Entrepreneur Navigator Guide

Ernesto Sirolli is a foundational innovator in the field of entrepreneur-focused economic development. He created *Enterprise Facilitation* that embraces the importance of the *basic transaction[1]* and demonstrated the value of *Enterprise Facilitators* (the equivalent of e2's *Entrepreneur Navigators*) and *Enterprise Facilitation*. Entrepreneur Navigators are possibly the most important first major ecosystem investment a community can make to enhance entrepreneurial ecosystem impact.

Background and Introduction

Within e2's entrepreneurial ecosystem building and operation *Development Framework*, the *Entrepreneur Navigator* is a primary resource and player. e2's *Entrepreneur Navigator Guide* provides a primer on the Entrepreneur Navigator job and role within a community's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Our E-Navigator Guide is organized into the following sections:

- ➢ Why is an E-Navigator[2] Important?
- ➢ Who is an E-Navigator?
- ➢ The E-Navigator Job within a Community's E-Ecosystem[3]
- ➢ Professionally Supported and Career Tracked E-Navigators
- ➢ Conclusion – Make the Commitment and Invest

Many Names for E-Navigators

There is nothing set in stone or magical about the name Entrepreneur Navigator or E-Navigator. Communities select names that seem right to them and the entrepreneurs they are trying to work with within their ecosystems. At e2 we encourage communities to pick the name that makes the most sense for them. Other names in use include Networkers, Entrepreneur Coaches, Business Coaches, Connectors, Concierges, and the list goes on and on.

Questions and Information

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Our first stop is **Why is an E-Navigator Important?**

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[1] The basic transaction is described later in this paper.
[2] In this paper we use "E-Navigator" as shorthand for Entrepreneur Navigator.
[3] We use "E" as shorthand for "Entrepreneur" throughout.

Zeynep Ton's 2014 book *The Good Jobs Strategy*[4] provides compelling case study research on the foundational role of ***excellent customer service*** by empowered key employees. In community-centered entrepreneurial ecosystems, the E-Navigator is core to high-value entrepreneur customer service. One-on-one focused entrepreneur attention and assistance accelerates entrepreneurial economic development impacts.

Why is an E-Navigator Important?
Consider the following five realities:[5]

1. Every community has entrepreneurial talent.
2. Every community has relevant and helpful entrepreneurial resources.
3. Most communities are responsive in working with entrepreneurs **who reach out** to them.
4. Most communities have staff assigned to working with entrepreneurs.
5. Most communities are under-performing in optimizing entrepreneurial development.

So why do communities need to invest in hiring and supporting an E-Navigator that might cost between $50,000 and $150,000 annually? Great question. Community stakeholders and funders almost always ask this question when considering creating an E-Navigator position. It is a fair question and the answer to this reasonable concern is rooted in the previously shared five statements.

Most high-performing communities are at best responsive in working with entrepreneurs. When entrepreneurs manage to find those in the community working with ventures (refer to Figure 1 for definitions), they ask for assistance and the community tries to help. Responsive venture development is good, but pro-active, and even strategic outreach to entrepreneurs and their ventures is even better. Pro-active and strategic entrepreneur engagement generates more ***Venture Deal Flow*[6]** and impact.

Figure 1. Three Kinds of Entrepreneurial Ventures

For-Profit Businesses	Nonprofit Organizations	Governmental Enterprises
For-profit businesses are obvious entrepreneurial development targets. But in rural America nonprofit organizations and governmental enterprise are also development opportunities.	Nonprofit organizations are economically important and service critical roles in our communities. They hire employees and provide essential and desired goods and services.	For many rural communities, government agencies and enterprises account for up to 30 to 50% of all economic activity. Government is an entrepreneurial development opportunity.

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[4] Zeynep Ton. *The Good Jobs Strategy – How the Smartest Companies Invest in Employees to Lower Costs and Boost Profits.* The Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. New Harvest, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing. 2014.

[5] These statements are based in e2's rural field work across North America.

[6] Venture Deal Flow refers to when entrepreneurs make investments into their ventures resulting in real estate development, new employing hiring, new markets and customers reached, and other outcomes.

Figure 2 summarizes *e2's Rural Community Development Capacity Continuum* providing context for E-Navigators and why E-Navigators are so essential in moving rural communities from Level 3 – Responsive to Level 4 – Pro-Active entrepreneurial development.

