

The Alisha Juelfs Story – eNaviagor *Sidney Entrepreneurship Stories*

By David Iaquinta, Ph.D. – February 14, 2024

About the Sidney Story...



For most Americans, Sidney is just one more rural community among thousands. Some may know of Sidney as the once home of **Cabela's Outfitters**. But Sidney is a community worth a deeper look as it reinvests itself one more time by focusing on and investing in entrepreneurial development. This story is part of a larger collection of Sidney stories and analysis. In these stories lessons are to be learned!

Sidney Story Collection...

Web Link

1. Sidney Story Collection by Don Macke
2. Sidney Case Study Executive Summary by Don Macke
3. Sidney, Nebraska – Entrepreneurial Community Case Study by Don Macke
4. Cheyenne County and Sidney Development Opportunity Profiles by e2 and Don Macke
5. E3 Assessment by the Sidney E3 team by David Iaquinta

Sidney Landing Page

Background Papers

6. What is a Community Champion? by David Iaquinta
7. The Sarah Sinnett Story – Sidney Champion and E2 Lead by David Iaquinta
8. The Cory Keen Story – E3 Champion by David Iaquinta
9. The Paula Abbot and Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center Story by David Iaquinta
10. The Melissa Norgard Story – Corporate Professional, Economic Development Director, Entrepreneur, and Mother by David Iaquinta
11. Stop the Swap Story by David Iaquinta
12. The eNavigator by David Iaquinta
13. The Alisha Juelfs Story – Navigator by David Iaquinta
14. The Amber Fields Entrepreneur Story with Jennifer Powell by David Iaquinta
15. Jillana Saunder... Entrepreneur – Savor and Grace – Sidney, Nebraska by Don Macke

Stories

16. *Community Champions...* <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/podcast/entrepreneur-ecosystem-champions-with-pam-abbot-and-sarah-sinnett.html>
17. *Entrepreneur Navigators...* <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/podcast/entrepreneur-navigators-with-alisha-juelfs-and-rachael-barry.html>
18. *About E3...* <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/podcast/exploring-e3-in-nebraska.html>

Podcasts

Thanks David...



At e2 we want to acknowledge the remarkable work of Dr. David Laquinta in conducting interviews, site visits, and curating many of these stories. Our **Sidney Story** could not be possible without Dr. Laquinta's remarkable work. Dr. Laquinta is a 50-year veteran college and university professor recently retired from Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln, Nebraska. He is an international expert in rural community economic development.

Listen to David's e2 **Pathways to Rural Prosperity** podcast from April 2022 focusing on "Community Resilience":

<https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/podcast/episode-33.html>.

SMIF Acknowledgement...



e2 would like to recognize support from the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation in hosting e2 and our **Sidney Story**. SMIF is a leader in community-centered entrepreneurship through its REV Initiative.

For more information:

<https://smifoundation.org/programs/economic-development-2/>

Why Stories Matter...

For nearly 50 years e2 has been gathering and curating stories about communities across rural North America. These stories serve to inspire and inform other communities as to what is possible with entrepreneur focused community economic development. Stories matter in that they are relatable to community builders across the continent. Sidney's stories are compelling and illustrate renewal after a massive socio-economic crisis. For more e2 stories check out...

<https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/library/community-regional-case-studies/>

Questions and Additional Information

Don Macke – e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

Hosted by the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation

Cell 402.770.4987 - don@e2mail.org - www.energizingentrepreneurs.org

The Alisha Juelfs Story – eNaviagor

By David Iaquinta, Ph.D.



