

**Center for Rural
Entrepreneurship**

energizing entrepreneurial communities



Organizing for Action

For Entrepreneur-Focused Economic Development



June 2014

About This Guide

Once you are ready and energized to launch an entrepreneurship initiative, you need to get organized to take action. This guide shares insights about the importance of organizing and provides guidance about what you need to put in place in your community so that you can begin the start-up process of becoming an entrepreneurial community.

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Other e2 University Packages

- Readiness
- Energizing Your Community
- Opportunity Assessment
- Strategy & Marketing
- Entrepreneurial Development Systems
- Working with Entrepreneurs
- Implementation Coaching



Contents

- Introduction
- Why Organizing is Important
- What You Need to Organize
- The Many Stages of Organizing
- Getting Organized
- A Final Thought...



Introduction

You have determined your community is ready and energized to become an entrepreneurial community and now it is time to get organized for action. For most communities, this will be your first real try at launching an entrepreneurship initiative. You might think of your community as being akin to an entrepreneurial startup. Our **Organizing for Action Guide and Resource Package** primarily focuses on start-up initiatives. However, our field experience, insights and the resources in this package are also relevant if your community has an existing entrepreneurship initiative that you want to grow or even if you are ready to become a breakout or high-performing Entrepreneurial Development System. Our guide to **Organizing for Action** focuses on:

- Why Organizing is Important
- What You Need to Organize
- The Many Stages of Organizing
- Getting Organized

