

## Ready response network

**Overview:** Through the Ready Response Network, the SBDC gauges the views of small business owners around the State on a variety of current issues affecting the sector. The SBDC regularly polls the Network, via emailed questionnaires, using the responses to inform policy development and raise small business issues in the media.

**Outcomes:** During 2010-11, five Ready Response Network opinion polls were conducted, on the following issues:

- Small business expectations for 2011,
- Dealing with major unexpected events,
- Attitudes and experiences relating to the resolution of business-to-business disputes,
- Social media and its use as a business tool, and
- The implementation of a Paid Parental Leave Scheme.

Membership for the Network has continued to show strong growth, with an increase of over 400 members during 2010-11 to a total of 1,114.

## Business Facilitation Services

### Aboriginal Business Unit (ABU)

**Overview:** The ABU broadens and enhances the SBDC's existing suite of business support services by specifically assisting and supporting the development of Aboriginal businesses and the Aboriginal business community in Western Australia.

This is achieved by working collaboratively with the Small Business Centre network, other Government agencies and industry to provide practical, tailored, relationship-based advice on a broad range of small business issues.

In 2010-11, as a result of a restructure, the Aboriginal Tourism Unit at Tourism WA joined the ABU at the SBDC. This included the provision of \$150,000 (ex GST) in both 2010-11 and 2011-12 for the specific purpose of continuing the delivery of a Capacity Building Program for Aboriginal tourism operators.

**Outcome:** During 2010-11, the ABU attracted 44 new business clients, conducted 58 client follow-up contacts, 57 company contacts and collaborated on the following projects:

- **Wiluna Regional Partnership Agreement and Many Rivers Microfinance (MRM)**

MRM commenced operations in Wiluna in November 2010 with a part-time fly-in, fly-out Field Officer supported by State Government and non-Government partners. In January 2011, this project was able to recruit a full time Field Officer based in Kalgoorlie to service the Northern Goldfields as well as Wiluna.

A total of 19 clients have been provided support in developing business plans in the areas of cross-cultural training, machinery and vehicle rental, vehicle spare parts, mentoring, catering, ceramics and screen printing, earthmoving, mechanical repairs, Sandalwood collection, new and used clothing and Aboriginal art.

- **Costing and Pricing workshop for Wajarri/Yamatji Geraldton**

An Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) was negotiated to build the Australian Square Kilometre Array Pathfinder (ASKAP) telescope and ancillary works in the Murchison region. Under this agreement, Wajarri/Yamatji businesses were to receive “beneficial contracting opportunities” however, feedback from Wajarri/Yamatji businesses indicated they were disappointed they had not been awarded any work on this project. To address this situation and assist the community in applying for future projects, the ABU engaged Framework Lifestyle Pty Ltd to develop and deliver a one-day course on “Costing and pricing products and services”, followed by one-on-one mentoring, specifically for Aboriginal businesses.

The course was attended by nine participants. Evaluations undertaken before and after the workshops indicated a 71% increase in knowledge and confidence after attending the workshop.

The ABU and Small Business Centre MidWest continue to support Wajarri/Yamatji businesses through mentoring, business advice and the Aboriginal Business Initiatives Fund (ABIF).

- **Gnaarla Kaarla Booja Employment and Economic Development Agreement (GKBEEDA)**

The ABU has worked with the GKBEEDA and local Small Business Centres to focus on strategies that will lead to better opportunities for Aboriginal enterprises within the resource sector, and with business and industry across Gnaarla Kaarla Booja country in the South West of the State.

- **Aboriginal Business Initiatives Fund (ABIF)**

In 2009-10, the ABIF fund was launched to assist Aboriginal businesses to conduct business capacity building activities. In 2010-11, a total number of 21 businesses were funded to undertake a range of activities including the development of business plans, feasibility studies, marketing plans and needs analysis as well as accessing professional advice. Funding spent during the year in review amounted to \$192,656, and resulted in several successful outcomes. This year, an Aboriginal business in Wyndham successfully applied for funding to establish a comprehensive occupational health and safety system which enabled the business to tender for large commercial contracts within the mining and resource industries. This resulted in the employment of 24 workers, 60 per cent of whom are Aboriginal people.