Figure 2. e2's Rural Community Development Capacity Continuum

Level 1 Not in the Game	Too many rural communities fall into the Level 1 category and are largely not engaged in community economic development. These communities have no or weak development organizations, no or limited staffing, and no or meager funding. They lack community economic development vision and strategy.
Level 2 Reactive	Most rural communities fall into Level 2. They have commitments to community economic development, development organizations, some staffing, and limited but often unstable funding. They are reactive to development threats and opportunities. Being reactive they are often behind the curve trying to catch up and missing optimal development outcomes.
Level 3 Responsive	Some communities, including most E-Communities, are at Level 3. They are reasonably responsive when entrepreneur reach out for help. They have good resources. But they are not connecting to most entrepreneurs because most entrepreneurs do not reach out for help.
Level 4 Pro-Active	Higher performing E-Communities such as Klamath Falls, Oregon, Hutchinson, Kansas or Ord, Nebraska achieve Level 4 status. They have E-Navigator Programs and are pro-actively mapping their E-Talent, targeting entrepreneurs for outreach and working one-on-one with entrepreneurs to connect them to assistance.
Level 5 Strategic	Relatively few rural communities achieve and sustain Level 5. These communities have identified entrepreneurial clusters for strategic development. They often have dedicated E-Navigators, Enterprise Facilitators, or E-Coaches working in specific economic clusters as Klamath Falls is with tourism development.

By investing in professionally supported and career tracked[7] E-Navigator positions, rural communities build on their Level 3 strong performance becoming Level 4 or high-performing Pro-Active communities. Most entrepreneurial development opportunities are found with entrepreneurs who are not asking for help. Smart E-Talent mapping and targeting, coupled with robust outreach and engagement, enables communities to work with more entrepreneurs and those with the greatest potential for development. **Hiring an E-Navigator is all about upping a community's entrepreneurial game and positioning it for greater community economic development!**

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[7] Community economic development staff turnover is a huge challenge for most rural communities. Committing to above average compensation packages coupled with performance-based career tracking enhances retention. More on this in the fourth section of this paper.

Current staff and volunteers can undertake what we call the *Entrepreneurial Ground Game[8]* (outreach, learning and networking to assistance) and activate more *basic transactions[9]*. However, our experience from decades of community work is clear – existing staff and volunteers have limited capacity to regularly undertake this work. Reality is existing staff already have more work than time. Unless this process of outreach, learning, and networking to assistance is undertaken regularly and with lots of entrepreneurs, the potential for more deal flow and impact is limited.

A dedicated **E-Navigator** can increase the volume of basic transactions in two ways:

1. Wake up every day and work with three to 10 entrepreneurs.
2. Work with volunteers to further expand outreach and networking to assistance.

A dedicated, career-tracked, and professionally trained E-Navigator increases the quality of interactions with entrepreneurs and dramatically enables higher-order assistance to occur. Entrepreneurs must trust that the E-Navigator can help them and will respect the confidentiality of their information before they will share those needs and wants that keep them up at night (e.g., the really important stuff). This is where real impact can be empowered.

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Remember the Ord Story

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Our case study of Ord[10] provides compelling evidence of the value of E-Navigators. Between 2000 and 2020, Ord employed an E-Navigator and financial packager within its local development organization, supporting over $100 million in deal flow[11] and impacting nearly 100 ventures including startups, transitions, and expansions. Most of this deal flow was realized during a 10-year period from the mid-2000s up to the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic. For a community with 2,000 residents, this is remarkable. Our case study documents having an E-Navigator was core to its success.

Our next stop is **Who is an E-Navigator?**

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[8] For more information on *e2's Entrepreneurial Ground Game* email Don Macke, don@e2mail.org and request the guide.
[9] The basic transaction involves a community reaching out to entrepreneurs, learning what they need and want, and then connecting them with community resources.
[10] https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/library/theme-papers/subjects/ord-nebraska.html
[11] Deal Flow referrers to actual venture projects supported by gap financing as documented by the Ord's LB840 financing program.

Like entrepreneurs, E-Navigators must have the right attributes and attitudes, but can be developed when properly trained, incented, and supported. E-Navigator is a specialized role and job. An E-Navigator has a range of roles that can be played. Customizing this position is a preference of the community's E-Team[12]. Being clear on the E-Navigator's job is foundational.

Who is an E-Navigator?

In the world of economic development, the E-Navigator position is both relatively new but not uncommon in communities and regions historically focusing on entrepreneurship. A number of legacy regional and state entrepreneurship initiatives have used some form of navigators for at least 30 to 40 years including:

- ❖ Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation[13]
- ❖ Michigan's Northern Initiatives[14]
- ❖ Maine's Coastal Enterprises[15]
- ❖ Sirolli's Enterprise Facilitation (global)[16]

Before we dig deeper into E-Navigators, it is important to remember there are related jobs in entrepreneur ecosystems. Figure 3 summaries the three primary professionals working one-on-one with entrepreneurs within *e2's Entrepreneurial Ground Game.*

Figure 3. Three Primary Jobs Working with Entrepreneur

Networker	Facilitator	Coach
The E-Navigator is the most basic "working with entrepreneurs" role. For most rural communities this is their best first hire. The primary job of an E-Navigator is networking entrepreneurs to assistance.	Rooted in Ernesto Sirolli's *Enterprise Facilitation* model, the *Enterprise Facilitator* provides both networking and advising assistance to entrepreneurs. Advising is a higher order role.	An E-Coach is skilled and experienced in counseling an entrepreneur in building a personalized growth strategy rooted in working with their entrepreneurial team.

