership	Wells Fargo, North Platte
Gothenburg State Bank & Trust Company	Western Nebraska Community College
Great Plains Communications	Wilson Public Library
Greater Fremont Development Council	Wortman Motor Company
Hamilton Telephone Company	
Hartington Chamber of Commerce	
Hartington Telecommunications Co., Inc.	

3. Communities will create a supportive business environment that uses and leverages local, regional and state resources.

- Community organizations and businesses provided sponsorships and donations to support local training courses.
- The Nebraska Department of Economic Development and the Nebraska Enterprise Fund provided grant and contract funds to NebraskaEDGE to support local training efforts.

Table 4: NebraskaEDGE Funding Sources, Five-year Composite

Year	Community Support*	Nebraska Dept. of Econ. Dev.±	Nebraska Enterprise Fund†	University of Nebraska	USDA Funds
2003-04	\$29,820	\$24,000	\$28,000	\$26,340	\$73,650
2004-05	\$36,275	\$0	\$25,500	\$0	\$22,486
2005-06	\$53,280	\$30,000	\$40,000	\$25,401	\$8,601
2006-07	\$66,465	\$30,000	\$44,100	\$49,216	\$0
2007-08	\$66,290	\$0	\$137,368	\$47,655	\$23,568
4 yr. totals	\$252,130	\$84,000	\$274,968	\$148,612	\$128,305

*Funds generated by community coalition for local course support. Amounts include cash and in-kind donations.

±NDED training job program support for instructional costs of each training course.

†NEF grant funds support state administration and local training efforts.

4. Community will experience an expanded economic tax-base and increased city and state sales tax through increased business activities.

- Business starts and growth directly affect the wealth of the community. One measurement of business starts is the number of businesses filing IRS Schedule C or Business Tax forms. Prior to EDGE, 75.5% of the 117 **Business survey** respondents had filed whereas 90% of the businesses are currently filing their business activities with the IRS.
- When **Business survey** respondents were asked the business’s total sales or total receipts for 2007 (Gross receipts or sales less returns and allowances), responses ranged from \$0 - \$6,000,000.
 - Fifty percent (50%) of respondents had \$70,000 or less in annual gross sales. Twenty-five percent (25%) had \$250,000 or more in annual gross sales.
 - The 2007 average sales for full-time businesses was \$622,041 and \$24,064 for part-time businesses.

- In comparing total sales from 2006 to 2007, 63% of the **Business survey** respondents reported an increase in sales with an average increase of \$221,371. Twenty-three percent (23%) reported sales to be at the same level.
 - Of the 43 businesses that reported a net profit in 2007, 58% attributed their participation in EDGE as contributing 25% towards their net profit, another 25% of the respondents attribute their participation as providing 50% or more contribution.
- For other related community impacts, see Participant Objective 5 in the next section, page 21.

*Greatest Impact –
 “Introduction to business forecasting. Helps to understand impact of sales on everything.”
 - Start-up Business Owner*

Participant Objectives

- 1. Participants will complete the training course with a business plan or attend majority of training sessions.**
 - **Participant Survey** respondents indicated that 71% of the 298 had completed the business plan for their business. Another 15% indicated that their business plans were still in progress at the time of the survey. *Of the individuals that were still in business at the time of the survey, 88% stated that they completed their business plan.*
 - Historically, information from course instructors indicated that 87% of class participants had completed a business plan and/or completed the majority of training sessions.
- 2. Participants will acquire and use practical business management skills, understand the business planning process and use the business plan for decision-making.**
 - Respondents to the **Participant Survey** indicated changes in application of business management and planning activities.

Table 5: Implementation of Business Management and Planning Activities

Planning Activities	Yes	In progress
1. Develop goals and objectives for your business	75%	17%
2. Conduct industry research	60%	9%
3. Assess your local/regional business climate	65%	13%
4. Assess and meet regulations that affect your business	56%	16%
5. Assess and minimize business risk	59%	21%
6. Analyze and target your customers	67%	18%

7. Prepare and implement marketing strategies that best reach your customers	52%	25%
8. Calculate your breakeven for products and services	63%	16%
9. Assess and adjust your pricing structure	58%	15%
10. Prepare projections and budgets	56%	19%
11. Prepare and manage your cash flow	55%	20%
12. Prepare and apply for business credit	37%	6%
13. Develop an exit plan for your business	22%	12%

N-298

- Individuals that had businesses currently in operation were more likely than those not in operation to have done or were in progress of doing the following:

- developed goals and objectives for business (95% compared to 87%)
- assess and meet regulations that affect business (77% compared to 63%)
- assess and minimize business risk (85% compared to 70%)
- analyze and target customers (87% compared to 80%)
- prepare and implement marketing strategies (84% compared to 60%)
- assess and adjust pricing structure (80% compared to 61%)
- prepare projections and budgets (79% compared to 67%)
- prepare and manage cash flow (82% compared to 59%)
- complete a business plan (88% compared to 81%)
- prepare and apply for business credit (50% compared to 30%)

*Greatest Impact—
“Writing of a business plan made us think through many of our operations and get policies in place.”
--Existing Business Owner*

- Respondents to the **Business survey** indicated changes they initiated in their businesses since participating in EDGE.

Table 6: Changes in Business Practices Since Participating in EDGE

Business Practices	Change
1. Changed marketing tactics/strategies	62%
2. Increased the types of products sold or services rendered to customers	52%
3. Changed insurance policies/coverage	34%
4. Changed the type of products/services offered customers	30%
5. Increased hours of operation	22%
6. Changed accounting system/accounting software	22%
7. Changed the legal structure of the business	21%

N= 120 businesses

3. If feasible, participants will start, expand or sell their business to increase their personal economic status.

- **Participant survey** respondents indicated their business activities increased since their participation in the EDGE course.
 - Eighteen percent (18%) of the **Participant survey** respondents indicated that they established, acquired or purchased a business. Approximately one-third (34%) of the individuals that had a business idea at the time of enrollment and 23% of the start-up businesses (less than one year) indicated they established, acquired or purchased a business since EDGE.
 - Thirty-five percent (35%) of all the respondents indicated they expanded their businesses. Over one-half (54%) of the existing businesses and 46% of the start-up businesses expanded their businesses.

Greatest Impact –
 “Legal and financial aptitude has increased; now know where to go to get help on these matters.”
 - Existing Business Owner

Table 7: Participant Respondents Business Changes as a Result of EDGE

Business Decisions	Total
Expanded your business	35%
Initiated no changes in your business	21%
Established, acquired or purchased your business	18%
Didn't start business	9%
Downsized your business operations	7%
Reorganized management operations	7%
Created a spin-off business	6%
Closed your business	4%
Sold your business	1%
Other	8%

N=298 participants

- Prior to EDGE program, 40% of the **Participant survey** respondents said the business was their primary source of personal income. Currently, 47% say the business is now their primary source of personal income.

4. Course participants will access local business networks and enhance relationships with business professionals.

- **Participant survey** respondents indicated changes in their level participation in community networks and professional relationships. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of the respondents increased their interaction with other local business owners and 48% increased their support to other business owners.

Table 8: Interaction Changes in Accessing Local Community Networks and Professional Relationships

Changes in Activities	Decrease	No Change	Increase
1. Use of local governmental/non-profit resources to assist your business	3%	67%	25%
2. Use of local private resources to assist your business (i.e., banks, attorneys, accountants)	2%	55%	41%
3. Interaction with other local business owners	2%	38%	58%
4. Support to other business owners	2%	47%	48%
5. Involvement in local business organizations	4%	61%	35%
6. Involvement in community organizations	3%	57%	40%
7. Involvement in community development activities	3%	61%	35%
8. Leadership in community development activities	3%	69%	27%
9. Financial contributions to community projects	3%	62%	32%

N=298 participants

- Participants whose businesses were in operation during the time of the survey, were more likely than businesses not in operation to have increased:
 - Interaction with business owners (63% compared to 48%)
 - Involvement in local business organizations (40% compared to 22%)
 - Involvement in community organizations (46% compared to 27%)
 - Involvement in community development activities (42% compared to 21%)
 - Financial contributions to community projects (37% compared to 20%)

5. Participating businesses will enhance the local economies through business investments, added employment and taxes.

- Fifty-one percent (51%) of the 298 **Participant survey** respondents feel their business has provided them with a higher standard of living since they took the EDGE course.
 - Start-ups (62%) and existing businesses (52%) were more likely than those with a business idea (31%) to say that their business provided them with a higher standard of living since they took the EDGE course.

