



University

Community Readiness for Entrepreneurship Guide

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About This Guide

This **Community Readiness for Entrepreneurship Guide** provides tools and insights from field experience for communities interested in assessing their interest and ability to launch entrepreneur-led economic development. The information in this guide will help you begin conversations within your community about current levels of readiness, resources, and talent. The tools included with this guide and additional external resources will also help your community identify which next steps are most appropriate.

The e2 University includes several additional guides to help you in your journey toward entrepreneur-led economic development:

- **Introduction to e2 University**
- **Organizing for Action**
- **Assessments to Strategy**
- **Working with Entrepreneurs**
- **Metrics, Stories and Sustainability**

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Part 1 – Introduction to Community Readiness for Entrepreneurship

A quick internet search finds two relevant “readiness” definitions:

1. “Willingness to do something,” and
2. “The state of being fully prepared for something.”

In this case, “prepared for something” is a community’s readiness to undertake and succeed with entrepreneur-led development and entrepreneurial ecosystem building. The first definition is also relevant. Critical to community readiness for entrepreneurship is sufficient willingness—and, we would add, commitment—to go down this development path aggressively and confidently.

Our introduction to **community readiness** covers three important contextual topics before you engage in readiness assessment and preparation:

- Why is community readiness so important?
- Where community readiness fits within the e2 development framework.
- Making the case for entrepreneurship.

Lessons from NetWork Kansas and eCommunities

[NetWork Kansas](#) is possibly America’s longest running and at-scale entrepreneurial ecosystem-building initiative in the United States. e2 became involved with NetWork Kansas during its formation over a decade ago. A central NetWork Kansas strategy is its [Entrepreneurial Communities](#) (eCommunities). Becoming an eCommunity brings a whole set of resources including access to business capital, community coaching and advanced entrepreneurial resources. Early in the eCommunity experience there was considerable community interest. However, NetWork Kansas experienced high dropout rates of interested communities. High dropout rates undermined the potential for demonstrated impact and was highly inefficient and costly for NetWork Kansas. Being an entrepreneurial organization, NetWork Kansas made changes and significantly increased time and investment into community readiness. This change has increased success with communities delivering greater impact and cost-effectiveness.

Why is Community Readiness Important? Our lessons from NetWork Kansas and eCommunities demonstrates why community readiness is important. For decades, particularly among rural and micropolitan sized communities, there has been a culture of program and resource offerings where communities felt the need to respond whether such resources had been prioritized by the community or were a good fit at the time. Communities feared that if they did not take advantage of available resources when offered by state, federal, corporate or foundation sponsors, they might miss an important opportunity. This process is not healthy, but it was reality by and large for the past four decades. In this environment communities would apply for assistance but often were not really committed. They would explore the opportunity and then often drop out. This pattern was costly and inefficient for both communities and resource providers.

Readiness Assessment Process

If your family was getting ready to take a major trip, chances are good you have a checklist you are using to make sure you have thought of everything and you are ready to go. The same is true with a new entrepreneurial venture. Readiness checklists do not necessarily translate to success, but they can be foundational in contributing to greater success. Our e2 readiness considerations and tools can help you, your partners and your community better understand the factors contributing to a successful initiative.

Bottom line, communities should not undertake development unless it is a demonstrated community priority with sufficient enlightened commitment (e.g., awareness of what is expected to achieve progress and success). Think of community readiness as an assessment to more objectively evaluate community readiness and what is necessary for positioning the community for real progress, success, and impact. Committing to a readiness process before committing to undertaking entrepreneurship enhances the probability for success. The flip side is initiative failure. There is a real and substantial community cost associated with initiative failure. When communities fail with development efforts, confidence is eroded and can impair the ability of a community to move forward with other initiatives. As in sports, cultures of failure are toxic, and this can become a barrier to progress for any community.

Readiness and the e2 Development Framework. For most communities actively considering investing in entrepreneur-led development, readiness assessment and preparation is the starting point. While the e2 development framework and process is represented as linear the actual process is circular.

We illustrate this with our shared educational experience. When our parents were getting us ready for preschool, we prepared so that we would succeed in this first educational journey. We engaged in getting ready for kindergarten, then elementary school, middle school, high school, and postsecondary education. The same is true with community entrepreneurship development. Readiness for getting started will help you launch an optimal initial game plan. As you develop and refine your strategy, additional readiness preparation will be required. Readiness always proceeds new and expanded strategy and ecosystem development.

Figure 1 illustrates the typical process a community or region will go through from the point when a decision is made to pursue entrepreneur-focused development to the day down the road when you document trend line changes in your community. Our field experience is clear: ensuring your community is ready for success is essential. The first step in succeeding with this development approach is testing your commitment or readiness to vision, develop, implement, and sustain an entrepreneurship game plan. We hope this Community Readiness Guide and the associated resources help your community move down a pathway to prosperity.

Figure 1 – The e2 Development Flow



Making the Case for Entrepreneurship. Most communities fall into one of three “economic development” categories:

1. Not in the Game
2. Focused on Traditional Economic Development
3. Considering Entrepreneurship

Based on e2’s field experience, relatively few communities are fully vested with entrepreneurship-led development. We explore each of these three categories next. Consider where your community is based on this typology.

Development – A Community Responsibility

The United States is unique in so many ways, but with respect to community economic development, it is truly unique when compared to most developed nations. In the United States, with our system of distributed power (e.g., Federal, State and Local), the primary responsibility for a community’s success and development rests with the community. In many developed nations, federal and provincial governments play a much greater role. This was possibly truer for the U.S. during westward expansion or the 1950s and 1960s. Today, as maybe never before, the job of development rests squarely on each community’s shoulders regardless of location, size, or capacity. Undertaking meaningful economic development, including entrepreneurship, rests with your community.

Not in the Game. Too many communities and regions unfortunately are not really in the economic development game. There are many attributes for communities that fall into this category. Here is a sampling to help your community see if you might fall into this category:

- The community is either complacent or indifferent and does not believe it needs to engage in economic development.
- There is really no economic development strategy for the community.
- If there is a strategy, there is little commitment and investment into strategy.
- The community is distressed, and there is limited capacity to undertake development.
- There is a strategy, but it is outdated and is not working and is eroding community support.
- There is conflict within the community among development interests, impeding the community's ability to get into the game effectively.

