



ENERGIZING ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES

A Pathway to Prosperity



Learning Theme 1 – Community Readiness

In 2005, when we, Don Macke and Deb Markley, wrote our first book on entrepreneurial development, we addressed the issue of community readiness. In the decade and a half since then, the issue has assumed even greater importance. Building an entrepreneurial culture takes time and perseverance, and communities must be ready to take on such a long-term challenge. And readiness has many dimensions including:

1. **The commitment and resources to undertake economic development – in general – and entrepreneurship – in particular.** Community institutions such as the Chamber or a town/county economic development department are important resources that must be open to (or at least not hostile to) supporting existing and emerging entrepreneurs.
2. **Entrepreneurship champions.** Whether from the local business community, within the Chamber or other business resource provider, some person(s) need to advocate for entrepreneurship as a development strategy and be willing to continue to “beat the drum” over time to bring others along. [Judy Schmitt](#) is a perfect example of an entrepreneurship champion from Jackson County Kentucky.
3. **Open and creative community leadership.** Entrepreneurship work requires some outside the box thinking about how to build – or rebuild – an economy. Community leaders, elected and informal, need to be open to exploring new paths that may look quite different from economic drivers of the past. The focus on outdoor recreation tourism by many of the communities that were part of this initiative provides a good example of creative community leadership.
4. **Local support resources for entrepreneurs – or the ability to network to regional resources.** Entrepreneurs, whether they are just starting up or have been in business for some time, need access to the right resources, at the right time. Ready communities identify and connect to local resources – accountants, lawyers, marketing people – or build relationships with external resource providers so that they can connect entrepreneurs as their needs arise. Many of the early efforts by Appalachian communities involved events like business meetups to introduce entrepreneurs to local and regional service providers in an informal, low-risk setting.
5. **Hope for a brighter future.** Communities embrace entrepreneurship as a development strategy because they believe it is a [pathway to prosperity](#). That belief is fueled by hope and a willingness to believe that no matter how tough things have been, there is a brighter future ahead. Such hope is often in short supply in rural places that have had to deal with multiple hits – outmigration of young people, loss of industry and jobs, loss of critical institutions like a hospital or a school. Appalachian communities that embraced entrepreneurship in a positive and effective way saw a path that included capturing more economic activity associated with tourism or redeveloping Main Street into a vibrant small business scene.

As you consider community readiness, you may want to explore some of the information contained in **Community Readiness for Entrepreneurship guide** in the e2 Resource Library.