- Fifty-three percent (53%) of the 120 **Business survey** respondents indicated they had reported full-time or part-time employees during the past year.

Table 9: Changes in Business Employment

Average Number of Employees per Category	Current Average	Prior to EDGE or 1 st Year Average
Year round: number of full-time employees, greater than 35 hrs/wk	4.65	3.51
Year round: number of part-time employees	3.5	2.5
Seasonal: number of part-time, seasonal employees	1.4	0.95

N=64

- Comparing prior to EDGE to the time of the survey, average part-time employment rose by an average 1.0 employee, full-time employees rose 1.14 and seasonal part-time increased by 0.45 employees.
- **Business survey** respondents also identified their current business assets in comparison to prior to participating in EDGE. Average business assets rose from \$189,729 prior to EDGE to current assets of \$316,748.

Table 10: Changes in Business Assets

Business Assets per Category	Currently	Prior to EDGE*
Average Business Assets – All Businesses	\$ 316,748	\$189,729
Average Business Assets – Part-time Businesses	\$40,761	\$18,123
Average Business Assets – Full-time Businesses	\$453,998	\$267,387
Average Business Assets – Existing Businesses	\$346,888	\$284,010
Average Business Assets – Start-up Businesses	\$200,631	\$49,333

N=65 – 75 businesses

* Dollar values not adjusted for inflation.

Assets include: buildings or land, equipment or materials (including inventory), business checking accounts, business savings accounts, other financial accounts, cars or trucks, any other business assets.

3 - Participant Survey

Results and Analysis

Business Profiles at Enrollment

In this section, individual responses to questions from the **Participant survey** are highlighted and supplement responses already addressed in Section 2 – Program Outcomes.

- Forty-five percent (45%) of the **Participant survey** respondents had an existing business when they enrolled in EDGE. Thirty-four percent (34%) of the participants enrolled in the course with an idea for a business and 21% had a start-up business (less than one year old).
- When asked how the respondent become involved with their business, over one-half (54%) of the respondents started their business themselves or with partners. Fifteen percent (15%) had no prior business association but an idea for a business. Twelve percent (12%) purchased an existing business.
- The majority of the participants were actively involved in their business. Seventy-five percent (75%) said they managed the day-to-day operations and 67% had financial control with the authority to sign loans, leases and contracts. Also, 61% of the respondents produced the business goods or services.
- Sixty-one percent (61%) of the participants own between 51% - 100% percent of the business. Sixteen percent (16%) own less than 49% of the business and 19% own exactly 50% of the business. Four percent (4%) don't know the percentage of the business owned by them.
- In 2007, the businesses provided an average of 46% of the participants' total household income. Fifty percent (50%) of the participants said their business provided 35% or less of their total household income. Forty-five percent (45%) said their business provided at least one-half of their household income, with 35% saying their business provided at least three-quarters of their household income.
- Ninety-five percent (95%) of the participants have access to a home or business computer. Four percent (4%) do not currently have access, but plan to purchase a computer within the next year and 1% do not plan to use a computer for their home or business.

*Greatest Impact –
“Sitting down & writing a
business plan & figuring out at
what point I can quit my
career to run my business full-
time.”*

- Start-up Business Owner

- Seventy-six percent (76%) of the participants reported having high speed Internet access, 11% reported having dial-up access, 10% had other types of access and 3% reported no access.
- Seventy-eight percent (78%) of the participants rated their general skill level in using the computer and various business software as being at least moderate. Twenty-two percent (22%) said they have significant computer skills.

Participant Motivations

- There are multiple reasons individuals participate in entrepreneurship training. Survey respondents indicated their motivations.

Table 11: Priorities for Participating in the Entrepreneurs Course

Highest Priority for Participating in the Program	Total
Decide if business ownership was right for you, or if your business idea was viable	33%
Receive assistance to make your existing business more formal, stable, or profitable	43%
Help address an immediate and threatening problem with an existing business	5%
Receive assistance to substantially grow your business	11%
Other	8%

N=298

- Business status does impact the respondent’s priority for participating in EDGE.
 - Most (83%) of those with a business idea participated to decide if business ownership was right for them or if their business idea was viable.
 - Most of the start-up businesses (60%) and existing businesses (65%) participated to receive technical assistance to make their existing business more formal, stable or profitable.
 - Some of the start-ups (17%) and existing businesses (15%) participated to receive technical assistance to substantially grow their business.
- Before participating in the EDGE program, participants had various plans for the operations of their business. After participating in the program, the plans for their business changed.

Table 12: Initial Plans for Business Operation, Prior and Following Training

Plans for the Operations of Business	Prior to EDGE	Since EDGE
Start the business	72%	26%
Continue the business until you find a better job or current job/occupation that provides more money/benefits	17%	21%
Keep the business as long as it pays its own expenses	29%	32%
Keep the business as long as it is profitable and provides extra cash	29%	49%
Continue to grow the business to the point that you can pass it on to children/family	23%	38%
Eventually sell the business for a lot of money and retire or start another business	10%	26%
Had or have no idea how long you plan to keep the business	29%	29%

N=298

- Of the Seventy-two percent (72%) of the respondents that stated they wanted to start their business prior to participating in EDGE, the majority of these businesses were idea (49%) and newly started businesses (24%).
- Respondents with start-up and existing businesses were more likely than respondents with a business idea to keep their business as long as it pays its own expenses prior to EDGE (39% and 36%, respectively, compared to 18% of those with a business idea).

Personal Skill Development

- Individuals that had businesses currently in operation were more likely than those not in operation to have done or were in progress of doing the following.

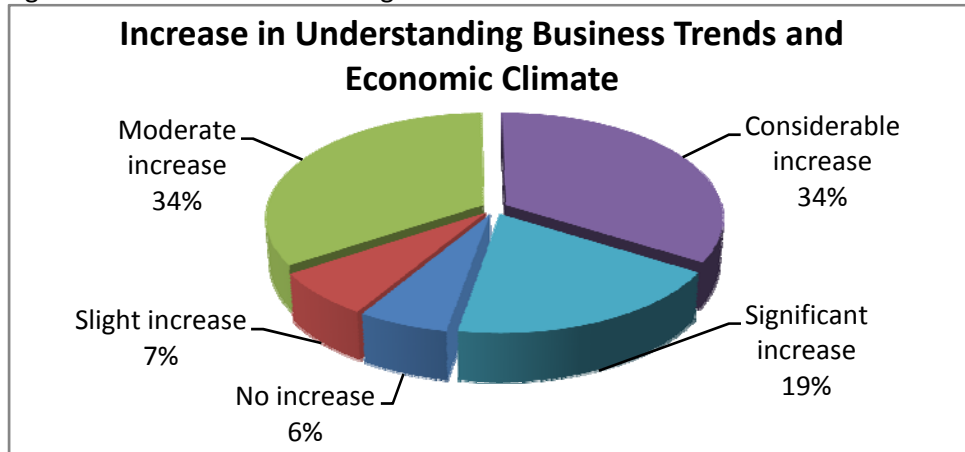
Table 13: Comparing Use of Business Knowledge and Skills

Business Skills Learned	Currently in Operation	Not in Operation
Developed goals and objectives for business	95%	87%
Assess and meet regulations that affect business	77%	63%
Assess and minimize business risk	85%	70%
Analyze and target customers	87%	80%
Prepare and implement marketing strategies	84%	60%
Assess and adjust pricing structure	80%	61%
Prepare projections and budgets	79%	67%
Prepare and manage cash flow	82%	59%
Complete a business plan	88%	81%
Prepare and apply for business credit	50%	30%

N=298

- Eighty-seven percent (87%) of the participants say they have had at least a moderate increase in their understanding of the business trends and economic climate that affects their business. Nineteen percent (19%) saw a significant increase. Persons with a business idea had the highest means compared to the start-up and existing scales.

