



# BJA Bureau of Justice Assistance Fact Sheet

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## Business Alliance Program: Creating Business and Community Partnerships

### Background

Virtually all urban jurisdictions and many rural communities in this country have disadvantaged neighborhoods. Formerly self-sufficient and prosperous, these areas have deteriorated over time, with the arrival of lower income residents who are unable to maintain the quality of housing. High crime, abandoned housing, inaccessible shopping, troubled schools, withdrawal of municipal services, obsolete recreation facilities, perceived or actual decline in police protection, and other changes further lead to a decline in community investment by businesses.

To help such disadvantaged communities establish economic self-sufficiency and to stimulate entrepreneurship, the Business Alliance Program was founded by the Florida Chamber of Commerce in late 1992. Business Alliance pilot programs were developed under grants from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), U.S. Department of Justice, as part of Operation Weed and Seed, a community-based program that “weeds out” crime from targeted neighborhoods and then “seeds” them with crime prevention, intervention, and treatment services. Today, business alliances may be found in Winter Park, Cocoa Beach, Bradenton, Ft. Myers, and Clearwater, Florida. The chambers of commerce in each of these jurisdictions received \$10,000 in matching grant funds from BJA to develop and implement business alliance initiatives.

### The Program

The Business Alliance Program, which has since grown out of Operation Weed and Seed, offers communities a framework for rebuilding the economic structure of

their neighborhoods through community-based efforts to improve living and working conditions. The program is designed to revitalize communities through public affairs projects; legislative activities; and economic, community, and human resource development. Business alliances employ an array of tactics to stimulate economic revitalization in targeted neighborhoods—from conducting small-business seminars and mentoring programs to establishing small-business loan programs and business incubators for entrepreneurs.

Business alliances often focus on increasing business and job opportunities by expanding existing businesses and attracting new businesses and jobs. More business in the community adds to the tax base, creates a thriving economic climate, and generates new jobs. More jobs, in turn, lead to fewer crime problems and an improved quality of life for the entire community.

Business alliances also deal with the problems of urban neighborhoods—high crime and unemployment, drug problems, declining or stagnating business districts, unsightly or abandoned buildings and surroundings, and lack of any organization or structure to stimulate economic renewal.

Tremendous benefits can result from pooling a community’s resources in a business alliance. Renewed economic vitality, improved physical conditions, and enhanced resident self-esteem and productivity all breathe new life into a neighborhood.

### Key Elements of a Business Alliance

The basic unit of the program is the business alliance, a voluntary organization of individuals and businesses that band together to promote the commercial, finan-

cial, economic, and civic interests of a community. The following essential elements characterize a business alliance:

- ❑ **Business and community partnerships.** Business alliances take advantage of the flexibility of the private sector and provide a means by which the business community can develop mutually beneficial partnerships. These partnerships reflect the unique characteristics of a business community and the perspectives of the business owners who are most directly affected by revitalization efforts. Through development of alliances, the program brings together public and private groups and individuals who are enthusiastic about fostering real economic change in their communities. The program helps community leaders and business owners design and implement an action plan to meet community needs. Each business alliance should tailor its objectives to meet the needs, abilities, and concerns of the residents and businesses it serves.
- ❑ **Action group.** The action group is the backbone of a business alliance. It can take the form of a council, a task force, or a committee. An action group has clearly defined tasks that are designed to accomplish goals and objectives. The action group must be made up of “movers and shakers” who can assess the needs of the community with an awareness of the economic, racial, ethnic, and sexual diversity.
- ❑ **Action plan.** The specific activities of a business alliance depend on community needs, capacities, skills, and assets; its mission is determined by the goals or action plan developed by alliance members. An action plan can be established either through an informal goal-setting program agreed upon by its members or through a formal needs assessment survey conducted in a targeted community. Action plans can incorporate any of the following activities:
  - **Economic development projects**, including retail activities, area planning, wholesale activities, industrial development, and services for existing industries.
  - **Community development projects**, including education, housing, cultural needs assessment, downtown redevelopment, crime prevention, public relations, transportation, and urban planning.

- **Human resource development projects**, including job training, recreation, human relations, and health care.
- **Public affairs projects and legislative activities**, including political effectiveness courses, economic understanding programs, tax studies, business-consumer relations, and high school and college business symposiums.

- ❑ **Board of directors.** The business alliance is run by a board of directors elected by its members. The board, which serves without pay, establishes the organizational policies and any necessary fees, subscription rates, or dues.
- ❑ **Financial support.** Financed on a voluntary basis, the business alliance apportions its expenses among its membership, which consists of both businesses and individuals. A business alliance also may apply to obtain grants from Federal and State sources to help administer the program.

A successful business alliance program includes sound organizational structure, definitive objectives, participating members, adequate finances, responsible leadership, and skilled administrative staff.

## Forming a Business Alliance

Community representatives interested in forming a business alliance can contact any of the organizations and programs listed in the monograph *Business Alliance: Planning for Business and Community Partnerships* (NCJ 148657), which may be obtained by contacting the Bureau of Justice Assistance Clearinghouse (see “For Further Information”).

## For Further Information

For additional information on the Business Alliance Program, contact:

### **Bureau of Justice Assistance Clearinghouse**

P.O. Box 6000

Rockville, MD 20849–6000

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Fax: 1–301–251–5212

Bulletin Board System: 1–301–738–8895

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### **U.S. Department of Justice Response Center**

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