

Blue Line Expansion - Timeline

October – December 2019

Outreach Plan - City meetings:

With: Minneapolis, Crystal, Robbinsdale, and Hennepin County

Create outreach plan by doing the following:

Step 1 (Oct.): get feedback from cities on outreach plan before submitting to the County Oct. 31st.

Step 2 (Nov. - Dec.): determine businesses to canvas and identify priority businesses via a tiered system based on the plan's service area and priority criteria. Tiers also be based off of city input.

Step 3 (Dec.): create canvassing list. If they don't have this we'll need to scope out the area both in-person and via Google Maps and come up with our

Work Plan:

Create work plan for Business Technical Assistance (including in-house TA, TA referrals using project microgrants, and intake form/spreadsheet that will be used for data input and reporting purposes).

****For Robbinsdale;** identify potential businesses that provide relevant TA services in the service area (e.g. banks) and/or co-led workshops on their area of expertise (depending on interest).

January - March 2020

Edits to Outreach Plan:

With: Minneapolis, Crystal, Robbinsdale, and Hennepin County

Get feedback from the County about the outreach plan and edit accordingly.

Flyer:

-Get feedback from the County about the side of the flyer about the project and finalize it.
-Look into adding a business success story.

Community outreach:

-Send flyer and additional NEON info to cities/chambers so they can connect businesses owners to our services when asked.
-Identify locations in each city for open office hours session (one per city) to connect home-based businesses/those looking to start businesses with NEON's services (e.g. TAB Workshop) and learn more about the project.

Edits to Work Plan:

-Get feedback from the County about the work plan and edit materials accordingly.
-Continue identifying TA service providers for microgrants.

March - September 2020

Canvassing (initial and follow-up visits):

Initial visits: we'll go around to the businesses and 1. let them know about the services NEON offers and 2. let them know about the Blue Line Expansion. We'll give them a double-sided sheet with info on NEON's services on one side and the importance of preparing for unexpected circumstances (including construction/the expansion) on the other. Priority businesses will be canvassed first.

****For Robbinsdale;** NEON's Community Engagement Team will co-canvas with members of the city's chamber to build trust.

-**Aren't interested:** we'll ask whether they'd be ok if we check-in.

-**Interested businesses:** we'll ask if we could ask some follow-up questions to gauge their business needs. Will record this data in the survey, which we'll then transfer to a spreadsheet. These questions are meant to determine which of NEON's technical assistance (TA) services would be useful to them. We'll also ask targeted questions to see if they meet the priority criteria (how at risk they are to the Blue Line expansion affecting their business). Will then connect with a business advisor (see below).

Follow-ups: the goal of multiple visits is to build trust and gauge interest. Businesses identified as priority businesses will be the focus of said follow-ups.

-**Weren't initially interested:** we'll check-in on them and see if they're interested.

-**Business that were interested BUT didn't meet with an advisor:** we'll follow-up as a reminder/to see if something in our process discouraged them from responding.

****We'll also continue canvassing to check if any businesses closed/opened.**

****Will meet periodically with cities on our progress as requested.**

****Will send reports on canvassing to County every 30 days using spreadsheet.**

March – December 2020

Business Technical Assistance (TA):

-**Interested businesses:**

Step 1: connect with a business advisor and give them the info we gathered while canvassing.

Step 2: meet with advisor. The initial meeting will be to assess business needs and determine what TA they could benefit from.

Step 3: provide TA. If it can't be done in-house we'll contract it out to previously identified service providers using the microgrants allocated to this project.

Step 4: give them "Next Steps" to work on before the next meeting. Subsequent meetings determined by progress made/type of TA provided/need.

****Will send reports to County on businesses who've received TA every 30 days using spreadsheet.**

December 2020 - February 2021

Business Assessments – Canvassing and TA:

-Create report compiling our findings from the TA we provided for the project (e.g. common issues businesses were facing, which services businesses utilized the most).

-Compile info on the microgrants (e.g. which services they were used for most often, their impact).

-Data from businesses we collected during canvassing and additional info collected during business advisor meetings will have been recorded in the spreadsheet mentioned earlier throughout the course of the project.

-Outreach and TA hours will be recorded in the spreadsheet for billing purposes.