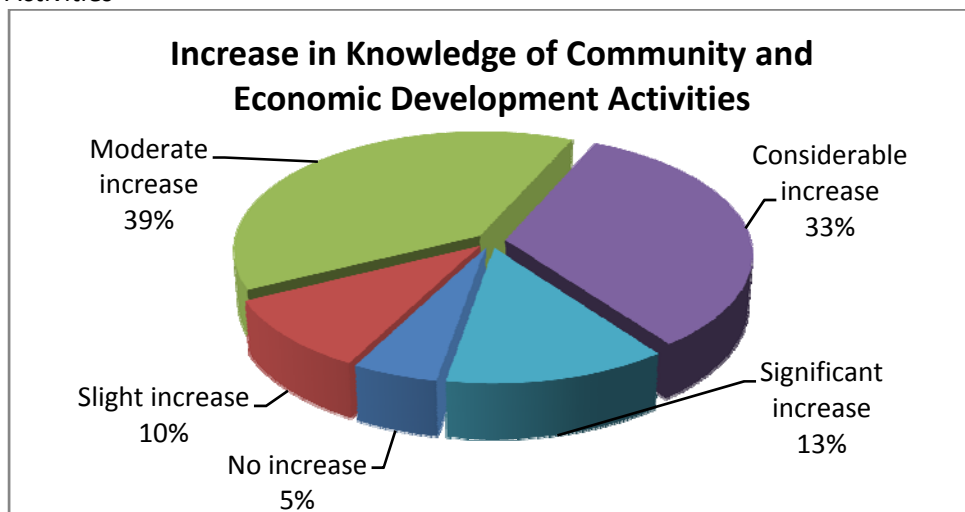
Fig. 2: Increase in Understanding Business Trends and Climate



N=298

- Eighty-five percent (85%) of the participants had at least a moderate increase in their knowledge of community and economic development activities and how they affect their business operations. Thirteen percent (13%) saw a significant increase.

Fig. 3: Increase in Knowledge of Community and Economic Development Activities



N=298

4 - Business Survey

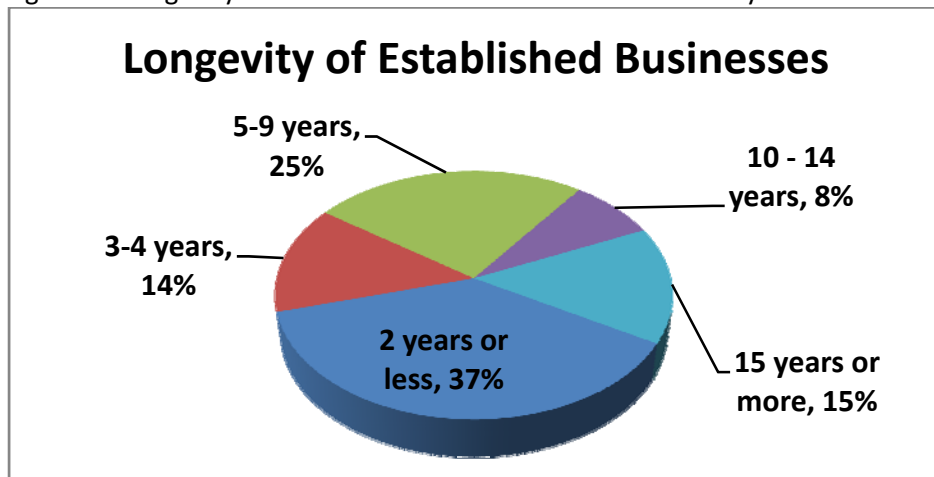
Results and Analysis

In this section, individual responses to questions from the **Business survey** are highlighted and supplement responses already addressed in Section 2 – Program Outcomes.

Business Longevity and Barriers

- Sixty percent (60%) of the 182 respondents had established, purchased or acquired a business prior to the survey. An additional 15% stated they had not yet established the business but still plan to do so in the future. The following chart depicts the number of years of operation for the established businesses at the time of the survey.

Figure 4: Longevity of Established Businesses at Time of Survey



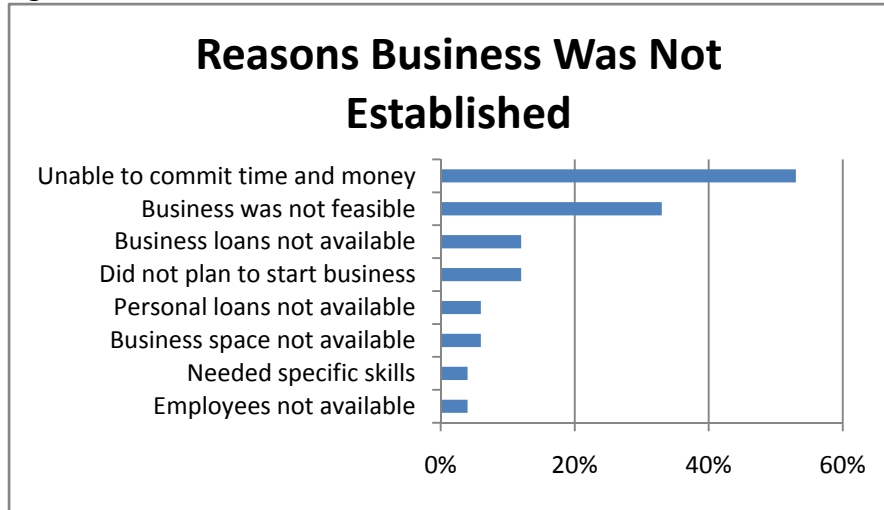
N=120

- Another 4% of respondents stated that the business for which they enrolled in EDGE was not established, but instead another business idea was pursued. Seven percent indicated that they will not be opening a business.
 - Of the businesses that did not start, the majority indicated their reason for not starting the business was due to their inability to commit time and money to the business.

"I believe EDGE is worth the time in taking. Even though I did not use it [EDGE course] to purchase or start a business, I have used it to help promote the business that I'm in.

- Business Survey Response

Fig. 5: Reasons Business Was Not Established



N=50

- Of the six businesses that closed, two indicated that it was because of inadequate cash flow or low sales. Others cited lack of access to business loans or credit, started another business, sold the business, and relocation

Business Status

- In 2007, 90% of the **Business survey** respondents reported filing an IRS Schedule C or Business Tax form. Prior to their participation in EDGE, 75.5% filed tax forms.
- Sixty-four percent (64%) of the Business respondents categorized their businesses as full-time businesses; 36% indicated they operated a part-time business.
 - Of the part-time businesses, 41% of the respondents considered the business to require less than a full-time effort.

Table 14: Characteristics of the Business Activities

Current Activities of Business	Total
1. Full-time Business	64%
2. Part-time Business	36%
Business is operated less than 12 months	11%
Business is a hobby which generates income	11%
Business is a part-time venture requiring on average, less than a full-time effort	41%
Business is seasonal (for example, firework sales, or tax preparer)	27%
Business is operated occasionally (example, consultant, event organizer or musicians)	11%

N=120

- Seventy-five percent (75%) of respondents indicated that household consumers and individual users accounted for 10% or more of their sales. In comparison with the 2002 Survey of Business Owners and Self-employed Persons report, EDGE businesses rely more on the household consumers and other businesses markets than do businesses in the national survey.

