

LEADERS ARE KEY Entrepreneurial Communities

Background & Introduction

This paper addresses the all-important role of community leadership in the success of entrepreneurial communities. A primary role of our community coaches is to identify and support critical local leaders empowering their ability to help their community succeed with this critical work. First, we review the importance of how you define your community for e2 work. Check out our e2 paper [Defining Your Community](#) for additional information.

Defining Community

Communities are our focus. Communities in this work can be defined through various lenses, as outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Defining Your Community

| Communities of Place and Interest | | |
|---|---|---|
| Communities of Place | Communities of Interest | |
| Communities of place have a defined physical location or an identified area based on shared socio-economic characteristics. New York City is very identifiable as a community of place. | Communities of interest are varied. Examples are those in the Panhandle of Texas interested in assisting children with food in-security and chambers of commerce. | |
| Communities Spatially or Culturally/Economically | | |
| Spatial Communities | Socio-Economic Communities | |
| Spatial communities are defined by precise geography such as the boundaries of a municipality or county. | Spatial communities are typically larger when shared socioeconomic characteristics are considered. | |
| Communities Spatially or Culturally/Economically | | |
| Current Residents | Former Residents | External Interests |
| When we think of a community’s residents, we typically focus on current residents who are permanent residents with strong identity to their community. | However, even though their permanent residences are elsewhere, former residents can have a strong identity with their hometowns. There is affinity. | Finally, there may be regional or even national groups (think regional bank with a local branch) that care about a community and are willing to become engaged. |

Defining your community by more accurately reflecting its true socioeconomic reach and relationships is foundational. Considering what actually constitutes your area community can help you better consider potential stakeholders within your e2 initiative and ultimate entrepreneurial ecosystem. Next, we explore the kinds of leaders that contribute more successful e2 initiatives.

Leaders are the Key to Success

There is extensive research focused on why communities succeed and fail. As one might expect, there are numerous reasons that explain different community outcomes over time, but a common rationale

surfaces time and time again in this vast research – the importance of leaders. The right kind of people exercising empowering leadership is central to community success.

Because of this research-based finding, a central focus of our entrepreneurial communities work centers on identifying and empowering community leaders. Our success as community coaches is most dependent upon the ability of the community leaders we are working with to help their community understand their entrepreneurial opportunity and act effectively on it.

The following framework can be used by community coaches to better understand both the “players” and “stakeholders” within a community and the likely roles they can play in success and failure.

Figure 2 – Likely Community e2 Players

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Scouts | In every community, there are scouts. These are the folks who go to conferences, follow newsletters and track opportunities that could help their hometowns. Scouts are often the first folks to engage a new program or resource. |
| Champions | Champions are those kinds of leaders who see real merit in an opportunity and advocate engagement. Champions are very important to us and become our primary partners within a community. Growing an ever larger and effective “champions group” is a primary development activity for our coaching. |
| Challenges | Most communities have challengers. Challengers are those community members who watch for potential risks and mistakes. They can be well-intentioned or simply negative in their general attitude. Divining between those “constructive” and “just negative” challenges is important. |
| Rainmakers | Rainmakers become very important over time. Rainmakers may not come to meetings or become directly involved in an initiative. Often, we have to engage them privately and even discretely, but they can make things happen such as raising money, getting the city on board, and the like. |
| Community Builders | Every community has well-intended citizens who volunteer. Often, they do not see themselves as leaders, but they are willing to give of their time, talent and treasure. A core group of champion leaders and community builders is an optimal setup for success. |
| Rest of the Community | Reality is that most residents in a community do not become directly engaged. We will explore strategies to create easy and fun ways to increase community member engagement, but most of the time we will be working with a smaller subset of the community’s residents. |

Figures 3 and 4 on the next page provide important information about likely e2 stakeholder groups. Figure 3 summarizes the most likely stakeholder groups to recruit to and engage in your e2 initiative. Figure 4 provides quick tools for inventorying potential stakeholder groups your community may want to map and identify key leaders with these groups to invite to your organizing efforts.

