

FAQs for prospective participants

What is Economic Gardening?

Economic Gardening is an economic development program that helps second-stage companies by delivering customized information to address strategic growth issues. In contrast to recruiting companies from another state or region (known as economic hunting), Economic Gardening focuses on local companies already operating in the area.

Why second stage?

Second-stage companies have moved beyond the startup stage but have not yet reached maturity. Sometimes referred to as scale-ups or emerging growth companies, they typically have 10-99 employees and \$1 million to \$50 million in annual revenue, although these are loose boundaries, especially in rural areas.

Although they represent a relatively small group of companies, second-stagers are engines of economic growth and generate more than double their share of jobs and revenues. Case in point, from 2005 to 2015, second-stagers represented about 17 percent of all U.S. companies, but generated more than 37 percent of jobs and 36 percent of sales. In contrast to startups and microbusinesses, second-stage companies have different needs to continue growing.



What do I get from the program?

In contrast to traditional business assistance focused on workforce development and operational issues, Economic Gardening addresses strategic challenges. Economic Gardening specialists on the National Strategic Research Team (NSRT) deliver customized information and analysis in five key areas: core strategy, market dynamics, innovation, temperament and qualified sales leads. Within these areas, NSRT members leverage sophisticated, corporate-level tools and techniques such as commercial databases, geographic information system (GIS) mapping, search engine optimization and digital marketing.

What don't I get?

We don't analyze your financials, create business plans, or engage in primary research (surveys, telephone calls, focus groups). Instead, Economic Gardening has a laser-like focus on addressing the strategic challenges and opportunities that you identify. Unlike consultants that prescribe or implement solutions, we gather a variety of data from high-quality sources (e.g., industry associations, federal government, universities, premier media and national experts), and then let the data guide CEOs to conclusions.

How does this work and how long will it take?

Initially, a team leader from the NSRT will interview you in a phone call (60-90 minutes) to establish a baseline of information about your company, customers, competitors and specific issues you're currently

working on. This is followed by another call (about an hour) with the team leader and NSRT members assigned to your company to define specific research tasks. The researchers then go to work and the team leader will set up dates for biweekly updates and a closeout call.

Overall, accepted companies spend 8-12 hours collaborating with their research team, which spends about 30 hours working on your company's issues. Engagements typically run from six to eight weeks. Yet we work at your pace; if you need to slow things down, just let your team leader know.

How do I work with the NSRT?

The NSRT consists of private-sector contractors from around the country who are specialists in their designated research areas and have been certified in Economic Gardening principles and practices at the Edward Lowe Foundation, which hosts the National Center for Economic Gardening (NCEG). These experts function like high-powered staff members on loan to you for a few weeks. You'll get the most from the engagement if you provide them with your full attention and availability. Many CEOs include their senior management teams in the engagement, which is ideal. What's most important is for the CEO to be involved in the Economic Gardening engagement from beginning to end.



What is the Greenhouse?

The Greenhouse is our secure collaboration website where you'll submit an application and then communicate with the NSRT. Researchers post their findings on this site, and you'll receive an email whenever there is activity in your Greenhouse workspace. The researchers will also contact you to discuss their findings and make sure the information is relevant.

Where did this program come from?

Economic Gardening was created by Chris Gibbons, NCEG's founder, in Littleton, Colorado. Over a 20-year period, Littleton's job base accelerated from 15,000 to 30,000 without recruiting a single company. The Littleton Economic Gardening program has received three national awards including being named a finalist in Harvard University's Innovations in Government program. Through a collaboration with Gibbons, the Edward Lowe Foundation began hosting the NCEG in 2011. The center oversees Economic Gardening operations and helps state and regional organizations get Economic Gardening networks up and running quickly. Currently NCEG offers programs in more than 25 states, where results have been impressive.