➔ **Increasing Skills, Experience and Expectations** ➔

We recommend career tracking rooted in (1) on-going professional development and certification, (2) progression from Level 1 to Level 2 to Level 3, and (3) deal flow performance.

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[12] An E-Team is described in the third section with other job descriptions.

[13] https://www.khic.org/

[14] https://northerninitiatives.org/

[15] https://www.ceimaine.org/

[16] https://sirolli.com/

E-Navigator Relevant BP 10[17] Roles and Talents. GALLUP[18] is well known for its ***StrengthsFinder[19]*** profile resources. GALLUP has gone on to create ***Business Builder 10*** or BP 10 profiles resources. At e2 we employ BP 10 profiles to help identify individuals with the optimal traits foundational to growing into a high-performing E-Navigator.

Figure 4 provides the primary role and talents traits empowering the optimal E-Navigator.

Figure 4. E-Navigator Specific BP 10 Roles and Talents

Primary Role – Conductor: "You possess great management talent, and — like a conductor who unifies an orchestra to produce beautiful music — you bring order and harmony to the chaos of a young venture. You build an organization by building its people and take pride in finding the right people for key positions. Trusting others to take responsibility, you look for ways to delegate work and authority. You are demanding and tend to challenge the status quo. With little self-doubt, you do not hesitate to decide and act on your own, regardless of what others think. When something needs to be done, you make sure it happens, even if something gets in the way. You are fixated on growth metrics and hold yourself and your team accountable for the goals you set."

Relationship	Delegator	Determination
✓ have high social awareness ✓ build diverse networks ✓ attract and maintain partnerships	✓ easily delegate authority ✓ are proactive collaborators ✓ recognize team strengths	✓ exhibit a tremendous work ethic ✓ are tenacious and persistent ✓ have the ability to recover from setbacks

The BP 10 ***Conductor*** role is equivalent to the primary networking an E-Navigator engages in with targeted entrepreneurs, connecting them to the right assistance at the right time and at the right cost. This is one-on-one customized and high-level customer service. The three primary BP 10 ***Talents*** of ***Relationship***, ***Delegator,*** and ***Determination*** are core to an E-Navigator's job. Essential for E-Navigator success is building relationships with not only the entrepreneurs they are working with, but also important resource providers. The E-Navigator can, but is not expected to, provide direct technical assistance to a community's entrepreneurs. Rather the E-Navigator is delegating to both resource providers and entrepreneurs specific work. Finally, working with people, and particularly entrepreneurs, requires determination. While E-Navigators can provide other roles and benefit from other talents, the role of ***Conductor*** and the three talents of ***Relationship***, ***Delegator,*** and ***Determination*** ensure the foundations for successful E-Navigator work.

The information in Figure 4 can be used in the development of E-Navigator job descriptions, candidate screening, and hiring. Individuals with the right E-Traits rooted in the GALLUP BP 10 roles and talents above will be strong candidates for the role of E-Navigator.

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[17] For more information… https://www.GALLUP.com/builder/225332/builder-rofile-10.aspx
[18] For more information… https://www.GALLUP.com/home.aspx
[19] For more information… https://www.GALLUP.com/cliftonstrengths/en/254033/strengthsfinder.aspx

Figure 5 provides comparable capabilities of Navigators, Facilitators, and Coaches.

Figure 5. E-Navigators Compared with E-Facilitators and E-Coaches

Level 1 – Navigators	**Level 2 – Facilitators**	**Level 3 – Coaches**
E-Navigator undertakes the following basic **e2 Transaction Activities**:	E-Facilitators undertake all the roles and responsibilities of E-Navigators plus the following:	E-Coaches have all the skills, experience, and jobs of both E-Navigators and E-Facilitators plus the following:
1. Work with the guidance of the community's E-Team.	1. Skilled in **_strategic listening_**.	1. Trained and have experience in the art and science of venture counseling.
2. Undertake targeted outreach to entrepreneurs.	2. Have training in subtle bias and have advanced sensitivity in minimizing biased behavior.	2. Experienced and are certified in working with the following continuum of E-Talent:
3. Work with entrepreneurs to identify needs and wants.	3. Experienced in helping entrepreneur focus, moving beyond tunnel vision.	a. Nascent and startups
4. Network entrepreneurs to relevant available resources.	4. Experienced in helping entrepreneurs set strategic priorities.	b. Challenged and struggling c. Lifestyle d. Transitions
5. Ensure quality control with respect to resource assistance.	5. Experienced in helping entrepreneurs sequence development actions.	e. Growth-Oriented f. High growth
6. Manage the entrepreneurial client portfolio.	6. Capable of dealing with difficult entrepreneurs, challenging the client relationship.	
7. Provide insight from working with entrepreneurs on resource ecosystem needs.		