*“Getting You the Right Resource
at the Right Time.”
“Do the Work with Them, Not for Them”*

Alisha Juelfs (AJ) – Synopsis

A resident of nearby Potter, AJ came onboard E3 in spring 2023 as Navigator for Sidney and surrounding small communities in Cheyenne County. Brokered by the E3 team with financial support from the Sidney Donor Advised Fund, resource support from WNCC, and advising by e2 and NCF, the Navigator position is a milestone in formalizing the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Sidney. AJ rapidly acclimated to the new role and has quickly expanded her contacts with entrepreneurs. Her chief challenge now is the rapidly growing number of demands that have started to impinge on her ability to conduct direct contacts with entrepreneurs. In this regard we discussed the need to harness the volunteer capacities of E3 team members to carry out certain dedicated tasks such as preparing leaflets or similar “back office” types of needs for which they have the necessary skills. This was discussed at length at the local E3 meeting in October and the team is working on creating an inventory of needs/skills matches. The importance of this goes beyond just getting the work done. It is essential that the E3 team be full members in the Navigator’s work since this is the essence of the ecosystem approach and central to avoiding Navigator burnout.

Alisha’s Origin Story

Alisha weaves her personal, work and family histories to explain how she has come to the role of navigator and why she is the right person to take on the challenge...

At the core of any role or position I’ve held has been customer service. My lengthy work history is reflective of my mantra, “How do you know if you like something if you haven’t tried it yet?” I’ve dabbled in many industries and enjoy community involvement and volunteer opportunities. All of which have helped me build character and a passion for people. As soon as I was of working age, I worked in various roles in a grocery store, restaurants, country club, and served as a merchandizing director at baseball tournaments. After college I moved to the front range and spent five years in retail management before having my first kid. Then I transitioned into being an agency manager for a non-medical homecare company. I worked for clients as well. When I moved back to my hometown of Potter Nebraska – which is a village – I worked at Cabela’s in the merchandizing department and later transitioned into learning and development for the merchandizing department. That included onboarding and training for new systems and program rollouts. I was really excited about that role.

When the company sold, I partnered to open and co-operate a power sports and camper dealership. Another pivot came with my second child. I began working for a water service and drilling company as their office manager. I had the opportunity to be at home with my kids part time and I took it. I was

then available to help friends who opened their tap house in Potter. I served as their manager over staff and inventory. It was a really fun and exciting opportunity, and they are doing really well not quite two years in.

I told myself I wouldn't go back to work full time until I found something that really fit me. The role for the entrepreneurial navigator posted and, wow, it just felt like this description was written for me. I am so passionate about people and helping them succeed that this opportunity allows me to do that exactly, on a large scale and get paid. I am just super thrilled to be a part of it. I've always tried to help any company I worked for, level up ... to be their biggest cheerleader. Now I have the privilege to do that for all of Cheyenne County Nebraska.

Snapshots: Alisha's Thoughts on Her Support Team

Referring to Sarah Sinnett... *"There's a lot of fire in that one."*

Speaking about Caleb Pollard, AJ says...

I am not in anywhere near the same category as Caleb. He has spent twenty years in economic development, and I look up to him, and I quote him often. I have had a few discussions with him. He checks in on me in kind of a mentor role. I super appreciate that because he's just honest and passionate.

Alisha characterizes her E-navigator team this way...

I do have a smaller navigator team and that is with Melissa, Cory, Paula and Sarah, my trusted advisors, the perfect team. They're phenomenal. They're so supportive. We decided, "let's start taking this back to the committee."

Talking about her E3 coaches, Alisha says...

Caleb, Don and Tara are also such a great network. I just feel so blessed to have this network because you talk to people that get it. And that's super motivating and inspiring because I don't feel alone anymore either.

Referencing the many other networks she has joined as a navigator, she says...

We're a movement. I'm more comfortable with that word ... because we always lead by passion. We're all moving in the same direction. We all see the potential of communities. We're always very positive thinkers, creative problem solvers.

Navigator Role – Aspect 1: Need

Alisha talks about where she is today and why she is starting to feel a bit overwhelmed and about the two aspects of her experience as a navigator. The first is addressing the need that is *"definitely present"*

in the community. In this context Alisha identifies the pace of change, the level of need, the amount of research, and the time needed to build relationships as factors competing for her time and attention...

