ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEMS

University

Entrepreneur Coaching

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Introduction

Entrepreneurial coaching is a foundational tactic within e2's development framework. Throughout this paper we will use a shorthand of "eCoaching" to refer to entrepreneurial coaching. Over the years, we have learned that committing to and investing in eCoaching can significantly accelerate progress driving greater entrepreneurial impacts (e.g., investment, jobs, startups, expansions, transitions, local tax base growth, etc.) and smart ecosystem building (e.g., right eResources based on eTalent needs and wants). This paper – **Entrepreneur Coaching** – provides a primer on the concept of eCoaching with field-tested insight on the art and science of coaching entrepreneurs within the e2 development framework.
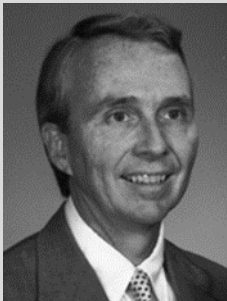
Why Entrepreneur Coaching?

The starting point for generating the economic development outcomes you seek is not the business; it is the **entrepreneur**. Supporting entrepreneurs is about developing people, and to do that well, we need to draw heavily from the fields of human development, education, and coaching.

According to Jay Kayne, formerly with the Kauffman Foundation and Miami University's Page Center for Entrepreneurial Studies, an entrepreneur is "*a person who creates and grows a venture*." Entrepreneurs are part of the creative class. They envision, create, and grow successful ventures in all three sectors of our communities: for-profit businesses, nonprofit ventures, and governmental enterprises. They are on a par with others who create value through their art, music, or literature. Many of these creative types have something in common – a coach. Think of how many young actors were coached by Lee Strasburg, student-athletes by John Wooden, journalists by Ben Bradlee, or young entrepreneurs by Larry Comer. In all these cases, the coach was not "on the field of play" but rather was on the sidelines, watching, listening, and asking the right questions.

Entrepreneur coaching is at the heart of working with entrepreneurs. The innovative use of coaching, coupled with a robust service provider network, provides the best strategy for supporting entrepreneurs

and creating significant economic development impacts. However, not everyone is suited to be an entrepreneur coach. Even those with the raw talent for this job require time in the field to get really good at coaching entrepreneurs, their teams, and their ventures. In this paper, we explore the importance of entrepreneur coaching as well as details of the eCoach role.

We owe our commitment to entrepreneur coaching to a conversation more than a decade ago with Larry Comer, a remarkable human being in so many ways. From southern Georgia, he was a serial entrepreneur, having grown large businesses including a lighting fixture manufacturing company that employed over 1,000 workers. He was also a civic leader, advocate for education and alumnus of Georgia Tech University. What really struck us, however, was his role in supporting new entrepreneurs. Larry was an entrepreneur coach, even though he did not use that label. As we learned more about him, it became clear that Larry had worked with hundreds of aspiring entrepreneurs, including many of his own employees. He had the right disposition to sit down with anyone interested in going into business and give them guidance. His approach was that of a coach, not a business expert, even though he was one. Larry would help entrepreneurs clarify their goals, values and how they could craft a smart game plan. He would make introductions to others who could help with business planning, finance, and connections to suppliers. By his example, we came to embrace the power of entrepreneur coaching.

Most entrepreneurs spend their time and energy **working in the ventures**. The eCoach's job is to creatively help the entrepreneur spend more time **working on the ventures**. An advanced eCoach helps guide the entrepreneur into creative space where reflection, learning, discovery, strategic focusing, and all the other things that lead to a more successful business can happen. But, for entrepreneurs to be engaged participants in the entrepreneurial coaching process, they need to see value from this process.

Being Disruptive

One of the primary tactics employed by an eCoach is to be disruptive. By "disruptive," we hope our eCoach engagements with entrepreneurs disrupts them from the day-to-day routines of "working in" or running their ventures. Most venture owners and operators spend most of their time, talent, and energy on running the venture. This is important without question, but it is equally important that the entrepreneur spend time "working on" their ventures in that creative space we call entrepreneurship. When entrepreneurs spend time in this creative space, ideas on how to grow a better or larger venture emerge. By being disruptive and creating opportunities to be in the creative entrepreneurship space, opportunities are generated for greater venture and economic development outcomes and impacts.

You may seek the development outcomes that come from a successful business. When Jack Newcomb helps an entrepreneur, he creates value for them in two ways. One way is by creating the space for them to work on their business, to rise above the trees and really see the forest. The other is through the support he provides for the myriad of other issues that come up on a daily basis from balancing life and work to building a stronger team to dealing with ethical challenges. Coaches like Jack (an advanced eCoach) coach the whole entrepreneur.

Jack Newcomb has worked as an enterprise facilitator and entrepreneur coach in a challenging multicounty region in southeast Kansas for more than a decade. But he brings many more years of entrepreneurial experience to this work. Jack embraces the Trinity concept articulated by Ernesto Sirolli: entrepreneurial success depends on having skills in production, finance, and marketing. He also understands that the job of the entrepreneur coach is to help entrepreneurs find their own best answers in these areas. Jack does this by meeting the entrepreneur where he or she is and building a trusting and honest relationship. He never fails to balance his job as cheerleader, educator, and provider of tough love as needed. He takes the time to listen hard, ask quality questions, and help entrepreneurs figure out for themselves where they are and where they need to be if they want to succeed. When that path calls for some concrete action (e.g., preparation of a business or marketing plan), he makes the right referral to the right resource and points the entrepreneur in the right direction.

