



ENERGIZING ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES

A Pathway to Prosperity



Source: Dan Vorisek, E Communities Coach, [Rural Action](#), Ohio

Engaging Entrepreneurs in Amesville



The village of Amesville, located in Athens County, OH has a population of less than 200 people. That is half as many people that once called this town home when it was a thriving farming and rail stop community through the 1900's until a massive flood in 1998 destroyed infrastructure and required that a large portion of the village land be set aside and remain undeveloped for homes and businesses. The community remained strong but because both the population and the number of businesses dropped significantly, village leadership looked for ways to capitalize on the assets that remained. Despite the setbacks in 1998, Amesville has demonstrated how to build valuable connections to their entrepreneurs in a way that fits the culture and capacity of the community.

The E-Community framework fundamentally looks to establish stronger connections between community members and their entrepreneurs to help businesses survive, thrive, and grow. Through the course of discussions with Rural Action's Community Coach, the E-Community team realized that the Village was the hub for a larger number of entrepreneurs than previously thought, although most were spread in and around the



roads near Amesville. The idea of direct survey outreach to business owners did not gain much traction with the team; they could not see much economic value in connecting to the few businesses in town, and there was no space to add new businesses due to the loss of business property in the flood. Additionally, there was the ever-constant time constraint that was an obstacle to the outreach and follow-up work for the few community members that could be involved with the E-Community project team.

As discussions continued on ways to better support the local entrepreneurs, the team decided to host a networking social called the Amesville Business Bonanza. A list of nearly 30 businesses in and near the village were invited and 13 entrepreneurs attended the first Bonanza event. Using the survey questions as a guide, the team asked each business owner to speak to the attendees and share 1) what their business was, 2) why they liked living and doing business in the Amesville community and 3) one thing that would help their business to do better. This was likely the first organized gathering of the Amesville business community in many decades.

The results of the first Amesville Business Bonanza carried over, and three more were held during the course of the following year. The E-Community team invited speakers on topics that businesses indicated would be helpful and increased the connection between technical resource providers and entrepreneurs. Additionally, as a result of feedback from the first Bonanza and funds from an ARC grant, the Amesville team was able to contract a marketing professional to design a new brand logo for the community that could be used by all of the entrepreneurs to market their products. The logo designer provided a style guide and free consultation time to help the businesses to become comfortable adding the logo to their marketing materials. The expectation is that with continued team leadership and guidance from Rural Action community coaches, the Amesville Business Bonanza will become a long-term fixture of this Entrepreneurial Community.