Career Tracking Progression

A more nascent person may be hired as an E-Navigator and over time progress in professional development, skills and experience becoming an E-Facilitator and ultimately an E-Coach. Career progression is important to talent retention and increased impact.   Additionally, an important allied professional development area is for an E-Navigator getting trained and experienced in Deal Flow Financial Packaging.[20]

Our next stop the **E-Navigator Job within a Community's E-Ecosystem**.

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[20] Financial packaging involves working with an entrepreneur, their venture potential capital funders (e.g., banks, investors, gap financing programs, etc.) creating robust and smart venture financing.

Developing a community's entrepreneurial talent is a road to growing a vibrant entrepreneurial economy and community. The E-Navigator operates within a larger entrepreneurial ecosystem. It is essential for the E-Navigator and the community's E-Team to understand the components of a high-performing entrepreneurial ecosystem. Evolving a sophisticated, yet elegant, entrepreneurial ecosystem positions an E-Navigator for greater success.

The E-Navigator Job within a Community's E-Ecosystem

This section of *e2's E-Navigator Guide* is organized into the following parts:

1. E-Navigator Job Description
2. A High-Performing Entrepreneurial Ground Game
3. Operational Considerations
4. Remember the Basic Transaction Core to an E-Navigators Work

E-Navigator Job Description[21]

Short Job Description. The E-Navigator is a career-tracked professional position foundational for any entrepreneur ecosystem. Other titles for this position are Entrepreneur Concierge and Business Assistance Coordinator. The E-Navigator is foundational to a community's *Ground Game*, which in turn is foundational to a successful entrepreneur-focused game plan.

Outcome Objectives:

1. Energizing the community's Ground Game with resulting outcomes and impacts
2. Effective, efficient, and impactful networking of relevant resources to entrepreneurial clients
3. Ensures an up-to-date entrepreneur portfolio and tracking system
4. Engages the community E-Team in continuous and regular entrepreneur mapping, targeting, and prioritizing for outreach and networking to resources
5. The E-Navigator can take on other roles including the E-Coordinator, Financial Packager and Program Manager

Roles and Responsibilities:

1. Leads the community's Ground Game
2. Is actively engaged daily in outreach to entrepreneurs and networking them to resources
3. Manages the E-Portfolio and tracking system
4. Ensures resource provider accountability
5. Advises the community's E-Team regarding gaps and needs within the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Supports entrepreneurial ecosystem building and operation

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[21] e2 has collected E-Navigator job descriptions and can share examples upon request.

It is important that this work remain volunteer-led and that the community's team does not just delegate these critical leadership roles to the community coordinator.

Special Skills:

- While experience as an entrepreneur is not essential, it is desirable
- Comfort with the language of ventures and entrepreneurs is critically important
- Strategic listening and network experience and skills are mandatory

Other Considerations:

- **Estimated Time Commitments.** Time commitments vary based on the size of the community and its ability to assign/hire staff to the community coordinator role. Generally speaking, time commitment ranges from a minimum two days per week to full-time. In a county-wide or regional game plan, the E-Navigator may dedicate targeted amounts of time in various communities.

- **Host Organization.** The Host Organization typically hires and supervises the E-Navigator. However, this position can be assigned to any of the core collaborating development partners.

- **Compensation Range.** Compensation and benefits should be comparable to a three to five-year veteran loan officer at a community bank. For most rural communities a total budget for this position and the E-Navigator Program runs between $100,000 and $125,000 annually. Actual costs will vary based on rural regional compensation markets.

A High Performing Entrepreneurial Ground Game

We have made the case for an entrepreneurial Ground Game and defined it within the e2 Development Framework. This section on the Ground Game is organized into the following parts:

1. Components
2. Key Players
3. Operational Considerations

Components. Figure 6 on the next page provides a visualization of the components or building blocks of an E-Navigator-centered, pro-active entrepreneurship ground game.

