

## Study looks at Lexington's entrepreneurial environment

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Recent Business Lexington articles have highlighted the Bluegrass region's growing reputation as a hub for high-tech entrepreneurial companies. The Lexington Venture Club reported that \$64.5 million was invested in new entrepreneurial ventures in 2007, an 82 percent increase over 2006. While Lexington is not a Silicon Valley, Research Triangle or Austin, Texas, the Bluegrass is home to a steadily growing number of high-tech entrepreneurial companies.

As a strategy to facilitate the growth, attraction and retention of high-tech entrepreneurial companies to the Bluegrass region, The Bluegrass Business Development Partnership — a recent economic development collaboration of the city, Commerce Lexington and the University of Kentucky — has launched the Bluegrass Entrepreneurial Environment Study. The study, conducted by the University of Kentucky Institute for Workplace Innovation, analyzes the assets and needs of the Bluegrass region's entrepreneurial environment.

Environments that foster innovation are those that have the assets, networks and culture to facilitate new ideas, products and businesses. Innovation drives productivity; productivity drives prosperity. Yet, to date, there has not been a systematic evaluation of the region's entrepreneurial assets and needs.

The Bluegrass Entrepreneurial Environment Study has already gathered information from focus groups with key community stakeholders and from interviews with area entrepreneurs. The third component of the study is a survey of high-tech entrepreneurs that captures the business and community factors they deem critical to growing and attracting successful high-tech entrepreneurial business in the region. The study then ranks these critical factors by their importance to entrepreneurs and their availability in the region.

The UK Institute for Workplace Innovation launched the entrepreneurial survey February 18 by distributing it to over 100 high-tech entrepreneurs in the region. If you have received an invitation and have not yet completed the survey, please do so today. If you have not received an invitation to participate and you lead a high-tech entrepreneurial company in the Bluegrass region, we want to hear from you. Please contact Mac Werner at [mac@iwin.uky.edu](mailto:mac@iwin.uky.edu) for more information about the survey.

Information gleaned from the Bluegrass Entrepreneurial Environment Study will be used to develop recommendations for enhancing the Bluegrass region's entrepreneurial environment. Additionally, the Bluegrass Business Development Partnership will publish the Bluegrass Region's Entrepreneur Success Report. This report will help to market the Bluegrass region by providing a series of case studies on the region's most successful high-tech entrepreneurial firms.

Lexington's success in growing, attracting and retaining high-tech entrepreneurs is the result of keen strategic planning by the region's economic development visionaries. The University of Kentucky, under the leadership of President Dr. Lee Todd, Dr. Len Heller, vice president for commercialization & economic development and Dean Harvey, director of the Von Allmen Center for Entrepreneurship, has made tremendous strides in utilizing university-based research in the regional marketplace. Mayor Newberry's Six Pillars of Progress for Lexington includes taking an innovative approach to economic development for the city. In his 2008 State of the Merged Government Address, Newberry noted that the city has "fundamentally changed the way we work to bring jobs to the community by creating a public/private partnership with Commerce Lexington and the University of Kentucky called the Bluegrass Business Development Partnership." The city has committed significant resources to foster efforts to grow high-quality jobs in Lexington to attract and retain young talent. "We have changed the way our team does economic development to focus more on the entrepreneur and growing jobs from within the region in addition to recruiting efforts," said Gina Greathouse, senior vice president, economic development, for Commerce Lexington. Kentucky is one of only a few states in the nation that matches federally funded grants to commercialize new technologies.

It's an exciting time to be living and working in the Bluegrass. As high-tech companies relocate to the Bluegrass region, they create a demand for high-skilled jobs to be filled by highly skilled individuals who will settle in the region and contribute to the culture and the economy. The recent sale of the locally grown Exstream Software to Hewlett Packard illustrates that investing in high-tech industries is not only worthwhile, but can lead to an increase in the Bluegrass' human capital. Drawing people who want to work in high-tech companies to the Bluegrass region furthers Lexington's goal of becoming the next great city where people want to live and work.

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