This list could go on, but you get the idea. ***Does your community generally fit into this “not in the game” category?***

Focused on Traditional Economic Development. Many communities fall into this category of a strong focus on traditional economic development. By “traditional economic development,” we refer to general community promotion with a strong focus on business recruitment and attraction. Since World War II, communities, and particularly nonmetropolitan communities, have focused on this one-two punch. Traditional economic development made sense during and following World War II when industry was moving from the coasts and big cities to nonmetropolitan communities. By 1980, business relocation shifted with more offshoring (moving to locations outside of the U.S.) when compared to relocations within the United States. But old commitments and patterns are hard to break, and too many communities continue to focus on an ever more expensive, competitive, and shrinking opportunity.

Given the impact challenges of traditional economic development, vested stakeholder groups are often threatened by emergent opportunities and strategies like entrepreneurship. Chambers of commerce, development groups, utilities and others vested in attraction see entrepreneurship as a competitor for support and resources. In a zero-sum world, this threat is real and can inhibit a community's ability to transition from traditional development to entrepreneurship. ***Does your community fall into this category?***

Either-Or

In the traditional-versus-entrepreneurship debate, our conversations are too often reduced to “either doing traditional development or entrepreneurship.” In our opinion, this is a false choice for most communities. All development should be rooted in genuine assets and opportunities. If your community has attraction opportunity, then this form of traditional development should be part of your portfolio. If your community has limited attraction potential, then you should focus more energy on entrepreneurship. Brian Dabson, when he was with the Corporation for Enterprise Development, made the case that entrepreneurship is the foundation for all economic development, including attraction. Brian argued that when communities create thriving entrepreneurial ecosystems, they are also building business climates enhancing all forms of development.

Considering Entrepreneurship. There is a growing number of communities, particularly metropolitan areas, and regions, that are actively considering and even exploring entrepreneurship-led development. For these communities, our **Community Readiness for Entrepreneurship Guide** and resources can be very helpful. As both successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurs know, doing your homework and being ready is important to success. At the same time, just as entrepreneurs must do, your community may never be fully ready and might just have to take the risk and get started down the entrepreneurship road. ***Does your community fall into the “considering entrepreneurship” category?*** If this is the case, this resource is for you and your community.

Part 2 – Foundations for Community Readiness

Community readiness for development, and particularly entrepreneur-focused development, can be complicated. What we have learned over the decades is community readiness is foundational for ultimate success with this development approach. Communities that are not adequately ready to undertake this work are more likely to fail. Community readiness is not “black and white” or you are ready, or your community is not ready. Engaging in assessing community readiness can help your community determine if there is sufficient “right stuff” for success and, more importantly, enable your community to become more ready by understanding the factors that enhance success and sustainability.

In **Part 2 – Foundations for Community Readiness**, we explore how you can first assess your community’s readiness for entrepreneur-focused development and then prepare your community for greater readiness enhancing future success. Based on our extensive field experience working with a wide range of communities and regions, we have identified four community readiness foundations:

1. Entrepreneurial Talent
2. Entrepreneurial Resources
3. Leadership and Commitment
4. Community Capacity

Entrepreneurial Talent (eTalent). It is obvious, but ironically it is often overlooked. In order to pursue entrepreneurship as a development strategy, we must have entrepreneurial talent.

Entrepreneurial talent is universal. Entrepreneurial ecosystems are not.

Andy Stoll – Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation

Oftentimes communities, particularly distressed communities, are uncertain if they have sufficient entrepreneurs to pursue this development strategy. This is a fair question, and depending upon size, location and development history, different communities will have varying entrepreneurial talent. Our

TIP: Some communities believe they have limited entrepreneurial talent and consequently there is limited opportunity for entrepreneurship. If your community is struggling with this concern, we suggest you jump ahead to our **eTalent Guide**. Complete the entrepreneur mapping exercise and chances are good you will discover two very valuable insights that will help your community make better decisions to proceed or not. First, the eTalent mapping will likely demonstrate you have much more talent than you thought. This is a powerful discovery and can motivate communities to move forward. Second, the eTalent mapping will give you a better idea of the kind of talent you have developmentally (e.g., stage of development) and your opportunities for development.

field experience, including in some very distressed parts of North America, agrees with Andy's insight. Every community has entrepreneurial talent, and this talent is the starting point for growing an entrepreneurial economy and community. Chances are good there are few or no high-growth and fully developed entrepreneurs, but there is entrepreneurial talent available to support and grow. We have found this process of supporting the eTalent you have can then create a cycle where over time more entrepreneurial talent is generated.

Entrepreneurial Resources (eResources). There is the legacy saying from America's Black universities and colleges that "a mind is a terrible thing to waste" (United Negro College Fund motto). Returning to Andy's comment, entrepreneurial ecosystems become the difference between success with entrepreneurship or failure. The whole point of the UNCF messaging is that without higher education dedicated to creating learning opportunities for African Americans, their talent and potential might be lost. Central to a strong, vibrant, and impactful entrepreneurial development ecosystem is access to relevant and useful resources. Access to capital, mentoring and other eResources become the tools and pathways whereby a community's eTalent can develop, grow, and thrive. As more entrepreneurial talent in a community that is progressing a culture can be cultivated, that motivates more residents to pursue successful entrepreneurship.

TIP: As you explore your community's readiness for entrepreneurship, you may feel that your community does not have resources that could help entrepreneurs. Maybe you are too small, too poor or too isolated, creating a deficiency perspective. In my childhood hometown of Mullen, Nebraska, population 459 in 2017, there are limited entrepreneurship development resources. But they are there, and down the road and over the internet there are a fuller range of resources. If your community is struggling with this question, then jump ahead to our **eResources Guide**. Complete the basic eResources mapping. You will discover you have plenty of resources, both simple and complex, if your community is willing to network with them.

Leadership and Commitment. There is extensive research and analysis regarding why some communities prosper while others fail. This also confirms this is typically true when other factors are considered. Community leadership that is empowering is often the difference between thriving and struggling communities. For entrepreneur-focused development to root and thrive, there must be sufficient community leadership and commitment.

Champions – A Form of Community Leadership

In our work at e2, we have become aware of a particular kind of community leadership we call **champions**. We have found that champions are critical to success. Oftentimes this small group of community leaders are the key to helping their community understand the entrepreneurship opportunity and how to move forward. What makes champions different than other leaders is the level to which they commit and become vested with this work. They come to believe that entrepreneur-focused development is central to their community's future, and they are willing to leave no stone unturned to help their community move forward. Champions display serious commitment and resilience when there are challenges helping others stay the course and move forward.