Considering Figure 6 on the previous page, the e2 Ground Game begins with an E-Team working group aligned with the E-Navigator. This group of volunteers, leaders, and community builders connected to key cooperating stakeholder groups, provides knowledge and guidance for entrepreneurial talent mapping, targeting, and portfolio management. They work closely with the compensated E-Navigator. The E-Navigator, employing entrepreneur outreach targeting strategies, engages in connecting with entrepreneurs. The E-Navigator's job is to establish trusting relationships. Employing strategic listening, the E-Navigator helps entrepreneurs clarify their most important needs and wants, and then works to connect the entrepreneur to relevant resources. This is not a "one and done" activity. Based on the E-

Team Portfolio targeting, the Navigator maintains communication with entrepreneurial clients creating opportunities for further conversations and networking to resources. This process generates deal flow and ultimately community economic development impacts. Additionally, the Ground Game provides critically important market intelligence around the strengths and weaknesses in a community's entrepreneurial ecosystem resources. The following visualization illustrates the key components of the Ground Game.

Figure 6. e2's Ground Game Visualized
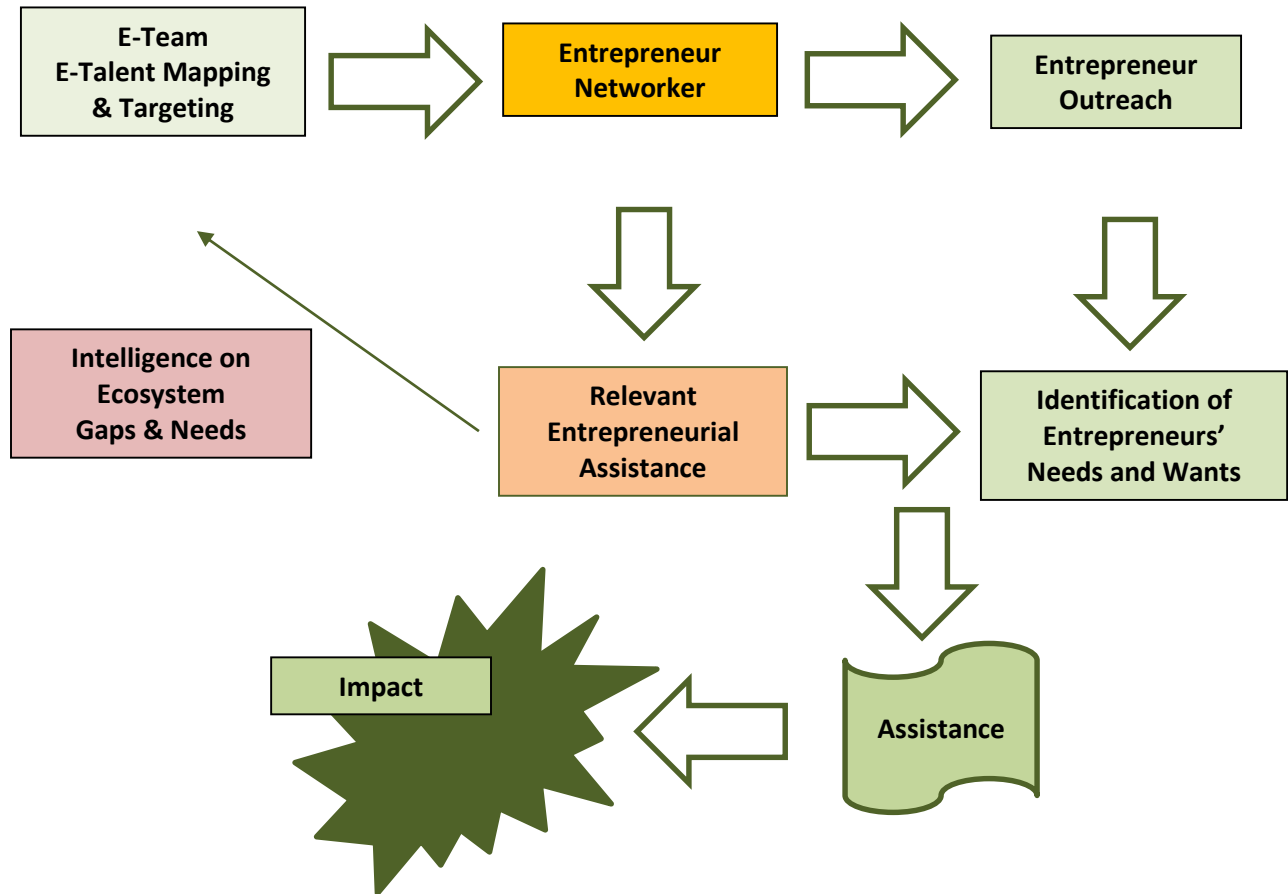
Key Players. Well defined, properly matched, and satisfying volunteer jobs enhance a community's ability to attract and retain engagement in their entrepreneurship work. Early professional and compensated staffing is foundational to early success and sustained effort over time. This section provides an overview for three paid positions and five core volunteer positions in the early stages of entrepreneurial ecosystem development. This list is rooted in e2's field-tested experience from communities like yours.

