



ENERGIZING ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES

A Pathway to Prosperity



Source: Ellie Dudding, E Communities Coach, [Rural Action](#), Ohio

A Coach's Journey

I stepped into the role of a Community Coach this summer after finishing a master's program this spring. As I was preparing to graduate, I was often (understandably) asked the question that overwhelms graduates, "What are you going to do?" Or the softer, "What do you want to do?" As my program was in the non-traditional field of Appalachian Studies, the question was often charged with sincere curiosity and more often than not, concern. The only response I could offer at the time was, "I don't specifically know what work I'll need to do, but I know where I want to be."

What I meant was I could be very happy doing a number of things, but I knew I wanted to be in my home communities of Southeastern Ohio and I wanted to be in rooms where conversations regarding community development in Appalachia were taking place. One of my best friends sent me the job post and while I initially wasn't sure what a Community Coach was, the description spoke of building support networks, relationships, and strengthening rural economies outside of traditional extractive practices, and that was exactly where I wanted to be.

What I have come to understand is that the major tasks of Community Coaching are consistently showing up, listening, and asking questions. Progress in our work is never flashy; success is noted in the small measured steps of systemic change. To us, this looks like community members from separate communities two miles apart showing up to the same events, a Chamber of Commerce adding small business resources to their website, a group of business owners sitting down and connecting names to faces for the first time. Coaches are tasked with keeping the big picture in mind, asking what the future looks like, and continuously pushing towards that future. We are facilitators, outside observers, and mediators, as a notable barrier to change we often see is old resentments and gossip. Simultaneously, we are familiar faces and dependable resources as we seek energy and keep momentum.

I am excited to bear witness to these changes and grateful for the opportunity to be engaged in a regional community. I hope to be able to sustain the relationships I'm building for a long time and be a supportive force in bringing a better future to Southeast Ohio.