Coaching Supporting Research

In 2015, we commissioned a comprehensive literature search and review focused on the art and science of coaching. While we have not updated our literature review for this paper, we believe our earlier work continues to be relevant. Check out **Literature Review – Business Coaching** for an overview.

How? The Art and Science of eCoaching

We believe strongly that an effective entrepreneurial ecosystem has eCoaching at its heart. We want to share three insights about entrepreneur coaching to get you started. For each characteristic, we have included a coach's story, drawn from our book, to help illustrate each concept.

Characteristics of an eCoach. Craig Schroeder, formerly a Senior Fellow with the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship (preceding organization to e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems), has long described a coach as:

- Someone who knows the game.
- Has probably played the game.
- Can teach the game.

We add, "someone who can innovate to increase performance within the game." John Adams, an advanced eCoach, fits this description well – he uses a process of facilitated discovery with the entrepreneurs he coaches. He does not provide the answers; he guides the entrepreneur to his or her own right answers.

John Adams is a former Marine and lifelong entrepreneur. Now he uses his experience and talents as a coach, working with entrepreneurs in Pottawattamie County Iowa. His present field of battle is this diverse county in extreme west central Iowa with its primary city, Council Bluffs (part of the Omaha Metropolitan Area), and its dozen or so small villages and farms in the rural eastern parts of the county. John understands what it takes to succeed in business. He has created and grown some businesses and witnessed some train wrecks as well. He has remarkable intuition. He speaks truth with love. Those he coaches listen and learn. John can generally see the right answers quickly, but he understands, as a coach, that there is only one right answer: the answer that the entrepreneur believes in and will act on. In our eCoaching roles, John's practice would fall into the "mentor or counselor" eCoach category.

Entrepreneur coaches must be openminded and able to accurately understand entrepreneurial needs in order to guide client entrepreneurs to answers that are meaningful to them. The following **Am I Entrepreneurial Coaching Material? Checklist** (Figure 1) can help you evaluate an entrepreneur coaching candidate. You can also try it yourself to see if you have the right characteristics and competencies to perform well as an entrepreneur coach.

Figure 1--Am I Entrepreneurial Coaching Material? Checklist

Thinking about becoming an entrepreneurial coach or just starting out in a coaching role? Use this checklist to explore the attributes that contribute to entrepreneurial coaching success. If you are open to growing, you can develop the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary for achieving success.

☐ A strong personal and professional interest in the community where you are going to be working.

☐ A strong background and interest in business and business development.

☐ A willingness to be trained in the art of providing direct one-on-one business coaching.

☐ A commitment to coaching best practice, where the focus is on helping entrepreneurs find their own answers versus having the coach be the expert who provides the answers.

☐ Openness to practicing strategic listening.

☐ Openness to using appreciative inquiry techniques when working with entrepreneurs.

☐ Experience with and openness to working as a member of a coaching team within an entrepreneurial resource network.

☐ A strong personal desire for learning and professional development. There is an art and science to entrepreneur coaching, and it takes time and experience to hone your skills.

☐ An openness to coaching the whole entrepreneur, including addressing issues related to their business and their life, such as personal goals, life balance, ethics, family, and health.

☐ A willingness to transfer a client to another coach if you are not the right fit because of age, gender, or some other reason that limits your ability to be a great coach for that particular entrepreneur.

☐ A willingness to practice tough love by being candid when needed and saying no when your relationship grows out of balance.

A great eCoaching relationship requires a solid foundation. Core activities within the eCoach's job are:

- **Define Expectations.** It is critical that the coach and entrepreneur define expectations for working together at the start. Some coaches offer guidelines or a contract that is agreed to by both parties. A simple set of shared expectations regarding how you and your entrepreneur will behave is the key.
- **Set Boundaries.** The coach must set boundaries such as when and how they are accessible to the entrepreneur. Decide ahead of time the frequency and location of meetings, for example, in a semi-private setting. If the entrepreneur is pushing boundaries, the coach will push back gently but firmly to get back on the right track.
- **Clarify Pacing.** Define the pacing for coaching and agree to regular meetings or contacts. The sooner routines are established to address issues, make commitments, and recognize progress, the better for the relationship.
- **Define Performance.** Coaches will work with entrepreneurs to set both long-term and short-term goals. These can be changed as reality demands, but defining what success looks like (e.g., specific business performance metrics such as growth in profits or sales) can create both strategic focus and accountability.
- **Ensure Strong Communication.** If a coach makes a commitment to meet, they must make the meeting. Coaches should also expect the same of their entrepreneur clients. Both the coach and entrepreneur will need to establish the most effective way to efficiently communicate and hold each other accountable.

Remember the characteristics of eCoaches discussed earlier in this paper. The combination of those characteristics with these core job duties mean that eCoaches are professional, objective, and able to give clients accurate, objective feedback and access to resources that will move the entrepreneur on their journey when they are ready.

Members of the community might be very helpful as a sounding board for the eCoach when issues arise in coaching relationships. Common red flags that coaches may see are:

✓ The entrepreneur is increasingly focused on problems they want the coach to solve.

✓ The entrepreneur is really stressed and wants the coach to be their shoulder to cry on.

✔ The entrepreneur is simply not doing the work.