Table 15: Types of Customers Accounting for 10% of Total Sales

Customer Categories	EDGE Results	Dept. of Commerce Results
1. Household consumers and individual users (excluding export sales)	76%	49%
2. Other businesses and/or organizations (excluding export sales)	45%	32%
3. State and local government (including school districts, transportation authorities, etc.)	16%	5%
4. Federal government	2%	2%
5. Export sales of goods/services	3%	1%
6. Not applicable	4%	8%
7. Other	5%	19%

Note: Data in comparison to the U.S. Department of Commerce, 2002 Economic Census, Survey of Business Owners Company Statistics Series, Issued September 2006.

N=120

Business Employment

- Business owners were asked the kinds of labor used in 2007. Fifty-three percent (53%) reported having full - and part-time paid employees. Twenty-six percent (26%) hired contractors, subcontractors, independent contractors or outside consultants and 14% paid day laborers to help with the business. Temporary staffing and leasing services were seldom used.
 - Of those respondents having contractors, subcontractors, independent contractors or outside consultants, 23% were in the construction industry, 19% were in manufacturing – durable goods, 19% in other services, 15% in retail trade, 8% in information, 8% in accommodation and food services, 4% in agriculture services, and 4% in agriculture production.
- Fifty-three percent (53%) of the 120 **Business survey** respondents indicated they had reported full-time or part-time employees during the past year.

Table 16: Changes in Business Employment

Average Number of Employees per Category	Current Average	Prior to EDGE or 1 st Year Average	Average Employment Increase
Year round: number of full-time employees, greater than 35 hrs/wk	4.65	3.51	1.14
Year round: number of part-time employees	3.5	2.5	1.0
Seasonal: number of part-time, seasonal employees	1.4	0.95	.45

N=64

- Of the businesses with employees, 57% provided extra benefits to their employees. Table 14 shows the types of non-required benefits provided by the respondents.

Table 17: Types of Non-required Benefits Offered to Employees

	Percent of Business
1. Health plans	46%
2. Dental or vision plans	14%
3. Paid vacation, sick leave or holidays	80%
4. Retirement plans	31%
5. Life insurance plans	26%
6. Disability insurance	14%
7. Stock options	3%
8. Other	26%

N = 35

Business Financing

- **Business survey** respondents indicated the types of financing currently used in their businesses. Sixty-four percent (64%) uses personal or family savings, 43% continues to fund their business through personal or business credit cards.
 - These results are compared to national results from the 2002 Survey of Business Owners and Self-employed Persons Report which too indicated a majority of business owners accessing personal or family savings of owner to finance their business. Interestingly, 28% of the national businesses indicated no financing was needed. This question was not included in the EDGE Business Survey.

Table 18: Current Types of Business Financing

Types of Financing Used in the Business	EDGE Results	Dept. of Commerce Results
1. Personal/family savings of owner/s	64%	55%
2. Personal/family assets other than savings	35%	9%
3. Personal/business credit card of owner/s	43%	9%
4. Business loan from federal, state or local government	15%	1%
5. Government-guaranteed business loan from a bank or financial institution	12%	1%
6. Business loan from a bank or financial institution	48%	11%
7. Business loan from a micro enterprise lender	4%	NA†
8. Outside investor	10%	3%
9. Business Equity	19%	NA
10. Other	5%	NA
11. None needed	NA†	28%

Note: Data in comparison to the U.S. Department of Commerce, 2002 Economic Census, Survey of Business Owners Company Statistics Series, Issued September 2006.

†Question was not asked in the respective survey.

N= 120

- Comparing business owners' responses between prior to EDGE and at the time of the survey, start-up and existing businesses had differences in the types of financing used.

Start-up Businesses

Changes in Types of Financing Used

- Personal/family savings of owner/s 64% decreased to 50%
- Personal/family assets other than savings 50% decreased to 38%
- Personal/business credit card of owner/s 27% increased to 46%
- Bank or financial institution loan 27% increased to 46%
- Outside investor 9% increased to 17%
- Business Equity 5% increased to 21%
- Microlender loan 5% increased to 8%

Existing Businesses

Changes in Types of Financing Used

- Personal/family savings of owner/s 68% decreased to 62%
- Personal/family assets other than savings 40% decreased to 34%
- Personal/business credit card of owner/s 51% decreased to 44%
- Bank or financial institution loan 41% increased to 54%
- Business Equity 8% increased to 21%

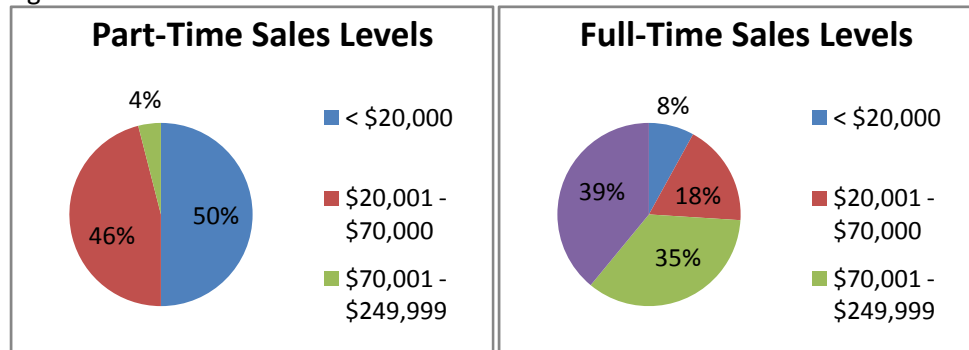
- Twenty-seven percent (27%) or 31 of the **Business survey** respondents reported using their business plan to obtain commercial financing. Of this amount, 75% obtained their loan from a commercial bank, savings bank, savings and loan association or credit union, 14% had a personal or home equity bank loan and 14% has a Small Business Administration (SBA) guaranteed loan.

- The average amount of the loans received was \$181,227. Fifty percent (50%) of the respondents had loan amounts of \$65,000 or less. Twenty-seven percent (27%) had loan amounts of \$35,000 or less and 27% had loan amounts of \$200,000 or more.

Business Sales and Profits

- **Business survey** respondents reported an averaged \$449,739 in 2007 annual gross sales. Responses ranged from \$0 - \$6,000,000. Fifty percent (50%) of respondents had \$70,000 or less in annual gross sales. Twenty-five percent (25%) had \$250,000 or more in annual gross sales.
 - Respondents that reported operating a part-time business had an average 2007 sales of \$24,064. Breakout of the different sales levels are below in Figure 6.
 - Respondents that reported a full-time business had an average 2007 sales level of \$622,041. Breakout of the different sales levels are below.

Fig. 6: Sales Levels for Part-time and Full-time Businesses.



N=86

- In comparison, 63% of all businesses reported an increase in 2007 sales over 2006 sales by an average dollar amount of \$221,371. Fifteen percent (15%) reported a decrease in 2007 sales as compared to 2006 sales. Approximate dollar decrease was \$197,011. Twenty-three percent (23%) stated their sales levels to be the same from 2006 to 2007.
- Responses for 2008 projections showed mixed results. Part-time businesses projected an increase in sales of \$13,286. Full-time businesses anticipate a decrease in sales of \$28,471. The anticipated decreased may be a result of higher gas prices which had reached an all-time high at the time of the **Business survey**.
- **Business survey** respondents indicated whether their business had a profit after all expenses and taxes had been deducted. Forty-three percent (43%) reported a positive net profit/net gain. Twenty percent (20%) reported breaking even or no profit, Twenty percent (20%) didn't know or refused to answer and (26%) reported a negative net profit or net loss.

- The size of the business helped determine the profit or loss of the business. In table 16, businesses that had gross annual sales less than \$20,000 were more likely to report a loss than businesses that had sales over \$20,000. Ninety-one percent (91%) of the businesses that reported sales over \$250,000 indicated they had a net profit or broke even in 2007.

