SYNCHRONIST

Launch Guide

Synchronist Suite

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Synchronist System Launch Guide

Launching a successful existing business program requires more that software. The following pages highlight the different elements that should be accounted for as you plan your program. We also have identified a number of different roles and responsibilities to be covered. It is not necessary to have different individuals for each role; however, it is important to recognize the breadth of the work to be done. Therefore, if one individual is responsible for multiple roles, it will take longer to implement a full-scale program.

Also, it is important to recognize that Synchronist System is designed to deliver value short-term and long-term. Traditional business retention was very short-term focused *(Figure 1, A & B)*. The same short-term benefits of a classic R&E program are by-products of the Synchronist approach.

Thank you!

Thanks for becoming a valued Synchronist System user. We are delighted to be your partners in taking your existing business program to a new level.

The following Guide may be helpful as you decide how to design/re-design your program.

As you plan your program, do not hesitate to ask for our input or for reference to other Synchronist Users that may be able to assist you in your design decisions.

Program

What will be the program name?
Will there be a specific identity created for the program?
Who will be the program spokesman/champion?

Program Goals

- **Short-Term Goal(s)** ***(Figure 1, A & B)***
  - Touch key employers
  - Identify and address company and community problems
  - Identify and assist expansion opportunities
  - Identify and address companies at risk

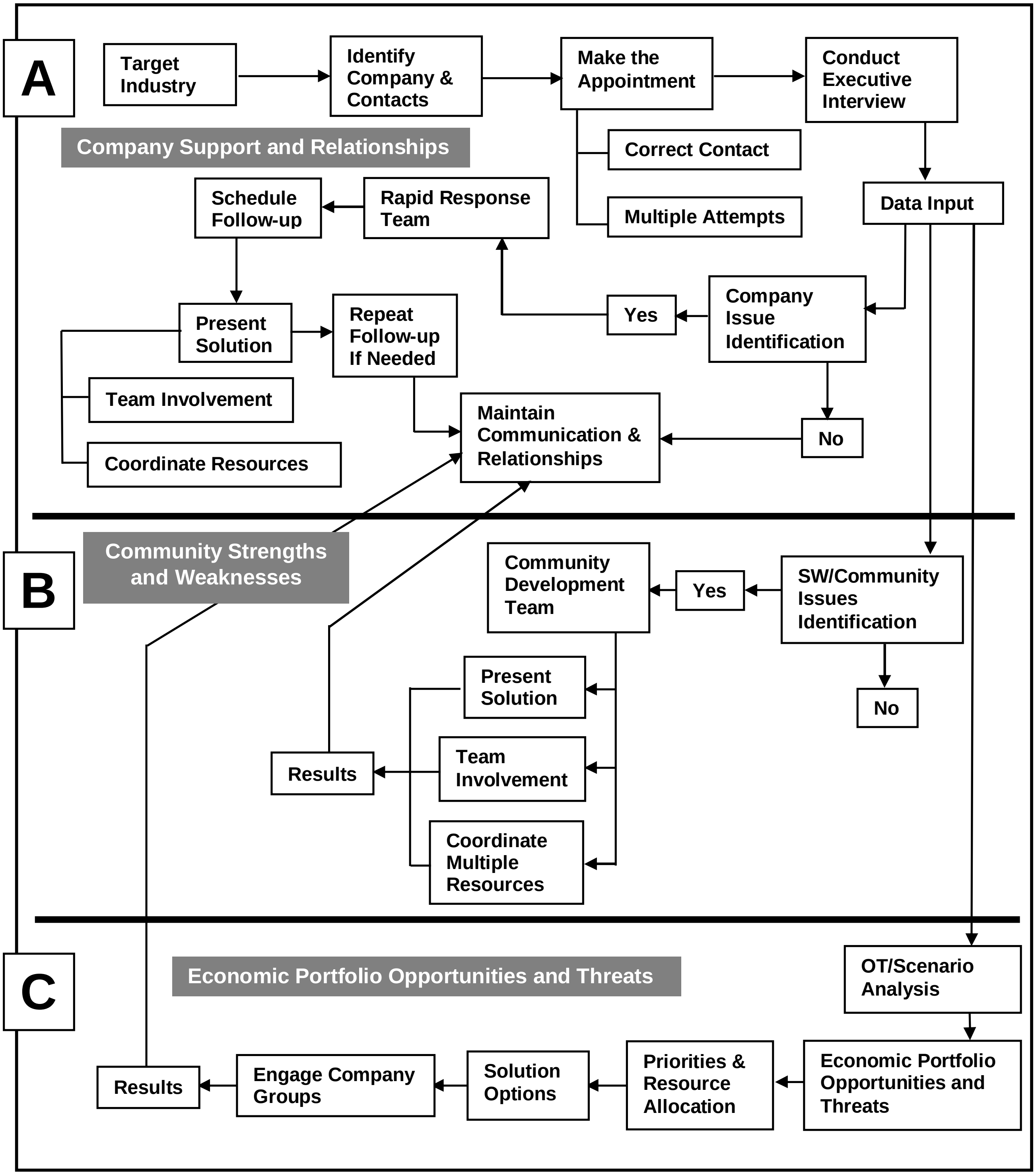
- **Long-Term Goal(s)** ***(Figure 1, C)***
  - Drive ED resources (organizational, community, and partner) to economic opportunities
  - Determine needs of growth and value companies in the community
  - Watch for business and economic trends