Work Plan:

Updated on: 1/13

Connecting Canvassed Businesses to NEON's Services:

Step 1: connect interested business we canvassed with a NEON business advisor. Give them the info we gathered on them while canvassing.

Step 2: meet with advisor. The initial meeting will be to assess business needs and determine what TA they could benefit from.

Step 3: provide TA. If it can't be done in-house, we'll contract it out to previously identified service providers using the microgrants allocated to this project. These microgrants can also be used by business who require funds to purchase tools to help grow their business (e.g. software, supplies).

Step 4: give them "Next Steps" to work on before the next meeting. Subsequent meetings determined by progress made/type of TA provided/need.

****Will send invoices to County every 30 days.**

****Will send reports to County on businesses who've received TA every 60 days using spreadsheet.**

Business Technical Assistance (TA):

NEON business advisors can provide the following TA depending on individual business needs:

1. Business Idea Assessment
2. Business/Strategic Planning
3. Business registration
4. License application
5. Loan package(s)
6. Financial projections
7. Accounting/bookkeeping
8. General training in business management
9. Regulatory system navigation
10. Real estate acquisition/lease agreements
11. Legal services
12. Alternative methods to reach customers

13. Training in bidding and estimates
14. DBE Certification
15. CERT Certification
16. Marketing (e.g. website/social media, signage)
17. Branding

Resource Referral: Any technical assistance needs not available through NEON would be referred to other available providers and resources.

Microgrants: some businesses may have TA needs beyond NEON and other Economic Development Resources. When that's the case, we'll refer them to the previously identified service providers:

1. **Marketing (e.g. website/social media):** LittleBox Social
 - a. Contact: Jenny Edstrom (Robbinsdale resident)
2. **Bookkeeping:** On the Books Accounting
 - a. Contact: Alisa Gay (Robbinsdale resident)

Microgrant Plan:

Updated on: 4/27

Contact: Anna Schmiel (*NEON's Community Engagement Coordinator*)

- Anna@neon-mn.org
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Determining Microgrant Needs:

Service area: within ½ mile of the proposed light rail stations in Robbinsdale, Crystal, and North Minneapolis.

Who qualifies: businesses categorized as “high” or “medium” priority businesses per the contract requirements (see below). Priority will be given to businesses who do not qualify/it does not make financial sense for them to apply for federal, state, county and/or city funds. Many of these businesses would be classified as “microbusinesses” (e.g. have few employees/relatively small amounts of revenue).

- **“High” priority:** local businesses that rely on foot traffic located within 1/4 mile of proposed Blue Line Extension light rail station in Robbinsdale, Crystal, and North Minneapolis.
- **“Medium” priority:** local businesses located within 1/2 mile, local chains (defined as having 5 or less locations) located within 1/4 mile OR business with limited public benefit (e.g. alcohol, tobacco).

Process: businesses will be informed of these microgrants in one of two ways.

1. Through direct outreach via emails/calls (and eventually in-person visits) by Anna.
2. Through their city/chamber (for Robbinsdale).

Types of Microgrants:

NEON will be using the Blue Line project's microgrant funds to provide two possible types of microgrants for businesses within the service area (½ mile of the proposed light rail stations). Businesses can receive up to one of each type of microgrant (depending on their need). The invoicing and information needed will be different for both (see sections below).

1. **Sub-contracting Technical Assistance (TA):**

- What: TA NEON can't provide in-house identified in the individual business work plans developed by NEON Business Advisors. This TA will be provided to businesses for a set duration (not to exceed contract end date). If the business wants to continue receiving the services, they'll be responsible for future payments.
- Sub-contractors: can be providers of the businesses choosing (e.g. current providers they're using). However, if they don't have a provider identified, advisors will refer them to those previously identified in the "Work Plan:"
 - **Marketing (e.g. website/social media)**: LittleBox Social
 - **Bookkeeping**: On the Books Accounting