✔ The entrepreneur wants the coach to help source their financing.

✔ The entrepreneur is blaming the coach for setbacks and problems.

✔ The entrepreneur demands more of the coach's time.

Community support may be needed to help the coach figure out the best course of action to take in dealing with these challenges. This may include training and networking for the coach, much the same as the coach would suggest for the entrepreneurs who are their clients.

<div align="center">**Another Resource – Growth-Oriented Entrepreneurs**</div>

Growth entrepreneurs, and particularly growth-oriented entrepreneurs, in rural areas are an important development opportunities. These entrepreneurs and their ventures hold the promise for greater economic development impacts. These entrepreneurs have unique and higher order needs, and your eCoach and ecosystem must prepare if you want to be relevent and helpful to this segment of your eTalent. Our **Growth-Oriented Entrepreneurs** paper provides insights into the specific opportunities and challenges of working with entrepreneurs who have the drive to grow their businesses. We often think of these entrepreneurs as occupying the "sweet spot" for development efforts because they have the potential to generate the kinds of development impacts we seek. If your targeting includes growth entrepreneurs, this paper provides useful insights and ideas about the type of support they may need.

Getting Off to a Great Start as an eCoach. Like all great journeys, getting started on the right coaching path is the key to success in the end. To ensure a satisfying and productive coaching experience, for you and the entrepreneur, make sure that you can mark off all the items on this checklist before launching your coaching endeavor.

☐ **Define Expectations.** It is critical that you and your entrepreneur define expectations for how you will work together at the start. Some coaches offer guidelines or a contract that is agreed to by both parties. A simple set of shared expectations regarding how you and your entrepreneur will behave is the key.

☐ **Set Boundaries.** Set boundaries such as when and how the entrepreneur can contact you. Decide ahead of time how often and where you will meet, for example, in a semi-private setting. If you feel that the entrepreneur is pushing boundaries, push back gently but firmly to get back on the right track.

☐ **Clarify Pacing.** Define the pacing for your coaching and agree to regular meetings or contacts. The sooner you can establish a routine where issues are addressed, commitments are made and progress is realized, the better for the relationship.

☐ **Define Performance.** Work with your entrepreneur to set both long-term and short-term goals. These can be changed as reality demands, but defining what success looks like (e.g., specific business performance metrics – growth in profits or sales) can create both strategic focus and accountability.

☐ **Ensure Strong Communication.** If you make a commitment to meet, make the meeting. Expect the same of your entrepreneur. Ensure you explore with your entrepreneur the most effective way to efficiently communicate and hold each other accountable.

Our **five keys to entrepreneur coaching success**:

✓ Maintain a degree of detachment and do not become emotionally engaged.

✓ Remain reflective and challenge your intuition so you can be optimally objective.

✓ Use catalytic opportunities to move hard when the entrepreneur is ready for real change.

✓ Avoid being formulaic; be innovative and creative instead.

✓ Avoid becoming the expert; your role is to help the entrepreneur find his or her own solutions.

Remember there is both an art and science to eCoaching. Like effective teaching, we are actively engaged with human beings who have fears, blind spots, stress, and concern about letting someone know what they do not know. As an eCoach, whether defined as a concierge or networker or full-blown business mentor, there is an art to working with entrepreneurial human beings. The following section addresses some of the **red flags** or warnings to watch out for as you engage in your eCoaching work.

eCoaching Red Flags. The following checklist can be used when you are coaching entrepreneurs to watch for potential red flag warnings or situations where the relationship is becoming problematic or out of balance. Use this checklist to keep your coaching relationship with your entrepreneurs healthy and productive.

✓ **The entrepreneur is increasingly raising problems that they want YOU to solve.** You cannot solve the problems of the entrepreneurs you are coaching. Your role is to help the entrepreneur develop THEIR solutions to THEIR problems.

✓ **The entrepreneur is really stressed and increasingly wants you to be their SHOULDER TO CRY ON.** Empathy is important and should be used to be supportive of the entrepreneurs you are coaching. However, if you are spending too much time listening to them complain, the engagement will erode and become less productive.

✓ **Things are not working.** The relationship with your entrepreneur has degraded. They are not doing their work. They may not be showing up to agreed-upon meetings. Too much time is being spent on a never-ending list of problems and blame being placed on others. YOU NEED TO TRANSITION and maybe end the relationship or at least put it on hold until the entrepreneur is willing to do their part constructively.

✓ **Just find me the money I need.** Chances are good that sooner or later some entrepreneurs you are coaching will develop an expectation that your role is to secure the financing they want. As a coach, you can clearly help an entrepreneur become capital ready and explore various financing options. But it is NOT your job to find them money.

✓ **You are the problem.** You find that an entrepreneur you are coaching is beginning to blame you for an increasing range of setbacks or problems. You may not always be at your best, but if you are being blamed for things you are not responsible for, it may be time to realign the relationship.

✓ **I need more of your time.** The entrepreneur you are coaching may begin to argue for more and more of your time – "if you can just meet with me more often," the story goes. If more time is not the right solution for the issues at hand, do not go there.