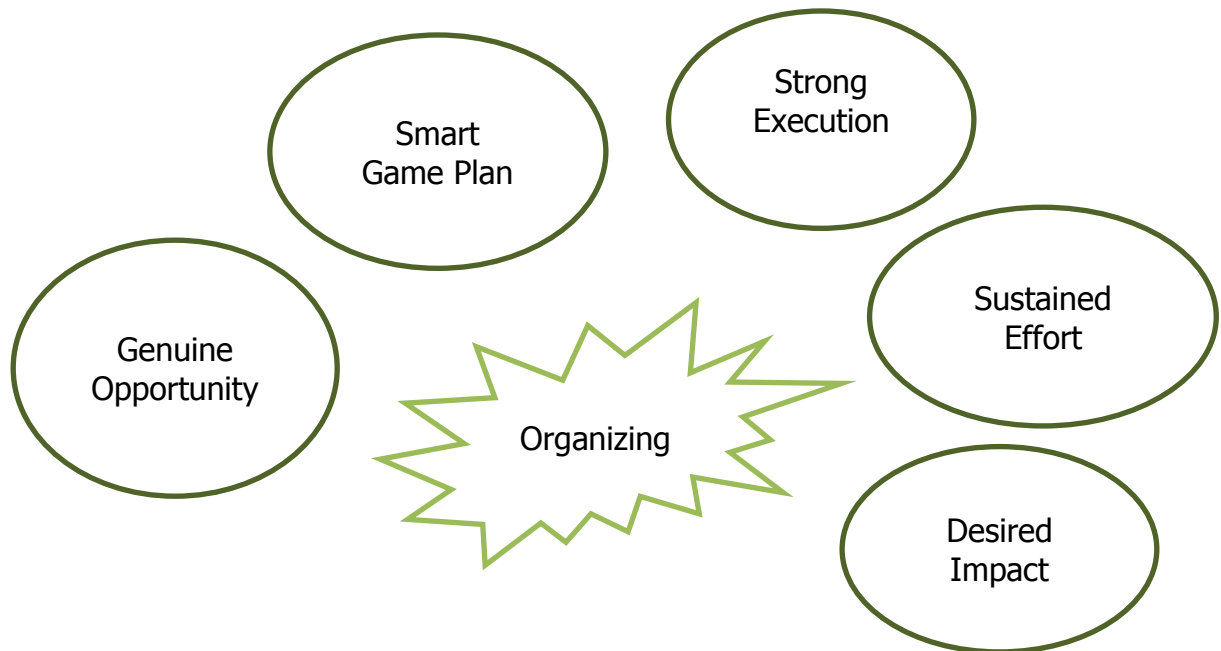
✓ **Organizing Tip...Pace Yourself**

| Pacing | Campaigns | Pushes |
|--|---|---|
| Creating and sustaining a fast moving pace within your initiative is highly recommended. Robust pacing ensures momentum is sustained. But sustaining such rapid pacing can be a challenge. | One way to sustain rapid pacing is the use of calendar-based campaigns. We can learn a lot from the organization and pacing of electoral campaigns. Annual campaigns are a good place to start. | Pushes typically last one to six months and are used to break campaigns into even more focused goals, actions and outcomes. We employ three-four month pushes within our year-long campaigns. |

Why Organizing is Important

Many things will contribute to your community’s development success including such things as a smart game plan, strong execution, and sustained effort including funding and staffing. Organizing within your community is central to being smart, good and effective with all elements of your development game plan.





Your community may have a more limited genuine opportunity or a constrained budget. Effective and efficient organizing of your partners and resources can empower your community to get the most from your entrepreneur-focused development efforts. Being smart revolves around using wisely whatever opportunity and resources you have. Sound organizing is a key to being smart.

✓ Organizing Tip...Challenge of Turf

Over our 40 plus years of working in economic development, we have witnessed the rise and fall of many initiatives. Some of North America's best economic developers have been part of these roller coaster rides. There are many reasons why good and promising initiatives do not survive, let alone reach high performing status. But a common thematic from the field is the challenge of turf. Congressional dysfunction illustrates how hard it is for people to work constructively with each other over the long periods of time necessary for meaningful progress. Time and time again, turf issues and competition emerge that undermine progress, drive good talent away and even derail proven strategies. War between two critical stakeholder groups (e.g., the chamber and the city) is all it takes. Managing turf challenges through effective organization must be a priority.

What You Need to Organize

There are four primary areas of focus for organizing:

1. Right Stakeholders
2. Smart Process
3. Strategic Actions
4. Accelerators

The following summarizes each of these four key areas for organizing.

Right Stakeholders. Becoming an entrepreneurial community is a team sport. Ernesto Sirolli (i.e., Enterprise Facilitation) makes this argument with his Trinity of Management. Successful entrepreneurs build effective and efficient teams with passion for and competence in the critical business areas of production, finance and marketing. Being

entrepreneurial, your community must build a strong team of the *right* stakeholders. Who are the *right* stakeholders? Here are some criteria to help you answer this important question:

- Are they currently active in your community's development?
- Do they have a strong self-interest (e.g., entrepreneurs) in your community's development but have not been part of your community's formal development efforts?
- Can they bring resources to support your initiative?
- Are they in a position to undermine or even block your initiative?
- Do they provide programs or services potentially valuable to entrepreneurs?

Using these five criteria, you can generate a list of potential stakeholder groups and their leaders; these are the *right* stakeholder to invite into your initiative. Ultimately, your initial stakeholders will be those who are willing and able to engage. In our resource package, we provide a stakeholder mapping tool titled *Leaders are Key* that is a useful starting place. Among your right stakeholders will be those who actually want to invest in your initiative. Cultivating these funders is a necessary part of stakeholder engagement. To help you think about the connection between stakeholders and sustainability for your initiative, we have included the ***Stakeholders and Sustainability Guide*** in this resource package.

Smart Process. Too often, when we are planning a new initiative or implementing a growth strategy, we do not give enough attention to the *process*. Selecting the right change process is important and you may need some help. Often, outside and compensated facilitation is a very smart investment. Our experience suggests that often when a stakeholder disengages, it is because they find the process (or lack of process) ineffective and a waste of their time; it is not

Stakeholders

Understanding the meaning of “stakeholders” is very important as you organize to grow your entrepreneurial community. Stakeholders are those public and private organizations in your community that have a “stake” in your community’s development. They have a deep self-interest and may even have a tradition of engagement in development activities. Within each stakeholder group, there are specific leaders who will shape and determine their group’s engagement.