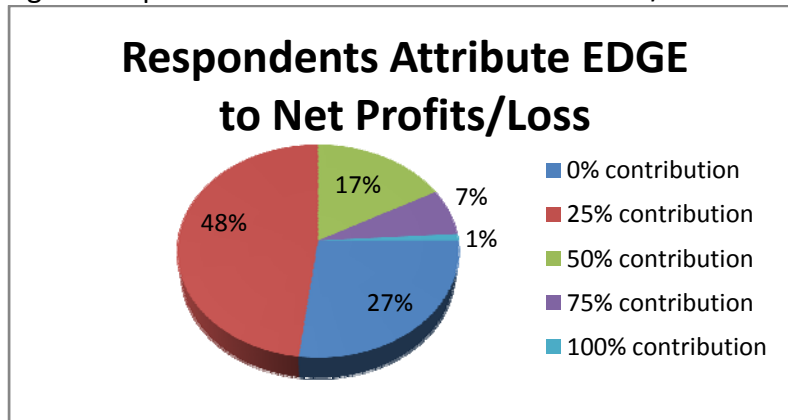
Table 19: Net Profit or Loss Categorized by Levels of Gross Sales

2007 Gross annual sales	Positive net profit/net gain	Negative net profit/net loss	No profit/broke even	Don't know/refuse to answer
Less than 20,000	10%	74%	16%	0%
20,000 – 70,000	48%	22%	26%	4%
70,001 – 249,999	64%	18%	9%	9%
250,000 or more	64%	4%	27%	5%

N= 86

- Fifty-two percent (52%) of the full-time businesses and 28% of the part-time businesses reported a net profit. Of the businesses that reported a net profit, the majority had sales over \$70,000.
- Forty-one percent (41%) of the part-time businesses and 14% of the full-time businesses reported a net loss for 2007. Of the businesses that reported a net loss, the majority had sales under \$20,000.
- The average reported 2007 net increase was \$43,371 and the average decrease was \$18,394.
- Respondents were asked how much they felt EDGE contributed to their net profit or net loss. The majority (48%) attributed EDGE to 25% of the changes.

Fig. 7: Respondents Attribute EDGE to Net Profits/Loss

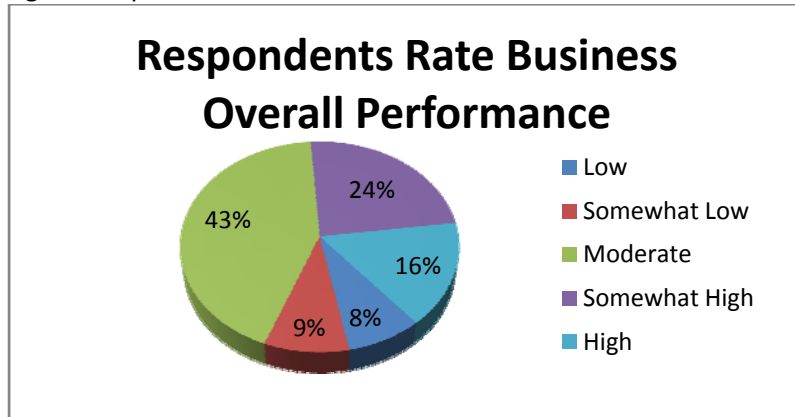


N=86

- Of the 37 businesses that had a net profit, 16% reported that EDGE had a 50% contribution, 58% attributed EDGE to 25% of the profit and 16% attributed EDGE to 0% of the profit.

- Of the 22 businesses that had a net loss, 60% reported that EDGE had no contribution toward the loss, 15% attributed EDGE to 25% of the loss and 20% attributed EDGE to 50% of the loss.
- Compared to competitors over the last three years, respondents rated their overall performance of the business in terms of sales and net profits. Eighty-three percent (83%) of the respondents considered themselves to be at least a moderate performer. (Individuals who were not in business over the past three years were eliminated from the results.)

Fig. 8: Respondents Rate Business Overall Performance



N=87

Changes in Practices

- **Business survey** respondents reported changes from prior to EDGE to current use of professional services (fee-based and free) to provide professional expertise on business activities and opportunities.
 - **Start-up Businesses Changes in Use of Professional Services**
 - Accountant, CPA 71% increased to 85%
 - Business Banker, Loan Officer 47% increased to 50%
 - Successful business owner 29% increased to 40%
 - Small Business Development Center advisor 6% increased to 20%
 - Non-profit organization business advisor 0% increased to 10%
 - Governmental advisor 6% increased to 15%
 - **Existing Businesses Changes in Use of Professional Services**
 - Bookkeeper 43% increased to 48%
 - Accountant, CPA 78% increased to 82%
 - Business Banker, Loan Officer 60% increased to 66%
 - Attorney 45% increased to 48%
 - Business insurance agent 63% increased to 68%
 - Non-profit organization business advisor 2% increased to 5%

- Ninety-three percent (93%) of the **Business survey** respondents reported using a computer for business activities. Changes occurred in specific business tasks.

Table 20: Computer Tasks Used in the Business

Computers Tasks Used in the Business	Currently	Prior to EDGE, or 1st yr.
1. E-mail or Internet connection	91%	90%
2. Online banking	62%	45%
3. Use Internet to purchase business products and services	80%	67%
4. Use Internet to sell business products and services	38%	24%
5. Apply for loans or other forms of credit online	10%	6%
6. Manage inventory	48%	33%
7. Administrative functions such as word processing	81%	83%
8. Manage the firm's accounts or bookkeeping	83%	76%
9. Other business tasks	61%	56%
10. Directly contributes to the business's primary activity	51%	48%

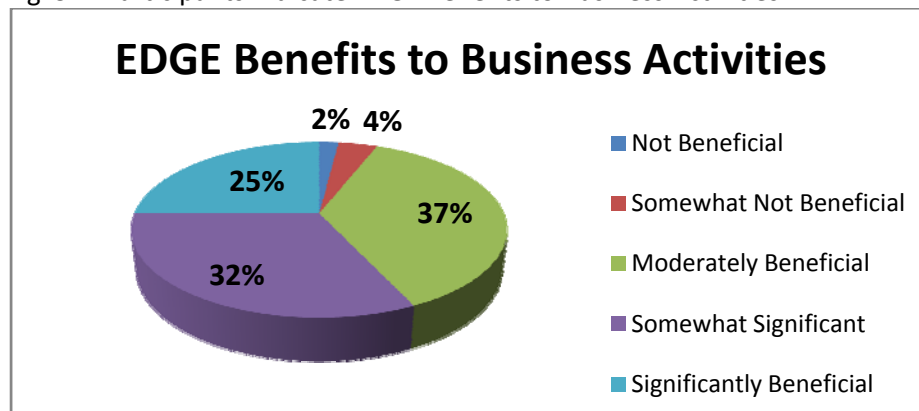
N=120

5 - Course Evaluation

Participants' Evaluation of Training Course

- Ninety-four percent of the participants had taken the NxLevel Entrepreneurs course, 5% participated in the Tilling the Soil of Opportunity and 1% participated in the Preparing the Entrepreneurial Venture (electronic curriculum) course.
- Ninety-four percent of the participants said the EDGE program was at least moderately beneficial to their business activities. On a 1 to 5 scale with 5 being the highest, respondents rated EDGE at 3.73.