Sustaining an eCoaching Program

The eCoach part of the overall entrepreneur ecosystem that is grounded in the community. As we shared in our **Working with Entrepreneurs Guide**, the eCoach is supported by an Area Resource Network (ARN) – your eCoach's key referral resources. Since you want your coaching efforts to continue to be strong, the community needs to be intentional about supporting your eCoach over time. That support goes beyond a vibrant network of resource providers and includes support for the coach's professional development and work plan; it means providing the financial resources so that the eCoach can perform effectively. It is the community's job to provide the coach with the necessary support to be an effective teacher and guide to your community's entrepreneurs. For more information, check out e2's **Metrics, Stories and Sustainability Guide**.

A tale of three coaches is the best way to demonstrate community support for the entrepreneur coach. Rural Deuel County South Dakota struggles with population and business loss, and these trends have been going on for some time. Over the past decade, community leaders decided to act. They created Deuel Area Development (DADi) and embraced becoming an entrepreneurial community. In the process, Joan Sacrison, DADi's primary staff person, was thrust into the role of entrepreneur coach. With limited business experience, Joan may seem an unlikely coaching candidate, but Joan and the community understand that "it takes a village." Joan uses her networking skills and her resource networks to connect entrepreneurs to local bankers, attorneys, and others who can provide needed support. Together, coach and community are seeing the seeds of success: new business starts, business expansions, and transitions to new ownership.

Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, is part of America's Rust Belt. Like many other similar cities, the past decade has been challenging. The community almost lost its major employer during the Great Recession. That wakeup call contributed to the Fond du Lac Economic Development Corporation's greater focus on entrepreneurship and Economic Gardening. Jo Ann Giese-Kent was hired to lead those efforts. A market intelligence researcher by training, Jo Ann has stepped into the coaching role knowing the community is behind her. The Economic Development Corporation is committed to creating a system of resources to support entrepreneurs and to helping Jo Ann network entrepreneurs to the right resource at the right time. While these efforts are still a work in progress, Fond du Lac has the right strategy, the right coach, and a strong community commitment to success.

Sue Shaner served as the entrepreneur coach in McCook, Nebraska, during the startup of its entrepreneurial community initiative. While Sue is not an entrepreneur herself, she has lived and worked with entrepreneurs her whole life. She is an educator and brings two really important skills to her coaching: strategic listening and networking. Sue uses her strategic listening skills to really understand what an entrepreneur needs to grow. Then she uses her remarkable networking skills to connect the entrepreneur to the best resources. In the process, she engages and is supported by the whole community. One example shows the power of these skills in action. Sue recognized the importance of capital access to entrepreneurial success. She visited with all the commercial loan officers in McCook, which serves as a hub for the broader southwestern Nebraska region. She got to know the loan officers, their institutions, and their preferences for doing business. She created a strong community support system for business finance. She took the time to understand her banking partners, to build trust and relationships. In turn, these bankers support Sue and her entrepreneurs.

Advisory on our eCoach Stories

We have drawn on eCoach stories from our work over time. Many of the eCoaches highlighted in this paper have since moved on through retirement or new jobs, yet their stories are still relevant and illustrate key learning and provide insights into employing an eCoach in your community. We will be updating our eCoaching stories from our recently completed e2 work in Central Appalachia (West Virginia, Ohio, and Kentucky) and Klamath, Oregon, ongoing work in Kansas and Southern Minnesota, and emergent work in Nebraska.

Key Connections

As noted in this paper already, there are a number of key connections among this eCoaching paper and other e2 University resources. In this section, we will explore the specific resources that are most related to eCoaching.

Assessments to Strategy Guide

Our **Assessments to Strategy Guide** LINK provides an eCoach foundational resources. The three assessments – development opportunities, eTalent, and eResources – provide your community and in turn your eCoach strategic direction with respect to entrepreneurial outreach, engagement of resources, and increased likelihood of deal flow or economic development. Each of these three assessments provide guidance for how your community's eCoach will approach his or her work.

Development Opportunities Assessment. Every community, regardless of size, should define economic development priorities based in part on sound research identifying genuine development opportunities. Our Development Opportunities Assessment coupled with our **Likely Entrepreneurial Development Opportunities** paper can provide strategic direction with respect to focusing eCoach and entrepreneurial ecosystem building efforts. For communities early in the entrepreneurship development game, this assessment can identify what we call "energy areas" or starting points like main street revitalization where there is already deep community commitment.

Entrepreneurial Talent Assessment. The eTalent Assessment can first help your community and eCoach map your entrepreneurial talent or your ecosystem's potential clients. Additionally, this

assessment can help you and your eCoach target the eTalent for outreach and networking to assistance. With the exception of mature and at-scale entrepreneurial ecosystems, most communities must find starting or growth points to focus eCoaching work. This assessment can provide a framework for targeting your community's efforts including that of your eCoach.

Entrepreneurial Resources Assessment. As we have articulated in our **Working with Entrepreneurs Guide** our basic eStrategy is to engage with entrepreneurs, network them to assistance and generate venture outcomes and ultimately economic development impacts in a community. For this basic transaction to have value there must be relevant resources given the unique needs and wants of your community's targeted entrepreneurial talent. e2's eResources Assessment can help you community organize assistance customized to your entrepreneurial talent.