Local Issues

While the Synchronist on-site visit (interview) form is a complete business assessment, frequently communities have local issues or concerns they want to explore during the executive interview. Synchronist provides for custom information in the company background form as well as the interview form.

Caution: Time is limited. If a decision is made to add additional question, the challenge is to limit the appetite for the “next” question. It is important to stay under one-hour for an interview.

Business Retention Flow Chart **Figure 1**



Adapted from work by Stephen G. Sparks, Baton Rouge Chamber of Commerce (LA)

Process

- **Target Company List (Appendix)**
  - Which companies?
  - Quality or quantity (see goals above)?
  - How selected?
  - What profile info is available (internally and/or externally)?
  - Preload info into the system (send to Blane, Canada for preload)?
  - How will additional background info be gathered?

- **Rapid Response Team**
  - Who are the go to people who will work to resolve each company related issue uncovered?
  - Will response team members be given a program orientation?
  - Who will manage the longer-term challenges and tasks?
  - Who will manage the response team and insure task completion?
  - Who will share the outcome with those requesting assistance?

- **Executive Meetings (Interviews)**
  - Staff?
  - Extended staff? (Local, Regional, and State ED Partners)
  - Board Members?
  - Volunteers?
  - Individuals or teams of two?
  - Timing: blitz 50 visits in a month or a monthly goal with calls throughout the year?
  - How will scheduling be coordinated?
  - Who will provide interviewer orientation?
  - Who will manage data input?
  - Who will provide data input orientation and training?
  - Will interview flow allow time for prompt follow-up as needed?

- **Confidentiality**
  - Confidentiality policy and management
  - Who will have access to the Synchronist System
    - Predefined access levels

- **Info Action**
  - Who will be the media spokesman?
  - Will a report be created?
    - Annual Report
    - Issue/topical report(s)
    - Policy recommendation report(s)
    - Management report(s)
  - Who will be responsible for reviewing information to identify and address community issues?
    - Infrastructure
    - Business climate
    - Workforce
  - Who will be responsible for substantive communications and relationship building with existing employers?
    - Funnel findings, results, networking, and business opportunities to existing employers.

- Who will be responsible for reviewing information as it is collected looking for economic opportunities and threats?
  - Company
  - Company Groups
  - Public Relations
  - Organizational
  - Partners
- Who will analyze findings?
  - Compare findings regional and/or national Synchronist data?