2. Non-deferrable business expenses:

- What: one-time payments for businesses under \$2,000 to cover non-deferrable business expenses (e.g. rent, utilities, equipment purchases). Priority will be given to bills/other outstanding expenses over new purchases.
 - Robbinsdale marketing plan: will also cover a marketing campaign hosted by the Robbinsdale Chamber of Commerce's social media/website to promote businesses within the service area (½ mile of the proposed light rail station) open during the pandemic. Part of the campaign will be helping get businesses set-up with online ordering. *Marketing TA provided for needs outside the pandemic will be consider "type 1" microgrants.
- Why: in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, NEON proposed to allow the microgrants to also be used to pay-off non-deferrable business expenses. **This is for a few reasons**:
 - After talking to businesses and presenting the TA microgrant option to them, Anna found that few were interested. This is because the pandemic is putting financial strain on small businesses, and they do not have time to focus on improving business operations through marketing and bookkeeping right now.
 - Providing them this assistance will help off-set their mounting costs, which will hopefully help them weather the pandemic.
 - By providing them with assistance they've asked for, we'll be building trust. In the future, this will hopefully make them more open to NEON's suggestions regarding their business operations. It will also hopefully make them more open to accepting a microgrant for TA as well.

Information Needed:

1. Sub-contracting Technical Assistance (TA):

- Meeting with a NEON Business Advisor will be required to receive these grants. Businesses will discuss their TA needs and how they're currently filling those needs (e.g. social media/website for marketing, spreadsheet as a bookkeeping system). Based on an assessment of their needs, an advisor will connect them with service provider(s).
 - This information will also be recorded in the "TA spreadsheet."
- Once this is confirmed, an advisor will do an email introduction between the business and the TA provider. The TA provider will take it from there and collect any further information needed.

2. Non-deferrable business expenses:

- In light of the pandemic, meeting with a NEON Business Advisor will not be required to receive these grants. However, this service will be offered and they will be referred to an advisor if requested.
- Instead, businesses will be required to discuss business expenses they're interested in possibly getting covered with Anna. She'll ask whether they've confirmed the bills are non-deferrable to assess need. She'll write it down and email it to Stephen for his approval.
 - This information will also be recorded in the "TA spreadsheet."
- For microgrants over \$500, she'll also email the info to Kerri Pearce Ruch from Hennepin County for her approval.
- Once this is confirmed, Anna will ask the business for a photocopy of the bill (or another document) to verify the microgrant's usage.
 - She'll send it to Kerri and save it in the business' individual microgrant folder for future reference.

Invoicing the County:

1. Sub-contracting Technical Assistance (TA):

- How: microgrants will be dispersed to NEON via the County.
 - **Invoices submitted:** NEON Business Advisors will submit invoices monthly for TA services they referred business to.

2. Non-deferrable business expenses:

- For businesses: microgrants will be dispersed to NEON via the County. *Includes microgrants for Robbinsdale's marketing plan.
 - **Invoices submitted:** Anna will submit invoices bi-weekly.

Payment:

1. Sub-contracting Technical Assistance (TA):

- How: sub-contractors will be paid via direct deposit by NEON's accountant through Bills.com. They'll be given instructions on how to set-up an account by NEON's accountant.
 - The NEON Business Advisor who made the referral will send sub-contractors' contact info to NEON's accountant.
 - **Payment schedule**: monthly (when invoice from the County is received).

2. Non-deferrable business expenses:

- For businesses: businesses will be paid via direct deposit by NEON through Bills.com. They'll be given instructions on how to set-up an account by NEON's accountant.
 - Anna will send businesses' contact info to NEON's accountant. The accountant will receive instructions from Anna with details to include in the invoice for record keeping purposes (e.g. amount usage).
- **Invoices submitted**: monthly (when invoice from the County is received).

- For Robbinsdale's marketing plan: LittleBox Social will submit an invoice through Bills.com for the total service cost for all businesses helped during each reporting period for Robbinsdale's marketing plan.
 - Anna will send LittleBox's contact info to NEON's accountant. The accountant will pay the invoice.
 - Anna will process these invoices within 3 days and send them to the County for payment.
- **Invoices submitted**: bi-weekly.

Reporting:

Per the contract requirements, Anna will submit a report every 60 days. This will include: businesses who received a grant, grant amount, and grant usage. It will also report on total grants remaining.

1. **Sub-contracting Technical Assistance (TA)**: The NEON Advisor who made the referral will request progress reports from provider.
2. **Non-deferrable business expenses**:

- Robbinsdale marketing plan: Anna will also include a summary of the forms submitted by LittleBox in the report.
 - LittleBox Social will send NEON a list of the businesses they're helping, what they're helping them with, and the cost the 1st and 15th of each month using the form created for this process. They'll submit one form per business helped.