



ENERGIZING ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES

A Pathway to Prosperity



Source: Robert Donnan and Mark Nigro, E Communities Coaches, [Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky](#)
Ten Takeaways for Local Entrepreneurs from a 2018 How-to-Airbnb Workshop hosted by the
E2C Working Group in Jackson County, KY

It Just Takes a Little Know-How

One of the most formidable challenges for local startup entrepreneurs in Eastern Kentucky is to identify small business opportunities with a relatively low threshold of entry—that is, they are accessible without requiring certification of expertise or a large investment of financial capital. It's also advisable to consider start-up possibilities that demonstrate obvious demand.

Jackson County, Kentucky, which hosts significant acreage of the Daniel Boone National Forest as well as other outdoor recreation and cultural attractions, is well-positioned to develop its tourism assets. Accordingly, the E2C Working Group has focused a great deal of attention on encouraging small business growth within its small but vibrant hospitality sector. The county's only local motel closed about three years ago, opening the door for a wave of entrepreneurial interest in developing small bed-and-breakfast operations.

When the E2C Working Group began to reach out and support Jackson County entrepreneurs who were seeking to establish their own bed-and-breakfasts, there were only three privately owned lodging facilities in the entire County. By November 2019, however, the tally had risen to 30 BnBs, a remarkable increase for such a short time period. If ever there were doubts that Jackson County and its surrounding region can patiently develop a robust outdoor recreation and cultural tourism economy, this data appears to allay those concerns and set the stage for sustained growth.

In support of its fledgling BnB entrepreneurs, the E2C Working Group hosted a two-part "How to Airbnb" workshop on two consecutive Sunday afternoons in November 2018. Co-developed by Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED) and the Brushy Fork Leadership Institute at Berea College, the workshop curriculum provided six hours of hands-on training in best practices about how to take full advantage of AirBnB's online website.

AirBnB describes its site as an "online marketplace that connects people who want to rent out their homes with people who are looking for accommodations in that locale." While the E2C-hosted workshop focused specifically on the Airbnb platform, the marketing and business concepts it presented have broad applicability for small business success across many sectors.

Mark Nigro, one of two E2C community coaches working with the Jackson County E2C Working Group, attended the "How to Airbnb" workshop. Afterwards he canvassed the workshop leader, Jesse Turner, who is the owner-operator of HomeGrown HideAways, a popular Airbnb located in nearby Madison County, as well as other participants in the Jackson County workshop to see what business ideas they had gleaned from the experience. The other entrepreneurs whom he interviewed for this article include:

Greg and Readith Lakes operate the Clover Bottom Bed-and-Breakfast near Big Hill. Greg and Readith launched their BnB in April 2019 and now offer several beautifully appointed rooms.

Teresa Powell (and her husband **Rick**) operate the popular City Gone Country Inn, a Jackson County BnB known for outstanding customer service and delicious grass-fed beef from cattle raised and processed on their own farm.

Kathy Rowe (and her husband **Scott**) operate Sturgeon Creek Farm, which offers a farmhouse rental.

Beth Tillery is a full-time Jackson County farmer who is considering making available a farmhouse rental through Airbnb.

The **Top Ten Takeaways** documented by Mark Nigro from his post-workshop conversations with attendees at the November 2018 training are as follows:

1. The Tourist Market for Eastern Kentucky is hot!

Powell > “Eastern Kentucky is growing its trail system—hiking, cycling, ATV, and horseback riding—to the point that visitors are eager to explore the beauty of this place. We just had a hiker that we picked up and took to the Sheltolee Trace trailhead. He started off in Morehead and he’ll end up in Tennessee. This young man is a very experienced hiker, having already hiked over 8,000 miles!”

Turner > “We’re in the midst right now of having at least one rental booked for three straight weeks—24 consecutive days! Just looking at our numbers for the month of March, our year-over-year business has grown 500%. I knew we were getting busier but seeing the numbers really shows the growth!”

Rowe > “We have one guy who found us from the Netherlands; he’s coming out in September! I have my first three-night stay guest coming this weekend, and I have another guest who is doing a college photography project and is looking for rural Kentucky people to photograph. So far I’ve been booked nearly every weekend this month and hope May will fill up fast.”