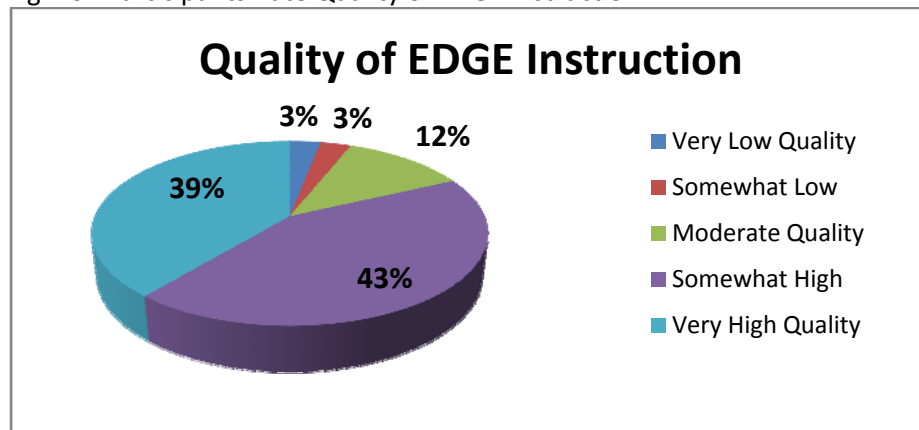
Fig. 9: Participants Indicate EDGE Benefits to Business Activities



N=298

- Ninety-four percent of the participants rated the quality of the instruction received while in the EDGE course as at least of moderate quality. Thirty-nine percent rated it as very high quality, with an additional 43% rating it as high quality. On a 1 to 5 scale with 5 being the highest, respondents rated EDGE at 4.12.

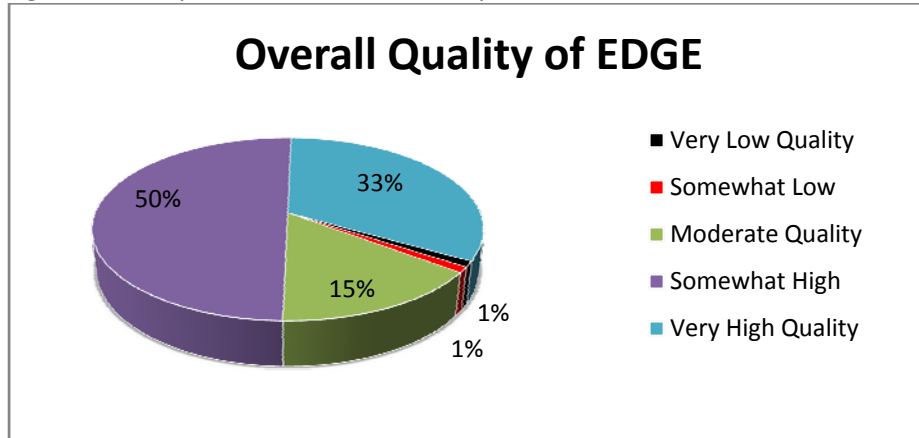
Fig. 10: Participants Rate Quality of EDGE Instruction



N=298

- Ninety-eight percent rated the quality of the overall course as of at least moderate quality. Thirty-three percent rated it as very high quality, with an additional 50% rating it as high quality. On a 1 to 5 scale with 5 being the highest, respondents rated EDGE at 4.13.

Fig. 11: Participants Rate Overall Quality of the EDGE Course

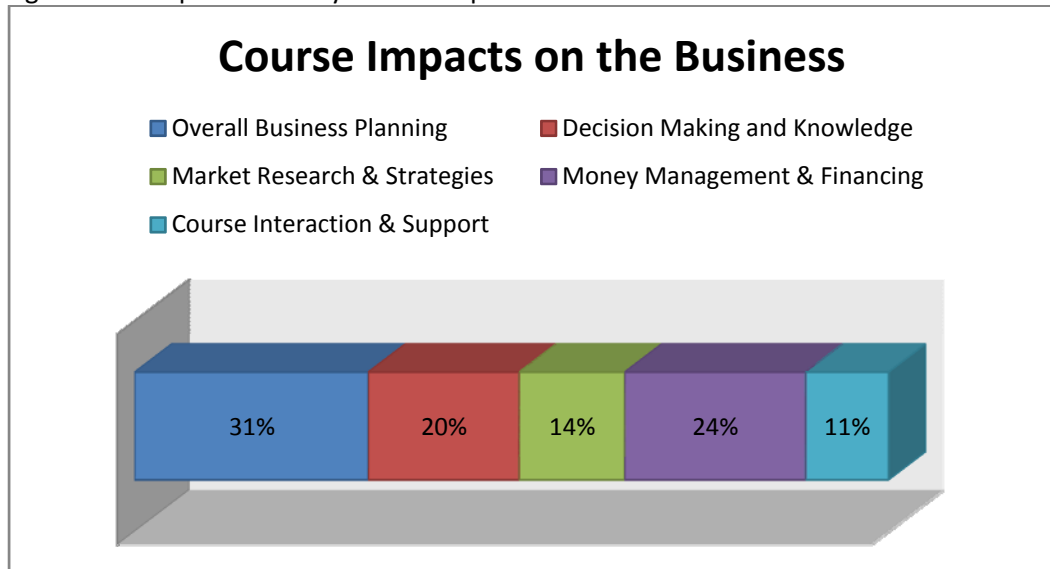


N=298

Reflection on Course Impacts

Individuals were asked to identify the one thing about the course that they felt has or will have the greatest impact on their business. Their responses are categorized below.

Fig. 12: Participants Identify Course Impacts on Their Business



N=298

- Overall Business Planning
 - “Actually making the business plan – if you can get through that – you are dedicated. It taught me so many things I didn’t know or wouldn’t have thought of to do.” – Idea business
 - “Making a business plan. I didn’t have a clear picture how all the aspects fit together before the class. It made me more confident.” – Start-up business
 - “Preparing the business plan helps give me a focus for progress.” – Existing business
 - “Learning how to make a formal business plan, especially the financial aspects. I now have several excel templates that I can use and modify as needed.” – Existing business
- Decision Making and Knowledge
 - “Taking the course showed us that our idea was not feasible.” – Idea business
 - “Gained confident & knew that we could do it. There were things we didn’t know, but EDGE filled in the blanks for us.” – Start-up business
 - “We completely re-evaluated everything. We made some major changes.” – Existing business
- Market Research and Strategies
 - “Marketing research, targeting customers, taking advantage of industry research and marketing skills.” – Idea business
 - “How to research and analyze business/industry trends and deal with all aspects of a retail business.” – Start-up business
 - “Charging an end price that is fair but is still profitable for the business.” – Existing business
- Money Management and Financing
 - “Learning how to plan and focus my attention on the financial aspects of the business.” – Idea business
 - “Bookwork is just as important as making a sale. We have to know where our business is financially.” – Start-up business
 - “Calculating break even made us realize that the business could not continue to operate in its present configuration.” – Existing business
- Course Interaction and Support
 - “How to deal with bankers, attorneys, accountants and cash flow. Before, we knew nothing about these things.” – Idea business
 - “Networking, networking, networking – I can’t say it enough.” – Start-up business
 - “Listening to other businesses’ problems and how they solved them.” – Existing business

Greatest Impact –

“Encouragement, it gave us inspiration in getting our book done, helped us in marketing it. Gave us networking ideas, encouraged us to keep trying new things.”

- Existing Business Owner

6 - Survey Respondents' Open

Comments

Participant Survey Responses

NOTE: Some comments included names for further contact. These names have been eliminated from this report to help ensure response anonymity.

- I am glad I took the class.
- I would like to have a small business group get together w/ learning experiences.
- At first we really enjoyed the Reba subgroup of REAP, but it dwindled to nothing.
- The EDGE Program was worth every minute of my time and energy.
- Good luck with your planning. This entire program appears good for NE. Can you get high school and college folks involved?
- Class was good, teachers were always well prepared. I think a class on pricing of your products, how much is a reasonable rate to charge, hourly rates when you provide services.
- This was an excellent course. I recommend to anyone contemplating (or already in) a business.
- My business idea was a lot different than the others. I was (am) interested in tire recycling, so many of the lessons were geared toward "knowns" and I had to do a lot of educated guessing since there is nothing remotely like that in this area. I haven't given up, just not now. Thanks so much.
- Great program. Just found it hard to make it to each class.
- You need to spend the next time in class w/ business people; Internet would lose the one on one effect.
- Have really liked the contact back w/ this program. Even though the business did not start up, the program gave tools to apply in personal life as well as a start to another business plan. Thank you very much.
- The class was wonderful. It took a huge commitment to stay with it, but it was very much worth it.