- **Capacity Building Program** During 2010-11, the SBDC continued the Tourism WA funded Capacity Building program for Aboriginal tourism businesses throughout the State. During the year in review, 23 Aboriginal businesses benefited from this program through business asset acquisitions, as well as marketing initiatives such as websites, brochures, banners, and website upgrades.

- **Making a Difference: Aboriginal Tourism**

**Strategy 2011-2015** This strategy was publicly released by the Deputy Premier and Minister for Tourism, Hon. Dr Kim Hames, MLA and the Chair of Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council, Mr Johnny Edmonds. This strategy will play a key role in providing opportunities for the continued development of Aboriginal tourism and the positioning of the industry as an iconic experience in Western Australia.

The SBDC is represented on the Aboriginal Tourism Strategy Steering Committee which aims to develop an implementation plan and oversee the achievement of actions identified within the Strategy.

### Small Business Centre (SBC) Program

**Overview:** The 25 Small Business Centres located around the State are not-for-profit, community based organisations providing locally delivered small business services. In 2010-11, the SBDC allocated \$3.074million in core operational grants to the network of Small Business Centres. Of this, \$2.35million (77%) was allocated to SBCs in regional Western Australia.

Leading up to 2010-11, cost pressures being experienced in the Pilbara region were becoming acute and the two SBCs in that region required a significant injection of funding to maintain viability. In response to this urgent need, the SBDC provided supplementary funding to both the SBC East Pilbara and SBC West Pilbara of \$50,000 each, bringing their total funding for the year to \$178,988 and increasing the total funding allocated to the SBC program to \$3.174million for 2010-11.

**Outcomes:** In 2010-11, the 25 SBCs continued to support new and existing small business operators throughout Western Australia. During the year in review, the Small Business Centre Network undertook 42,476 client sessions (down 6%), which resulted in 1,375 new business start ups (down 22%). In addition, the program facilitated the creation of 2,079 jobs (down 41%) and hosted 9,232 workshop participants (down 18%). The drop in the number of clients, business start-ups and consequent jobs created during 2010-11 is possibly due to the current cautiousness evident throughout the business community as a result of volatile global economic conditions, coupled with a high value Australian dollar and low consumer spending.

A range of professional development events for SBC managers was undertaken during the year. Optional professional development workshops have also been offered to the SBC Committees during the year in their local region. The SBCs in Albany, Kununurra, Northam, Merredin and Manjimup took advantage of these sessions, with topics covered ranging from keys to strategic thinking, planning and executing, recognising and closing gaps in employee performance, building an effective board of members, and organising and conducting productive meetings.

In order to allow the SBCs to focus more on program delivery, a review was conducted of the SBC reporting requirements for the SBDC. As a result of this review, the annual Service Delivery Plan will be condensed and quarterly reports extended to twice yearly, resulting in an overall reduction in the reporting burden for the Small Business Centres.

During the reporting period, SBCs around the State have been involved in the following special projects:

- In December 2010, the floods experienced in the Gascoyne, Pilbara and Murchison regions were so widespread and caused such significant damage that the State Government activated a Category C as part of the Western Australian Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (WANDRRA). This was the first time a Category C had ever been declared and allowed small businesses affected by the floods to access up to \$25,000 in grants for clean-up and immediate restoration costs. The SBDC worked with the SBC Gascoyne (Carnarvon), and the Fire and Emergency Services Authority (FESA), to assess the eligibility of small businesses to access the grants available. The SBC Gascoyne was the primary contact point for small businesses affected by the flood.
- The SBC Wheatbelt West (Northam) was supported by the SBDC following the announcement by the Federal Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) of a \$165million Immigration Detention Centre being developed in Northam. The SBDC, along with the SBC Wheatbelt West, addressed a 200 strong gathering of small business operators in Northam to highlight the economic opportunities created by the Northam detention centre and how local businesses could capitalise on this investment. As a result of this meeting, the SBDC later presented a tailored information session on “quoting and tendering” so local businesses could be prepared to participate in the provision of products and services should the detention centre go ahead. This presentation was attended by 50 business owners and was well received.
- In February 2011, the Minister for Small Business announced a support package for the businesses in Manjimup affected by the closure of the Gunns timber sawmill. A support program, including small

business operators being able to access grants of up to \$1,500 for financial, legal or accounting services, was coordinated by the SBDC and the SBC Warren Blackwood. Thirteen applications for grants were received. Through this initiative, the SBC Warren Blackwood was well positioned as a strong support agency in times of crisis.