Center for Rural Entrepreneurship

that they fail to believe in the initiative. Your most valuable stakeholders want to get something important done and they will only allocate time to those initiatives they believe have a reasonable chance of going somewhere and succeeding.

Strategic Actions. Earlier in this guide (page 3) we introduced the idea of using “campaigns” and “pushes.” This approach is very promising based on our field experience and observations from other arenas. Use of a campaign and push approach requires discipline and strategic planning where you set specific goals, both short-term and long-term. This approach provides both an action roadmap and progress tracking. It allocates and focuses stakeholder effort on creating peer accountability and impact. Later in this guide, we share suggested progress benchmarks that you can employ in moving your initiative from dream to reality, whatever your starting point.

Accelerators. Finally, you and your community have choices. There are clear decisions and commitments you can make or not make. Depending upon the commitments you make, you can accelerate your progress. Two key accelerators include pacing and investments:

| Pacing | Investments |
|---|---|
| <p>Developing and launching a new initiative (whether a startup or expansion) can drag on when your pacing is very slow. And, there is often a price to pay for such slow pacing: some stakeholders drop out and those still engaged have trouble keeping track of where they are going. While aggressive pacing requires real commitment and may strain your resources, it can also accelerate progress.</p> | <p>Many new initiatives are under-capitalized or bootstrapped. For example, your team may be unwilling to invest in a facilitator or an initiative coordinator. Under-capitalization is a primary reason why initiatives move too slowly, have ineffective change processes and result in either grudging progress or outright failure. Smart and adequate investment makes a difference.</p> |

In our deep and long-term engagement work in Kansas, we have identified five specific accelerators that warrant investment consideration:

1. Community Coaching
2. Opportunity Analysis
3. Focusing on the Right Entrepreneurs
4. Entrepreneur or Business Coaching
5. Right Entrepreneurial Infrastructure

The table below provides a short description of each of these five accelerators. We share them now so that they can become part of your organizing process as your stakeholders begin to make key decisions and commitments. The Center can be a resource for you in all of these areas. In this Resource Package, we have included a short paper we prepared for NetWork



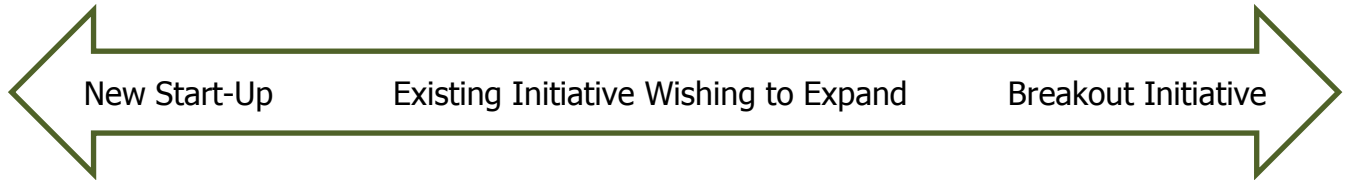
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Kansas on the topic of accelerators, *Accelerating E Communities in Kansas*. This paper will provide you with deeper insights into why you might want to address these topics early in your organizing work.