1. Likely Paid Positions:[22]

- Coordinator of ecosystem building efforts
- E-Navigator
- TA Matching Grant Program Manager

Hybrid Position. Early in the work of building an entrepreneurial ecosystem, a community may not have commitment and funding for these three positions. It is possible to incorporate all three jobs into one full-time position with the following allocation of time:

- 20% - Coordinator
- 60% - E-Navigator
- 20% - TA Matching Grant Program Manager

2. Likely Volunteer Positions:

- E-Team Co-Leaders
- E-Team Members
- Documenter
- Working Team Members
- Technology Coordinator

The following provides short descriptions for each of these eight key players:

e2 Community Coordinator. The entrepreneurial community coordinator serves as a bridge between the community, the community host organization, and the community coach.

Entrepreneur Navigator. The E-Navigator is a career-tracked professional position foundational for any entrepreneur ecosystem. Other titles include E-Networker, Entrepreneur Concierge, and Business Assistance Coordinator. The E-Navigator is foundational to a community's Ground Game, which in turn is foundational to a successful entrepreneur-focused game plan.

Program Manager(s). When a community has defined entrepreneurial programs, program management is needed, including engaging and supporting necessary volunteers. Likely early-stage programs include:

- Entrepreneur Cost-Sharing Program
  - o Mentors
  - o Customized Technical Assistance
  - o Cohort Programs
  - o Venture Expenses
- Venture Gap Financing Program(s)
- Entrepreneur to Entrepreneur Events

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[22] These e2 job descriptions are available upon request.

E-Team Co-Leaders. Rooted in e2's field learning, we recommend that the E-Team be chaired by co-leaders. Use of co-leaders provides redundancy and a progression of E-Team chairs over time.

E-Team Member. The core team is the primary leadership team, composed of committed and passionate champions. Core team members serve as an executive leadership team working to ensure that the community's game plan is designed, developed, and executed. Core team members help the community create a vision for this work, engage others, and then lead and guide to ensure coordination and effective execution. Core team members do *not* do all the work themselves.

Documenter. The role of the community documenter is to capture the evolving story of the initiative – key activities undertaken, commitments made by individuals and organizations, and testimonials/stories from entrepreneurs of the impact the community has had on their businesses. In addition, the documenter helps to gather agreed upon metrics – measures of success – that describe the overall impact of the work and that can be shared with stakeholders and the community more broadly. Note: This role can be more than one person.

Working Team Members. Team members are recruited based on their willingness and ability to help achieve the outcomes of these groups (described below). The plan is that these working groups are temporary and ultimately their work finds a permanent home. For example, the work of an E-Outreach working group (identifying and reaching out to entrepreneurs) should become the mission and role of a stakeholder or group of stakeholders coordinated by one organization. The E-Resources working group evolves into the community's Entrepreneur Resource Network (ERN), comprising both private and public entrepreneur resource providers managed by a host organization.

Technology Coordinator. Using a hybrid community engagement approach involving community site visits and technology (e.g., web-based information sharing folders, conference calls, video calls, and webinars) to enable remote meetings and communication is essential. Both the sponsoring organization and the community should have a technology coordinator who can facilitate these remote connections and help to build the capacity and comfort level in the community for accessing resources remotely. While the technology coordinator will help to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of community engagement related to this specific initiative, this experience should help the community feel less isolated from innovation and resources that might be useful in other aspects of the community's development.

Operational Considerations

We strongly recommend that every community first commits to entrepreneur-focused community economic development, and then commits to an ***Entrepreneurial Ground Game***. We offer the following operational considerations as your community moves from commitment to action to impact:

1. Serious Commitment to Entrepreneur-Focused Community Economic Development
2. Robust Commitment to the Entrepreneurial Ground Game
3. Create a Ground Game Working Team
4. Hire an E-Navigator
5. Complete Entrepreneurial Talent Mapping and Targeting

6. Design and Implement Entrepreneur Outreach
7. Begin Networking Entrepreneurs to Relevant Resources
8. Learn from Working with Entrepreneurs to Identify Ecosystem Building Priorities
9. Grow Entrepreneurial Clients, Generate Deal Flow, and Create a Portfolio System
10. Evolve Your Resource Network

Next, let's explore in greater detail each of these actions in our 10-point action plan:

Step 1 - Serious Commitment to Entrepreneur-Focused Community Economic Development. The starting point is a serious commitment to entrepreneur-focused community economic development by your community, its development stakeholders, and a leadership team. Commitments stated become real when smart goals are set, investments are made, and substantial execution is undertaken.