Figure 3 – e2 Stakeholder Groups

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Local Government | Local government typically includes municipalities, counties, and school districts. |
| Development Groups | Development groups can include chambers of commerce, development corporations, main street program, and tourism/convention groups. |
| Major Employers | Major employers often include manufacturers, health care, cooperatives, and other ventures with significant employment in the community. |
| Non-Profit Organizations | Non-profit organizations ranging from youth baseball to social service agencies fall into this stakeholder category. |
| Civic Groups | Civic groups range from Rotary to Extension Circles. Civic groups often have important community members and leaders among their numbers. |
| Faith Community | Each community is different, but for many communities inclusion of the faith community members is important. |
| Others | Other potential community stakeholder groups include farm organizations, area community colleges, regional universities, and the like. |

Figure 4 – eCommunity Collaborating Partner Checklist

| | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| | Municipal Government | | Chamber of Commerce |
| | County Government | | Development Corporation |
| | Public K-12 Schools | | Main Street Program |
| | Area Community College | | Tourism/Convention Bureau Group |
| | Regional University or Colleges | | Civic Organizations |
| | Private K-12 Schools | | Faith Community |
| | Cooperative Extension | | Farm Groups |
| | Regional Development Organizations | | Others? |

Next, we consider some of the keys to community success related to identifying and developing leadership for your e2 initiative and engagement of stakeholder partners.

Community Keys for Success

One does not need a PhD to understand why some communities are more successful than others. There are volumes of work which document that the **keys for success**, when employed by communities, make all the difference. Figure 5 on the next page summarize the most important actions a community must take to ensure optimal success. *When you review these KEYS and reflect on your own career and life, you will recognize your own personal formula for success.*

Figure 5 – Community Keys for Success Summarized

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Opportunity Focused</p> <p>Successful communities take the time to identify genuine opportunities that will improve the community. Successful communities act on these opportunities and make them reality.</p> | <p>Compelling Goals</p> <p>Successful communities set compelling, clear, and accountable betterment goals. These goals provide both a roadmap for action and goal posts for celebrating progress and success</p> | <p>Leadership Team</p> <p>Nothing happens without leaders willing to help their community discover opportunities, grow a vision for the future, set goals, and sustain effort over time. <i>We need a local point person who coordinates between the community and outside resources.</i></p> |
| <p>Community Engagement</p> <p>Successful communities involve the entire community bringing the full potential of the community's talents, skills and ideas to bear in support of community agreed to development goals.</p> | <p>Smart Action Plan</p> <p>Having a vision and setting goals is essential, but without a smart action plan that moves to implementation, such plans are nothing more than words. Successful communities have smart action plans.</p> | <p>Regular Meetings</p> <p>Successful communities stay engaged, and one key tactic is regular meetings where the business of community betterment is undertaken. Regular meetings provide important pacing essential for progress.</p> |
| <p>Strong Execution</p> <p>For community betterment to occur, work has to be undertaken. Strong execution of the action plan ensures that over time goals are met and the community's vision for a better present and future are realized.</p> | <p>Staff Support</p> <p>Field experience is clear. Consistent supporting staff accelerates progress. Staff does not replace leaders and volunteers. But it can increase effectiveness and efficiency of community engagement.</p> | <p>Funding</p> <p>Little invested and little accomplished- so goes the saying. Community betterment takes dollars and appropriate funding to support staff, action plan implementation and other costs.</p> |

Early on in this paper we touched on the unique leadership role of **community champions**. When determinants of community success or failure are boiled down, the engagement of community champions is on the short list. Because of their unique importance to e2 initiative success, we have developed additional content focused on community champions.