| | |
|--|--|
| Community Coaching | A community coach works with community leaders to better leverage resources for development. When the community has embraced entrepreneur-focused economic development, the coach works to guide the local team and to help hold everyone accountable for progress. The coach can help you put to work each of the four other accelerators to increase the pace of progress and the impact of your initiative. |
| Opportunity Analysis | Successful economic and business development must be rooted in genuine opportunities. Investing in assessment and analysis of your community's unique development opportunities is a way to accelerate the start-up and progress of your initiative. In Kansas and other places, the Center has provided such independent assessment. This analysis becomes a powerful tool in the hands of a community coach or leadership team; you can ground truth this analysis and craft a refined set of development opportunities to provide strategic focus for your entrepreneurial community efforts. |
| Focusing on the Right Entrepreneurs | Every successful business owner knows that you must match your products and services with customers who really want to buy them. The same is true for communities working with entrepreneurs. You need to map your entrepreneurial talent and target development efforts to achieve strategic economic development goals. Such market and customer engagement can reduce assumptions and allow you and your team to focus on real opportunities to support entrepreneurs, demonstrate the value of your initiative and begin realizing development impacts. |
| Entrepreneur Coaching | Communities that provide entrepreneurial coaching to their targeted businesses can dramatically increase development activity and ensure better matches for financing and other assistance. An entrepreneur coach can help your community increase outreach, visitation, intake and screening and referral to assistance for targeted businesses. Hiring and supporting an entrepreneur coach requires investment, but is a real key to accelerating impact. |
| Entrepreneurial Infrastructure | Your community needs to develop a robust infrastructure for entrepreneurs that includes local as well as resources outside your community. Building this infrastructure is a process of identifying what you have and what you can connect to through your networks, and then working to fill gaps through investment and collaboration. The ultimate goal is to grow an entrepreneurial eco-system that stimulates and supports increased entrepreneurial activity throughout your community. |

The Many Stages of Organizing

If your community wants to support entrepreneurs as part of your overall development strategy, you must become entrepreneurial yourself. So, thinking and behaving like an entrepreneur, consider this continuum of organizing based on your progress toward becoming an entrepreneurial community.



New Start-Up Initiative. You are new to this game. There is a core group of community leaders who believe that entrepreneur-focused economic development is the way to go. But like a budding entrepreneur who has never really started a business, you and your community have never really launched an entrepreneurship initiative. Startups are always risky and the potential for failure is real. Doing everything you can do to increase the chances for success is paramount. Just as with a newborn fawn, what happens in the early days and months could determine whether your initiative lives or dies.

Assuming aggressive pacing, here are the progress benchmarks you might expect to achieve in your first year:

| First Year as an Entrepreneurial Initiative Startup | | |
|---|--|---|
| New Year Push <i>January through April</i> | Summer Push <i>May through August</i> | Fall Push <i>September through December</i> |
| Early Organizing Visioning & Development Preferences Identified Assessment – Particularly Targeting Early Strategy Development Begin Entrepreneur Outreach Business Coach Hired Area Resource Team Established | Regular Entrepreneur Visitation Client Intake & Enrollment Coaching Provided to Es Referrals to Resource Providers Assistance Being Provided Stories of Early Impact Captured External Resource Network Formed | Expanded Outreach Expanded Intake and Coaching Repeat Clients A Portfolio Based on Targeting Refined Resource Network “Go To” Resources We Trust Impact Stories & Numbers |

This aggressive pacing ensures that there is a story of success to share with your funding stakeholders by the end of your first year. Adequate success helps you make a stronger case to continue and *expand* funding for your initiative based on demonstrated opportunity and a strategy that is getting results. While your community has not been transformed, you have “proven up” and earned the right to pursue year two of your start-up initiative.

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Existing Initiative Wishing to Expand. We know from research on small business startups that failure is more common than survival. What is less well known is that there are also profound risks associated with growth or expansion. Struggling to grow and growing too fast can undermine earlier success and even put your initiative at risk of failure. Your organizing strategy must grow and strengthen to enable your initiative to grow. What are some of the progress benchmarks associated with an initiative growth plan?

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Year 1 | System Assessment Growth Analysis & Plan 3-5 Year Capital Campaign Devised |
| Year 2 | Conduct Capital Campaign New 3-5 Year Capitalization & Budget Operational Plan & Staffing |
| Year 3 | Launch Expansion |

More sophisticated organizing will be required to grow your initiative. Taking this important step will also require more time. You want a process with strong pacing but one that allows you to assess your situation and opportunities well, engage your community and particularly your stakeholders in the process and liberate the funding commitments necessary to capitalize your next three to five years of work.