Step 2 - Robust Commitment to the Entrepreneurial Ground Game. The second most important community commitment is to an entrepreneurial ground game as the heart of your community's entrepreneurial game plan. Pro-actively engaging smartly with your area's entrepreneurs is the bedrock of any high-performing and impactful entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Step 3 - Create a Ground Game Working Team. This ground game activity is so important we recommend that your community's E-Team create a dedicated Ground Game Working Team to advise and support this activity.

Step 4 - Hire an E-Navigator. While the Ground Game can be undertaken with just volunteers, sustaining a highly effective effort is challenging without dedicated, professional trained, and career tracked staff. The E-Navigator is the number one hire we recommend for an early-stage entrepreneurship initiative.

Step 5 - Complete Entrepreneurial Talent Mapping and Targeting. Using e2 tools, conduct entrepreneurial talent mapping and targeting twice annually for smaller and slower changing communities and quarterly for larger and more dynamic communities. Use of these tools and processes by the Ground Game Team and Resource Network(s) creates more efficient and effective entrepreneurial outreach.

Step 6 - Design and Implement Entrepreneur Outreach. Your community has numerous tactical options for undertaking entrepreneur outreach. But in Step 6 your need to explore the options and craft your own entrepreneur outreach game plan, and then begin to execute it religiously.

Step 7 - Begin Networking Entrepreneurs to Relevant Resources. There is no point in doing entrepreneurial outreach unless you are prepared to network entrepreneurs to relevant resources. Remember Sirolli's counsel (inset below). Paring your outreach with standing up your resource network is core to generating deal flow and impacts.

Step 8 - Learn from Working with Entrepreneurs to Identify Ecosystem Building Priorities. We advocate "demand driven" entrepreneurial ecosystem building. Focus on those repeating areas of needs and wants based on the entrepreneurs you are working with. Remember most of their immediate needs

and wants can be met with area business services, mentors, and venture-to-venture peer counseling events.

Step 9 - Grow Entrepreneurial Clients, Generate Deal Flow, and Create a Portfolio System. Over time your engagement with targeted entrepreneurs will create clients, stimulate deal flow, and require an information management system (IMS). At e2 we have a basic resource you can use to not only manage your clients, but empower your E-Navigator and Ground Game Team to prioritize outreach and engagement efforts using our simple scoring system. Remember, there are both commercial and public advanced IM systems available for larger communities.

Ernesto Sirolli's Advice

Ernest Sirolli and his Enterprise Facilitation ground game provides some important advice for all communities in their entrepreneurial ground games. Sirolli counsels that venture success rests with their entrepreneurs and we are here to provide meaningful help. It is not our responsibility to find solutions for every need and want of the entrepreneurs we are working with. He continues that we should strive to bring value in our assistance where we can, learn where we have gaps, and use this to both advance the entrepreneur and the development of our entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Step 10 - Evolve Your Resource Network. Be intentional and collaborate regularly with those in your community developing your resource network. Your work with entrepreneurs provides high quality and grounded market intelligence that can inform where you invest into your ecosystem.

Remember the Ecosystem Basic Transaction

Within the ***Development Framework and Process***, the ***basic transaction*** is core to this decades-long and community-demonstrated entrepreneurship development game plan. The basic transaction is both simple and powerful. Within the transaction, a community reaches out to targeted area entrepreneurs and listens to them learning about their strategic and tactical needs and wants. Then the community reaches into its resources to network and connect entrepreneurs to the right resource, at the right time and at the right price. Increasing basic transactions translates into more entrepreneurial deal flow and desired community economic development impacts (e.g., investment, more ventures, new markets, more jobs, better jobs, expanded local tax bases, etc.).

Repeat Forever. Community economic development is a 24-7-365 forever community commitment. The ground game has the same reality. More robust and sustained Ground Games generate more development opportunities empowering more deal flow and development impacts. This process is not a "one and done" activity.

Our next to last stop is the all-important considerations related to **Professionally Supported and Career Tracked E-Navigators**.

During the glory days[23] of rural economic development, large scale projects[24] and business attraction was king. During these years, community-funded economic developers were often among the highest paid professionals in rural communities and spent decades working for the same development organization. For the past 30-years business attraction opportunities and economic developer jobs have eroded. Compensation has declined and turnover rates accelerated.

Professionally Supported and Career Tracked E-Navigators

Malcolm Gladwell's 2008 book *Outliers*[25] makes the case that for a person to become proficient at something requires 10,000 hours of practice. While the science and math of this proposition can and has been challenged, there is truth in this concept. For community economic developers the formula for career and community impact success includes three elements:

1. A clear and reasonable job to do with constructive oversight and guidance.
2. Strong professional support and development.
3. Time on the job learning the art and science of doing it well.