Community Capacity. The final foundational element to readiness is **community capacity**. There are many considerations when evaluating community capacity to undertake development. Here is a short list of key considerations:

- The timing is right, or this is the wrong time (e.g., too much going on).
- Sufficient organizational support or lack of opposition.
- Adequate funding and staffing.

TIP: Every state has resources that can help your community assess and develop leadership and your community's development capacity. Oftentimes state development agencies, regional development organizations, utilities, foundations, and county extension offices can be resources to your community. Do not be afraid to seek out help. Remember we all suffer from the "forest and trees" challenge. We are often too close to our own reality; some outside help and perspective can help us better assess our readiness.

For distressed or struggling communities, community capacity for undertaking meaningful development becomes particularly important. Conditions are never perfect but ensuring sufficient capacity to move forward is critical to community readiness.

Time

Thoughtful and sustainable community development takes time and a degree of patience. Our communities have been undergoing change and development for decades and, for some, hundreds of years. Entrepreneurship takes time to realize transformative change. While these impacts do not become significant in one or two years, within a decade this kind of economic development can remake a community. In our culture of immediate outcomes, part of being ready for this kind of development requires an understanding of the pacing and time required from commitment to strong indicators of desired impact and change.

Of these four foundations to community readiness, we believe champions committed to entrepreneurship are the most important. Most communities have entrepreneurial talent. All communities can assess relevant and impactful entrepreneurial resources. Nearly every community has some capacity for moving forward. Champions, in our experience, are always the most essential ingredient for success.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead, anthropologist

Organizing for Action

The end game of readiness assessment and preparedness is a smart decision to move forward or wait. Readiness is intended to be a relatively quick process, knowing that further readiness assessment and preparedness will occur throughout the e2 Development Framework and particularly the Organizing for Action phase. As you are undertaking readiness assessment and preparation, take a peek at the **Organizing for Action Guide** and resources. These can provide you a much deeper idea of what it takes to be ready and successful with community-based, entrepreneurship-led development. If there are resources and tools in Organizing for Action that you feel would be helpful to getting to that smart commitment decision, then use them.



We encourage communities to employ the **foundations for community readiness** to not only assess your community's preparedness for moving forward, but to inform your community about areas where you can invest to enhance your readiness contributing to both initial success but longer-term sustainability.

Our next stop is a review of a simple, but powerful tool developed by the Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurial Leadership called the **Community Life Cycle Matrix**.

Part 3 - Community Life Cycle Matrix

For years e2 has employed a simple but effective tool developed by the Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurial Leadership called the **Community Life Cycle Matrix**. This tool used transparently by community leaders (or community coach) with community stakeholders and the community at large, can help a community understand if the timing is right given what is going on in a community.

We illustrate how the **Life Cycle Matrix** (Figure 2) can be used to first test community readiness for entrepreneurship and define actions to improve the community's readiness for starting an entrepreneurship push. If a community is in the **Chaos Phase**, there may be too much community conflict to marshal the necessary commitments and resources to move forward with a new major development initiative like entrepreneurship-led development. As a community moves into the later stages of the **Emergence Phase** may be the prime time for community readiness for entrepreneurship. As a community moves from the **Emergency Phase** into the **Vision Phase** the community is optimally ready for taking on major new development work. Next, explore each of the Life Cycle Matrix phases.

Actualization Phase. Community is highly developed and encourages learning & innovation while respecting history & culture. Community shares resources with others and regularly monitors itself, continuing to enhance capacity.

- **Learning Stage:** Learning culture present in core values of people and organizations.
- **Innovation Stage:** Innovation occurs in community & at an individual citizen level; sense of opportunity permeates community.
- **Integration Stage:** Business, education, government, and NGO communities work together.

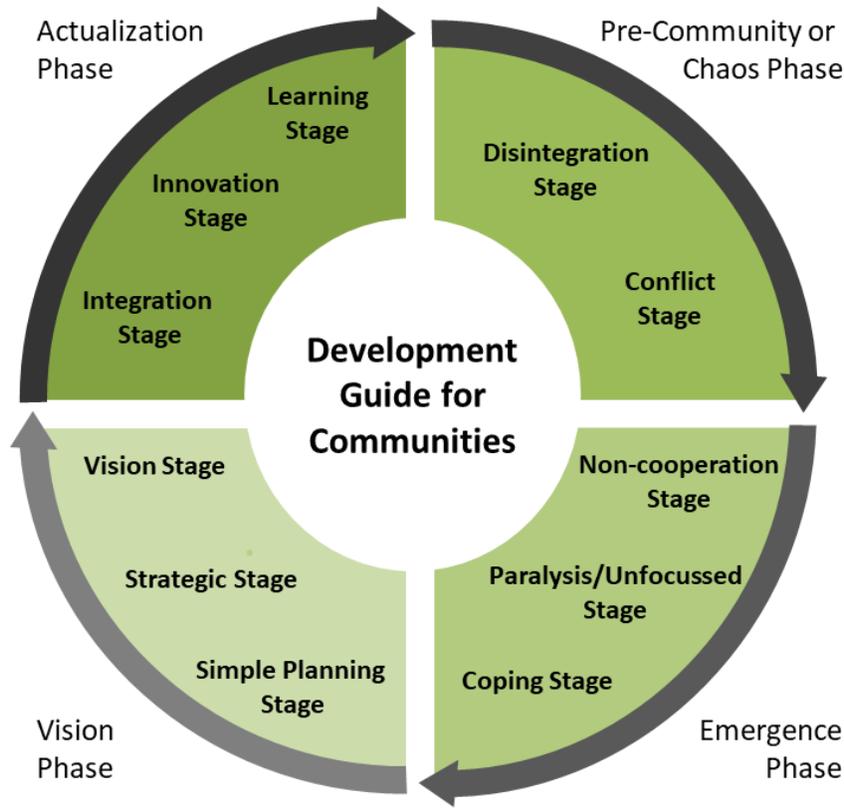
Action: Community undertakes regular reviews and reflection activities to maintain or enhance stage/phase.

Pre-Community or Chaos Phase. Community is undeveloped. Limited sharing of resources or recognition of value of a community.

- **Disintegration Stage:** Can occur at any time from internal or external changes.
- **Conflict Stage:** Truly conflicted community; people cannot gather to accomplish anything; low self-esteem.

Action: Community can (re)form through the identification of and action of influential and respected leaders (elected or unelected).

Figure 2 – Community Life Cycle Matrix



Source: Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurial Leadership

Emergence Phase. Community exists but has significant problems, making anything but survival & fulfilling short-term needs impossible.