<p style="text-align:center">Staffing and Volunteers</p>

As is the case with entrepreneurs, we have been on a learning journey. There are hard lessons learned through trial and error. A foundational lesson is that committing to dedicated, paid, and career-tracked eCoaching dramatically accelerates both desired business development outcomes and economic development. While we found that entirely volunteer based efforts can work effectively for a time, sustained efforts require committed staffing often working with volunteers.

eCoaching as an e2 Accelerator

With any kind of community-centered economic development, we are challenged by the ticking clock or the passage of time. Part of this challenge is rooted in how we fund economic development in our communities. By and large, community-centered economic development is funded by fundraising. Local government agencies, larger employers, main street businesses, banks, and other groups are asked to underwrite economic development efforts. In some states, there is dedicated tax support either through the state or by local option taxes. Because of this funding model, there is precious time between when we launch a new initiative and when it must demonstrate impact, or local funding is likely to erode or even dry up.

Over the past 20 years, we have systematically explored how we can accelerate e2 from the point of initial community impact to when we have tangible evidence of business development and economic development impacts. Our experience tells us that if the commitment is made on January 1, we better have evidence of outcomes and impacts by the fourth quarter of that same year. If we do not, chances are good that community support for the initiative will be questions and financial support eroded.

eCoaching is one of the more important accelerators that can energize our work and move it to scale much more quickly than without eCoaching. Reflect a minute and this finding is intuitive. Dedicated staffing, working with volunteers, can simply do more work in most cases than an entirely volunteer-based initiative. Having one or more eCoaches waking up every morning, reaching out entrepreneurs, and networking to assistance stimulates and supports more deal flow and ultimately more desired economic development impacts.

Working with Entrepreneurs Guide

Our **Working with Entrepreneurs Guide** focuses on the art and science of working with entrepreneurs. Pairing this eCoaching paper with the **Working with Entrepreneurs Guide** can equip your community and eCoach with sound information on smart and impactful deployment of eCoaching.

It is important to remember that when we talk about entrepreneurs, those creatives who create and/or grow ventures in your community, that we are talking about a continuum of entrepreneurial talent ranging from the nascent entrepreneur who is totally new to the entrepreneurship space to well-established venture owners now exploring serious growth. In e2's **Working with Entrepreneurs Guide**, we explore the range of entrepreneurial talent available in most communities and provide insight on the right eCoaching techniques appropriate to each group based on their unique development stage.

A key part of the **Working with Entrepreneurs Guide** is guidance on outreach (including visitation and surveying), intake, screening, and networking to assistance. These are the basis tactics in working with entrepreneurs to be employed by your community's eCoach and volunteer team.

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Papers

The naming convention of **entrepreneurial ecosystems** is relatively new. Earlier in our work, we employed the term **entrepreneurial development systems** (EDSs). By and large, based on our understanding, we are talking about the same thing – the environment and culture that stimulates and supports (or not) entrepreneurial behavior within a community, region, state, or nation. We have collected and curated a number of resources that can be helpful to that potential part of an eCoach's job or ecosystem development:

- The Kauffman Foundation's **Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building Playbook 3.0**
- **Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building in Rural America, Four Decades of Learning**
- **Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building 101 – Lessons from Northwestern Missouri**

These resources can be helpful to your community and eCoach in envisioning your unique entrepreneurial ecosystem based on your community's genuine development opportunities, entrepreneurial talent, and resources.

Naming Conventions

The word *entrepreneur* can create challenges as employed in our communities. Some find the word less than accessible. As a result, in addition to the use of the term entrepreneurial coach or eCoach, there are other naming conventions employed by communities. Some of these naming conventions include business coach, networker, resource networker, concierge, and coordinator. Regardless of the name you choose, it is important to define the eCoach's job and roles.

Continuum of eCoaching Roles

Based on our extensive field experience with eCoaching across the United States, we have developed a continuum of eCoaching roles. Understanding how other communities are employing eCoaching with their entrepreneurs can be helpful in deciding your community's approach to eCoaching within your entrepreneurship game plan. Figure 1 provides an overview of the three primary eCoaching roles and approaches based on this fielding learning.

In our various e2 resources, we often delineate eCoaching from "basic" (e.g., outreach and networking to resources) to "advanced" (e.g., where there is a deeper engagement with the entrepreneur). In Figure 1 we employ the language of "least" to "most" complex roles with respect to working with

entrepreneurs. These scales and descriptions do not apply to the other three possible job roles of an eCoach addressed in the next section of this paper.

Figure 2 – Continuum of eCoaching Roles

Least Complex Role ←	→	Most Complex Role
Concierge	Deal Packager	Mentor
The concierge approach primarily involves reaching out to targeted entrepreneurs, identifying needs, and networking the entrepreneur to resources.	In addition to the concierge networking role, the deal packager is central to developing and packaging business deals, including financing and technical assistance.	The mentor role includes concierge and deal packaging and often becomes more engaged as an entrepreneurial mentor. As a mentor, the eCoach must have greater training and experience.
Talent Availability and Recruitment Considerations		
Based on our experience, there is large pool of individuals in most rural areas that can be trained and prove effective in the concierge role of entrepreneur outreach and networking to resources.	Deal packaging is a common economic developer role, and on a statewide basis, there is generally a good talent pool with experience in venture deal packaging. Additional training may be needed on the concierge role.	Being an effective entrepreneur mentor requires both venture and mentoring experience. Not all persons with venture experience are able to be effective mentors. The pool of persons skilled at this level is more limited.