Breakout Initiative. You have been engaged in entrepreneur-focused development for some time. You have learned a lot. Your community has a neat game plan and resource support system. You are getting impact and there is support for becoming a “high performing” entrepreneurial eco-system. You want to make a breakout to the next and highest level of performance. Few businesses achieve breakout like Wal-Mart, Google, Microsoft or Southwest Airlines. The same is true for communities and their development. Growing a world-class environment for entrepreneurs demands a lot. We will not spend much time on achieving breakout. If this is where you are headed, we can connect you to the folks in those relatively few places where breakouts have been achieved so that you can



Lessons from Wal-Mart

Everyone knows some version of the Wal-Mart story. For those of you who are younger, it seems as if Wal-Mart has been with us forever. A closer look at the world’s largest retailer is informative in setting your community’s expectations for progress and success.

1950. Sam Walton buys a store in the Arkansas Ozark community of Bentonville (2,900) from Luther E. Harrison. For nearly a decade, there is only one Walton’s 5 and 10.

1960s. Decision to grow using THE low cost pricing strategy; the Wal-Mart brand emerges.

- 1967 – 24 Stores Across Arkansas
- 1968 – First Store Outside Arkansas
- 1975 – 125 Stores

1980s. Wal-Mart is a generation old (25 years) and has not yet become the well-known retail powerhouse it is now.

- 1985 – 882 Stores
- 1988 – Sam Walton steps down
- 1990s – Breakout is Achieved
- 1995 – Nearly 3,000 Stores Globally
- 1996 – First Wal-Mart in China

It took two generations (50 years) to achieve breakout status and world recognition. Setting aggressive but realistic stakeholder expectations is recommended as you start and grow your entrepreneurial efforts.



learn from the field.

Being Entrepreneurial

In North America, a typical community with 25,000 to 30,000 residents will generate a billion dollar plus economy. By any standard, a billion dollars is a significant level of economic activity. If our hypothetical community were a corporation, it would be on a short list of many state's important businesses. Source: Center analysis using IMPLAN data.

In 1955, Fortune Magazine created the Fortune 500 list of America's most important corporations. Since its founding, over 2,000 businesses have made the list. Even among America's biggest and most success businesses, there is churn. Less than one in five original Fortune 500 companies is still on this remarkable list. Source: History of the Fortune 500 by Emily Beach with eHow.

The lesson is clear: being competitive, successful, large and important today is no guarantee for being in that same position tomorrow. We exist in a very competitive global environment. Whether we are focused on a Fortune 500 Company or a community of 30,000, smart and intentional action is required to ensure future success and economic relevancy.

So how does a business or a community ensure sustainable success and prosperity? The answer lies, in part, in being entrepreneurial. A key attribute of an entrepreneur is the ability to perceive strategic change and opportunities. Entrepreneurs act to ensure they remain competitive. Bottom line, entrepreneurs spend time growing their business versus simply running their business. The same must be true for communities.

Communities that are successful over generations must be entrepreneurial. Communities, like people, tend to become less entrepreneurial when they are successful. They may rest on their laurels and lose motivation to be entrepreneurial and compete aggressively. Unfortunately, the world economy and society continue to change. As we are enjoying our prosperity, we miss the turns in the road and plant the seeds of our own decline. A key to successful organizing is developing and sustaining a culture of entrepreneurial attitudes and behavior.

Getting Organized

In this package, you will find a **Getting Started Checklist** to use as a guide for getting organized. Our checklist can provide your team with context, a stepped process and worksheets you can adapt and use to target your early stakeholder meetings around some key decision points. Please note that this resource assumes that a business coach is part of the overall strategy. Regardless of whether you employ a business coach, this resource can help you focus your meetings on critical topics that will move you to key decisions, commitments and a game plan for action.

Every community and situation is unique. All of our tools are based on actual field experience and, therefore, reflect the unique circumstances of that time and situation. View the resources included in this package as providing a “framework” that you can customize to your needs. Of course, if you feel you need some help customizing our framework and tools to your needs, our team is available to contract with you to provide specialized assistance.

