

Chatham Small Business Center Status Report

The Chatham County Small business center is located on the Pittsboro campus of Central Carolina Community College. The center is a part of the North Carolina Small Business Center Network housed throughout the 58 schools in the NC Community College system. Though all colleges in the SBC Network host a small business center, Central Carolina Community College is unique in its capacity. Through local partnerships, CCCC is able to provide a full-time small business center position in each of the three counties in its service area. While many colleges struggle to service multiple counties with a single position, CCCC is able to offer more support to our local business community.

History and Structure

Prior to my employment, the CCCC small business center was run out of the Lee County office by Mike Jones. The previous Chatham County Coordinator was a part-time position held by Gary Kibler. All Harnett County operations were handled by Nancy Blackman. At that time, the Chatham County EDC also supported a position to assist small business development. Gary Kibler retired in August of 2014. By then, the EDC had let its small business position go and was deciding how best to support the small business community in Chatham County. Through the efforts of Diane Reed and Dr. Pamela Senegal, the decision was made to pool resources thereby making the Chatham County small business center coordinator a full-time position housed at the Pittsboro campus of CCCC.

I was hired as the full-time small business center coordinator in October of 2014. The initial structure had me reporting to Mike Jones in Sanford. Mike Jones retired in the spring of 2015 and Nancy Blackman expressed her intent to retire at the end of 2015. I was promoted Small Business Centers Director in the spring of 2015. I hired Terri Brown as our Lee County Coordinator in the summer of 2015 and hired Mari-inetta Pavlic as our Harnett County Coordinator in early 2016. As director, I run the SBC department out of Pittsboro, but our records and part-time administrative assistant are located in Lee County. All director and coordinator positions in the SBC are full-time as a result of local partnerships.

Responsibilities

The CCCC SBC Director has several core responsibilities. First and foremost, the position must facilitate all services required by the state SBC Network. These services are to provide one-on-one, confidential business consultations, hold free small business development seminars and maintain a resource library for prospective business owners. The secondary responsibilities of the SBC director are to serve as a liaison for the college and the county to local business development groups, to attend pre-development meetings regarding small business projects, to manage the departmental budget for all SBC operations, to complete an annual report for the state office and to serve as a representative on local efforts like the Siler City revolving loan fund and the Building Integrated Communities initiative.

Funding

Currently, Chatham County provides 23,000 dollars per year in support of small business center operations. This funding is routed through the Chatham County Economic Development Corporation. The initial agreement was for the EDC to provide one half of the annual salary for the SBC coordinator. There was no request for an increase in salary resulting from the Chatham position's promotion to director. There have been incremental raises and increases in benefit costs for the position as mandated by the state. Chatham County's commitment has held at 23,000 dollars per year. Thus, Central Carolina Community College is now supplying more than half of the cost for the salary and all of the benefit costs.

Performance Measures

Chatham County	2016	2017	2018
Business Owners Contacted	98	151	128
Training Events	22	26	23
Total Event Attendance	118	161	178
Counseling Sessions	66	79	84

Counseling Hours	59.4	68.2	96.5
Online Training Events	9	29	21
Online Attendance*	169	698	378
* Not Chatham Specific			

Innovations and Programming

The operations of the Small Business Centers within CCCC have changed significantly in the past three years. We have undertaken several efforts to make our services more accessible and impactful. We have made significant strides in diversifying our online profile. We maintain a weekly newsletter with over two thousand recipients as well as expanding our social media presence. Our most extensive transition under my leadership has been to incorporate webinars into our training opportunities. We now offer a multitude of synchronous online trainings and the attendance numbers have been a significant improvement over most of our in-person offerings. We are preparing to offer asynchronous webinars for the first time in 2019. This will allow users to access and play training sessions whenever it fits their schedules. While the NCSBCN is still determining how it will count attendance for these sessions, CCCC is taking the lead on the initiative because it is vitally important to have resources accessible at all times to prospective business owners.

I have also been involved with several innovative efforts occurring specifically in Chatham County. The NC Rural Center helped establish a revolving loan fund for Siler City and the Small Business Center has been a partner and facilitator throughout the process. I have also been working to assure that Hispanic business owners are aware of and able to utilize our resources. We have provided programming in Spanish and are heavily involved with action planning for Building Integrated Communities, Go Global NC and the CCCC Center for Latino Progress.

I have worked with the Chatham Arts Council and the Chatham Artists Guild to present a seminar on taking quality photographs for artists and small business owners. I continue to work intimately with the artistic community in Chatham to assure that they benefit from our incoming development. I look

forward to working more on making public art a focus for future development and assuring that some of those projects go to local artists.

In the fall of 2018, we worked with several local partners to present a business planning series specifically for food producers. In addition, I have developed seminars on business basics for farmers and food trucks. I give business resource presentations for several CCCC programs with a high likelihood of subsequent entrepreneurship.

The CCCC Small Business Centers have also maintained a focus on internal professional development. To that end, I have completed the following programs at CCCC: NC Rural Center's Rural Economic Development Institute, Latino Initiative program through Go Global NC (the Center for International Understanding), Leadership Chatham through the Chatham County Chamber of Commerce, and the Transforming Leaders fellowship through Leadership Triangle.

Future Goals

I would like to see us continue our track of innovation and improvement in the future. We will continue to grow out our online offerings. We are currently in the process of redesigning our websites to increase functionality. A key part of this will be expanding our online resource section. I anticipate this project will be largely completed by summer 2019.

I also want to assure that non-English speakers have access to the resources they need to start and operate businesses. I am working with CCCC to help them create the Center for Latino Progress with this in mind. I also plan to focus our efforts on agricultural producers, artists and tech entrepreneurs. These are three areas where Chatham County distinguishes itself and three areas where we could be helping more. There is a current groundswell of tech small business interest. I have been meeting with several groups to determine what resources are needed. One issue is rural broadband, but that is outside my sphere of influence. Another issue is whether or not Chatham County is ready for a co-working space and how that might be effectuated. I think we are on the brink of needing such a space, but determining its nature and operation will take considerable thought and effort.

Conclusion

I am very excited to be in this position at this time. I grew up in Chatham County and have never cared for any place like I care for this one. Like many, I lament the loss of some of our quaint charm, but I also recognize the tremendous opportunities we have sitting in front of us. While many NC counties are figuring out how to shrink gracefully, we are blessed with figuring out how to grow while maintaining our character. Support for small business is one of the best ways to make sure that the character and personality of Chatham is not lost in a frenzy of development.

Thank you for your previous and continuing support. Small business is the backbone of our local economy and we are entering a phase of unprecedented growth. I am resolved to make sure that our local business owners are ready and able to benefit from that growth.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jon Spoon
CCCC Small Business Centers Director