

Getting Started Checklist

Background & Introduction

For the past decade, the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship (www.energizingentrepreneurs.org) has been developing and field testing various strategies and tactics related to entrepreneur-focused economic development. Our **Entrepreneurial Communities framework** couples use of **entrepreneur or business coaches** with the construction of a healthy **entrepreneurial ecosystem**. Together, these critical components can accelerate development impacts in a wide range of communities throughout North America.

This document provides a comprehensive checklist for “getting started” with the Center’s **Entrepreneur Communities Framework**. We hope this “checklist” will enable your community to get organized to move forward with this promising economic development strategy. Our **Getting Started Checklist** is comprised of the following steps in creating, implementing and sustaining your community’s “E Community” initiative.

<p>Readiness</p> <p>The first step is getting your community ready for entrepreneur-focused economic development. In most communities, ensuring readiness is foundational to ensuring success. Failure has a severe price and should be avoided at all costs. (Our Readiness Package can help you assess your community’s readiness.)</p>	<p>Organizing</p> <p>The second step is for the community to organize itself to create, launch and sustain your entrepreneurial community initiative. Organizing can be challenging but creates the foundation for moving forward.</p>
<p>Assessment</p> <p>The third step is assessment to clarify opportunities, assets and preferences. This process provides the information necessary for strategy building.</p>	<p>Strategy Building</p> <p>The fourth step is strategy building. Making smart choices about where to focus finite energy and resources is critical to building a successful program.</p>
<p>Implementation</p> <p>The fifth step is going to implementation. At some point, your community needs to go live and begin growing your economy by growing your entrepreneurs.</p>	<p>Sustainability</p> <p>For your entrepreneurial community initiative to achieve meaningful impact, it must be sustained. Real progress comes with time and continued effort. The final step is building a multi-year sustainability plan.</p>

Before we visit each of the major E Community program steps, we share a possible timeline for your initiative.

Possible Timeline for Your Entrepreneurial Community Initiative

The following tables provide a comprehensive timeline highlighting key activities and benchmarks. This timeline is intended to provide a framework for building customized “action” roadmaps in each “E Community.”

Detailed Quarterly Timelines. The following tables provide a summary of likely key activities and progress benchmarks for year one:

1 st Quarter of Year One		
Month	Key Activities	Progress Benchmarks
January	Program Organizing Stakeholders’ Group Established Area Resource Team(s) Recruited Coach(s) Identified or Hired Program Orientation Training	<i>Basic organizational infrastructure for the program is organized and initial training is provided.</i>
February	Assessment E Talent Identified & Visitation Resource Mapping Community Preferences Identified E Targeting & Portfolio Developed	<i>Completion of the assessment provides critical information for strategy and system building.</i>
March	Strategy Development Strategy Development Support System Development Initial Outreach First Services Provided	<i>Strategy Developed System Developed Program Launched!</i>

Every community moves at a difference pace, but our goal would be to have completed organizing, assessment and strategy development by the end of March with initial outreach and service provision beginning in March.

2nd Quarter of Year One		
Month	Key Activities	Progress Benchmarks
April	Program Outreach & Gear Up Scale Up of Outreach Area Resource Team Functioning Fine Tuning the Portfolio Trouble Shooting Services	<i>The E Community Program moves to full implementation with scaled up outreach and coaching services.</i>
May	Resource System Development Program Implementation Continues Area Resource System Built Out	<i>Expanded Portfolio ARN in Place</i>
June	External Resource System Development Program Implementation Continues Begin Sustainability Planning Build Out External Resource Network	<i>External Resource Network in Place Quarterly Progress Review</i>

3rd Quarter of Year One		
Month	Key Activities	Progress Benchmarks
July	Program Growth Portfolio Expansion System Gap Analysis External Resource Network Build Out	<i>By July we hope the Program is growing and reaching its stride.</i>
August	Program at Scale Portfolio is Full Increasing Impacts*	<i>By the end of July the Program should be well established and working effectively.</i>
September	Sustainability Strategy Program Continues Operation A Sustainability Strategy is Defined	<i>Program at Scale. Quarterly Progress Review</i>

* In the first quarter, the stakeholders group would define performance metrics to measure progress and success. We recommend that this system is simple and includes both data and stories.

The Center staff and Entrepreneurial Communities Team have supported initiatives in communities and regions across North America. We often provide regular mentoring with the Entrepreneur Coaches or Coaching Teams throughout the first year. These mentoring calls typically occur every 7 to 10 days

Center for Rural Entrepreneurship

initially and then stretch out as the coach becomes more comfortable with her mission and role. The Center also offers an “E Coaching Network” to enable communities and their Entrepreneur Coaches to connect with other communities following a similar pathway to prosperity. We facilitate this networking by providing the communication infrastructure needed to connect communities and coaches practicing entrepreneur-focused development. Entrepreneur coaching is both science and art form and becoming effective requires experience. Networking with other communities and coaches can provide a rich environment for learning and sharing. We believe that other coaches and communities ultimately offer the greatest potential for growing your community’s most effective initiative.

By the start of the fourth quarter of the first year, your Entrepreneurial Community initiative should be well established and your community should be well on its way to creating a “system” of support for your targeted entrepreneurs. In the communities we are supporting, the Center typically begins to wind down its engagement at this point and your community needs to step up to ensure your program’s on-going success and sustainability.