There are five considerations we offer as you are getting organized:

1. Defining Your Community
2. Early Stakeholder Candidates
3. Clarifying and Setting Expectations
4. Making and Keeping Commitments
5. Organization, Staffing and Governance

Framework

Every promising or best practice is specific to a particular community, situation and application. When we abstract the core elements of a promising or best practice, we create a framework that is informative to other communities and their unique circumstances. Building your capacity to learn and adapt practices from other communities can be very valuable to growing a smarter strategy more quickly. Remember the old saying about not recreating the wheel!

Defining Your Community. What is your community? This may seem like a foolish question, but we continue to find that it is not. Different stakeholders may come to your initiative’s table with varying community definitions. For example:

- The Mayor may only be thinking about the area served by municipal government.
- County Commissioners are thinking county-wide.
- The Chamber may define itself as an “area” chamber including other places.
- An entrepreneurial service provider might serve an even broader collection of communities or even regions in the state.

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While defining community may not be a huge challenge, it is helpful to agree to a working definition among your stakeholder groups. This definition will be used to define the geography for opportunity assessment, entrepreneur and resource mapping, and other targeted activities. Remember as your strategy evolves, you can evolve your definition of community by either narrowing it or expanding it. Today your focus may be just the city; in three years, you may have partners wanting to expand your initiative to a neighboring community and all the rural entrepreneurs within your county. Remember to be entrepreneurial and make changes in your game plan when they make sense.

After you define your community, we suggest you establish a baseline by gathering information from entrepreneurs and community leaders about your community's support for entrepreneurs. The ***Entrepreneurial Community Survey*** included in this package is a good place to start. You might use it with your early stakeholder candidates (see below) or have partner organizations, e.g., the Chamber, share with their members. It is a useful tool to gather information quickly about your community's starting point.

Early Stakeholder Candidates. There can be angst in deciding which potential stakeholders to engage early in your organizing efforts. You may be uncertain about who should be invited and concerned that leaving someone out may create a problem down the road. In ***Leaders are Key***, included in this package, you will find a list that you can use with your team to begin to think about the likely suspects to involve. If you can, look for stakeholders who are also business owners and entrepreneurs; this will help keep your group's size manageable and, most importantly, begin the task of engaging entrepreneurs.

We recommend that you adopt an open door policy which allows folks to become engaged when they are serious about supporting your initiative. Stakeholders may come and go, but ultimately you want a core group of stakeholders who are committed and willing to support the initiative long enough for it to bear fruit.

Clarifying and Setting Expectations. A quick way to determine early on which stakeholders are genuinely interested in being part of your initiative is to clarify and set expectations. We have included in our Resource Package a simple worksheet and exercise: ***Initiative Expectations – Stakeholders Quick Survey***. We recommend you complete this exercise in one of your early stakeholder meetings. Have everyone complete it and then use the results to inform a facilitated discussion to help you find common ground upon which to build your initiative and identify where and how various stakeholders might fit.



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Making and Keeping Commitments. Chances are good that you will have both “action” and “process” oriented personalities within your stakeholders’ group. You need both types of personalities on your team. Their respective approaches to this work will result in a better initiative. But, there will be tension between the more extreme personality types. Ultra action-oriented people want to make decisions quickly and get on with implementation. Ultra process-oriented people can study, talk and review your game plan forever (at least it seems that way). Process folks slow things down, leading to a potentially more thoughtful course of action. Action folks push to get moving with the work, potentially building needed momentum. Managing this tension well can result in a more optimal game plan. BUT, ultimately decisions to act must be made. And, these decisions must be accompanied by specific commitments, such as:

- ✓ I will talk to the banks and raise the necessary funds for the assessment.
- ✓ I will reach out to the area university to see if they want to become part of the initiative.
- ✓ I will chair a working group to begin the process of hiring a business coach.
- ✓ My organization is willing to serve as the fiscal agent for this initiative.
- ✓ We will commit to monthly working group meetings to keep our initiative moving forward.

