



ENERGIZING ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES

A Pathway to Prosperity



Learning Theme 7 – Marathon Not a Sprint

The work of building a robust entrepreneurial community requires long-term commitment of time, talent, and treasure. In many cases, it requires uncovering the entrepreneurial roots in a place – roots that may be covered over by years of reliance on a single industry, like coal mining or textiles. It requires building the infrastructure to support entrepreneurs including formal and informal leaders, connections to or locally-based resource providers, sources of capital – in other words, an effective entrepreneurial ecosystem.

All of this work takes time. The E Communities work in Appalachia was, by many accounts, a short-term effort. The work unfolded over a mere 3.5 years. And the actual work on the ground, in communities, began only after start-up work to train community coaches, introduce the work to potential community partners, and then organize to get started, a process that took 6-9 months. However, in each sub-region, there was important progress made over that time. We documented one “deep dive” story from each state partner to demonstrate how this work unfolded over time and to bring the learning themes related to this work to life. We encourage you to explore these stories by going to the list under [Learning Theme 7](#).

Perhaps the best way to understand the long-term nature of this work is to read the stories of early efforts to build entrepreneurial communities. We suggest two – Ord, Nebraska and NetWork Kansas.

[Ord, Nebraska](#) – a town of about 2,000 located on the edge of the Nebraska Sandhills – was an early adopter of entrepreneurial development. Almost two decades ago, they took a proactive approach to their own development, passing a local option sales tax to support economic development and launching a leadership program that, in turn, has encouraged a number of local residents to launch their own businesses. The result has been remarkable – almost no vacancies on Main Street; new families moving to town after decades of population loss; increased school enrollment; even the first brewery in town!

[NetWork Kansas](#) was established through a progressive act of the legislature in 2004 to create a center for rural entrepreneurship in the state. Several decisions early in its 15 year history have made all the difference: the decision to hire entrepreneurs to lead the effort; the decision to create a virtual central hub that connects entrepreneurs to hundreds of resource providers across the state; and, most importantly, the decision to launch the [E-Community Partnership](#) effort to have boots on the ground in communities identifying entrepreneurs and connecting them to resources. Steve Radley, President and CEO of NetWork Kansas, explains:

“The E-Community Partnership helps get targeted resources to targeted entrepreneurs in a way that wouldn’t happen without it. The communities are the spokes connected to the NetWork Kansas hub.”