### Small Business Initiatives Fund (SBIF)

**Overview:** The SBIF, administered by the SBDC, provides project funding for the exclusive use of SBCs. The fund enables SBCs to identify local business needs, develop project proposals aimed at addressing those needs and deliver initiatives throughout their region.

**Outcome:** In 2010-11, over \$40,000 was paid to the SBCs to support the delivery of projects aimed at assisting small businesses. Projects supported throughout the year include:

- The delivery of the Swan Service Excellence Program through the SBC East Metro (Midland). This program successfully raised awareness of the importance of customer service and its impact on the success of a business. Eleven businesses and 46 staff participated, filling 116 training course places.
- Funds provided to the SBC Warren-Blackwood for a community support package in response to the closure of Gunns Limited sawmilling operation in Manjimup. (See details above under SBC program.)
- The SBC West Pilbara ran a business workshop during the inaugural Pilbara Pulse Economic Forum. The workshop focussed on how businesses should utilise Pilbara growth to market their business.

## Corporate Affairs and Communications

**Overview:** The role of Corporate Affairs and Communications is to promote the services of the SBDC and the achievements of the small business sector in Western Australia, to small business and the public at large.

During the year in review, the SBDC has been prudent in its use of paid advertising and increased its use of online promotion through social media initiatives, direct communication with clients, personal presentations to stakeholder groups, sponsorship of small business events and awards programs, and increased editorial content in newspapers and magazines.

### Outcomes:

**Social media:** As a low-cost marketing tool requiring minimal time investment, Facebook has proved a useful tool to interact with existing and potential business clients. Since creating a Facebook page in April 2009, membership of the SBDC page has doubled, totalling more than 1200 people by June 2011. Through this medium, the SBDC has established dialogue with members, allowing them to interact by voting on topics, asking questions, and providing comments. This has resulted in an increased number of interactions to all posted items.

Statistically, SBDC Facebook members are predominantly female, aged between 25 and 44 years. Most are from Western Australia, but there are a number of members located outside Australia.

The SBDC is also using Twitter as a useful promotional tool for projects such as the BizFit program. To date, it has gathered 90 followers, but enjoys further reach as a number of messages are re-posted by other members.

**Media and public relations:** The SBDC is now well established amongst local, state and national media outlets as a reliable source of relevant, timely facts and statistics on the small business sector, as well as a source of contacts for small business operators with interesting stories to tell. As a result, many SBDC clients have benefited from being featured in newspapers, magazines and television stories in Western Australia, interstate and overseas. During the year in review, greater promotion of small businesses and their accomplishments was achieved by:

- featuring 56 SBDC clients in media opportunities in state, national and international newspapers, magazines and television programs, and
- preparing eleven success stories of clients from SBDC networks for posting on the website, bringing the total number to 118.

**Professional presentations:** Throughout 2010-11, SBDC business advisors from the Specialised Services team delivered 31 presentations to approximately 1,300 individuals at events conducted by business and industry associations, educational institutions, government agencies and individual businesses.

A wide variety of organisations requested presentations from the SBDC including: Swan Business Connect Midland, Waratah One Steel Rural Fencing Contractors Forum, the Institute of Certified Bookkeepers, Challenger and Central TAFE, "Handmade" Children's Market, Rockingham Kwinana Business Networking Group, the City of Bayswater, Financial Counsellors Association, Pamoja Community Association, Australian Institute of Building Surveyors, Shire of Mundaring, Perth Regional Visitor Centre Managers and the Department of Fisheries.

Topics covered by the presentations included:

- An overview of SBDC services,
- Starting and running a small business,
- Operating a home based business,
- Leasing commercial premises,
- Preparing for export,
- Business planning,
- Marketing for small business,
- Financial management, and
- The SBDC tourism program.