- Coping Stage: Planning for day-to-day & infrastructure needs whenever possible.
- Paralysis/Unfocussed Stage: Community is working together but setting goals or making simple plans impossible.
- Non-cooperation Stage: Gathering of people is possible but working together effectively is not; lack ability to listen to one another.

Action: Community can advance through focus on small, non-political, trust-building projects to build success, respect, confidence, relationships & skills.

Vision Phase. Community recognizes the importance of vision and long-term planning; is able to move in this direction.

- Simple Planning Stage: Preliminary community planning & visioning possible.
- Strategic Stage: Community becomes strategic in their planning; some longer-term planning possible.
- Vision Stage: Able to undertake & follow-through on vision & comprehensive strategic planning.

Action: Community can engage in planning, meaningful consultation of its member, & working towards the development of strategic thinking & planning, and, ultimately, identifying community-wide values, distinct community characteristics and a vision.

Community Readiness Assessments

e2 has developed comprehensive [Community Readiness Assessments](#) that can be used to build on the Life Cycle Matrix and complete a more detailed community readiness assessment. We recommend that you consider an outside moderator to help your community complete this assessment.

Next, we explore some resources and tools that can help your community get ready for entrepreneur-led development.

Part 4 – Resources and Tools

In this section of our Readiness Guide we share a series of resources and tools to help your community assess readiness and enhance your readiness for moving forward with the confidence that your community has enough of the right stuff to ensure success both short-term and longer-term. When you boil readiness down, it involves six readiness factors.

The Six Readiness Factors

Over the years e2 has curated those factors most influential for community-centered entrepreneurial development including openness to entrepreneurship, balancing business attraction, willingness to invest, a leadership team and willingness to work beyond town borders.

Openness to Entrepreneurship. Is the community open to exploring entrepreneurship as an economic development strategy? Central to such a commitment is the firm belief that within your community there are entrepreneurs who can create a new generation of successful businesses and there are service providers and community leaders willing to help them achieve success.

Balancing Business Attraction. Does the community balance a more traditional economic development approach with a focus on supporting local businesses and energizing entrepreneurs to create and build homegrown enterprises? For 50 years, the mainstay economic development strategy has been business attraction, particularly the search for industries. Supporting entrepreneurship requires a willingness to broaden the economic development strategy beyond this traditional recruitment model.

Entrepreneurship Programs. Has your community had experience with entrepreneurship programs already? Stop and highlight any of the following entrepreneurial programs that your community has experience with, either currently or in the past:

- Networking infrastructure for entrepreneurs
- Mentoring programs for entrepreneurs
- Efforts to improve business services for entrepreneurs
- Micro lending or other business financing services
- Entrepreneurial training programs such as “how to start a business” seminars or courses
- Business counseling services
- Youth entrepreneurship education programs. Etc.

Willingness to Invest. Most rural communities have limited experience with entrepreneurial programs. Do not assume you cannot create an entrepreneurial development strategy if your experience with these kinds of programs is limited. What is most important is a willingness to develop and support these kinds of activities.

Leadership Team. Can your community create a team that will work on an entrepreneurial strategy? To be successful, a community needs a core leadership team committed to building and supporting an entrepreneurship program. Remember, as Margaret Mead once said, “Never forget that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Beyond Town Borders. Is your community willing to create partnerships with other area communities to find the human and financial resources needed to be in the economic development game? Are you willing to look outside the community’s borders to find the resources to support your entrepreneurs? In today’s competitive world, we must collaborate to create enough scale and capacity to support effective economic development strategies.

Three Community Readiness Surveys and Tests

Over the years at e2 we have developed three community readiness surveys and tests that can be used by your community to first assess your readiness for entrepreneurship and then commit to actions to improve your community’s readiness:

1. Simple Community Readiness Test
2. Moderate Community Readiness Test
3. Complex Community Readiness Test

e2’s **Simple Community Readiness Test** lends itself to a very quick and easy way to gain extensive community input regarding your community’s readiness for entrepreneurship. There are just six quick questions. Based on your understanding of the previously outlined readiness factors in Part 2 of this Guide, with the following tool you can rank your community on each readiness factor using a 1–5 scale, where 1 is a limited degree of readiness and 5 is a high degree of readiness. This exercise is useful in terms of identifying areas that may need to be strengthened as your community pursues an entrepreneurship development strategy.

Figure 3 – Simple Community Readiness Resource, Version 1

Score Card:	Not Ready				Very Ready
Factor 1 – Openness to Entrepreneurship	1	2	3	4	5
Factor 2 – Balancing Business Attraction	1	2	3	4	5
Factor 3 – Entrepreneurship Programs	1	2	3	4	5
Factor 4 – Willingness to Invest	1	2	3	4	5
Factor 5 – Leadership Team	1	2	3	4	5
Factor 6 – Beyond Town Borders	1	2	3	4	5

Overall Score _____ (circle and sum)

Understanding the Score:

1-6	Weak Score – Little Readiness – Capacity Building Required
7-12	Soft Score – Some Readiness – Gap Filling Necessary
13-18	Good Score – Readiness Potential – Begin to Build on Assets
19-24	Strong Score – Readiness Present – Build on Assets
25-30	Very Strong Score – Considerable Readiness – Energize Your Entrepreneurs

Once you have tabulated your readiness scores, you can use this information in two ways. The overall score can help give you and others in the community a sense of the starting point. Are we in a strong position as we begin to encourage entrepreneurs? Are we starting from scratch? This understanding can help you set realistic expectations for progress toward energizing entrepreneurs.

Using this Tool to Assess Readiness

You can address these readiness factors as part of a focus group of community leaders and residents who have an interest in entrepreneurship. It is important to bring a diverse group of leaders together so that you get different perspectives on readiness. Service providers in your community, such as a business counselor with SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives) or the chamber president, may have very different views on the community’s readiness for entrepreneurship development than the entrepreneurs themselves. Experienced entrepreneurs may view the community environment in a different way than do new start-up entrepreneurs. You should strive to get as many different views on your community’s readiness as possible.

You can also use the scores for individual readiness factors to identify those parts of the community’s environment that may require special attention as you develop an entrepreneurship strategy. If your score on **Openness to Entrepreneurship** is low, you might want to ramp up your public relations efforts quickly to begin introducing the community to its successful entrepreneurs in very visible ways such as a Celebrate “Homegrown” Entrepreneurs Day or ribbon cutting. If your **Beyond Town Borders** score is low, you might want to charge a committee of town leaders with the immediate task of identifying and connecting with regional service providers who might bring additional resources to your local entrepreneurs.