- **Funding**
  - How will miscellaneous cost be covered?
  - How will on-going operational costs be covered?
  - Is there a budget for data?
  - Is part-time assistance for data collection or entry needed?

Program Roles and Responsibilities

A successful business retention program is multi-faceted. There are many important roles. Each has its purpose and requirements. The greatest failure in developing successful business retention programs is underestimating the resource requirements shown in Figure 2 and outlined below.

Key Program Roles & Relationships

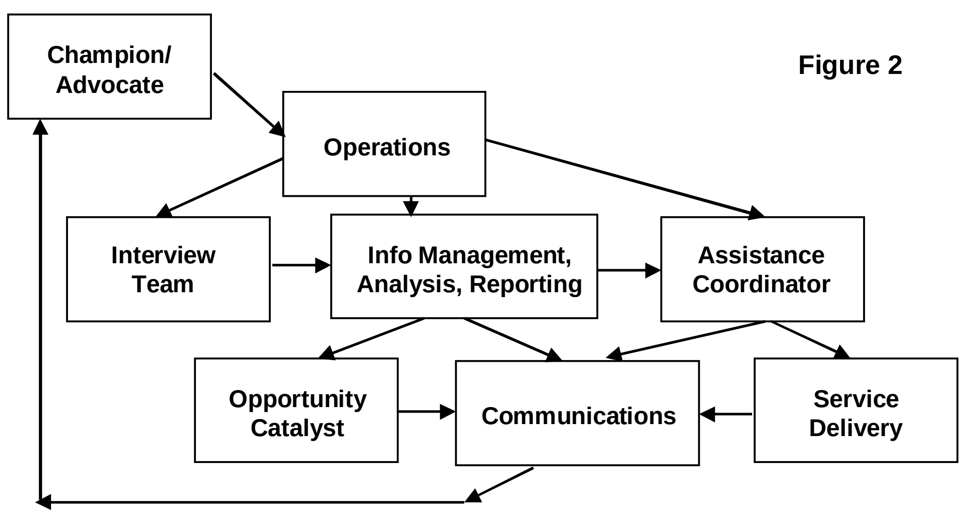


Figure 2

Champion/Advocate

- Outside person
- Awareness building/promotion
- Partnership development
- Spin results (media, leadership, investors/members)
- Apply results
- Pushing information into policy

Operations

- Interview coordination
- Data management
- Quality control
    - Data
    - Analysis
    - Data interpretation and public dissemination
- Staff & partner coordination
- Volunteer recruitment, training, motivation
- Partner recruitment, orientation, motivation

Information Management

- Gather background information on existing employers to be interviewed
- Convert raw data into usable information
- Package and present info for varied audiences
- Explore new ways to use existing data

Communications

- Feed success stories to advocate, operations, communications
- Push findings, results, and opportunities to existing employers
- Share information within the organization as well as the community

Assistance Coordinator

- What is needed?
- Who can help?
- How will they be informed?
- When there's a gap, who follows-up?
- Did it get done?

Opportunity Catalyst

- Business opportunity?
- Partner opportunities?
- Joint venture potential?
- Market opportunity?
- Cluster potential?

Response Team

- Team formation
- Coordination
- Follow-Up
- Tracking
- Reporting
- Analysis

Business Services (Services to strengthen individual firms)

- Service Delivery Partners (public and private)
- Available Programs
- Program Matching/Application Support

Launch Sequence

Step 1: List Categories

Determine which of the following categories will be used for selecting companies.

