



ENERGIZING ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES

A Pathway to Prosperity



Learning Theme 3 – Community Coaching

For most communities, embracing entrepreneurial development is a new thing. It takes different skills, especially for community leaders whose primary job is not economic development. And, as with any type of skill building, it can help to have a coach. Someone who can provide support, ask good questions, connect you to resources and, when needed, be a cheerleader. The E Community coaches – and the coaching support provided by the e2 team – were critical pieces of the infrastructure built as part of the E Communities initiative.

The Field

For those who want to explore community coaching in more depth, we recommend [A Field Guide to Community Coaching](#). The authors bring years of community development experience to this work and have identified some of the important roles for community coaches.

In the E Communities work, the first few months of the initiative were focused on building the capacity of coaches to introduce and advance the E Communities framework in their towns or counties. All of the coaches brought community development experience to this initiative. For most, however, the focus on entrepreneurship was new ground. Together we worked to build capacity so that the coaches could effectively step into a variety of roles including:

- Guide – Supporting the community team to identify and then achieve its goals
- Capacity Builder – Making connections to resources so that the community team gained confidence and capacity to work with entrepreneurs
- Learning Coordinator – Introducing new ideas, like the e2 framework, to the teams and bringing other new ideas and resources to the table (e.g. new ways to think about Outdoor Recreation and Tourism opportunities)
- Communicator/Coordinator – Keeping the work moving forward in the early days as community leadership was identified and supported
- Connector – Bringing community teams together to facilitate peer learning and sharing

And the coaching continued throughout the initiative with monthly one-on-one coaching calls with Don Macke and Deb Markley and then quarterly peer coaching calls across the three states. This investment – both initial and ongoing – was critically important to the long-term success of this work. It helped to build rooted capacity in the region that will outlive the initiative. Read reflections by two coaches – [Dan Vorisek](#) and [Ellie Dudding](#).

The Power of Peer Learning

While each community coach charts their own unique path, there is tremendous value in engaging with peers. This value was evidenced by the E Communities coaching self-organizing to do quarterly calls where they could share what was working, where they had challenges and how they were adapting the framework to work best in their communities. They shared tools and gave advice to help each other make progress and, in some cases, get unstuck. For the first half of the initiative, these calls were “coaches only” calls; in the second half, the calls included more content and support brought by Deb Markley and Don Macke. Going a step further, two coaches from West Virginia traveled to Kansas to meet with staff of [NetWork Kansas](#) to learn more about their

[Entrepreneurial Communities Partnership](#) program – a network of over 60 communities across the state that are building stronger entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Outside of this initiative in Appalachia, we see evidence of the power of peer learning. In 2017, the [Kauffman Foundation](#) launched the ESHIP Summit, a three-year initiative designed to “bring together builders of entrepreneurial ecosystems to help accelerate the emerging field of ecosystem building, by collaboratively creating tools, resources, and knowledge to better support communities that empower the makers, doers, and dreamers in our communities” ([ESHIP Summit](#)). These events brought together both community and entrepreneur coaches and service providers from around the country. Also in 2017, [Rural Rise](#) began as a grassroots effort of “intrepid rural entrepreneurial ecosystem builders” to provide mutual support and learning opportunities for people working on entrepreneurship development in more rural places.

More recently, e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems launched the [National Network for Ecosystem Builders](#) to connect to peers and tools to accelerate ecosystem building work.

Community Coaching vs. Entrepreneur Coaching

There is a distinction between the important work of coaching an E Communities team and the equally important work of coaching entrepreneurs. In this initiative, the primary responsibility of the coach was to the community team. However, particularly in this rural landscape, often the coach needed to wear a different hat, to help connect an individual business owner to a resource provider or to facilitate the introduction of a training opportunity for local entrepreneurs or to take advantage of an opportunity to bring a critical resource to the community’s entrepreneurs. These coaching roles required different skills and, as a result, different coaching support. The coach’s needed to better understand, over time, the art and science of working with entrepreneurs. To learn more, explore the **Working with Entrepreneurs guide** in the Resource Library.