

## What's Economic Gardening?

Economic Gardening® represents a new way of thinking about supporting growth companies and letting business owners know how important they are to their local economies. So instead of offering traditional incentives like tax credits or real estate discounts, we're offering something that might be even more valuable to CEOs: information — strategic information — gathered with their guidance and customized for their company.

In contrast to traditional business assistance focused on finances, business plans and operational issues, Economic Gardening addresses strategic growth challenges such as developing new markets, refining business models and gaining access to competitive intelligence. To do this, teams of highly skilled research specialists mine sophisticated databases and leverage a number of high-end tools related to search engine optimization, social media marketing and geographic information systems.

Here's how our model works: Partnering with the National Center for Economic Gardening (NCEG), we've set up a statewide program to provide virtual access to research teams that are assigned to a select group of qualifying



companies. Using private conference calls and a secure online workspace, the teams will interview the companies to identify their specific growth issues. The team devotes about 36 hours to each company over the course of a few weeks as they work quickly to deliver action-oriented information.

“Economic Gardening specialists enable CEOs to identify opportunities they may not be aware of and point them to new tools and information to apply immediately — which is why it's ideal for second-stage companies,” says NCEG founder Chris Gibbons.

## Targeting second-stagers

Second-stage companies (growth-oriented companies that have moved beyond the startup phase) play a critical role in job creation and vibrant economies. Indeed, between 2005 and 2015, second-stage companies represented about 17 percent of all U.S. establishments, but generated about 37 percent of jobs and 36 percent of sales, according to data from YourEconomy.org. Although funding and resources exist for small businesses and startups, second-stage entrepreneurs have different needs to continue growing — needs that economic gardening programs are specifically designed to zero in on.

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## Who should you refer?

To be eligible for the Virginia Economic Gardening Program, participants must:

- 1 Be a for-profit, privately-held company that has been in business for at least five years and maintained its principal place of business in Virginia for at least two years.
- 2 Generate annual revenue between \$1 million and \$50 million.
- 3 Employ between 10 and 99 full-time-equivalent employees.
- 4 Demonstrate growth in employment and/or revenue during two of the past five years.
- 5 Provide products or services beyond the local area to regional, national or international markets.
- 6 Be referred by a participating economic development organization.

## The role of entrepreneur support organizations



Entrepreneur support organizations (ESOs) play an important role in the network's success by identifying eligible second-stage companies and referring them to the Economic Gardening program. ESOs may include chambers of commerce, universities, small business development centers, technology councils and, of course, economic-development agencies. The common denominator: they're all working to accelerate the success of local entrepreneurs.

ESOs also help by educating companies about Economic Gardening services, setting appropriate expectations and following up with them afterward. Since the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) is funding this opportunity for a limited number of select businesses, there is no initial cost for second-stage companies accepted into the program.

## Benefits for ESO partners

**Build trust.** Referring local companies into an Economic Gardening program helps ESOs build trust because they're introducing clients to services they can't get anywhere else.

In fact, Tammie Sweet, director of GrowFL and former CEO of the Economic Development Council of Collier County, says that economic gardening "dramatically changes how entrepreneurs look at ESOs." Both because Economic Gardening helps existing, smaller companies and because entrepreneurs see benefits within a few hours, ESOs take on a higher profile and become more meaningful, she explains. "Entrepreneurs turn into advocates for the ESO and become a very vocal group that can drive positive change in a community."

**Increase effectiveness.** ESOs that participate in an Economic Gardening network learn more about each other, which enables groups to avoid duplication of services, refine their core strengths and refer clients to other groups when appropriate.

**Strengthen culture.** Economic Gardening helps establish an entrepreneurial culture within communities that is critical to regional growth. Local businesses tend to have greater commitment to their regions and the most impact on sustainable job creation than companies with out-of-state headquarters. If they grow, the whole community benefits.

*"There has to be trust between entrepreneurs and the ESOs referring them into an economic gardening network... Entrepreneurs need to know ESOs can truly support them, and Economic Gardening proves that you know what their needs are and can deliver on helping them."*

— Tammie Sweet, director of GrowFL

*"Economic Gardening is a very tangible way to support economic development in your region. What makes the program so different is how it addresses specific challenges that second-stagers are facing."*

— Denise Beigbender, program manager  
at the Hennepin-Carver-Anoka-Ramsey-Scott  
Economic Gardening Program

*"Economic Gardening is about more than just data. It provides a unique approach to addressing business challenges, and clients who develop a sound understanding of its frameworks can leverage that knowledge long after the closing of an Economic Gardening engagement... By helping small businesses expand, Economic Gardening increases gross sales of participants, imports new wealth into the state of Louisiana and accelerates the creation of jobs."*

— Christopher Cassagne, business development  
officer at Louisiana Economic Development



The National Center for Economic Gardening is a partnership between the Edward Lowe Foundation and Chris Gibbons. NCEG delivers economic Gardening Services and maintains national standards in training and certification for both regional and statewide networks. The Edward Lowe Foundation is a nonprofit organization that supports entrepreneurship through research, recognition and educational programs, which are delivered through entrepreneur support organizations (ESOs). For more info, visit [www.edwardlowe.org](http://www.edwardlowe.org)