List Category[1]	Yes/No
Industry type (if desired)[3]	
Critical Employers or industries	
Business sector or target industry cluster(s)	
Energy load	
Image companies[4]	
Largest employers and largest taxpayer	
Mid-sized companies 25 – 250 employees	
Small, emerging companies, 5 – 50 employees	
Public/quasi public employers[5]	

[1] Some categories may overlap, e.g. largest employer/large energy user
[2] Industry type, e.g. cluster, manufacturing, headquarters, and commercial services
[3] Image companies are well known outside the community and create positive impressions of the community and/or draw traffic to the community
[4] Schools, hospitals, government facilities, large non-private employers

Step 2: Categorization

1) Review the list and mark each company based on their industry group.

   a) Primary sector (Synchronist PRIME)
   b) CRTS sectors (Convention, Retail, Tourism, local Service or Synchronist CRTS)
   c) Public/quasi public

2) Review the company list for any companies with known high risk concerns.

3) Review the company list for each of the categories identified for inclusion in Step 1.

Synchronist CRTS or Synchronist PRIME

Research has proven it is impossible (worse than a waste of time) to use a single interview instrument on both primary sector employers as well as secondary (retail and service) businesses. In these two sectors, executive's views, interests, and needs are polar opposite. Even seemingly neutral questions, e.g. strength and weaknesses, produce vastly different responses. The central difference in these survey instruments is:

PRIME = Explores the community as a product capable of supporting and attracting primary sector business investment.

CRTS = Explores the community as a market capable of drawing visitors and shoppers necessary to support retail and service businesses.

Synchronist CRTS was created to help communities manage this important portion of their economy.

Step 3: List Filters

Choosing a group of company executives to interview requires some thought. The selection will depend on the purpose of the interview process as well as how you want to use the findings. With the Synchronist interview, we have two primary interview goals: 1) understand the company and their role in the community's economic future and 2) identify problems that are barriers to growth in the community. The relationship, service delivery, and connecting clients to resources are goals of the process, not the interview.

Statistical validity is not a requirement in interview selection in economic development given the nature of our audience. The business community in every community is dominated by small local firms. A statistically valid sample will bias the results toward this audience making it more difficult to see and gain support for more important issues.

We recommend selecting companies by category. The following is our recommended representation. Modify the categories and percentages to fit your local needs.

List Category	Primary Representation Percent	CRTS Representation Percent
Industry type (if desired)[3]	XX	XX
Primary sector or target industry cluster(s)		
Energy load	15	5
Image companies[4]	5	20
Market (local, regional, national, global)	10	0
Largest employers and largest taxpayer	15	25
Mid-sized companies 200 – 25 employees	35	30
Small, emerging companies, 5 – 50 employees	10	15
Public/quasi public employers[5]	10	5
Total[6]	100%	100%

[1] Some categories may overlap, e.g. largest employer/large energy user
[2] When a category exceeds the target representation, a random sample of the companies within that category should be selected
[3] Industry type, e.g. PRIME cluster, manufacturing, headquarters, and commercial services or CRTS cluster, accommodations, food, entertainment
[4] Image companies are well known outside the community and create positive impressions of the community or draw substantial traffic to the community
[5] Schools, hospitals, government facilities, large non-private employers (caution if both Prime and CRTS interviews are being conducted in the community, we recommend these organization interviews use Synchronist Prime where they share more common issues
[6] Percents shows are guidelines, not absolute. This is intended to produce a representative sample, not a statistical sample

2) Check to insure 80% (+/- 5%) of the companies on the selected list are primary sector companies if using Synchronist Prime or CRTS companies if using Synchronist CRTS. <u>Note, it is impossible to use the same interview form for both primary sector and retail/commercial businesses. The business drivers and market scope are vastly different confusing the findings and complicating analysis potentially leading to the wrong conclusions.</u>

Step 4: Executive Identification & Background Information Collection - Collect and organize contact and company information in a usable manner to make it available for interview and easy updating over time. Think of this as building an editable knowledge base that will survive your time in this position and benefit those who follow you. They should be able to step into the role and learn your procedures and understand what has happened, results of previous interviews, status of open service issues with only a modest level of training.