Every meeting you have during the early organizing phase and continuing through implementation should have specific and important business to cover, actionable items and a way to ensure you have specific commitments to get the agreed-to work done.

Organizational Structure, Staffing and Governance. Eventually as you move from early organizing to building a solid foundation under your initiative, you will need to address three next stage organizing topics:

1. Organizational structure
2. Staffing
3. Governance

As your initiative begins to pick up steam, you will need to move from an organic and informal collaboration to one with more structure. There will need to be a more permanent organization, funding, staffing and a governance structure that allows all your stakeholder groups to remain engaged and supportive, but entrepreneurial in your ability to make decisions and get the work done. *Our entrepreneurial communities’ team can help you find the right answer when you get close to this stage.*

A Final Thought...

Too often, our communities are driven to action out of fear and/or crisis, including:

- Natural Disasters
- Consistently Bad Community Image (e.g., “Murder Capital”)
- Chronic and Severe Unemployment, Poverty and/or Depopulation
- Loss of a Major Industry or Employer

These events unsettle the status quo and spur community leaders into action. When times are good, even if not great (e.g., community still ranks in the bottom third of communities in the state), we tend to become complacent. We call this the prosperity trap. On a personal level, first-generation affluent parents run the risk of spoiling their kids. Mom and dad are always able to provide and their kids have not learned the lessons that come with economic struggle. This next generation may become more complacent and may be less motivated to become successful in their own right.

The same is true for communities. For decades, Detroit was a world class city thriving on the success of the auto industry. As this industry began to struggle, Detroit failed to re-invent itself and now faces the worst crisis. At first the decline was slow and there was the belief that the auto industry in Detroit would come back. It did, but not in a way that repopulated Detroit’s many struggling neighborhoods with thriving middle class families. Events that move us to action may be short-lived so an organizational key is to keep the fires stoked so that your stakeholder group remains engaged, active and committed to making trend-line changes in your community.

Lesson of Venice

Venice provides a remarkable and relevant lesson. It emerged from the swamps as a refuge from the violence of Europe’s Dark Ages.

Venice was early to the Enlightenment and became a political, economic and military powerhouse dominating the Mediterranean Sea. For centuries, it grew in power and status. It had the best minds, capital and opportunities.

But in its prosperity, it lost its entrepreneurial and competitive edge. It missed the importance of the discovery of the new world and the shift in development opportunity. Its fortunes declined.

For several centuries, it continued to live off of its legacy wealth and assets. Eventually it declined in profound ways. Today, Venice is a shadow of its former self. Tourism and subsidies sustain its economy.



How The Center Can Help

The Center can help you increase prosperity through entrepreneur-focused economic development in a number of ways:

- **Awareness.** We can help you raise awareness of the entrepreneurship opportunity through keynote speeches, workshops and informational webinars.
- **Mentoring & Advising.** We offer very affordable mentoring to community leaders attempting to build or strengthen a strategy. This support can include procuring project funding.
- **Assessment.** We can provide quick to in-depth opportunity assessments essential for smart game plan development. We also have a team that does Targeted Industry Studies.
- **Strategy Development.** We have extensive experience helping communities craft customized and optimized development strategies.
- **Training.** Via our Working with Entrepreneurs program, we provide comprehensive and field tested training for development practitioners and leaders.
- **Implementation Coaching.** We can provide implementation coaching customized to your game plan on a real-time basis through modest retainer arrangements.
- **Sustainability.** We can help you find the long-term funding to ensure robust support for your entrepreneurship strategy.

Our Entrepreneurial Communities team is led by Don Macke, with more than 38 years of development experience. We have established a national team of practitioners, both inside and outside the Center, who bring research, coaching, incubation, market intelligence and other content expertise to this work. Additionally, we can draw on one of the largest networks of entrepreneurship practitioners across North America to support specific projects and provide learning partners for advancing our work and bringing value to your community.

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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