

Business Hotline Program Status Report

SUBMITTED TO:

Legislative Council Economic Development Committee
State Capitol
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PREPARED BY:

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Section 49 of Senate Bill 2018 asked for a status report as follows:

SECTION 49. BUSINESS HOTLINE PROGRAM - REPORT TO LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

During the 2005-06 interim, the commissioner of commerce shall report to the legislative council on the status of the business hotline program. This report must include information regarding what information the program provides to callers; the number of calls made to the business hotline number; the manner in which the information is provided to callers; followup data; how the program is marketed; whether the program should continue; and whether there are potential changes that could be made to improve the dissemination of business information to businesses in the state, to persons planning on starting a business in the state, and to businesses wishing to do business in the state.

Background

The North Dakota Business Hotline is a toll-free number, 866-4DAKOTA, which makes the wealth of information, program assistance and expertise in state government available through one simple phone call. The idea for the Business Hotline came out of the 2004 Business Congress and was passed as a legislative directive during the 2005 session for the Department of Commerce to implement.

Commerce spearheads the effort and is the first point of contact for all calls. Commerce personnel then forward the calls to staff in 25 primary state agencies that have been identified and trained to participate in the Business Hotline program.

All the Hotline agencies use a common email database and tracking system that logs the calls, the question asked, and tracks who is responsible for following up with the call. The system sends regular email reminders to the person responsible for completing the call until the customer's question is answered.

Current Status

Commerce activated the Hotline program on Feb. 1 with a "soft launch." In April, Gov. Hoeven, Majority Leader Rick Berg and Shane Goettle officially launched the site publicly at a press conference in Bismarck.

Number of calls made to the hotline

To date, from Feb. 1 through July 17, the Business Hotline had registered 101 calls from 16 different states. Commerce has answered 60 of those calls, and has referred 38 to other state agencies including 15 to the Secretary of State's office.

Information the program provides to callers

The program provides a wide variety of information to callers. A number of calls have been related to business insurance, licensing and regulatory requirements, and business financing. Several calls have been received about the Ambassador program.

There have also been a fair number of calls from Commerce customers who asked to speak to a specific employee. These people presumably called the Hotline because it was toll-free. We have also logged a half dozen or so marketing calls from vendors soliciting our business.

Manner in which the information is provided to callers

A vast majority of the questions have been answered over the telephone.

How the program is marketed

The program was launched at a news conference with the Governor and Rick Berg and widely distributed to in-state and out-of-state media. Information has been sent to hundreds of Commerce stakeholders and the Hotline number is included on a wide variety of Commerce marketing materials including the web site, the governor's site, and printed collateral materials used at marketing events. A huge outdoor banner hangs above the entry at the Commerce building.

Point-of-sale displays and pens featuring the Business Hotline number have been distributed to all 25 Hotline agencies for use in their reception areas. Governor Hoeven has agreed to tape a public service announcement this month promoting the number, which should air this fall.

Program should continue

At this point it's too early to tell whether or not the program should be continued. The expense of designing and implementing the program has already been expended, so ongoing costs are minimal. Early indications suggest the Hotline is providing valuable services to some customers.

Potential changes that could be made to improve the dissemination of business information to businesses in the state, to persons planning on starting a business in the state, and to businesses wishing to do business in the state

At least one other state offers a web-based one-stop shop for any and all business questions. North Dakota might explore the costs and value of establishing a similar program.

NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE BUSINESS HOTLINE

Number of Calls Between 2/01/2006 and 7/17/2006

Call Distribution Summary	# Calls	Percent
Department of Commerce	60	59.4%
Other State Agencies	38	37.6%
Entities Outside State Gov't	3	3.0%
Grand Total	101	100.0%

Detailed Breakdown of Call Distribution

DOC by Program	Complete	Open	Total	%
Administration	0	0	0	0.0%
American Indian Business Development	4	0	4	6.6%
Community Services/CDBG	0	0	0	0.0%
Community Services/Energy	1	0	1	1.6%
Community Services/Gov't Services	0	0	0	0.0%
Community Services/HOME	0	0	0	0.0%
Community Services/Renaissance	1	1	2	3.3%
Community Services/Self Sufficiency	0	0	0	0.0%
DOC/Administrative	6	1	7	11.6%
DOC/Legislative Liaison	0	0	0	0.0%
DOC/Marketing/Communications	7	0	7	11.6%
EDF/Administration	1	0	1	1.6%
EDF/Ambassador	4	0	4	6.6%
EDF/APUC	2	0	2	3.3%
EDF/Business Development	4	0	4	6.6%
EDF/NDDF	0	0	0	0.0%
EDF/Research	9	0	9	15.0%
Tourism/Administration	0	0	0	0.0%
Tourism/Communications	0	0	0	0.0%
Tourism/Group Tour Marketing	0	0	0	0.0%
Tourism/Int'l Marketing	0	0	0	0.0%
Tourism/L&C Coordinator	0	0	0	0.0%
Tourism/Marketing	0	0	0	0.0%
Tourism/Outdoor Promotions	0	0	0	0.0%
Tourism/Travel Counselor	0	0	0	0.0%
Workforce Development	2	0	2	3.3%
Receptionist	17	0	17	28.3%
Total Department of Commerce	58	2	60	99.4%

