

Bozeman BEAR Strategic Plan - 2014

This simple document is the Bozeman BEAR Strategic Plan for 2014. It is not an operations plan nor does it lay out goals and objectives in the traditional way. Instead, it asks seven big questions:

- 1) What's our winning aspiration? What's our reason for existing as a program and an organization?*
- 2) Where will we play? What space will we occupy in the economic development landscape here in Bozeman and the Gallatin Valley?*
- 3) How will we win on our chosen playing field?*
- 4) What do we need to be good at in order to win?*
- 5) How do we manage it all?*
- 6) What assumptions are we making with all of this?*
- 7) How do we know we're winning?*

The answers to these questions set the Bozeman BEAR team in a strategic direction. It identifies where we want to play and what we need to do to actually succeed. It lays out basic metrics. It is a simple document but it guides our work on the two fronts where we have chosen to play: with the clients we hope to help and with the team of volunteers that have chosen to be a part of it all. This document will certainly change as our work evolves.

Bozeman BEAR – What's Our Winning Aspiration?

The BEAR team is a network of private sector volunteers and public sector entities that support economic development and business assistance opportunities throughout Gallatin County.

Our reason for being is to help businesses in Bozeman and the Gallatin Valley grow and thrive.

Specifically:

- 1) We aspire to be an essential broker between our clients and the resources that can help them get to the next level. Specifically, these resources include mentors, training dollars, and occasionally business opportunities and clients.
- 2) We aspire to build a trusted team of business advisors that has a lot of fun, helps local businesses, and is rewarded by being part of the team.

Bozeman BEAR – Where Will We Play?

Clients = anyone who comes to us. Our clients tend to be small businesses in Bozeman and the surrounding communities who learn about the BEAR team and its opportunities.

Product = We provide two primary products to our business clients:

- 1) Access to a team of mentors who provide feedback and perspective on specific issues for up to two hours at no charge
- 2) Access to training dollars at the MT Dept of Labor

Geography = Gallatin County

When utilizing our mentor network, the clients we work with best tend to be those with specific needs (hiring/firing someone, website development, accounting questions, etc) that can be addressed in a single session with a volunteer from the BEAR team. Often, the clients that use our services most successfully are those who have been in the industry for some time but have only been in business for themselves for a year or so and who will get a lot out of these single, free sessions.

Bozeman BEAR – How Will We Win?

Bozeman BEAR has to succeed on two fronts: with clients on the one hand, and with the volunteer team members on the other.

We win by quickly and effectively matching our clients with mentors (both volunteer, private sector mentors as well as with public sector entities) who can help our clients with specific needs.

We win by helping our clients get training dollars. These training dollars can sometimes be very industry specific (helping a web developer learn a new coding language, for example); other times, they can be customized training that helps a client learn a specific business function (connecting our clients with sales or management coaches, for example). We take an active role in helping clients identify training ideas and in getting the IWT paperwork to an approvable level.

We win by respecting the time and energy of our volunteer mentors, ensuring that their time is well spent and that the BEAR program is fun and worthwhile. Sometimes our team members get contracts from their mentoring activities, sometimes they create customized training and we use grant dollars to help both the clients and the team members extend those two hours of volunteer time into something more meaningful, and sometimes our team members simply have a cup of coffee and share their perspective with a client. All of these interactions should be worthwhile for our volunteers. As a BEAR team, we do not

(and cannot) actively seek to help our BEAR team members get contracts but we are open to the possibility when it happens.

The Bozeman BEAR team's innovation has been in combining the two halves of our work: the mentor network and the training dollars. Often, a client has a specific need - sales, management, understanding their financials, inventory management - but no way to pay for a consultant. We have successfully matched our clients up with mentors and coaches who then create customized trainings around these needs; we then go get the training dollars at the state to pay for it. This represents our work in its highest and best form: helping a promising client identify their need; finding them someone who can help them with that need; and then finding the money to help them pay for it.

Bozeman BEAR – What Do We Need to be Good At?

- A) The work of the BEAR coordinator focuses on listening to the client, being able to tease out a client's true need(s), and being able to creatively match resources to those needs. This is deeply personal work – our product is often a mentor connection that we offer a client, and that mentor needs to be a good match for them. We need to be great at figuring out exactly what's going on with a client and then effectively brokering the relationship between client and mentor.
- B) We need to be great at staying organized. We average 1-2 clients a week, and each client averages 2-3 mentor connections. We need to make sure that those connections are happening and that they are worthwhile. We've got to track all of it.
- C) We need to be great at helping our clients access training dollars. Most of our clients are not used to dealing with government paperwork, and our role is providing a human face and a helping hand to help the client complete the application and get it submitted to Helena. We need to advocate for our client's applications with the Helena office.
- D) We need to be great at thinking through creative and effective ways our clients can use those training dollars. Sometimes they want it for one thing but could use it much more effectively another way. We need to be great at helping our clients see and understand the possibilities.
- E) We need to be responsive and responsible to our clients. When we suggest a possible mentor, we need to broker that connection quickly and efficiently. When our clients need training dollars, we need to help them access that money as efficiently and painlessly as possible. We have developed a reputation for making things happen quickly, and that takes work.
- F) We need to create strong camaraderie within the team. Our volunteers are just that – volunteers – and we are asking them to give their knowledge away for free (in small chunks, anyway) with no promise or even intent of getting paid work for their time. This is also deeply personal work.
- G) We need to have a great relationship with the Dept of Labor so that we can best access the training dollars.
- H) We need to have a broad team that can handle a wide variety of business needs.

- I) We need to have great relationships with all other resource providers in the community, specifically Prospera, SBDC, NRMEDD, Job Service, Gallatin County, City of Bozeman, etc.

Bozeman BEAR – How Do We Manage All of This?

- A) We need ways to track and manage all of our clients and the work we do for them (Executive Pulse).
- B) We need regular and personal follow-up systems in place for each of our clients to make sure they're getting what they need.
- C) We need regular systems in place to make sure the team is happy – Beer with BEAR, summer potluck, regular coffee shop/lunch meetings with the team members

Bozeman BEAR – What Big Assumptions Are We Making?

- A. Volunteers will be willing to continue donating their time
- B. The training dollars continue to be renewed by our legislature
- C. The director continues to receive political support to do all of this
- D. The team doesn't devolve into a competitive, back-biting mess but instead stays focused on the community benefit of it all
- E. Businesses in the market are willing to share their personal stories with us and are open to meeting with volunteers.
- F. Everything continues to stay confidential

Bozeman BEAR – How Do We Know We're Succeeding?

- A. We serve at least 50 clients annually
- B. We broker at least 150 relationships annually
- C. We bring in at least \$100,000 in training dollars a year
- D. Our clients are still in business a year later