Turnover among community economic development staff in rural America is epidemic. High turnover undermines the ability of rural communities to undertake necessary and desired development. We strongly recommend that any entrepreneur-focused staffing be supported with a commitment to professional development including:

1. Competitive Compensation
2. Performance-Based Retention Incentives
3. Career-Tracking
4. Professional Training and Support

Let's explore each of these E-Navigator success builders:

Competitive Compensation. Above average compensation given wage rates in a rural region are essential. Talented persons may start in the E-Navigator job but with success they are recruited to other community jobs offering better pay and benefits. Providing competitive pay with strong benefits ensures better first hires and a stronger starting position for retention.

Performance-Based Retention Incentives. In rural America's economic development glory days, local economic developers focusing on business attraction and larger scale development projects often enjoyed performance-based retention incentives. Not only were these economic developers enjoying great base pay and benefits, but when they realized job success (e.g., more business attraction and

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[23] The "Glory Days" of economic development began with World War II and followed into the 1970s with the relocation of industry and businesses from the coasts and major cities into rural America.
[24] Rural large-scale projects include dams and reservoirs, parks, and other public recreational lands and infrastructure projects including railroads, highways, telecommunications, pipelines, and navigable waterways.
[25] Malcolm Gladwell. *Outliers: The Story of Success*. 2008.

retention, and development of larger projects) they received performance bonuses. Great base compensation plus performance bonuses resulted in total compensation that ranked them among rural communities' highest paid individuals. Given the job of E-Navigators, performance metrics can be established to re-created performance-based bonuses incenting future performance and enhancing retention.

Career-Tracking. Career tracking is a well-established worker retention and development strategy. Providing clear performance goals, coupled with strong support, a community can establish a schedule for enhanced base pay and performance bonuses. Adopting career tracking best practices is foundational to growing high-performing E-Navigators and retaining them longer.

Professional Training and Support.[26] There is compelling evidence that high-performing staff, including E-Navigators, benefit greatly from a smart onboarding process and ongoing professional development and support. E-Navigator professional development benchmarks include:

1. Onboarding orientation and counseling – First 30 days of hiring
2. Resource networking training and mentoring – First 90 days of hiring
3. Financial packaging training and mentoring – Within the first year of employment
4. Entrepreneur coaching training and mentoring – Within the second year of employment
5. IEDC Entrepreneurship Certification[27] – Within three years of employment

Time to wrap up and move to **Conclusion – Make the Commitment and Invest**.

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[26] e2 offers E-Navigator hiring, onboarding, training, and peer group support services. Contact Don Macke at don@e2mail.org for more information.
[27] IEDC now offers professional certification course in entrepreneur-focused development. More are coming in 2023. https://www.iedconline.org/.

Robert Stowell is a legacy leader in Ord, Nebraska.[28] Ord and its Valley County Region has realized Level 5 rural community performance. It has transformed its economy from just two economic sectors to eight. When Bob is asked to share his counsel with other rural communities he provides three pieces of wisdom:

1. Grow empowering community leaders
2. Be willing to invest in community economic development
3. Double down on entrepreneur-led economic development

Conclusion – Make the Commitment and Invest

One of my home towns is Ogallala, Nebraska (2021 population of 4,823). Ogallala is located in Keith County (2021 population of 8,279) and is the lead community as part of Nebraska's E3 Initiative[29]. Keith County E3 is making the case to its economic development stakeholders and funders for a full-time and dedicated E-Navigator. The following analysis was shared placing the cost of an E-Navigator in context to the size of Keith County's economy:

If Keith County were a corporation
A conservative estimate of Keith County's economy suggests that your economic value is between $750 million and $1 billion! If Keith County as a community were a corporation, this would be a significant corporation. A billion-dollar corporation would invest at least between five to 10 percent of its gross revenues or $50 to $100 million into research, development, and marketing. Does Keith County invest anywhere close to $50 to $100 million annually into its development? Probably not. Central to making the case for increased ecosystem development and operation staffing is the case for more robust investment into community economic development.

Corporations that fail to invest in their own development lose competitiveness over time and often fail. The same is true for communities. Community economic development in the United States is a local responsibility and requires a 24-7-365 forever commitment. A community's willingness to invest smartly in community economic development programs and staffing is essential. Possibly one of the most important community economic development staffing investments is an E-Navigator.

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[28] https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/library/theme-papers/subjects/ord-nebraska.html
[29] e2 has both a story and podcast focusing on Energizing Entrepreneurial Ecosystems Initiative (E3).