Step 5: Finalize Interview Guide – The Synchronist System Interview Guide (On-Site Visit form) is complete. It is not necessary to add additional questions. However, some communities have local issues to explore while conducting visits. Therefore, if you want to add local questions, they should be determined well in advance of the launch. **Caution, the most significant problem other users have shared about opening a discussion on local issues is controlling the appetite for the next question!** The process can quickly snowball out of control. Rest assured that the Synchronist System has been proven to effectively roots out all types of issues without resorting to individualized questions for specific interest groups. In fact, it is better to conduct the Synchronist Interview as is and then, use this knowledge to select companies for more detailed surveying by those interested in a more detailed discussion on workforce needs or exporting for example.

Step 6: Prepare or Secure Data Management Tools - Insure procedures and tools to organize collected information for analysis and reporting. Arrange access to Synchronist (personal IDs and passwords) for the administrator and operators who will be inputting, managing, reporting, and analyzing interview findings.

Step 7: Conduct Operator, Interviewer, and Response Team Training - Plan and coordinate training as part of the launch. This improves operations as well as the quality of information collected. Groups and/or individuals can participate in Blane, Canada Ltd.'s monthly training webinar series (data entry, reporting, advanced reporting, interviewer, and customer relationship management (no cost) as part of the training if desired.

Step 8: Begin Scheduling and Conducting Interviews - Determine who schedules the appointments and how they will be coordinated to avoid duplication or call backs when someone has declined to participate. Set a minimum Data Quality Index (DQI) such as 80% to insure all interviews are essentially complete to insure information is as valuable as possible. Low DQIs will limit the potential of interviews.

Step 9: Activate Response Team as Needed – Prepare the response team procedures on follow-up to individual employers who ask for assistance or have "red flag" problems to be addressed. Organize, assign, and distribute assistance requests. Track and manage requests through to completion in Synchronist Assistance Tracking feature. Report back to individual requesting assistance as to the outcome and capture satisfaction.

Step 10: Organize and Compile Findings for Analysis and Reporting – Synchronist provides numerous predefined reports on all the subjects explored during the executive interview. Synchronist x-Tool also provides tools for data analysis and graphing. The analyst will organize the findings from different reports to tell a story of the situation in the community and the business climate. The story, supported by graphs and tables will provide insight for decision-makers and leadership.

Step 11: Promote Findings and Recommendations Drawn from the Report – What did we learn. It is essential to share findings broadly to document the value of the executive interview process. At a minimum, interview participants and leadership should have access to the findings. Findings should be presented in multiple formats: executive summary, full report (printed and digital, e.g. PDF), presentation such as PowerPoint, press release, newsletter articles, web site notices, etc.

Step 12: Initiate Action to Implement Recommendations – Take the top priority(ies) and set a plan to implement the required change or correction. If action is required by others, develop a persuasive presentation or report detailing findings which support the recommended action that can be used to recruit support and stimulate action.

Step 13: Continue the Interviews and Repeat the Cycle – One of the biggest changes in business retention has been the movement to an on-going business retention effort. Instead of periodic blitzes, many organizations now have monthly call goals to insure ongoing contact with employers and continually refreshing their knowledge of changes in the community.

Company List Resources

In addition to your own list sources, the following are recommended resources and procedure for selecting companies for business retention interviews. All lists will have some inaccuracies. The quantity will vary by source.

National

- Harris Directory
- Dun & Bradstreet MarketPlace database
- Hoover's Business Information
- Public Library (business services section)

Regional & Local

- Public Utility Partner
- Tax Assessor's Office
- City Business Registration List
- Workforce Investment Board
- Economic Development Organization
- Chamber of Commerce
- Council of Governments
- United Way

Other Synchronist Planning Resources

- Synchronist Users' Resource Site – *http://www.blanecanada.com/Users/Synchronist_Resource.htm* *
    - Sample reports
    - Confidentiality agreements
    - Partnership agreements
    - Advance letters
    - Press releases, media kit
    - Synchronist description for Board Members
    - Interviewers Guide, training kit
    - Blank forms
    - And much more

** Note: Log in details will be provided separately on request.*