



eCommunities

Building Community Entrepreneurship Ecosystems

Public Value

The Nebraska Entrepreneurial Communities "eCommunities" program is supported by a U.S. Economic Development Administration grant and has proven transformative for 20 communities in 12 Nebraska counties, over half facing prolonged rural population declines. This program addresses economic challenges by fostering a proactive, community-led approach to entrepreneurship. Through strategic conversations, goal-setting, and action plans, the initiative has seen diverse outcomes tailored to each community's needs.

The Situation

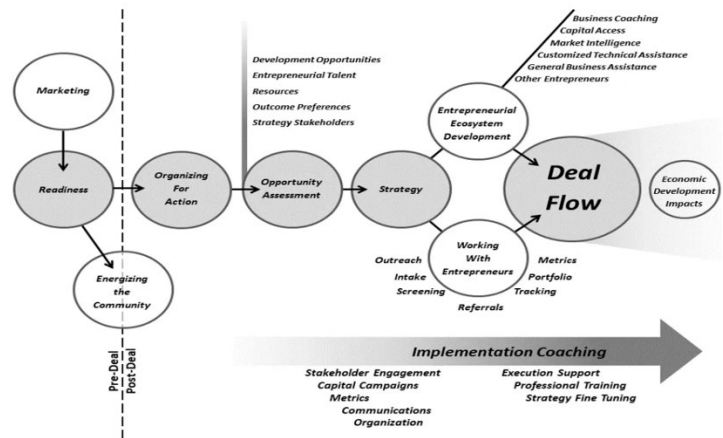
The program delivers crucial development support to business owners and their communities. Beyond adding essential jobs post-pandemic, engaged businesses empower owners and local economic leaders, enhancing their capacity to explore new markets for long-term financial stability. Active and regular listening sessions with the local business community resulted in several documented barriers to development including a need to help owners sell their companies. Community groups in Ord and Columbus arranged for a University NBDC Consultant to deliver a "steps to successful business transition" program.

Extension Response

RPN Educators guide local eCommunities committee to demystify the startup process with local partners by developing a wonderful system of supports for current and future business owners known as Business Resource "Roadmaps". In parallel, three entrepreneurship coaches work directly with local business leaders who refer clients needing assistance. The eCommunities program follows an outline aimed at getting people to start thinking about what success looks like in their towns. It begins with conversations among community-selected steering committee members who focus on identifying the strengths and weaknesses of their entrepreneurial climates.

Impacts

Revenues of 129 eCommunities-supported businesses increased by \$2,447,000 so far. Revenues of 33 eCommunities-supported businesses rose by \$638,000 from April to September 2023. These businesses have collectively added 69 full-time and 59 part-time employees since 2021, with 23 full-time and 13 part-time hires from April to September 2023.



Sandhills eCoach stated, "not being employed at the local economic development office has allowed more direct and accountable conversations with entrepreneurs since we're somewhat removed from the inherent politics of that organization".

Primary Contact

Shawn Kaskie - Extension Educator
Rural Prosperity Nebraska
(308) 872-6831; shawn.kaskie@unl.edu

Collaborators

U.S. Economic Development Administration
UNL Extension Educators - Jason Tuller & Sandra Barrera; UNL eCoaches - Caleb Pollard & Doris Lux

Extension Big 3 Alignment

- Strengthen Nebraska Agriculture & Food Systems
- Inspire Nebraskans & Their Communities
- Enhance The Health & Wellbeing of All Nebraskans

