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# Trade development center expands its reach as budget shrinks

CITD forms new partnerships to provide counseling for businesses



Sacramento Business Journal - by [Kelly Johnson](#) Staff writer

Noel Neuberger | Sacramento Business Journal  
Brooks Ohlson, executive director of the Sacramento Regional Center for International Trade Development, works with a group of Chinese agricultural delegates. [View Larger](#)

The local center that helps businesses trade globally is going to travel a lot more itself — all around Northern California.

The **Sacramento Regional Center for International Trade Development** has doubled the counties it serves following the

closure of six of its 14 centers statewide due to California's budget woes.

Since July 1, the Sacramento CITD has been serving businesses in 22 counties — up from 11 — stretching north to the Oregon border. The center picked up the area previously served by a CITD in Chico.

Centers also were cut and consolidated in the Los Angeles area, Ventura and Oakland. The Sacramento CITD, which is housed within the **Los Rios Community College District**, and its seven sister centers were kept open, based on performance and geographic coverage.

The centers are funded through the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. The budget for 14 centers had been about \$2.5 million.

"It got cut back to about a million," said Jeff Williamson, statewide director of the centers.

Individual centers also are funded from grants, federal contracts and local sponsorship dollars.

Last week, Brooks Ohlson, executive director of the Sacramento region center, still had to pull out a map to tally up the number of counties for which he's now responsible. But serving additional counties and businesses doesn't faze Ohlson, a veteran of advising companies on international trade. Before joining CITD five years ago, Ohlson ran the **Northern California World Trade Center** for eight years. His international trade résumé goes back much further. Ohlson's also the honorary consul general of Bulgaria.

The task is "not daunting," he said. "At the World Trade Center, I served this same territory with less staff."

Businesses in the Sacramento area and elsewhere within his new territory still will receive the global trade counseling they're seeking, Ohlson said.

The CITD will make that happen through some new partners and partnerships.

Joyce Michaelson, a consultant who previously worked for CITDs in the Bay Area and Chico has come aboard. In all, the center has six international trade consultants, eight interns, and a permanent staff member in addition to Ohlson.

The Sacramento center also will continue to collaborate with the local Small Business Development Center and the Sacramento U.S. Export Assistance Center, two organizations with which it shares an office. And the export assistance center, which is part of the **U.S. Department of Commerce**, last week landed a second trade expert — doubling that agency's local staff to two. The Sacramento CITD also can get help from the international trade division of the Governor's Office of Economic Development. GoED, as it's called, formed this spring.

"It's not like we're an entity all to ourselves," said Panda Morgan, director of the **Northeastern California Small Business Development Center-Greater Sacramento & Greater Sierra**.

"With fewer resources we need to learn how to serve more clients more effectively," such as through partnerships with the U.S. Department of Commerce and the **California Department of Food & Agriculture**, Williamson said.

Will companies in the Sacramento region still get the level of international trade assistance to which they're accustomed?

"I think the possibility is there," Williamson said, adding that at least in the short term, partnerships and improved technology can help compensate for the lack of state funds.

"Nobody's going to be left without a response," Williamson said. "We don't want to leave anybody hanging."

While Ohlson and Williamson are optimistic about what can be accomplished through partnerships, the cuts still come at a bad time. Given the lackluster domestic economy and a weakening exchange rate with some countries, international trade is even more important for U.S. companies, Williamson said. The country needs to invest in exporting.

"It's a time a lot of people are looking abroad for market expansion," he said.

*[kjohnson@bizjournals.com](mailto:kjohnson@bizjournals.com) / 916-558-7860*

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