Venture versus Business

In this paper and other e2 resources, we often intentionally employ the term *venture* versus *business* to be more inclusive of the broader entrepreneurial development opportunities. In most communities, there are three kinds of ventures or enterprises. Each type generally creates economic activity, supports jobs, and either directly or indirectly expands local tax bases. Our first venture type of course is for-profit business. But rounding out this list are social ventures organized as nonprofits (e.g., health care, social services, recreation/YMCAs, etc.) and civic or governmental ventures (e.g., county museums, area state parks, government funding health clinics, etc.). As your community considers your entrepreneurial development opportunities, also consider your nonprofit and governmental ventures.

We encourage communities to seriously consider this continuum of eCoaching as you develop your strategy and commit to hiring eCoaching staff or consultants. Ponder your needs and available candidates. If you have a rich resource environment, a networking eCoach might serve your needs well. If your community has a strong gap financing program, consider a packager type eCoach. Finally, if your resource environment is sparse, then making a commitment to a more advance eCoach capable of mentoring should be a consideration.

Circuit-Riding eCoaches

In rural America, finding the funding to support economic development staffing is always a challenge, even for the most committed communities. A potential innovative solution is for a group of communities within a socioeconomic-aligned region to come together to hire an eCoach who is

employed on a circuit-riding basis. Based on funding from each collaborating community, the eCoach spends proportionate time in each community. This spreads the costs and can foster stronger regional collaboration where it is optimal to build the resource part of your ecosystem. Within Ernesto Sirolli's **Enterprise Facilitation** framework, a circuit-rider enterprise facilitator (i.e., a form of eCoaching) is often employed. For more information on enterprise facilitation, check out the Sirolli Institute at www.sirolli.com/enterprise-facilitation. Also, by doing a simple web search, copies of Ernesto Sirolli's first book Ripples from the Zambezi – Passion, Entrepreneurship and Rebirth can be located. This book provides the philosophical foundations for enterprise facilitation.

Four Potential eCoach Responsibilities

In this paper, we have defined the primary role of the eCoach to involve engaging with area entrepreneurs and networking them to resources driving both venture and community economic development impacts. Within that overarching role, there are four distinct responsibilities than an eCoach may have, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 – Four Potential eCoach Responsibilities

#1 Working with Entrepreneurs	The primary and most important responsibility of an eCoach is working with entrepreneurs, including outreach, developing relationships, learning about the entrepreneur's needs and wants, and networking the entrepreneurs to appropriate resources.
#2 Ecosystem Building	Given the eCoach's intensive work with entrepreneurs, often the eCoach works with the eTeam to identify gaps in a community's entrepreneurial ecosystem and supports the community in building out the ecosystem.
#3 eTeam Support	In smaller communities where funding staff is a more of a challenge, the eCoach may also provide staffing support to the eTeam, including organizing meetings, communications, and other eOrganization needs.
#4 Capturing & Documenting Impacts	Assuming the eTeam is using a portfolio approach and some kind of client relationship management system, eCoaches often support the capture and documentation of entrepreneur outcomes and impacts, including testimonial and story capture. Regardless of who take the lead with this activity, the eCoach must be involved given their firsthand knowledge.

In smaller communities bundling these eCoach responsibilities may be a necessity given funding. However, with each additional duty more and more time is distracted from the primary job of an eCoach and their engagement with entrepreneurs.

Recruitment and Job Descriptions

At e2, we have helped communities develop eCoach recruitment materials and job descriptions. This curated collection of sample materials actually used by communities across the U.S. can help you and your community develop your game plan for generating candidates and defining their jobs within your approach to entrepreneurial development. Making smart hires and career tracking your eCoach is important as working with entrepreneurs is a relationship-based form of development. Ensuring you have consistency of staffing in this position enhances relationship building, driving both venture outcomes and economic development impacts.

Before we move on to our next eCoaching topic, we want to address two important considerations:

1. Consider Civic-Minded Retired Venture Owners. Nearly every community has potential eCoaches. Our experience supports the view that one promising area to explore is your community's retired venture owners and operators. These retired businesspeople know the game and have rich insight on what it takes to be successful in your community. The question is whether they have the right attitude and skills to be a coach. We find that retired business owners who are also civically engaged and oriented probably have the right stuff to be a good eCoach. A modest stipend with expenses can go a long way to hire an eCoach from this pool of retirees. Additionally, the hired retiree has networks and relationships with other business owners and retirees, positioning them to grow a network of volunteers expanding your eCoaching capacity with marginal costs. The downside with this approach is retirees often want to work part-time and maybe only during certain seasons. There can be high turnover, and that is why we recommend creating a volunteer network to ensure greater continuity over time.

2. Naming Conventions. Given that entrepreneurship can be a hard term to use in many rural communities, there are a number of alternative naming conventions that are being used by communities across the country, as discussed earlier in this paper. Employing other names beside eCoach is fine and this a local decision. However, by using "entrepreneur," your community has the opportunity to educate your community and venture owner/operators about the difference of "running" a venture versus "working on" a venture (e.g., the creative process of entrepreneurship).

Empowering Your eCoach and eCoaching Team

Our next stop in this section of our eCoaching paper are some resources, tools, and tactics that can empower your eCoaching effort towards greater impact.

eCoaching Team Concept

Earlier in this paper, we introduced the idea of a network of eCoaches drawing from your community's active and retired venture owners and operators. Creating a group of volunteer eCoaches, working with a paid eCoach requires time, some funding, and a larger organizational effort. But this commitment and approach has merit in that it can increase your community's capacity for providing eCoaching services, enable working with more entrepreneurs, engaging volunteers better suited to different eTalent opportunities (e.g., from startup to transition to growth) in your community, and contribute to better continuity of effort. Additionally, this network of volunteers, who often are also community leaders, can enhance sustainability.

