



WASHINGTON STATE
UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION



READY, SET, GROW YOUR BUSINESS

BY THE NUMBERS

- 217 stakeholders completed surveys, providing input for program design.
- 140 participants in training sessions, representing 89 businesses across 4 regions.
- 74.5% of participants are current small-business owners.
- Many participants are newer business owners, with 47.2% in business less than five years.
- 33% pursued networking opportunities with other small-business owners.

2015 ISSUE

Small business ownership represents a significant component of the Northwest's economy, yet there are identified gaps in available training and access to resources. The vast majority of existing entrepreneurship and small business start-up services are focused on larger firms and concentrated in urban centers, adding the barrier of travel time and distance for rural businesses to secure help. WSU Extension Community and Economic Development staff in rural communities identified a high-priority need for technical assistance for business expansion and retention, as well as for entrepreneurship and business start-up. A statewide survey of rural community leaders identified small-business support as their number one interest.

RESPONSE

Ready, Set, Grow Your Business teams developed 3 variations of small-business assistance models and tested them in 4 regions. WSU Extension engaged regional stakeholders, existing networks, and new partners to create models to reach the target audience. Training and business-assistance sessions were designed to create a professional network and provide access to experience, advice, and resources. Participant pre-session surveys indicated the desire to learn how to effectively market their business, network with other local entrepreneurs, and build local connections for support.

REGIONAL MODELS AND HIGHLIGHTS

All models included a mix of topics from business feasibility and creating a business pitch, to product development, social media, legal structures, bookkeeping and record keeping, using financial statements to make strategic decisions, insurance, and access to capital.

Northeast WA: Eight sessions included presentations from professional resources, local business success stories, Q&A, networking, and refreshments.

Northern Idaho and Southeast WA: Nine sessions were held using the same model as in Northeast WA with the addition of one-on-one coaching and networking.

Lower Columbia Basin: Five three-hour workshops were conducted in Spanish with hands-on learning and follow-up advising sessions. Latino entrepreneurs requested additional sessions, and new partners delivered a second series.

Columbia Gorge: One-day industry-specific training and 2 agricultural tours focused on value-added food production from concept development to market delivery.



QUOTES

“Businesses enjoy the additional one-on-one help after each session, learning on a more personal level and applying it to their unique businesses. They all have the drive to be successful.”
—Jacob Stevens, student in the U of Idaho Entrepreneurial Studies and Idaho/SE WA Coach

“I’m very motivated and I see the changes in my business because of all these classes.”
—Latino business owner

“It’s so encouraging to be surrounded by people and businesses who are so positive and want to make our communities successful.”
—Northeast Washington business owner

“It’s so important to surround yourself with positive people when you are starting a business and that is the real value of these workshops.”
—Northern Idaho business owner

FUNDING

The Ready, Set, Grow Your Business team leveraged a \$50,000 WSU internal grant to support entrepreneurs.

University of Idaho
Extension

IMPACTS

Three models, with training opportunities tailored to regional needs, increased the strength, competency, and profitability of new small-business owners.

- Follow-up surveys reveal that in the weeks following session workshops, participants pursued business development assistance such as meeting with a Small Business Development Center or other business assistance expert, networking with other businesses, and business research.
- Session participants reported an increased understanding of controlling business expenses, variations in marketing approaches, and improving branding in their business practices. They also reported an increased desire to use social media better in their business operations.
- Participants also reported gaining a more complete picture of their local business climate, the skills to quickly present the benefits of what they offer to others, and an increased ability to document and process their products.

REGIONAL OBSERVATIONS

Northeast WA (Stevens & Ferry Counties): The networking and relationship building, coupled with a condensed training portion, brought in more participants than any other recent technical assistance. They appreciated the flexibility, easy access to classes, and variety of resources.

Northern Idaho (Latah & Benewah Counties, ID; Garfield, WA): Participants found the most value in networking. Professional presentations that were most appreciated: how to use financial statements to make strategic business decisions and effective marketing practices. One-on-one coaching helped several businesses overcome challenges.

Lower Columbia Basin (Latino-focused): The participants valued the informative presentations in Spanish. For them, it was a big commitment to show up one evening per week for five consecutive weeks and, remarkably, there were few absences. Because of the success, the series was repeated a few months later.

Columbia Gorge (Klickitat & Skamania Counties, WA; Hood River, Wasco, & Sherman Counties, OR): Opening a way for producers and processors to communicate has been key for future planning. They are looking for a way to start a group or alliance to continue educating themselves.