



# ENERGIZING ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES

## A Pathway to Prosperity



Source: *The West Virginia Hub*, October 9 2018, provided by [The Hub](#)

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## Entrepreneurial Communities leaders travel to Kansas, Meet up in Charleston, *by Dan Taylor*



*Energizing Entrepreneurial Communities teams meet in Charleston*

September was a busy month for the Energizing Entrepreneurial Communities program here at The Hub!

While the great work continued in participating communities, our VISTA Breanna Collins and I went across the country in search of some best practices around rural community economic development and entrepreneurship support. [NetWork Kansas](#), based in the Wichita area, runs the original Entrepreneurial Communities program, which began 10 years ago. Their program began with 6 communities in 2008 and has expanded to sixty in 2018!

Their program is funded through a lucrative state Entrepreneurial Investment Tax Credit, allowing them to offer a gap financing loan fund for their communities, as well as programming to support entrepreneurial growth. Programs include Ice House Entrepreneur curriculum, the Youth Entrepreneur Challenge (YEC), Destination Boot Camp, Makerspace Boot Camp, Economic Gardening and more.





*Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge group at NetWork Kansas*

We met the NetWork Kansas program team in Wichita, first visiting a coffee shop which had previously used their loan fund for expansion, before heading off on a road trip to meet some of their community teams.

Our first stop was roughly two hours away, in the far corner of southeastern Kansas, the town of Columbus. We met with Janet Miller, the Economic Development Director for county and team lead. They joined in 2014, and their core program team includes a county commissioner and a young entrepreneur. They currently facilitate IceHouse classes, a YEC program with schools, the loan program, and have been to Destination Boot Camp, as well.

We had lunch supplied by two young entrepreneurs who recently bought a new space, with support from the team and loan program.

Next, we were off to the FabLab makerspace in Montgomery County, Kansas, housed at Independence Community College. The currently expanding FabLab is the brainchild of Jim Correll, and opened in 2014. They offer a yearly membership to the space for \$125, and support other communities and entrepreneurs, who can not only visit and use, but eventually model from them create their own makerspaces, if they desire. The FabLab project came together over the course of an Ice House program and entrepreneur lunch series hosted at the community college.

Jim stressed that you must create the culture before the space, to get buy in and assure community usage. The NetWork Kansas programming, such as Ice House, helped building this culture and buy in.

Now back in West Virginia, it was time for the Entrepreneurial Communities Mid Program Convening, held September 27th in Charleston. Representatives from all four of our teams in Wyoming, Boone, Lincoln and Taylor Counties were present.

This was the first time that all of these teams, from across West Virginia, had been in the same room since the program kick off last year. We learned about what success these communities have had so far, and what challenges they have faced. We discussed what resources were out there for our communities to share with aspiring or established entrepreneurs, and what those entrepreneurs needs might be based on some survey data that our teams have been collecting. Maybe there are workshop opportunities, outreach opportunities and partnerships to build these entrepreneurs up, as well as build up our communities.

Deb Markley from the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship led these discussions, and Barbara Wyckoff from Creative Disruptors led a training on supporting entrepreneurs in the ideation stage.

Lastly, we announced a new mini-grant program for these communities, the Entrepreneurial Investment Grants program, to help out teams with projects around business and resource provider networking events, local business appreciation events and activities, encouraging youth entrepreneurship, marketing/promotional work, etc.

Overall a busy and productive month! We look forward to the last year of this program and what we can accomplish in these communities by working together!