Greatest Impact –

“The business plan. This opens communication between us and our lending institution. This tool puts us in an extremely knowledgeable position in the formation, day-to-day operations and future growth of our company.”

- Idea Business Owner

- I would highly recommend this course to anyone considering.
- Very pleased with the program. Just wish I had more time and income to focus on a business venture.
- Need to educate new business owners on do's and don't's. Maybe other business owners could shed light on their "bad choices." It is a "dog-eat-dog" world out there and new business owners try to do what is best, but without some experience, you learn the hard way, which in turn can have negative effects on your business making it.
- The instructors were great and genuinely wanted to help as much as they could.
- We did not get our business plan finished. Spring is probably our busiest season. Maybe fall would have worked better. So maybe when you offer the class, you should vary the time of year. Maybe you already do that.
- We lack capital to make the necessary investments to make the business a success and the courage to borrow the necessary amount considering the risks involved, despite a fair probability of success. I am tired of working mostly to support the banks, government and credit card processors.
- Karen's devotion to each of us as her students.
- EDGE was a great experience.
- Very good program not only for new business or someone thinking of starting a business, but as well as a long-term existing business.
- EDGE was a very positive experience and I learned a lot. EDGE probably saved us from making a bad decision.
- This is a great program and hope it continues.
- This course was great money spent, time as well. It was positioned in the early part of Feb-May. For me, it was excellent.
- Any way EDGE can get info out to existing & potential business owners is great. They are busy people and need up-to-date information. I think EDGE is a great program to get that info out to them.
- Appreciate the survey & hope there will be follow-up class to see how we are doing and other small business - success & failure.
- This class was extremely beneficial. Everyone should take it.
- EDGE is awesome. Keep up the good work.
- The course was good for me; I wish I had taken it before I opened my store.
- The EDGE course was a quality learning experience.
- Point out to business owners - need to factor in how the state of the overall economy will affect your business. Also, just because all your research verifies that your business should be a success, there are some types of businesses that reflect a more cultural knowledge and some communities (like North Platte) will be difficult to judge (get the pulse of).

- I was not at every class, but I have always felt there is room to learn and grow management skills.
- The course was very interesting and helpful at the time I took it to make an important business/career decision.
- I have often jokingly said "my beef cattle cow/calf operation could support a family; in a third world country." Fuel/equipment, cost of business inputs, land, USA cost of living and luxuries=expensive. Thank you.
- The class was awesome, but I'm convinced it was the teacher who made it so.
- The course was very beneficial. The research made me aware that I did not want to start a business.
- Overall the course was good - a repeat of business classes I took @ college. Add time for research and where and how to contact supply sources.
- This survey like the class was too much busy work and not enough substance. I wanted to know how to set up sales tax accounts and discover any licenses I need for a small business. I still have no idea if I have taken the legal steps to run my business and collect sales tax.
- I think this should be a high school accredited class. I would be willing to help teach in my area of Potter. Thank you. Great class.
- We benefitted mostly from the one-on-one time from the experienced people like T.O. and open discussion times.
- Thank you. I look forward to other opportunities here to develop/sharpen my skills in business.
- I am glad I took and completed the EDGE class. It was an excellent opportunity to network with other small businesses.
- I was not able to make it to all the classes because of my other job.
- I don't know how to answer most of the ?. I run a body shop for cars. I took the program because I am looking at making something. Why I took the class still thinking about it, but I cannot come up with the time that needs to be devoted to it. Thank you.
- I didn't complete my EDGE business plan. But since EDGE, I have continued to work on it. It is now established, but going very slow in developing the 2nd phase of it. This is partly because of time constraints and partly from trying to organize a business 210 miles from where I live. But, things are slowly falling into place and as everything looks now, I should be operating Phase 2 during the summer of 2009. Also, even though I didn't complete my EDGE business plan, I still put together a comprehensive analysis/assessment of my business. I did not put all into the "proper" forms and styles and formats that an economic major would have to do. When I presented it to my banker, for a loan for equipment, she said, "I can see you have done a considerable amount of analysis and have put a lot of thought and planning into what you want to do." I got the loan.

- I have a friend that took this class about a year before I did and said the class was a great learning experience. She had a different instructor that I did. I have talked to a couple of people that I took the class with and we all have said we would not do it again. I'm thinking the instructor has something to do with it. I think if we had been taught better we may have come away learning more.
- Our group was somewhat polarized between smokers and non-smoker. Smokers would go outside at break and smoke. They got to know each other more than the few people who don't smoke or want to be around smoke. So the networking aspect was decreased. I understand there's really nothing you can do about it but thought I'd mention that this was an obstacle for us in getting to know the other business owners more.
- As a community development director, I primarily took the class so that I could advise the people who contact me about starting a business. It gave me tools and information to help them be successful in their endeavor. Using the museum, which has been in business 50+ years and is owned by the city, as my business enabled me to create a plan and go through the same steps necessary for other participants.
- Keep expanding this program with the new technology (Webinars, Podcasts) and encourage its promotion through the Chamber of Commerce(s). This program has definitely made a measureable impact on my business. I now attribute my future success to the knowledge and network(s) created by my graduating from this program. Thank you!!!
- The course really was excellent. I think anyone who is passionate about and committed to a business would find the course useful--even if it is to find out that he/she really isn't cut out to be an entrepreneur.
- Thanks for your efforts!
- I went in with my eyes shut but at the end of the class they were wide open.
- Great program, well designed and I use these skills daily. THANKS
- I am glad that I was able to have the chance to take this class and to develop the friendships found by the class. I think that it should be a must and put forth by bank, to provide new business owners this class. If a bank wants to help out a new business, it would be great if they would recommend this class and if they graduate, give them the help that they need to get it going! I am a graduate of many UNL Extension Classes, just completing Leadership Plenty. I think you for your services that you provide to those that want to learn.
- Thanks for putting together a great class.
- You want my participation, but you have never gotten my initial business plan back from the instructor. Thanks.
- I appreciated the EDGE experience and will go back to my plan with a new idea I have.
- Enjoyed our instructor, liked the classroom atmosphere, learned from other questions. Would do it again. Thank you.

- The course is a lot of work, but well worth the time & effort.
- An important class, especially for rural Nebraska and beginning business owners.
- This course was the best thing to learn more of business. I will always have my manual (if I ever get a chance). Thank you very much.
- This class did much to focus my efforts and affirm my planning. We are still a long way from reaching business credibility for internet-based business.
- I appreciated instructor feedback and course material. I would say it was worth my time.
- The need for continued education after this class is a great idea.
- We were very positive after taking the class, but things went south and was not a pretty sight - foreclosure sale & loss of location very costly. More time needs to be spent on the adverse conditions & what to do when things are not going good. One thing we have learned is don't trust a bank. They will not help you when the chips are down, even though they say they will.
- I'm sorry to admit this, but my experience was so bad, I really feel it was a big waste of cash I should have kept in my business.
- I really appreciate this follow-up survey but there must be more follow-up, at the least in short term.
- The class was a bit expensive for struggling start-up company. I really liked Sue as an instructor. She used PowerPoints - good. Printed slide prints - good. Read every word on slides - not so good.
- I am glad you are continuing with the EDGE class. Thank you for the opportunity.
- As reflected by the last question, I appreciated the casual atmosphere of our class and the common sense approach of EDGE.
- Thanks. Wanna buy my business or know of anyone wanting to buy one?
- I took this class to find better ways of marketing our business. The guest speaker for marketing was very tight-lipped and only interested in setting up appointments. He used the class as a marketing tool for himself. He did not suggest any places to look for promoting business and he did not have any examples of the cost of promotions...i.e. he could have given ball park figures of a 10 second ad on the radio during peak periods vs. 10 seconds in off-times and who listens when. Or, newspaper ad, magazine ad cost. Business cards, what to put on them, how to get them out to the customers. Signs on business, where to get them, how much to spend, what gets noticed. The world-wide web. You can set up a business web page that takes credit cards & can be found on a search engine for free. There are also relatively free advertising when you put business decals or logos on your vehicles. Our speaker was not willing to share any marketing ideas much less marketing strategies. He has ideas that new businesses may not have thought of. He could have made suggestions like putting your name on license plate brackets and passing them out to all of your friends & family. Someone sees it, reads it, thinks nothing of it--but later, hears your business name, doesn't realize why, but knows they've

heard of your business. Ideas! That's what we are looking for when we take the class. Point us in the right direction. Feel free to contact me.