**Small business event sponsorship:** During 2010-11, sponsorship was provided to 23 Small Business Awards programs throughout the State, from Esperance to Kununurra. These programs help raise the profile of small business in regional areas, and acknowledge the significant economic contribution they make to the local community. Awards programs also enable the SBDC to build strong ties with a diverse range of small business organisations while reinforcing existing relationships with local chambers of commerce.

In addition to this, 15 separate events were also supported where it was deemed a significant benefit could be achieved for the small business sector and for the SBDC. At each of the 38 events sponsored, the SBDC had representation and on each occasion had the opportunity to address those attending. In total, the SBDC supported these events to the value of \$162,000.

### **GWN WA Regional Small Business Awards**

**(WARSBAs):** The annual WARSBAs were held in November 2010, and were attended by the Minister for Commerce together with more than 260 small business operators, their family and friends, and representatives from regional chambers of commerce and business associations. As naming sponsor, GWN TV Network provided free television advertising to the value of over \$100,000 and this year, the SBDC secured Woodside as a new sponsor for the category of Best Aboriginal Business.

The winners for 2010 were:

- Business of the Year - McLaren Hire, Karratha
- Best Home Based Business - Terra Temptations - Bumbak's Preserves & Icecreams, Carnarvon
- Best Franchise Business - Harvey World Travel, Karratha
- Best Business Achiever - Timbercheck Truss & Frame, Bunbury
- Best Aboriginal Business - Portacomm SX5 Building Systems, Karratha
- Best Micro Business - Fish & Whistle Backpackers/Port Hotel, Carnarvon
- Best Business with 5-10 employees - Southside Mechanical Services, Geraldton
- Best Business with 10-20 employees - McLaren Hire, Karratha

The 2010 WA Regional Small Business Hall of Fame Inductee was Mr Barrie Stearne from Esperance. Mr Stearne was recognised for establishing the Small Business Centre concept in Western Australia and for his continued contribution to small business over many years.

**SBDC promotional materials and publications:**

During 2010-11, approximately 300 publications, brochures, flyers, banners, signage, forms and booklets, were produced by the SBDC for promotional purposes. To ensure production costs are kept to a minimum, the SBDC designs and prepares many of these requirements in-house using the graphic design and writing skills of the Corporate Affairs and Communications team.

**Advertising expenditure:** during 2010-11, advertising was undertaken as follows:

Market research organisations:	\$17,532.90
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Advertising agencies:	\$114,828.32
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<b>Total Expenditure for 2010-11:</b>	<b>\$132,361.22</b>
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**2011-12 SBDC Communications Strategy**

During 2010-11, the number of clients accessing the services of the SBDC was analysed, revealing a downward trend in client numbers. This, coupled with the forthcoming establishment of a Small Business Commissioner and associated alternative dispute resolution services, has provided the opportunity to review all communication, marketing and promotion activities.

In 2011-12, the agency will develop a new communications strategy for the SBDC which will incorporate the new services of the Small Business Commissioner with the existing services of the SBDC. The strategy will align all SBDC communications activities including advertising, editorial, sponsorships, marketing collateral and professional presentations to increase marketing reach to new and existing target markets.

**Corporate Resources****Role and Function**

The Corporate Resources team assists in the achievement of the SBDC's goals through the provision of a comprehensive support function comprising:

- financial management including budgeting and accounting services,
- human resource management,
- online services management,
- information technology infrastructure management,
- facilities management including assets, fleet, accommodation and procurement,
- records, library and information management services, and
- administration.

**Relocation to new premises**

**Overview:** After more than 20 years located on the corner of Hay and Pier Streets in Perth, the SBDC moved to new premises at 140 William Street on 2 May 2011. The new building which opened in December 2010, is situated on the corner of William and Murray Streets, directly above the Perth Underground Railway station, enabling ready access for clients and employees. The move has seen the SBDC operations consolidated, with the SBDC Information Centre and offices now all located on a single floor.

**Outcome:** Earlier in the year, in preparation for the move, an internal transition group was established to deal with a number of issues including change