4 th Quarter of the First Year		
Month	Key Activities	Progress Benchmarks
October	Program Continues Increasing Impacts Assess Program	<i>Year 2 Go or No Go Decision Stakeholder Commitments</i>
November	Program Continues Increasing Impacts Program Adjustments for Year 2	<i>Year 2 Game Plan Defined</i>
December	Program Continues Increasing Impacts Annual Recognition & Celebration Begin Implementing Year 2 Strategy	<i>Celebrate Progress!</i> <i>Center Support Ends Annual Progress Review</i>

Checklists for Key Steps

Becoming an entrepreneurial community is a complicated effort. We have found that checklists provide one way to keep your focus on the specific activities that need to be accomplished to know you are making progress. The tables below provide checklists for each step in this process.

Readiness		
Met	Readiness Checklist Items	Answer
	Is this initiative a good fit for the community?	
	Is the timing right?	
	Are there community champions who will lead?	
	Are there community institutions that will support?	
	Does your community have designated funding?	
	Does the community have a coach candidate?	
	Are there people to serve on the Area Resource Team?	
	If you are planning to work with the Center, are you willing to use technology including teleconferences, webinars etc.?	
	Is there potential opposition to this initiative?	
	Overall Readiness?	Go/No Go Decision

*(You might want to review the information in the Center's **Readiness Package** if you are having trouble answering these questions.)*

[illegible]

Organizing

Done	Organizing Checklist Items	Status
	If you are working with the Center: Complete agreement with the Center.	
	Identify possible stakeholders. Engage stakeholder partners in the program.	
	Identify and appoint a project lead person. Identify and hire the Entrepreneur coach.	
	Identify and recruit members to the Area Resource Team (ART).	
	Orientation training for stakeholders, coach, and ART.	
	Determine communication and media strategy.	
	Baseline training.	
	<i>Begin assessment.</i>	
	Identify additional stakeholders. Engage additional stakeholder partners in the program.	

Worksheet

Assessment		
Done	Assessment Checklist Items	Status
	Define & Finalize Assessment Strategy	
	<p>Opportunities. First, we need to identify the entrepreneurial talent within your community including the following actions:</p> <p>Area Economic Opportunity Analysis Entrepreneur Talent Mapping Session Strategic Targeting Entrepreneur Visitation Define Portfolio</p>	
	<p>Assets. Second, we need to inventory the development assets you have available locally and regionally that can support targeted entrepreneur development:</p> <p>Local Asset Mapping Regional Asset Mapping Partner Targeting Recruitment & Engagement</p>	
	Assessment Report	
	<p>Preferences. Once your preliminary “opportunities” and “assets” assessment work is complete, it is important to share the report with your stakeholders and ensure it conforms to community preferences for development.</p>	

Worksheet	

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These checklists focus on the first three action steps of readiness, organizing, and assessment. The remaining three action steps—strategy development, implementation, and sustainability—build on the information gained and decisions made during this first series of steps. Since these final three action steps are driven by the unique circumstances and desires in each community, we highlight some general ideas based on our work across many communities.

Strategy Development

The organizing and assessment work greatly informs and shapes your entrepreneurial community strategy. Every community is unique. While there is a framework to guide you, the strategies you select must be customized to the unique circumstances and preferences of your community.

Implementation

We encourage you to create an initial three-year implementation plan based on the strategy developed by your community, including progress benchmarks for each quarter. Based on our field experience, we anticipate the following progress in most communities:

Year 1	
Organizing Assessment Strategy Building Implementation Coach - ART - Outreach Initial Impacts	Months 1 & 2 Months 2 & 3 Months 3 & 4 Months 5 and beyond
Year 2	
Sustainability Strategy Implementation	Early in Year 2 Early stage impacts
Year 3	
Implementation Sustainability Strategy	Expanding Impacts Finalized and Implemented

Sustainability

As you set out to become an Entrepreneurial Community, it is essential to plan for sustainability from the outset. In a time of constrained development resources, no community can assume the funding available at startup will be there year after year to sustain your efforts over time. The Stakeholders and Sustainability Guide included in this resource package offers useful insights into creating a strategy for sustaining this important work so that you can achieve the development impacts you desire.

Questions & More Information

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The Center for Rural Entrepreneurship's mission is to help community leaders build a prosperous future by supporting and empowering business, social and civic entrepreneurs. With our roots and hearts in rural America, we help communities of all sizes and interests by bringing empowering research, community engagement and strategy development to you through our many Solution Areas. Our **Solution Area Teams** empower communities to discover their own answers to the challenges and opportunities they face:

- **Community Development Philanthropy:** Providing research and community engagement strategies that help communities build philanthropic capacity and create development resources now and in the future.
- **Youth Engagement:** Providing tools and a framework for communities to engage young people now and to bring them home in the future.
- **Measurement Research Policy:** Providing the tools to help communities define development goals, measure success and improve outcomes.
- **Entrepreneurial Communities:** Providing a roadmap for communities to design and deliver entrepreneur-focused economic development strategies that work.

To learn more about us, go to www.energizingentrepreneurs.org.

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