- Really good course. It gave me organizational tools, personal growth and increased understanding of business skills.
- I would like to see continuing topics discussed for graduates of PK EDGE to help further address issues that come up for business owners. It would be fun to continue on with the group we had for the PK EDGE class. Maybe meeting 4 times a year or having a workshop day.
- As a result of the EDGE program, I feel prepared to embark on my business adventure should I decide to in the future.
- Excellent program.
- Because I attended as an active employee who does network with employers and she makes business decisions.
- I would never have taken this course if Great Plains didn't match the cost. Thanks to them.
- The program needs to be known by more people. A lot more would take the class if they knew about it. We have taken classes through SCORE & UNL--very little % knew about EDGE or REAP. We are always wanting to take any kind of classes to learn from.
- The course was great and I have recommended it to several people.
- Maybe a web site option that can link willing past classmates together.
- Some of these questions were extremely difficult to understand.
- I thought the class was very helpful. I did not get to use what I learned for the business that I took the class for because it sold shortly after I took the class. The business has since closed. But I am able to use the knowledge I gained in other business ventures.
- I have a photography business if that gives more insight into the answers I chose.
- The EDGE Program helped tremendously and gave both of us a great beginning to start our business.
- When we started the class, we had no idea of what we need: tax forms, sales tax payment, business # or any of the things we need. All we learned was how to write business plan to get money to start a business. We had the money, we wanted to know the start-up. This was a waste of time and money for us. We talked to the teacher, explained what we want and she said that it would be covered later, but never was. This could be a good class for someone that was started and needed help, but did not help me at all. Now that my health has hurt me NE lost a small business because of this class. I feel that I was lied to and wasted 300.00. Thanks.
- I liked the course, especially visiting with the prior business owners who changed and made others plans work.

- I was unable to complete the 12 week class, but the material allowed me to complete my business plan in its entirety a year later, when time & family commitments allowed.
- A face-to-face program is the most successful method of learning and receiving feedback.
- I think developing economic opportunities in the rural areas and small towns is a fantastic idea. Thank you for helping.
- The class was extremely informative. Anyone considering starting or acquiring a business should definitely take this course first.
- The course was very similar to my business mgmt class at UNO, except actually making a business plan.
- We (I) found the EDGE course the best use of our time & money to formulate a business plan, test the market, get to know other business owners and instructors. Great job UNL.

Business Survey Responses

NOTE: Some comments included names for further contact. These names have been eliminated from this report to help ensure response anonymity.

- If anyone is interested in buying existing business with plan est. in 1999 please contact:....only open 2 months in 2007
- I highly recommend all current and pre existing business people take this class.
- The EDGE course was very helpful when looking at our business but we have other ventures that take precedence to our EDGE business. But when we work it, it works very well.
- I learned so much from taking the EDGE class. Wish I could have had it sooner. It is an excellent program.
- The Edge course was invaluable to developing a business plan to present to financial institutions for a loan. We have been able to see the process of our business and have felt positive about our experience in the class. We have had a chance to go through a couple of years of changes needed to continue. We support this program in Nebraska!
- I enjoyed the class very much and did learn a lot. I still have dreams of my business, and if that becomes a reality, I know I will use what knowledge that I acquired from the EDGE class.
- Our business closed in March of 2007--much of what I learned in the Edge class may have saved us had I taken the class before I purchased and attempted to run the business.

- From the beginning of the course, I knew my idea was one that could not simply be "paid for" or a loan taken out with me opening my doors for business in a few weeks. My idea of operating a carousel company is still a unique one (we went to Gettysburg's 145th anniversary battle this past July and there is yet to be one period-correct amusement ride at any civil war event I've been to). And I keep scanning the Renn Faire websites and my idea still has not been rivaled by any event photos I see. My biggest problem has been finding a job that pays my bills and still allows me time to do the carving necessary to produce the figures. And, I haven't found anyone to produce a base that can be taken apart and put into a trailer that will work for my machine. The class was very good in the fact that it made me take a good look at what it would cost to do this. I think if the class could focus more on each individual company's needs in some way, rather than giving generic situations to study, it would be more helpful. Thank you!!!!
- The course really helped me writing a business plan but just can't afford business at this time. I would recommend the course to anyone writing a business plan.
- Yes. Part IV, question #26 will not allow you to "check all that apply". I could only check one. Hope this survey helps you!
- Extremely helpful info was garnered no matter what our current business status. THANKS!!
- Very much enjoyed taking the course. Valuable information disseminated through the course. At the time course was taken not much training was provided by way of Internet research/links/resources, valuable information in today's business environment. Although what I learned wasn't used for start-up business, I still apply it in my freelance business. Thank you for offering EDGE to Nebraskans.
- Thanks again for a great program
- The NebraskaEDGE course was very thorough and was very beneficial in helping us determine if our business idea was feasible. Without it, we may have just plunged in and later regretted it. Everyone who wants to open a new or take over an existing business should take this course!
- EDGE is a great program. I hope you can make it available to more people by offering an on-line version.
- I took the EDGE class in Spring 2004. My intention was to gather information and facts needed to operate a business. I believe it provided that. However, that said, I went ahead with my business and ran it in rented business property for 2 1/2 yrs. My research for my plan showed that the county and area had the capital to support my type of business---however what it did not provide was the fact that just because there are people making the income to afford your products does not equal that they will. This community is unlike any other I have ever lived in (5 different states) and the people are not highly cultured and appreciative of local talent. Since we are a mobile society (traveling for ball games, school functions. visiting relatives) and local culture and economy has taught them to bargain shop and wait for sales, there were few that appreciated local customer satisfaction versus saving a few pennies. Advertising is key---but at some point it should be paying for itself and that never happening here. I totally believe that I did not do anything wrong in the

operation of my business and that in many other locations it would have been a success.

- We are a nonprofit organization so many of the questions did not pertain to our business so they were left unanswered. I answered as many as possible.
- I believe edge is worth the time in taking. Even though I did not use it to purchase or start a business, I have used it to help promote the business that I'm in. Thank you for letting me participate.
- I think the course could include more information for non-profits, or maybe a different course could be offered for that. A lot of the principles taught in the course apply to non-profits, though, which is helpful.
- The business is about the same, except students are involved in inventories and the sales class decides items to sell through the bookstore now.
- At the time I took this class, I was employed by this business. Not long afterward, I changed jobs. Since then, the people that now work there have not had the privilege of to attend the EDGE class. Even though I no longer work there, the information I received will prove useful at any job I will ever have.
- I believe this course helped me from making a costly mistake.
- Sorry it took so long to respond. The EDGE course really did help me be a successful business owner. From 2001-2006 I owned and operated Visage skin clinic and Day Spa. I could not have done it without the knowledge I received from this class. I now teach at College of Hair Design in Lincoln and it was because of the move I closed my business. I am now an Esthetics Instructor and share my knowledge of business in my business course. I would recommend this course to anyone who is thinking about doing it right, it will save the stress that lack of knowledge will bring.
- NxLevel helped teach me to ask questions and continue to try new things. It also has me evaluating whether or not to keep my livestock enterprises. The reason for doing NxLevel was to build a sizeable cow/calf operation and selling replacement heifers. That and my hog enterprise is currently losing me large quantities of money. We will evaluate at the end of the year.

7 – Contacts

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