Figure 4 provides a second **Simple Community Readiness Test** that includes three statements that can be used to determine community attitudes and community readiness. Depending on community or stakeholder responses this tool can identify where additional education or making the case for entrepreneurship is necessary. It is easy to deploy and tabulate. This particular tool can be used in community meetings with immediate tabulations and shared results enabling community discussion of the results. This quick turnaround attribute of this tool can be used to stage a deeper stakeholder or broader community dialogue. Our two simple community readiness tools can be combined to create a slightly larger survey instrument that provides two lenses on community readiness.

Figure 4 – Simple Community Readiness Test, Version 2

Simple Community Readiness Test

Complete the following, indicating your level of agreement with each statement. Mark a score from 1 to 5, where 5 means strong agreement with the statement and 1 means little agreement with the statement.

Score Card:

Most people in my community understand that entrepreneurs are critically important to the future development of our economy.	1	2	3	4	5
People in my community really support someone who is creating a new or expanding an existing business.	1	2	3	4	5
People in my community continue to support an entrepreneur who fails and is trying again with a new enterprise.	1	2	3	4	5
My community has developed programs to assist entrepreneurs to develop and grow.	1	2	3	4	5
My community is supporting a youth entrepreneurship program in the schools.	1	2	3	4	5

Overall Score _____ (circle and sum)

Understanding the Score:

0-5	Hostile
6-10	Indifferent
11-15	Mixed Support
16-20	Supportive
21-25	Highly Supportive

Layered Use of the Simple Community Readiness Test

Visualize that you and a core group of community champions are exploring entrepreneur led development. You want to create a broader conversation in your community about pursuing a serious



entrepreneurship initiative. You have invited all the likely suspects to an exploratory meeting – chamber, development corporation, school district, community college, city, county, main street program, etc. – and need a way to kick off a more in-depth discussion. Once you have covered the meeting basics of introductions and meeting purpose, you have each representative from these organizations to complete the Simple Community Readiness Test. Each participant completes the text and tabulates their results. Then each participant shares their total score and provides a brief explanation for their scoring.

Following this sharing there is a deeper discussion about potential community readiness and then a commitment by these representatives to use this tool with the leadership and possibly membership of their organizations. The results, potential stakeholder group by stakeholder group are tabulated and shared back with the core team. This collection of activities can help not only assess potential readiness but create all important stakeholder and community engagement. This very process of engagement can stimulate learning and commitment to action.

Remember, with our e2 resources your community is empowered to innovate and develop your own approaches and tools to prepare your community for readiness for entrepreneurship.

Figure 5 on the next page provides e2's **Moderate Community Readiness Test**. This tool requires more introduction and takes about twice as much time to complete and process as the simple tests. While the math for tabulations is still relatively easy. You may need to have calculators available for participants and employ a moderator to provide both group and individual assistance. Our moderate test is much more specific and may not be suitable for wide community use. Participants should include representatives from key potential stakeholder groups that have more detailed knowledge of your community's development efforts.

Figure 5 – Moderate Community Readiness Test

Moderate Community Readiness Test

Use this worksheet to explore and rate the ways that your community helps to identify, support and nurture entrepreneurs. Complete the following, indicating your level of agreement with each statement. Mark a score from 1 to 5, where 5 means strong agreement with the statement and 1 means little agreement with the statement.

Score Card:

Community clubs or school activities promote entrepreneurship.	1	2	3	4	5
A Chamber of Commerce or Development Corporation helps local businesses get started and supports existing business expansion.	1	2	3	4	5
The public recognizes or acknowledges business achievement.	1	2	3	4	5
There is a program(s) that identifies and recognizes entrepreneurs in the area.	1	2	3	4	5
Our community has intergenerational mentoring by business owners and managers.	1	2	3	4	5
There are internship opportunities for local youth and young adults returning from college.	1	2	3	4	5
There are networks linking entrepreneurs to resources, e.g., capital, new employees, and strategic partners.	1	2	3	4	5
Our community has an environment that values and supports young people who are starting new businesses.	1	2	3	4	5
Entrepreneurial education is part of the K-12 curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5
Our community has an information resource center or person to help entrepreneurs develop their enterprises.	1	2	3	4	5
Entrepreneurs have access to affordable and professional legal, accounting and consulting services.	1	2	3	4	5
Our community has a business expansion and retention program.	1	2	3	4	5
Our community has access to financing resources supporting start-ups and expansions.	1	2	3	4	5
Entrepreneurship training is available locally.	1	2	3	4	5
The community has a microenterprise development program.	1	2	3	4	5

Overall Score _____ (circle and sum)

Understanding the Score:

15-29	Not Ready – Work Needed
30-44	Some Work Needed to be Ready
45-59	Ready
60-75	Very Ready

Using the Three Tests in Sequence Over Time

Your community may want to consider using three readiness tests – simple, moderate, and complex – in sequence over time. Engaging your potential stakeholders, you may first start with the simple test to explore if there is adequate potential for moving forward and defining what actions are needed to become prepared. As your engagement with stakeholders broadens and deepens you can employ the moderate test to stretch the conversation and further community readiness for entrepreneurship. As you transition from readiness to organizing you might want to employ the complex readiness test as part of your stakeholder involvement work. As some time in this process you can use the first community readiness test to provide opportunities for wide community engagement employing electronic, in-person and pick up and drop off survey approaches.

e2’s **Complex Community Readiness Test** requires significant more time and usually a trained moderator to administer it. This test is designed for use with very informed stakeholder leaders. Typically, the complex test is used once there are strong indications that the community is ready to move forward with entrepreneurship. Often times this is a transition activity between readiness assessment and organizing for action.

The questions within this complex test can help determine each stakeholders’ level of interest, understanding and commitment. In many cases this test can be used to determine “who is in” and “who is out” of a potential collaborative that can be formed during the organizing phase. For many communities there may be sufficient buy-in to move forward but some key stakeholder groups elect to not be engaged. Rarely do all key potential stakeholder groups commit at the same level when a new initiative is being formed or as the initiative my move from where it is today to the next level of development.

The Importance of Sufficient, But Not All Commitments

In a perfect world every potential development stakeholder group will see the merits of making entrepreneurship-led development a top priority. But our field experience is clear, rarely do perfect situations exist. Personalities, other priorities, community politics and other factors can result in some stakeholder groups holding back or even opposed to your initiative. Traditional development groups for example may be threatened by a new entrepreneurship initiative will compete for local funding diluting their focus on attraction. The key readiness question is whether there is sufficient stakeholder support and managed opposition to enable your community to move forward with a reasonable prospect for success.

