



ENERGIZING ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES

A Pathway to Prosperity



Learning Theme 9 – Progress Linked to “Energy Areas”

When the capacity in a community is limited, especially in terms of leadership, progress is often linked to building on existing energy in the community. In one community, it may be a focus on revitalizing downtown such as Grafton, WV’s focus on renovating an historic downtown theater. In another, the excitement may be driven by a renewed commitment and focus on addressing inequitable outcomes for people of color. Whatever the “energy area” might be, progress is much more likely to occur by taking a collaborative approach – bringing the tools associated with E Communities work to the table in support of a specific sector or issue.

This theme came through clearly in this work, particularly in Ohio and Kentucky. In both regions, outdoor recreation and tourism was attracting attention and resources as an economic development strategy. While much of the focus was on the natural infrastructure – building trails and trail heads, turning railroad beds into multi-use trails, and taking steps to become [Trail Towns](#) in Kentucky – the E Communities teams brought the entrepreneurial perspective to these conversations. They asked questions about where people would stay, where they would eat, what support services needed to be in place, etc.

The results? One, the limited leadership capacity was leveraged by having E2C Teams in Kentucky, for example, join forces with Trail Town groups. In Ohio, energy around the Bailey’s Trail development spilled over into discussions with the E Communities teams. Stories of some of these efforts are gathered under [Learning Theme 9](#). Two, additional resources are being pulled into these efforts, building more energy for the work ahead. Three, partnerships across organizations and states have been solidified. For example, the [AirBnB Workshop](#) developed in Kentucky was brought to Ohio through the networking and sharing of the E coaches.

While the “energy area” most prominent in the E Communities work were centered on outdoor recreation and tourism, in other communities it has come from a focus on youth entrepreneurship, Main Street revitalization efforts targeting local business owners, and local farm to table efforts, as examples. Common themes across these areas are (1) the energy area ties to local assets in the place consistent with [asset-based community development](#) and (2) entrepreneurs are a key component of any strategy to harness this energy area to produce sustainable economic development outcomes and community prosperity. Looking for – and finding – these energy areas early in the process of entrepreneurial ecosystem building is one strategy for greater success.