TOOLKIT

FEAST!

...matching food businesses with tools for growth

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Establishing Relationships—Peer & Coach Meetings

SPONSOR

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

SOUTHERN MINNESOTA INITIATIVE FOUNDATION

Collaborating for Regional Vitality
Program Description

Thank you for your interest in the Feast! Smart Start Initiative!

Feast! Smart Start is a facilitated technical assistance program for food businesses, developed and offered by the FEAST Local Food Network. The FEAST Local Food Network was co-founded by the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation and Renewing the Countryside. It is a partnership of many organizations, businesses, and individuals committed to growing a sustainable, local and regional food system that encourages innovation.

Additional programs supported by the FEAST Local Food Network include Feast Financing, the Grow a Farmer loan program, and the Local Foods Marketplace event. As a result of our work, we hope to see current businesses flourish and new businesses get established. Our objectives are to link entrepreneurs to information and business expertise, to boost entrepreneurs’ access to financial support, and to increase and strengthen regional connections.

FEAST! Smart Start provides an intentional framework and customized businesses training specific to the growth needs of each food business. Any organization or town that seeks to make food-based businesses a primary economic development focus will find this model invaluable to increase business knowledge, market opportunities and operational success.

The Feast Smart Start Toolkit is a collection of documents and plans to help communities and organizations replicate the program. For more in-depth discussion of the lessons learned during program implementation, please refer to the grant report, *The FEAST Smart Start Initiative—A model for supporting growth in regional food businesses*, coming soon from the Feast Network. To request a copy, email info@local-feast.org.

FEAST! Smart Start provides an intentional framework and customized businesses training tailored to the growth needs of participating food and farm businesses. Over a one-year period, three phases are designed to progressively guide entrepreneurs to work “on” their business, rather than constantly “in” their business. Three key aspects of the transformational work include assessment, peer networking, and structured technical assistance.

Program goals are primarily focused on measurable changes in business’ strength and growth. However, intangible effects may also result from bringing together these like-minded entrepreneurs, often sharing similar challenges and experiencing a range of benefits from emotional support to specific assistance like supplier referrals, technology, and even product collaborations.

The Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF) and Renewing the Countryside (RTC) would like to thank and commend the Minnesota Department of Agriculture for supporting this work that has helped regional food businesses become stronger. We hope the sample documents provided in this toolkit will serve as an effective guide for replicating this program.

SMIF and RTC are eager to see this work continue and are available as counsel by contacting us individually or via email at info@local-feast.org.
Program Structure

The four main components of the Smart Start program are shown in the image above. Since the last two components are concurrent, there are three main phases of the program. Those phases are described below, along with the associated documents provided in the toolkit for those activities.

**Kickoff Conference / Toolkit Module 2 (Planning) and 3 (Launching)**

Up to 50 small- to mid-sized businesses are invited to convene.

**GOALS:** to allow businesses to become familiar with their fellow entrepreneurs in the food space, discuss challenges among themselves and entrepreneur panelists, learn about the program, and apply to continue on to the next phase.

**TOOLS:**

_Documents below are included in the toolkit folder according to the file number shown in parenthesis_

**Module 2: Planning your Smart Start Initiative**

- Planning Guide document
- Logos folder

**Module 3: Launching your Smart Start Initiative**

- Planning Guide document
- Sample invitation to kickoff conference (M3-2)
- Region map for conference- print ready (M3-3)
- Region map with markers- sample (M3-4)
- Sample conference agenda (M3-5)
- Conference evaluation (M3-6)
- Benchmark assessment (M3-7)
- Executive Training Application (M3-8)
Executive Training / Toolkit Module 4
In the second quarter of the program, up to 15 businesses are accepted for a ‘deeper dive’ into crucial aspects of small business leadership and management. The Executive Training consists of two sessions, with content tailored to the selected businesses participating.

GOALS: to provide some general information on a variety of key topic areas and allow for a workshop approach with hands-on work and discussion; to also focus on growth needs of businesses through assessments that can guide the planning team in the selection of appropriate business coaches.

TOOLS:
Documents below are included in the toolkit folder according to the file number shown in parenthesis

Module 4: Delivering Executive Trainings
- Planning Guide document
- Sample Executive Training Agendas (M4-2, M4-4)
- Sample Executive Training 1 handout (M4-3)
- Goal-setting worksheet (M4-5)
- Executive Training evaluation (M4-6)

Peer Networks & Business Coaching / Module 5
For the third and fourth quarter of the program, businesses are organized into groups that convene monthly for a facilitated discussion on a variety of topics. Also during that time, the businesses meet with a coach once a month to work on specific areas of need. Near the end of this phase, the final evaluation is launched to capture impacts of the program.

GOALS: Foster peer support and provide resources for businesses to get one-on-one expertise on their challenges and needs.

TOOLS:
Documents below are included in the toolkit folder according to the file number shown in parenthesis

Module 5: Establishing Relationships—Peer & Coach Meetings
- Planning Guide document
- Sample coach contract (M5-2)
- Sample monthly client survey (M5-3)
- Sample monthly coach survey (M5-4)
- Sample final surveys (M5-5, M5-6)
- Sample client interview tool (M5-7)
Program Timeline

Quarter 1
- Gather contact information for potential client participants
- Plan logistics and content for kickoff conference
- Present conference
- Collect evaluations from conference attendees
- Collect Benchmark Assessments and Executive Training Applications from conference attendees who wish to continue in the program
- Announce selection of clients to proceed in program (if necessary)

Quarter 2
- Input data from assessments and applications
- Plan logistics/content for Executive Trainings (with guidance from applicant data)
- Present Executive Training sessions
- Collect evaluations from final session
- Collect/input any homework that may guide coach selection, e.g. goal-setting worksheet
- Convene team to discuss and select coaches appropriate to each business’ needs
- Invite coaches to participate; agree on terms; distribute/collect signed contracts
- Plan logistics/content of peer network meetings, including securing a facilitator

Quarter 3
- Conduct introductions between clients and their coaches
- Instruct them on expectations, ie 4 hours of coaching per month
- Maintain communications to ensure receipt of coach invoices (time and mileage)
- Send monthly survey to clients & coaches once coaching sessions have begun
Thank you

The Feast Smart Start implementation team would like to emphasize that the provided documents, images and guidance are intended simply as starters. Communities replicating the program are invited to make adjustments as needed, especially with the agendas, which should be considered as examples.

Certainly, each community will have different businesses, different needs, and different expertise. We hope to inspire and witness the building of these networks, this support, and this community.

Above all, we thank you for your interest in joining in this effort!

– The FEAST! Smart Start Initiative implementation team

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Business logos for the 15 participants in the 2017 Feast! Smart Start Initiative