Other State Agencies	Complete	Open	Total	%
Agriculture	0	0	0	0.0%
Bank of ND	0	1	1	2.6%
Career & Technical Education	0	0	0	0.0%
Dakota Manufacturing Extension Partnership	5	0	5	13.1%
Emergency Services	0	0	0	0.0%
Financial Institutions	1	1	2	5.2%
Game & Fish	0	0	0	0.0%
Governor's Office	0	0	0	0.0%
Health Dept	0	0	0	0.0%
Human Services	0	0	0	0.0%
Insurance Dept	2	0	2	5.2%
Job Service	1	0	1	2.6%
Labor	0	0	0	0.0%
North Dakota Trade Office	0	0	0	0.0%
Parks & Rec	0	0	0	0.0%
Real Estate Commission	1	0	1	2.6%
Rural Dev/Tech for Business	1	0	1	2.6%
Secretary of State	14	1	15	39.4%
Securities Dept	0	0	0	0.0%
Small Business Development Centers	2	3	5	13.1%
Tax Dept	5	0	5	13.1%
Transportation	0	0	0	0.0%
University System	0	0	0	0.0%
Water Commission	0	0	0	0.0%
Workforce Safety & Insurance	0	0	0	0.0%
Total Other Agencies	32	6	38	99.5%

Entities Outside State Gov't*	Referrals	Total	%
Attorney Generals office	1	1	33.3%
Impact Foundation-Christine Martin	1	1	33.3%
McQuade Distributing	1	1	33.3%
Total Outside Entities	3	3	99.9%

Source of Calls Based on Area Code

Area Code	State	# Calls	%
000		3	2.9%
111		1	0.9%
334	Alabama	1	0.9%
650	California	1	0.9%
303	Colorado	1	0.9%
860	Connecticut	1	0.9%
302	Delaware	1	0.9%
808	Hawaii	1	0.9%
847	Illinois	1	0.9%
317	Indiana	1	0.9%
515	Iowa	1	0.9%
218	Minnesota	9	8.9%
320	Minnesota	1	0.9%
507	Minnesota	1	0.9%
612	Minnesota	4	3.9%
651	Minnesota	3	2.9%
763	Minnesota	1	0.9%
800	NANP area	1	0.9%
402	Nebraska	2	1.9%
701	North Dakota	56	55.4%
215	Pennsylvania	1	0.9%
412	Pennsylvania	1	0.9%
570	Pennsylvania	1	0.9%
610	Pennsylvania	1	0.9%
605	South Dakota	2	1.9%
972	Texas	1	0.9%
608	Wisconsin	1	0.9%
920	Wisconsin	2	1.9%
Total		101	97.7%

*Entities outside state government are not required to report results to the hotline system so only the number of referrals made to them are recorded.

NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE BUSINESS HOTLINE

Results of Calls Between 2/01/2006 and 7/17/2006

Results Summary	# Calls	Percent
Responded To Request For Assistance	72	80.0%
Referred Elsewhere	12	13.3%
Unable to Assist or Refer	6	6.6%
Grand Total	90	99.9%

Detailed Breakdown of Results*

DOC by Program	Responded to request	Unable to assist or refer
American Indian Business Development	4.4%	0.0%
Community Services/Energy	1.1%	0.0%
Community Services/Renaissance	1.1%	0.0%
DOC/Administrative	6.6%	0.0%
DOC/Marketing/Communications	7.7%	0.0%
EDF/Administration	1.1%	0.0%
EDF/Ambassador	4.4%	0.0%
EDF/APUC	2.2%	0.0%
EDF/Business Development	3.3%	1.1%
EDF/Research	10.0%	0.0%
Workforce Development	2.2%	0.0%
Receptionist	18.8%	0.0%
Total Department of Commerce	62.9%	1.1%

Other State Agencies	Responded to request	Unable to assist or refer
Bank of ND	0.0%	0.0%
Dakota Manufacturing Extension Partnership	5.5%	0.0%
Financial Institutions	1.1%	0.0%
Insurance Dept	2.2%	0.0%
Job Service	1.1%	0.0%
Real Estate Commission	0.0%	1.1%
Rural Dev/Tech for Business	1.1%	0.0%
Secretary of State	12.2%	3.3%
Small Business Development Centers	2.2%	0.0%
Tax Dept	4.4%	1.1%
Total Other Agencies	29.8%	5.5%

Detailed Breakdown of Referrals*

DOC by Program	Referred Within DOC	Referred to Other State Agency	Referred Outside the System
American Indian Business Development	0	0	0
Community Services/Energy	0	0	0
Community Services/Renaissance	1	0	0
DOC/Administrative	2	0	0
DOC/Marketing/Communications	1	0	0
EDF/Administration	1	0	0
EDF/Ambassador	0	0	0
EDF/APUC	0	0	0
EDF/Business Development	2	0	0
EDF/Research	2	0	0
Workforce Development	0	0	0
Receptionist	0	0	0
Total Department of Commerce	9	0	0

Other State Agencies	Referred Back to DOC	Referred to Other State Agency	Referred Outside the System
Bank of ND	0	0	0
Dakota Manufacturing Extension Partnership	0	1	0
Financial Institutions	0	0	0
Insurance Dept	0	0	0
Job Service	0	0	0
Real Estate Commission	0	0	0
Rural Dev/Tech for Business	0	1	0
Secretary of State	0	0	0
Small Business Development Centers	0	1	0
Tax Dept	0	0	0
Total Other State Agencies	0	3	0

Calls Resulting in Business Leads*

DOC by Program	Leads
Total Department of Commerce	0

*Entities outside state government are not required to report results to the hotline system so their information is omitted from this portion of the report.