Resources, Tools, and Tactics

There are a wide ranges or resources, tools and tactics that can empower your eCoaching investment. But there are some prioritized resources we particularly find valuable, which we will explore in more detail next.

YourEconomy

We encourage your community to check out www.YourEconomy.org. This amazing business data resource was initially developed and hosted by the Edward Lowe Foundation and is now hosted by the University of Wisconsin system. Mark Lange and his team continue to evolve this resource. For more

complex economies and even very rural regional economies, YourEconomy provides business dynamics through their free website and by compensated customized services. For your community's ecosystem and your eCoach's work, this data can be empowering and allowi you to track venture development opportunities and trends.

Portfolio Approach and Client Tracking Software. Your eCoach is working with clients who happen to be entrepreneurs, their teams, and ventures. Managing client information is important and can become inconsistent, undermining the performance of your eInitiative and your relationship with your entrepreneur clients. Providing your eCoach with a client relationship management (CRM) system and software is recommended. This resource can be complex and expensive. Consider you needs and make smart choices. Also, through e2 we offer a basic CRM that works well for most rural communities. The larger your portfolio of clients, the more you will want to consider commercially available packages. Check out our **Working with Entrepreneurs Guide** for additional information.

Consider your targeting of entrepreneurs and management of your entrepreneurial clients within the context of a portfolio approach. As is the case with a diversified retirement investment portfolio, your community will create a smart portfolio that you can finetune based on your preferences, needs, and opportunities. Use of a CRM can help you manage your portfolio effectively and efficiently, leaving more time for working with your entrepreneurs and ecosystem building.

Hard versus Soft Referrals. In our **Working with Entrepreneurs Guide,** we address in some detail the difference between hard and soft referrals. A primary job of your community's eCoach is to network entrepreneurs to resources involving referrals. Done well (e.g., employing hard referrals), these referrals can bring value to your entrepreneurs, generate venture outcomes (e.g., new investment, job creation, etc.), and grow your community's entrepreneurial brand. Done poorly (e.g., often caused by using soft referrals), you can lose a client, fail to generate impact, and erode your reputation within your own community.

Access to SourceLink. At e2, we embrace the optimal entrepreneurial development approach as "top down" and "bottoms up." Earlier in this paper, we shared some resources on entrepreneurial ecosystem building that address this concept. Foundational to the "top down" strategy is regional or statewide entrepreneurial infrastructure that enhances both entrepreneurial resources (e.g., access to capital, market research, etc.; see the next section for more detail on this topic). For communities, and particularly their eCoaches, having access to the SourceLink platform is a deal changer. The ability to identify both general and unique entrepreneurial resources quickly is a great asset to an eCoach working with local entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, not every community has access to SourceLink.

Employment of Tools for Business Success. Another great resource that complements a community's investment in eCoaching is Resources &Tools for Business Success. This web-based source can create a locally branded web-based front door for area entrepreneurs. Populating the Resources & Tools for Business Success platform can create greater awareness of and access to area "go to" entrepreneurial resources while also creating access to a wide range of public resource from the U.S. Small Business Administration, Business Development Centers, and state resources.

Community Coaching. Our eCoaching approach and resources are rooted in our knowledge of community coaching. In a lot of ways, this makes sense because our e2 approach to entrepreneurial development is community centered. While the "science" (e.g., working with communities versus working with entrepreneurs) may be different, the "art" of coaching considerations is quite similar

between community coaching and eCoaching. At e2, we have collected and curated a series of community coaching resources that can supplement this paper and prove helpful to your community and eCoaching team. These resources can be accessed HERE.

<p align="center">**Community Coaching**</p>

Coaching is widely employed in business, government, sports, and other venues. There are extensive resources available on coaching specific to each of these arenas. eCoaching is one form of coaching. Within the e2 framework, we employ community coaching as a key resource empowering entrepreneurial communities. There are additional resources to the community coaching world that can be helpful to your community's eCoach. Also consider professional development and educational programs offered on coaching that could enhance your eCoach's capabilities and skills.

eCoaching Onboarding and Training Resources. For years, e2 and the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship before it provided eCoaching onboarding and training assistance. Currently, we do not have up-to-date self-help resources available on eCoach onboarding and training, but later this year we hope to add these resources to our e2 University library. In the meantime, contact Don at don@e2mail.org for ideas and connections to other eCoaches around North America. We find being part of a peer learning group can be very helpful, particularly to solo eCoaches, in developing the skills and insight to become more effective and efficient at this most important work.

Five Basic Ecosystem Resources

The NetWork Kansas SourceLink platform has over 500 public and nonprofit resource listings. Many of these resources provide basic services like the Kansas Small Business Development Center and others are very specialized. All are important to some entrepreneurs based on their particular needs and opportunities. Based on our field work across North America, we find there are five basic eResources that every eCoach should have access to as they work with your community's entrepreneurs. Figure 3 summarizes these five essential eResources.

