



Economic Vitality Partnership contract 2015 Annual Report to City of Sonoma

Through a contract with the City of Sonoma and with the ongoing direction of the Economic Vitality Partnership Steering Committee, the Sonoma Valley Chamber of Commerce provided an expanded economic development program in 2015. The Partnership supports business creation, retention, and expansion. Priorities for 2015 included supporting economic diversification and entrepreneurship, improving connections for businesses to available resources, and facilitating the development of a qualified local workforce and the ability of employers to meet their staffing needs and to "hire local". Activities and accomplishments included:

Business Assistance: The Economic Vitality Partnership (EVP) program manager provided one-on-one assistance to more than 80 existing, new, and prospective businesses in 2015.

LOCAL-Fest: The first annual LOCAL-Fest, a new business showcase and community welcome, was held in March 2015 with 30 new businesses and several hundred attendees. The Chamber successfully applied for \$2,500 in marketing funds from the Sonoma County Category E program to promote an expanded LOCAL-Fest+New Business Showcase in 2016.

New Business Video Guide: The six-minute video guide to Starting a Business in the City of Sonoma+was updated, and the Business Start-Up and Relocation Guide print packet was revised and expanded. Sonoma was named one of the Best Places to Start a Business+in northern California in 2015 (NerdWallet).

City Business Loan Program: Twelve matching loans to local businesses were made in 2015 through the City's Business Improvement Loan program, in amounts from \$1,350 to \$10,000.

Business Workshops: In 2015, four Small Business Development Center (SBDC) workshops were hosted in Sonoma, including Social Media Starter Kit (Parts I and II), Hands-on LinkedIn, and Business Start-Up Orientation.

Hire Local: The Chamber now convenes a monthly meeting with youth service non-profits and SVHS to collaborate on work readiness and connections to the business community. The Chamber teamed up with Teen Services Sonoma to organize and moderate a What Employers Want+panel discussion and cocktail hour+mixer as part of their job readiness certification program (spring and fall 2015); led the

co-sponsored Teen Speed Networking event; and assisted with first High School Career Fair, as well as serving on the SVHS Engineering Academy Advisory Council and providing one-on-one connections for job shadows and internships.

Emerging Sectors: Two new alliances were launched in 2015 to support emerging sectors and diversification of our local economy: The Sonoma Innovation Alliance, and the Sonoma Creative Alliance.

Business Outreach & Communication: The SonomaValley4Biz.com website was merged into the Chamber's new website, and we worked with City staff to update the business information and links on the new City website. The EVP program manager Presented on Financial Incentives for Business+at Chamber Table Talk, and conducted targeted outreach to businesses that could benefit from local and state business incentive programs, including CA Competes+. Other Table Talk meeting topics in 2015 included A Chat With City Leaders; Coffee with Chiefs Sackett and Freeman; and Downtown Parking, among others. The EVP manager assisted City staff with information for an update to the City's sign ordinance and associated outreach materials. The Chamber assisted in gathering information via several on-line surveys related to City issues, as well as disseminating information regarding business-specific public meetings.

Green Business: The Chamber conducted targeted outreach to local lodging and restaurant businesses on water conservation. We also assisted the Sonoma County Energy Watch and Sonoma County Energy Independence Programs in local promotion of their local LEAF (Local Energy Action Forum) event held in Sonoma on June 18.

Data and Resources: The Chamber surveyed Certified Access Specialists (CASp) in California and compiled a list of CASp professionals willing to provide services to businesses in Sonoma Valley. The Plaza Retail Overlay District (PROZ) ground floor business inventory was updated in the spring and fall. The annual Sonoma Valley Business Survey was conducted in the fall, with 65 businesses responding. Findings were presented to the Economic Vitality Steering Committee, and a more detailed summary of findings and trends is being prepared.

“LOCAL Spoken Here” program: The annual Shop local+program was refreshed with a new logo and promoted the benefits of shopping locally during the holiday season with a City proclamation, video, banners, window signs, bag stuffers, and a social media campaign (#ShopSonoma #ShopTheSprings).

Regional Collaboration on Economic Issues: The Chamber actively participates in the Supervisor's coalition to transform the Sonoma Developmental Center, the Valley's largest employer, and continues to partner with the Sonoma County Economic Development Board on initiatives affecting our local economy.