I've been in the role six months and the first couple of months were just a huge learning curve. I'm continuing to learn so much. It's still taking time to get traction on who I am, what E3 is, and what we provide. We haven't done a full marketing campaign and I'm just not ready for that. ... I'm the only employee, so of course I feel short-staffed right now. [The job] ... did pick up momentum and things are going at a much higher rate than I was ready for. I don't know how you get ready for that because of the learning curve.

At the base of all this, there definitely is a need. I definitely see the need for these communities. There're two sides of it. They just don't know what's out there. They don't have time. They don't know how to access it. It almost feels like every interaction I have is my first because the needs of those businesses are so different, case by case. There is no one-size-fits-all. There are so many factors that go into getting them the right resource. Building the relationship is the priority. Both Don ... and Caleb talk about that. "They have to trust you. Otherwise, they're not going to invest in what you're saying." And I'm not going to invest in what I'm saying unless I'm confident in it. There's that research piece. There's a lot of research that's going into every single case right now. It's exciting, but it's also very overwhelming because it just doesn't pop out naturally to me.

Alisha sees that things are different for economic development than for a navigator and she sees that while time is a scarce resource for both entrepreneurs and her, for entrepreneurs it is also an indicator of their willingness to do the necessary work...

Whereas ... Caleb and economic development individuals that have been in this circuit for so long, they know what programs they need to send ...[entrepreneurs]... to right away. I'm getting that way with certain programs in Nebraska. I get really confident saying, "There's a business plan resource; have you checked this out?" Or "There's some grants available through these guys... gap financing through NEF [Nebraska Enterprise Fund]." Those are starting to flow pretty easy, like local incentives. But when it comes down to industry type ownership, like legal ownership, as to how they can tie into those resources, it's just that every single client is different. And that's been really eye opening. In some it's like, "Oh yeah, this is a need." For example, business plans are required for local incentives; they're required for grants, banking, and a lot of different things. It's just a smart thing to do, but a lot of people don't have one. ... I hear it over and over and over again, "Well, I don't have time. I don't know how to do that." Or "I went through NBDC, and it was overwhelming." Or, whatever. There's a lot of excuses in my opinion, the biggest one being time.

The need is real and providing direct services to and building relationships with entrepreneurs is at the center of Alisha's navigator response strategy...

I'm working with the Chamber to set up a business planning workshop and create a model that we can do at least once a quarter; that's my goal. [This has been held now with some 22 participants.] The advantage of where I'm sitting is I'm sitting at WNCC so I can use their partnership with that. I can reach out to the Chamber and have them come to the I&E Center [Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center] at WNCC. That collaboration is crucial for me to be able to do my job. I use my resource partners as often as anything I do on the internet. They are my go-to search engines. That's one big take away right now,

is just that absolute need. There's definitely a need without even really advertising. We post a little bit. We spoke at the City Council, but it's a lot of word of mouth. Obviously, that doesn't come easily without building a relationship first. So, that's really exciting to see that I'm getting referrals based on experience because you don't always get to hear the positive part of it... or the negative for that matter.

Navigator Role – Aspect 2: Networking

What about Alisha's own development? The other aspect of her experience as a navigator is developing her network of support. She speaks directly to that...

The other side of ... [my experience] ... is the network. What I was saying with Caleb, and Sarah, and Cory, and E3. Not just ... [the network itself] ..., but the passion that people have for communities is so inspiring. I've gotten into some network groups in western Nebraska that have been game changing for me because I find out about grants before they're available. You can say, "Hey, I have a business that's doing this, what would you suggest." It has opened the door for me to meet even more people. It didn't make sense back in March and April and May when I was new.

Now six months in, I crave those meetings because I learn so much from them and I have a contact. I actually have good questions now. Before, I always said to everybody, "Sarah gave me this big list of people I need to reach out to, but I don't have questions yet. I want to be conscious of their time too." Now I'm finally at the point of, "Hey ... [coach] ... now I have one for you." It has just taken me a while to get to that point. That's extremely encouraging because I know I'm backed by a whole team of people when I raise my flag and need help. That's been very eye-opening. Even with being overwhelmed, I'm still very motivated.