Community Champions

Our team at e2 has decades of experience working with communities. Over these years, we have come to recognize that the real **key to success** in community development is a certain kind of community leadership we call **champions**. Champions are local leaders who empower their communities to embrace change, capture opportunity and sustain strategically important development. Where we have strong champion leadership, we find communities that are progressive and able to ensure a brighter future for their residents.

In our initiative to develop entrepreneurial communities, the identification and development of e2 champions is paramount. A primary focus of our community coaches is related to helping community champions engage their community in support of growing entrepreneurial communities, a stronger

economy and a more prosperous future. This paper summarizes the attributes of community readiness based on the community champions approach.

Desired Attributes for Champions

Our potential success in growing entrepreneurial communities is rooted in finding and growing champions. As we consider adding e2 communities, we should consider the number and quality of community champions in determining community readiness as well as your community's success with organizing for action. Specific desired champion attributes include:

Community Reputation. The champions must have a positive reputation within the community. However, given community leadership structure, this may be an outlier group attempting to move the community forward.

Sufficiently Large Champions Group. This cannot be one or two individuals but must include enough champions to create system leadership for this initiative.

Commitment to Entrepreneur-Focused Development. The champions group should have a deep belief that entrepreneur-focused development is the foundation of all economic development. A deep understanding of and commitment to entrepreneur-focused development could mean to the community's future is on solid ground.

Committed to Strategic Development. The champions must be committed to long-term, deep strategic development and believe that their community will embrace strategic development.

Committed to Community and Resident Engagement. There must be a strong understanding and commitment to broader community and resident engagement. Strategic development must come from the larger community and not just a small group of leaders.

Networkers or Weavers

Effective champions often have strong networking or weaver skills—the ability to navigate across the community, organizations, and personalities, recruiting and engaging key leaders and community builders into the entrepreneurship work. Typically, champions have excellent knowledge of the community and key players. They are able to reach out to these key players, listen carefully, and find pathways to engage these key players within their community's entrepreneurship initiative.

Committed to Partnering with a Community Coach. In those situations where your community is working with a regional or statewide organization and you have a community coach working with your community, there must be a commitment to partner with us and a comfort level with the assigned coaching team (assuming there is one).

Committed to Learning and Sharing. We need a commitment from the champions group (and ultimately the community) that it is open to serious learning and willing to share their experiences with documenters/ evaluators and other communities.

They Believe the Timing is Right. The champions group must have a strong consensus that the timing is right for the community to engage in strategic development.

Champions Job Description. Here we provide language our coaches can use with their partner communities to help identify, recruit, and secure clearer champion commitments.

Community Champion(s)

A champion is someone who wins a victory or achieves an important goal. In our work a community champion is a person who is passionately committed to their community and its success. Specific to our Prosperity Community Initiative, a community champion is a leader who is willing to work with us and in turn help their community focus on those strategically important issues and opportunities foundational to the community's generational or long-term success.

Our end game is more prosperous communities.

Our role is community capacity building for strategic development.

Our leverage is empowering community champions to lead their community.

1. A person who is willing to make the commitment to be part of a core group of community leaders willing to spend time, energy and talent on helping their community focus on strategically important issues and goals foundational to their community's long-term success.
2. A person who is willing to collaborate with our Extension Coach and Resource Team to:
 - a. Find avenues to engage their community and key stakeholder groups.
 - b. Develop the capacity of their community to engage more effectively in its own development.
 - c. Evolve a more strategic community-wide vision and development agenda.
 - d. Recruit others and their organizations in this process expanding ownership, leadership and community builders; and
 - e. Work with their community to find the resources (financial, human, ideas, etc.) to energize their community's strategic development agenda.
3. Make at least a 12-month commitment to the core group to actively engage and lead. Work to make sure that when you are ready to leave this group you have helped find a strong replacement.
4. Help find a suitable home (some resourced community organization or collaboration) willing to provide a safe and fair home for this all-important community visioning and strategic planning and doing work.

Questions and Additional Information

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