Turner > “For 2018, we hosted about 1,000 guests, representing 28 states and 5 countries.”

Tillery > “I didn’t realize there are so many people out there who haven’t had a farm experience. I’ve been doing it (farming) all my life, and it was really surprising to learn that so many people want to experience life on a farm, or at least a little touch of it. We sure have it!”

2. The Airbnb Workshop is perfect for those just starting.

Lakes > “The Airbnb training was timely for us. The biggest help it gave me is being associated with an experienced Airbnb operator. Jessa really provided a good confidence boost. While we are at the initial stages of launching our BnB, it helped me to learn from her insights and experiences.”

3. Jessa Turner, the How-to-Airbnb Workshop Trainer, is knowledgeable and effective.

Tilley > “I went to the training because I’m unfamiliar with what people are expecting when they stay at someone’s place. Like, how nice does your place have to be? How much time does it take to do this right? So I thought the training was helpful because the trainer is someone who has a farm like me and is doing this Airbnb thing so well.”

Powell > “Jessa was just wonderful! The one thing that stood out more than anything was that she talked about all the hard work that it takes to be successful. But it also can be fun. She offered so much wisdom.”

4. **The Airbnb Training is practical.**

Rowe > “I like the fact Jessa told us all about how to get going, the way she explained good ideas for marketing, and the value of being honest with people.”

Powell > “What we learned from Jessa that I liked is you can start out small, and then you are more likely to be successful, because you learn about the market, the places where you can advertise that pay off the best, the most effective advertising channels.”

5. **Visitors staying at your Airbnb rental seek a memorable experience.**

Turner > “What has worked well for me is making sure folks who book with us have some sort of unique experience. So they can tour our farm. The kids can collect real eggs from real chickens. If you can create a really unique experience, you'll capture more people. It could be that your rental unit itself is really unique or the place you have is distinctive.”

Rowe > “The last batch of folks helped me find duck eggs in the yard all around our fields!”

Powell > “I had a family here just last week who spent nine days with us. They found us through Airbnb. They wanted to teach their grandson about riding ATVs and wanted a safe trail area. The mom and the grandson never left the farm! And through Airbnb, they are planning to come back for four different bookings all through the following year.”

6. **Some visitors just want peace and quiet.**

Rowe > “We already have some folks reserved who want peace and quiet. They want a creek and a pond and a farm setting, and that's exactly what we have!”

7. **The Airbnb training imbues confidence.**

Lakes > “We're a bit green at this. It's a new venture; so before diving in, it was great to get help with some of the processes and considerations that it takes to be a success. That's what the training provided: Details and ideas to be successful, and a confidence boost, too.”

8. **The Workshop helps you think about effective marketing and outstanding customer service.**

Lakes > “We're on the front end of opening things and connecting to various media. We want to establish ourselves with high quality experiences and really good marketing. This training helped us with that.”

Powell > “For me the hard part is doing what it takes to earn the Airbnb “Super Host” status. For one thing, this requires replying to guest inquiries within one hour. I do it within 10 or 15 minutes, no matter the time they contact me. What's fun is that I get to meet so many people from all over. And through their stories, I get to experience the entire world from my own place.”

Tillery > “I learned that to do this right, you have to get a little comfortable with computers. I realized that it will take some time and energy, that I'll need to become better and more comfortable with interacting through the Internet.”

9. The “Instant Book” feature on the Airbnb platform is a safe, easy, and reliable way to book visitors.

Turner > “The Instant Book feature takes out the extra step of us having to review the customer. I'm not concerned about having a problem customer because Airbnb's booking process requires the renter to pass certain criteria that can demonstrate their ability to pay. Plus, they provide a security deposit. And since we—the providers—get to review the customers, they want to behave well. Airbnb will boot out bad clients!”

10. Social Media doesn't have to take a lot of time to be effective.

Turner > “The Airbnb is not social media. It's a reservation platform, but all these tools should work together. When it comes to social media, my sites are all connected, and I keep things updated regularly. I try to post something once a day to my social media. It doesn't take a lot of time—maybe five minutes a day to snap a photo and send it to our Instagram, which I've connected to autopost to our Facebook page. I do want my posts to have good quality, because they represent our operation, so I want every post to be worthy and distinctive in some way.”