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Changes in store for state Office of Entrepreneurship

By DON SERGENT dsergent@bgdailynews.com Apr 12, 2018

Business startups aren't for the faint of heart, with the Small Business Trends website reporting that more than half of small businesses fail within the first four years. But some restructuring within the Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development should make life a little easier for the state's aspiring entrepreneurs.

Warren County resident Brian Mefford was hired in January as executive director of the cabinet's Office of Entrepreneurship, and that office now directly administers the Kentucky Innovation Network in a new structure that Mefford thinks will benefit the state's small businesses.

The 12 regional Innovation Network offices, including one in Bowling Green, had been administered by the Kentucky Science and Technology Corp. Mefford believes bringing them under his office's umbrella makes sense.

“We’re looking to align all the various resources and services related to entrepreneurs and small businesses that are currently spread across various state agencies under the cabinet for economic development’s office of entrepreneurship,” said Mefford, founder and past CEO of Bowling Green’s Connected Nation broadband services company. “By aligning, I feel like we can be more strategic and efficient.”

Although his office isn’t likely to see a budget increase out of the current legislative session, Mefford said this reorganization will ultimately allow more resources to get to the business owners who need them.

“Our aim is to take what has been a fairly high level of administrative overhead and direct it to startups and small businesses,” he said. “Government is never going to be the end-all and be-all for small business owners, but we can make it easier for them to start and to grow, either by providing capital or providing resources.”

Terry Gill, secretary of the economic development cabinet, said the new alignment is less about the government playing a role in small-business growth than it is about government getting out of the way of those startups.

“We want to help clear the landscape of obstacles and encourage entrepreneurs to think big, so Kentucky becomes recognized as a place to ignite great ideas and grow strong companies,” Gill said in a news release.



Jeff Hook, director of the Kentucky Innovation Network office in Western Kentucky University's Center for Research and Development on Nashville Road, is another supporter of the state's new economic development structure. His office connects entrepreneurs with potential investors, mentors and subject matter experts, among other services.

“The changes will bring some efficiencies to the program, and it demonstrates that we have the support of the cabinet for economic development,” Hook said. “They also created a deputy director position for the office of entrepreneurship. That's further evidence that the cabinet sees working with startup companies as a priority.”

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