<p align="center">**Figure 3 – Five Essential eResources**</p>

Access to Capital	Access to right kind of capital at the right time with the best possible terms is foundational to venture development and success. For most rural ventures, capital includes equity from the entrepreneur, bank debt financing, gap financing, and Limited Liability Company seed/equity.
Business Planning & Mentoring	For most entrepreneurs, whether a new start up or a seasoned venture seeking growth, business planning and mentoring is foundational. With a good area mentor network, these resources can be provided locally. Alternatively, they can be found in our nation's network of Small Business Development Centers and counselors.
Deal Packaging	By deal packaging, we mean someone working the entrepreneur and all the various resource players (e.g., banks, technical assistance providers, etc.) to package a new deal. It may be a startup, transition, or an existing business growing into a new market. Deal packagers are core to any ecosystem. The eCoach can often play this role, or help can be procured with regional business finance programs. We believe this is best done locally by an eCoach.

Market Research	Market research is part of any business plan. Advanced market intelligence is as important for growth-oriented entrepreneurs as access to capital. The entrepreneur's own research, basic help from a Small Business Development Center, or advanced help from an Economic Gardening program represent a continuum of market research options.
Networking to Specialized Resources	Specialized resources cover a large waterfront from intellectual property protection to product labelling to use of social media marketing. Some of these resources are local, but many are found in the larger regional and statewide ecosystem. The ability of communities through their eCoach and Area Resource Network to help entrepreneurs connect to these specialized resources is paramount.

Check out our resources within our **Assessments to Strategy Guide** focusing on eResources for more information on equipping your community and eCoach with the right resources empower their work with your entrepreneurial talent.

Develop Your Ground Game

Within our e2 development framework, the most essential component is effectively working with your community's entrepreneurial talent. The basic act of engaging with entrepreneurs, building relationships, learning about their needs and wants, and then networking them to meaningful assistance is hugely important. We call this the **ground game**. Employing an eCoach, or better yet an eCoaching team (e.g., paid eCoach, volunteers doing outreach and area mentors), can greatly enhance and expand your community's e2 ground game. Earlier in our work with communities, we suggested eCoaching as an option. Today, we strongly recommend the use of eCoaching earlier as a foundation to a community's probabilities for success, impact, and sustainability.

We hope this paper on eCoaching is helpful to you. We want to hear from you. We know eCoaching (while typically not called eCoaching) is widely practiced in North America by a wide range of practitioners. Share with us your learning, counsel, and stories by emailing Don Macke at don@e2mail.org.

Access and Use of e2 University Materials

Single Party Users. Our entire e2 University is available free of charge to selected users. If you and your community are interested in any or all of these resources, contact info@e2mail.org.

Compensated Users. For those users wanting to use e2 University in their compensated work, e2 is happy to explore licensing options. Contact Don Macke at don@e2mail.org.

Nonprofit Users. If your organization is a charitable non-profit that works with multiple communities, e2 is open to non-compensated licensing options. Contact Don Macke at don@e2mail.org.

International Users. If your organization is located in or focused on non-U.S. locations, we are open to collaborative efforts to translate our work into other languages and cultures for possible use. Contact Don Macke at don@e2mail.org to explore options.

Kansas and Nebraska Users. Nebraska and Kansas have played an extraordinary role in evolving our e2 development framework. Access to e2 University resources is available free of charge to end users through NetWork Kansas and Nebraska Extension in Nebraska.

A Condition for Access and Use of e2 University Resources

In all cases e2 asks users to execute a **use agreement.** As part of this agreement, we require a commitment from you to share your learning back with e2. We need user feedback to continue our learning so that e2 can support entrepreneurship ecosystem building and future resources for users yet to come.

Additional Help

Don Macke is not currently accepting new advising and consulting work. However, based on scheduling availability, Don is willing to do an exploratory call to better understand your needs and expectations, and recommend pathways forward. Contact him at don@e2mail.org.

How e2 Can Help

e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems helps communities increase prosperity through entrepreneur-focused economic development and ecosystem building. Led by **Don Macke,** e2 has a national team of practitioners who bring research, coaching, incubation, market intelligence and other expertise to this work.

What We Do

- ✓ **Mentoring.** We mentor and coach new practitioners seeking to pursue entrepreneur-led development. We provide advice and support for building eEcosystem strategies that work.

- ✓ **Analytics Support.** e2 helps communities and regions understand their entrepreneurial potential through research and data. Explore some of our research tools and reports here.

- ✓ **e2 University (e2U)** is our platform for sharing guides, papers, stories, tools, and resources with communities wanting a deep dive into eEcosystem building. Don Macke leads the e2U team with analytics support from **Cathy Kottwitz** and report preparation from **Ann Chaffin.** Special recognition for their e2U legacy contributions goes to **Dana Williams** and **Deb Markley,** LOCUS Impacting Investing.

- ✓ **Fostering the eMovement.** We support the national entrepreneurship movement along with our partners including the **Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City**, **SourceLink**, **Edward Lowe Foundation**, **Kauffman Foundation**, and **NetWork Kansas**. We are a founding member of Start Us Up: America's New Business Plan, a coalition dedicated to strengthening entrepreneurship across America. Together, we continue to advance the foundational ideas of building entrepreneurial ecosystems and entrepreneurship-led economic development.

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NetWork Kansas, a 501c3 nonprofit organization dedicated to developing an entrepreneurial ecosystem in Kansas, is the home for e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems. NetWork Kansas connects aspiring entrepreneurs, emerging and established businesses, to a deep network of business building resource organizations across the state.