Figure 6 – Complex Community Readiness Test

Section 1 - Applying Community:									
Section 2 – Community’s Organizational Readiness for Entrepreneurship: Circle the number that corresponds most closely with the factors that impact the entrepreneurial environment and this E-Community’s likelihood to utilize funds and be successful.									
An initiative which lacks cooperation, collaboration, and would likely result in no usage of E-Community funds.			A moderately collaborative group appropriate for the population but with little proven success of cooperation.				Ideal situation for collaborating to utilize E-Community funds and impact the entrepreneurial environment positively.		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10



Section 2 Score:

Award 1-2 points if there is additional data that implies likelihood of exceptional community composition and collaboration.

Section 3 – Community Funding Capacity. Section 3 explores community readiness from a funding standpoint first exploring if funding is available, the amount of funding available and finally the duration of funding commitments.

Part A – Status of Funding

Fundraising Required			Some Existing Funding				Funding Secured		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Part B – Funding Level Commitments

**Explanation: K = 1,000s of dollars. These are annual funding commitments and assume a typical area rural community of \$5,000 residents. These estimates can be recalibrated for larger or small communities.*

Under \$25K*		\$25 to 50K		\$50 to \$100K		\$100 to \$125K		Over \$125K	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Part C – Funding Commitment Duration

1 Year or Less		2 to 3 Years		3 to 5 Years		5 to 7 Years		7 – 10 Years	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Section 3 Score:

Part A Score:

Part B Score:

Part C Score:

Section 4 – Staffing Support for eCommunities:

Part A – eCommunity Host Organization

Host Organization – Award 1-10 points based upon the commitment and suitability of a host organization for your community’s eCommunity initiative.

There is no clearly defined or accepted host organization for your eCommunity initiative.

There is a host organization, but some stakeholder groups have reservations about the host organization.

There is a deeply committed host organization widely accepted by other stakeholder partners.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Part B – eCommunities Leadership Team									
Leadership Team - Award 1-10 points based upon the representation from public and private sector, our meetings with the point person and/or leadership team, and the general feeling of how well this team will work with the community coach, adopt initiatives suggested, and remain engaged.									
A group which is not well represented by public/private sector, has not met actively with the community coach, and which is unlikely to adopt initiatives and be engaged.			A moderately collaborative group representing public/private sector who has met with the community coach and seems reasonably likely to cooperate.				Ideal situation for collaboration with the eCommunity Partnership. Broadly representative teams who have been actively engaged with the community coach and seem highly receptive to adopting new initiatives in addition to utilizing funds.		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Part C – Dedicated Staffing									
Dedicated Staffing – Award 1-10 points based upon the commitment of dedicated staffing with a clear job description focusing time and energy on your eCommunity initiative.									
There is not currently dedicated staffing, but our community is actively exploring how to provide more dedicated eCommunity staffing.			There is staffing commitment including a part-time host organization coordinator and part-time entrepreneur coach.				There is dedicated full-time staffing including both a host organization coordinator and entrepreneur coach.		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Section 4 Scoring:									
Part A Scoring:			Part B Scoring:				Part C Scoring:		
Summary Scoring & Results Interpretation									
Section 2 Score (Maximum of 30 points): Section 3 Score (Maximum of 30 points): Section 4 Score (Maximum of 30 points): Total Score (Maximum of 90 points): Score of 30 Points or Less – Weak Readiness – Important Preparation to be Undertaken Score of 30 to 60 Points – Moderate Readiness – Some Preparation Still Required Score of Greater than 60 Points – Strong Readiness – But Some Preparedness Gaps May Exist									



Sample Community Applications

Our e2 Development Framework can be used by an individual community to move forward with an entrepreneurship development game plan. In some cases, there are regional or even statewide initiatives offering support to communities seeking to become eCommunities. In these situations, there are host organizations or state/regional collaborative groups offering community coaching and other assistance to communities. Based on our experience with these kinds of regional/state and community initiatives, communities apply to become part of the regional/state supported initiative. Those groups funding the state/regional initiative want to ensure that partner communities are ready and truly committed to optimize the resources and support being offered.

Two of e2's most recent experiences – Central Appalachia and Southeastern Minnesota REV – offer robust learning and insight. Both initiatives were multi-year, well-funded and staffed, and involved regional host organizations providing community coaching and other financial/staff assistance to collaborating communities. In both of these cases host organizations pursued the creation of a portfolio of ready communities to test the e2 Development Framework and demonstrated the potential impact of entrepreneur-led development in their regions of rural America.

Central Appalachia e2 Initiative

The Central Appalachia e2 Initiative was hosted by the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship (predecessor organization to e2) in partnerships with three regional development partners – [Rural Action](#) in Ohio, the [Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky](#) and the [West Virginia Hub](#). This multi-year demonstration project was funded in large part by the [Appalachian Regional Commission](#) as part of its POWER+ Initiative. Figure 7 provides the community application developed to enroll partner communities in this e2 initiative.

Figure 7 – Sample Community Application, Central Appalachia Project

Sample Community Compact Agreement ARC POWER+ e2 Initiative

Background and Introduction

Through the ARC POWER+ e2 Initiative we (state host organizations plus the E2 and ARC) are partnering with a select group of communities. We embrace the values of asset-based community development (ABCD) or “doing with” versus “doing to” or “doing for.” Our values for this work are rooted in the International Community Development Society’s **Principles of Good Practice** (www.comm-dev.org/latest/item/86-principles-of-good-practice). This paper provides relevant background and sample language for a **Community Compact Agreement**.

Meaning of Compact

A community compact is not really a legally binding agreement. Chances are good that it is not enforceable. Rather it is an attempt to create a clear and transparent understanding, agreement and commitment focused on the work we are proposing to do together. So, a compact is an intentional ethical commitment to our shared desire to work together and it defines the respective jobs and responsibilities that each party (i.e., the community and the host organization) is committing to undertake and fulfill to the best of their ability.

Sample Language

There are typically four parts to a community compact agreement:

1. Opening Statement of Intent
2. The Value and Roles of the Host Organization
3. The Roles and Responsibilities of the Community
4. Parties Signing on Behalf of both Parties

We like to keep this compact to no more than two pages in length. Again, we DO NOT want this to feel like a legally binding contract.

The following is sample language relevant to our ARC POWER+ e2 Initiative.

