

Case Study: Calls Plus of Lafayette, Louisiana

Louisiana's statewide Economic Gardening program helped Calls Plus (legally registered as New Orleans Teleport Inc.) increase annual revenue more than 60 percent within a year of its engagement.

A Lafayette, Louisiana-based multilingual telecom center, Calls Plus entered the state's Economic Gardening program in December 2015, looking for help with business development. "We needed qualified leads, we needed evaluations, and they delivered for us," says Barbara Lamont, founder and CEO of Calls Plus.



Calls Plus founder Barbara Lamont and Laniya Sanchez, director of business development

Among deliverables, the Economic Gardening team provided:

- Lists of hospitals and health care systems that might be looking to outsource their call center services, including contact information for decision-makers at VA hospitals across the country.
- Leads on school systems with homeland security funding that might be launching safety-tip and anti-bullying phone lines.
- Competitive intelligence, which included an online analysis of competitors' offerings, pricing and what their websites looked like.

Shortly after wrapping up its Economic Gardening engagement, Calls Plus won two new contracts — a fraud hotline with a utility company and a hotline for a large federal agency to provide counseling services for at-risk youth. "Although these contracts weren't necessarily big in terms of revenue, they have high growth potential and step our company up to another level," says Lamont, noting that she had wanted to enter the utility sector for some time.

Within four months Calls Plus won two more significant projects: a five-year contract to deliver a 24-hour safety hotline for a large national organization, and another as a subcontractor for a statewide school system's

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safety hotline. These projects will boost annual revenue by \$500,000 and \$175,000 respectively.

Armed with these new contracts, Calls Plus generated more than \$1.6 million in 2016 revenue, up from \$1 million in 2015, and it increased staff from 28 to 45 employees.

In the past Lamont has had other types of business assistance, including workforce training grants and a leadership mentor. “Although those were very helpful, Economic Gardening was different because it provided solid leads to help us make money,” she explains. “It gave us resources we wouldn’t have had otherwise.”

“The researchers helped us focus on our core values and strengths and establish better criteria for pursuing new clients,” she adds. “Instead of trying to mine the states where we already have a substantial presence, we began to seek clients in new geographic markets, expanding on our skills with crisis hotlines.”

The Economic Gardening engagement also resulted in Calls Plus expanding its portfolio of services. In mid-2016 it began to offer a total package of end-to-end patient care to existing health care customers. Moving beyond answering phone calls, the company now provides complete patient interaction from review of electronic health records to appointment setting and nurse triage advice. They have also added multichannel contacts for all callers, including email, text messaging, FTP sites, web chat, child and adult protective services and other social service case intake and management. Albeit a bit rocky at first, Lamont says, the new product is now bringing in substantial revenues and increased opportunities.

“One of my big takeaways was that growth was possible, and we shouldn’t look for it in traditional places,” observes Laniya Sanchez, the company’s director of business development. “The Economic Gardening researchers not only helped identify new prospects, but also gave us the confidence to pursue them.”

Indeed, Calls Plus expanded its facility from 2,500 to 3,700 square feet with the option to lease another 3,500 square feet. “Economic Gardening helped jump-start that investment,” says Sanchez. “Instead of waiting for the big contracts to land, we went ahead and started expanding our staff and facilities so when we got the contracts, we were ready.”

“Economic Gardening lit a fire under us,” Lamont agrees. “Even though we weren’t able to act on all the research immediately, it focused our thinking in the right direction. Before the engagement, we were floundering. We would wait for a bid to come out and wait to think about whether it was for us or not. Now we’re faster, smarter and much more proactive.”



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