



ENERGIZING ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES

A Pathway to Prosperity



Learning Theme 2 – Creating an Entrepreneurial Culture

Factory Man tells the story of one furniture entrepreneur in Appalachia who tried hard to keep his production – and his company – in the U.S. Unfortunately, few books document the life and legacy of rural entrepreneurs and the difference they made in their communities. As a result, too many communities struggle to remember and embrace the entrepreneurial culture and spirit on which they were built. The work of building an entrepreneurial community, then, starts with creating an entrepreneurial culture. The communities that have done this well have often gotten good at three things.

Creating a Visible Focus on Entrepreneurial Development

One of the first communities to establish such a focus was Littleton, Colorado. Their approach became known as [Economic Gardening](#) – growing your own – and launched a national movement. Other communities have taken smaller steps to hire an Entrepreneurship Navigator ([StartUp Hutch](#) in Hutchinson, Kansas) or create some visible downtown co-working space for entrepreneurs ([Think Tank](#) in Biddeford, Maine). Many of the business meet up events hosted by the E Communities partners in Appalachia served to celebrate and lift up a culture of entrepreneurship. Simply identifying support for small business as a focus for your economic development efforts is one way to signal that your community supports people who are trying to start and grow a business.

Sharing Stories of Successful Entrepreneurs

One of the first things we did in 2001 when we created the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship was to start gathering stories of rural entrepreneurs. Too often, we found that community leaders did not believe that entrepreneurial talent existed in their rural place. Sharing these stories – and helping them to see where their own entrepreneurial talent was “hiding in plain sight” – was a critical first step to shifting the culture toward believing it was possible to grow your own. Many of the stories from this work are captured under Learning Theme 2 [here](#).

Celebrating Success

Given how long it has taken for the entrepreneurial roots in many communities to become covered over, it is going to take time to restore a spirit and culture of entrepreneurship. That is why celebrating success – both large and small – is critically important. Communities have done a number of things to create a sense of celebration:

- [Kansas Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge](#) – supported by NetWork Kansas’ Entrepreneurial Communities and even held virtually in 2020!
- [Wyoming County Pitch Competition](#) – by and for the community in Southern WV
- Local support for [Small Business Saturday](#) – a national day of support for local businesses

[Learning theme 5 – Momentum, Momentum, Momentum](#) – includes stories of entrepreneurs, events, and newsletter features that provide inspiration and additional ways you can help create an entrepreneurial culture in your community.