ARC POWER+ Community Compact Agreement

Compact Intent. Funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) along with matching funding from (Organization here) and other funders is making it possible for (Organization here) to provide this opportunity for your community to grow a stronger economy and community through entrepreneur-focused development. This Community Compact Agreement establishes a partnership between the host organization (Name Here) and your community (Name Here). This is not a legally binding contract; rather it is a sincere and serious commitment to undertake this work together to grow an entrepreneurial economy and community.

What We Bring to the Table

#1 – **Community Coach.** We will commit a coach and coaching team to work with your community.

#2 – **Research Support.** We will provide free research support to help your community build a stronger, smarter business development game plan.

#3 – **Two-Year Commitment.** We are prepared to make at least a two-year commitment to work with your community in support of this development effort.

#4 – **Resource Mobilization Help.** We will work with your community to leverage resources to help the community build its own capacity to engage in entrepreneur-focused development.

#5 – **Working with Entrepreneurs.** We will provide you with a customizable framework, process and tools to help you find and engage local entrepreneurs, networking them to available and relevant assistance. Our partner in this work is the national e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems (www.energizingentrepreneurs.org).

#6 – **Community Engagement Assistance.** Our coaching team will help your team engage in more effective and efficient community and resident engagement that is supportive of this work.

#7 – **Learning from Other Communities.** We will organize opportunities for your community to engage in activities to learn from other communities working on entrepreneurial development in our state and Central Appalachia. There will be some financial assistance to support community participation in these events.

#8 – **Tracking Progress.** We will help your community define, track, and communicate progress.

What You as a Community Need to Do

America is unique in the world in that the ultimate responsibility for a community’s future rests with the local community itself. In other countries, like Canada, provincial and national governments assume a much larger responsibility for community and regional development. We are looking for communities that are willing to make a serious commitment to this work and aggressively engage with us to ensure your community’s longer-term future prosperity. We seek to realize four desired outcomes as we work together with your community:

Long-Term Strategic Partnerships	Development Capacity Building	Smart Development Strategies	Desired Transformative Change
We want to partner long enough to enable transformative change in communities.	We want to significantly increase the development capacity of our partner communities.	We want to evolve smart development strategies that can enable transformative change.	We want to see evidence that we are moving the needle on indicators of desired transformative change.

Champions. We need a commitment from at least 5 to 7 community leaders who are willing to champion this work. Part of this champions’ commitment is a willingness to invest up to two years of effort so we can achieve success.

Coordinator. We need a host organization and an assigned community coordinator to help us establish effective and efficient engagement. The community coordinator will work directly with our lead coach to make sure this work progresses and brings value to your community and its long-term future.

Community Engagement. Strategic development capable of making a real difference to the generational future of the community cannot be realized by a small group of leaders and residents. We need a commitment from the host organization and the champions group to real stakeholder and community engagement. Engaging the whole community is foundational to success.

A Commitment to Entrepreneurship. We need a commitment from the champions group and the community that focusing on entrepreneurship as a development strategy is a high priority.

Time and Funding Commitments. There is no fee to your community to be part of this development opportunity. But there is a serious commitment of time and there will be some costs associated with participation. You will be expected to make a real time commitment to engage in this work. In addition to assigning a coordinator, there will be costs associated with meetings, volunteer time and other work costs.



Work with Our Resource Team. We are proposing a partnership. We need a commitment from your community to work constructively and honestly with our resource team. This includes being creative in the use of technology to increase access to resources.

For the Community

Date

For the Host Organization

Date

Social Compact Versus Legal Agreement

Both the ARC and REV community applications employ a **social compact** versus a legally binding agreement. With a social compact there is a commitment by both the community and the host regional organization to work together and provide certain commitments to enable success. Social compacts are enforced by good will and peer pressure, not legally enforceable action. Social compacts are best employed with new initiatives where both host organization and the community are taking risks to test the e2 development framework. With more established and proven initiatives the agreement between host organization and community can become more specific and legal. Again, typically even these more legal agreements are not enforced through litigation but rather provide the basis for either party to withdraw engagement due to non-performance by the other party.

Southeastern Minnesota REV Initiative

A second multi-year eCommunity initiative, **Rural Entrepreneurial Venture (REV)**, sponsored by the [Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation \(SMIF\)](#), has advanced our knowledge of optimal regionally-sponsored eCommunity initiatives. The SMIF is among a collection of regional community foundations created over 25 years ago to foster not only community philanthropy but rural community economic development. The Initiative Foundations are unique within the community foundation world in that community economic development was a core mission from the start of their founding. SMIF has been deeply engaged in economic development, and particularly entrepreneurship, for years. It hosts gap financing funds and other assistance more common with regional development organizations. Over three years ago SMIF made a strategic commitment to employ the e2 Development Framework to help smaller (i.e., under 5,000 residents) rural communities in southeastern Minnesota become entrepreneurial communities.

REV is employing community cohorts where over three-year cycles communities apply to become REV eCommunities. Figure 9 provides REV's first cohort community application.

Figure 9 – Sample Community Application, Southeastern Minnesota Project

Rural Entrepreneurial Venture (REV) Program Application

Click in the boxes below to type your information. Use the Tab key to navigate through full application. Save and/or print the full application to submit to Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF).

I. Applicant Information		
Organization completing application		Federal Employer ID # (FEIN) for fiscal host
Primary Contact Person	Title	
Geographic area applying on behalf of (please list all communities/towns):		
Population (combined if applicable):		
Address	City	Zip
	County	Telephone
Email Address		Fax
Tax Status (Eligible organizations are tax exempt 501(c)(3) organizations, units/agencies of local, state or federal government and public schools):		
<input type="checkbox"/> 501(c)(3) <input type="checkbox"/> Unit of Government <input type="checkbox"/> Public Agency (Government Created)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Public school/Higher Education Institution		
Community Coordinator: If a program lead has been identified and is different from person applying, please list. This is the person who will be contacted for award notification, site visit scheduling, etc.		
Project Contact Person		Title
Organization		
Address	City	Zip
	County	Telephone
Email Address		Fax



II. Narrative (Please limit to 6 pages)

I. COMMUNITY INFORMATION & SELF-ASSESSMENT

- A. Describe your community's commitment to exploring entrepreneurship as an economic development strategy.
- B. Share any successes or lessons learned by your community in nurturing entrepreneurs and organizing community leaders:
- C. How does your community balance a business attraction approach with a focus on supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs?
- D. How have you seen community buy-in and ownership in developing needed economic development resources?
- E. Please describe the demographics of your community (race, age, gender, business sectors):
- F. How will your community plan to create a Champion Leadership Team that represents the community demographics listed above to work on entrepreneurial strategy?
- G. Explain how your community has worked across sectors (public, private, governmental, philanthropic, faith and other institutions) effectively:
- H. Share what entrepreneur programs are already in place in your community:
 - Networking infrastructure for entrepreneurs
 - Mentoring programs for entrepreneurs
 - Efforts to improve business services for entrepreneurs
 - Micro lending or other business financing services
 - Entrepreneurial training programs such as "how to start business" seminars
 - Business counseling services
 - Youth entrepreneurship education programs
 - Other programs to your community
- I. Please describe and partnerships or successes through previous SMIF programming or grants. Please indicated participation in the follow and if applicable, speak specifically to any SMIF involvement with:
 - SMIF's Community Growth Initiative
 - SMIF's Early Childhood Initiative
 - SMIF Affiliate Fund
- J. In today's competitive world, we must collaborate to create enough scale and capacity to support effective economic development strategies. Describe your willingness to work with regional and statewide partners and share examples of how you have developed collaborations in other projects the community has initiated.

<p>I. Proposal Checklist – Required Documents from Applicant Organization</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Completed application</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Audited financials or filed tax forms if unaudited. If available online, please provide link.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> IRS 501(c)(3) Determination Letter (if a nonprofit organization)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Letters of support: commitment of 3 organizations or institutions and the resources they will provide to this initiative, for example: business, education, social organizations, or associations</p>

<p>II. Application Submittal</p> <p>I have read thoroughly and comply with the Rural Entrepreneurial Venture (REV) Community Program Guidelines. To the best of my knowledge, all information provided in this application is true and correct.</p>	
Authorized Signature	Date
Print Name	Title
<p>Email application to jenniferh@smifoundation.org.</p> <p>Fax application to 507-455-2098</p> <p>Send application via postal service to:</p> <p>Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation Attn: Grants Coordinator PO Box 695 Owatonna, MN 55060</p> <p>All applicants will be contacted via email or telephone to confirm receipt of their application.</p> <p>Please contact the Grants Coordinator if you have any questions:</p> <p>Jennifer Heien Grants Coordinator 507-455-3215 x133 jenniferh@smifoundation.org</p>	

Community Readiness - Two Perspectives

Our Readiness Guide and resources can help an individual community determine and shape its readiness for entrepreneurship or help a statewide or regional development group launch an eCommunities initiative like those operating in Central Appalachia, Southeastern Minnesota or the statewide eCommunities program hosted by NetWork Kansas. In the first case our resources can help your community, absent regional or statewide support, explore if you have enough of the right stuff to launch a successful eCommunity initiative. In the latter case our readiness tools and approach can be used by



both the host organization and potential collaborating communities to ensure there is sufficient readiness and community commitment to enable entrepreneur-led development to success both within individual partnering communities, but also within the larger portfolio of cooperating communities.

It is our hope that we have helped you gain a deeper understanding of why community readiness is so important and how your community or initiative can not only determine community readiness but take meaningful actions to enhance community readiness. We encourage you to take community readiness seriously. Skipping or short-cutting this important work can be counter-productive. In your desire to get started you may move forward with an initiative only to find you are not ready and foundation for impactful and sustainable work is insufficient. Remember, when communities and initiatives fail, there is a lasting cost.

Your next stop is our [Organizing for Action Guide](#) within our e2 University and Development Framework.

Access and Use of e2 University Materials

Single Party Users. Our entire e2 University is available free of charge to selected users. If you and your community are interested in any or all of these resources, contact info@e2mail.org.

Compensated Users. For those users wanting to use e2 University in their compensated work, e2 is happy to explore licensing options. Contact Don Macke at don@e2mail.org.

Nonprofit Users. If your organization is a charitable non-profit that works with multiple communities, e2 is open to non-compensated licensing options. Contact Don Macke at don@e2mail.org.

International Users. If your organization is located in or focused on non-U.S. locations, we are open to collaborative efforts to translate our work into other languages and cultures for possible use. Contact Don Macke at don@e2mail.org to explore options.

Kansas and Nebraska Users. Nebraska and Kansas have played an extraordinary role in evolving our e2 development framework. Access to e2 University resources is available free of charge to end users through [NetWork Kansas](#) and Nebraska Extension in Nebraska.

A Condition for Access and Use of e2 University Resources

In all cases e2 asks users to execute a **use agreement**. As part of this agreement, we require a commitment from you to share your learning back with e2. We need user feedback to continue our learning so that e2 can support entrepreneurship ecosystem building and future resources for users yet to come.

Additional Help

Don Macke is not currently accepting new advising and consulting work. However, based on scheduling availability, Don is willing to do an exploratory call to better understand your needs and expectations, and recommend pathways forward. Contact him at don@e2mail.org.

How e2 Can Help



e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems helps communities increase prosperity through entrepreneur-focused economic development and ecosystem building. Led by [Don Macke](#), e2 has a national team of practitioners who bring research, coaching, incubation, market intelligence and other expertise to this work.

What We Do

- ✓ **Mentoring.** We mentor and coach new practitioners seeking to pursue entrepreneur-led development. We provide advice and support for building eEcosystem strategies that work.
- ✓ **Analytics Support.** e2 helps communities and regions understand their entrepreneurial potential through research and data. Explore some of our research tools and reports [here](#).
- ✓ **e2 University (e2U)** is our platform for sharing guides, papers, stories, tools, and resources with communities wanting a deep dive into eEcosystem building. Don Macke leads the e2U team with analytics support from **Cathy Kottwitz** and report preparation from **Ann Chaffin**. Special recognition for their e2U legacy contributions goes to **Dana Williams** and **Deb Markley**, LOCUS Impacting Investing.
- ✓ **Fostering the eMovement.** We support the national entrepreneurship movement along with our partners including the **Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City**, **SourceLink**, **Edward Lowe Foundation**, **Kauffman Foundation**, and **NetWork Kansas**. We are a founding member of [Start Us Up: America's New Business Plan](#), a coalition dedicated to strengthening entrepreneurship across America. Together, we continue to advance the foundational ideas of building entrepreneurial ecosystems and entrepreneurship-led economic development.

Contact Us

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www.energizingentrepreneurs.org

[NetWork Kansas](#), a 501c3 nonprofit organization dedicated to developing an entrepreneurial ecosystem in Kansas, is the home for e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems. NetWork Kansas connects aspiring entrepreneurs, emerging and established businesses, to a deep network of business building resource organizations across the state.

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