Caleb, Don and Tara are also such a great network. I just feel so blessed to have this network because you talk to people that get it. And that's super motivating and inspiring because I don't feel alone anymore either. I know I can always reach out to any of those individuals for a quick conversation and they can talk me down a little bit and they can talk me through it.

Alisha articulates how networking and training have combined to enhance both her growth and her self-awareness...

Both Don and Caleb talked about "soft landings." I've had a few of those. It's good we can be in a spot where we can provide the slow let down of, "No, I don't think that's going to work." A lot of the terms I have learned through Don's training, through conversations with Tara and Caleb, all the E3 stuff that I've been involved in, and all the networking things I've gone to have been very term heavy. I wrote those things down. I ate them up, and now I'm finally seeing it myself. It's starting to really click like, "this is what they were referring to." Now I can go back to my homework and dig out those documents from Don and reread it. Now I know how to approach it and get some different types of responses or approaches to handle it.

AJ identifies the networking relationships as the heart of both her inspiration and continuing motivation despite feelings of being overwhelmed by the navigator role...

Now I get to meet podcasters and it opens the door to all these outlets that people don't know about because they don't have time to go look for it. I'm in a position ... [where my work will help an entrepreneur] ... connect to somebody. That's the goal, the awareness that they're not alone. There are other people in Nebraska and other states that are in the same situation that you are. "Read this article. Let's make a connection." That's the cool stuff that's slowly starting to happen. It's just as expected, it's taken months to get there. I just hit the ground running and finally now after six months I'm starting to see some of those interactions producing a result.

AJ agreed that when a client responds with "I don't have time," they may mean more than just that. On the surface when a client says, "I don't have time to go do the research," it is true, but it leaves deeper emotions unspoken. It provides a safe cover for fear, anxiety, disinclination, and even laziness at times, regarding doing the necessary work. Helping clients past their fear of acting may be the bigger challenge for the navigator. When we suggested the analogy to a health club membership, Alisha said...

... just one small movement and you feel better than the day before. For example, GROW Nebraska has been talking about a new fund since March 1. They won't publicly announce it ... until January 1. The advantage of knowing a representative is that now we're in the loop once the application process is open. So, anybody that I have met with that I think is eligible, I contacted them first. There's going to be a ton of people that are going to be eligible, I hope, but we're prescreening for the representative to help streamline the process. I met with the Chamber [Toshia] and the Tourism Director [Kendra] and told Kendra who I contacted. She had a list in mind that I haven't had any interaction with, and we split up the responsibility. I reached out to the ones that I feel are true clients, and she reached out to the ones that are her members. [Together] ... we came up with a list of, "these are neither clients nor members, but we think they are eligible, and I will reach out to them." That's been super exciting because right now my priority is helping those businesses get their application in ... and it requires a business plan, so ...[now] ... I've been working on lots of business plan writing.

Prioritizing: Linking Resources and Servicing Clients

Here AJ is speaking about prioritization in matching clients to resources. What about prioritizing clients after referrals are made? Having steered a client to a resource or assigned them a task, does the client follow through with the task or not? Does AJ prioritize spending time with the clients that have followed through, yet maintain a relationship with those that haven't, cycling back at a lower priority?

The response I'm getting from people ... [as to whether] ... or not they are taking the time to do the work is very split. [For some] ... they want this help and I send it to them, and then its crickets. ... I was getting frustrated that I was putting in this work and wasn't getting anything back. One of the coaches said, "Do the work with them, not for them." It was very clear that you gave them homework, and until they hit this, this, and this ... [there is no more advising]. "You gave them a task. If they don't get that done, you can't move on to the next step." For example, I met with the GROW Nebraska ... [representative and] ... with each of those clients. They all heard her say what the benefit was and that they needed a business plan, and they all lit up. So now I am setting benchmarks. Some of them don't need my help at all. They just need reminders; they just need that cheerleader. [For others] ... I am setting times to come to campus, "Block two hours. I'm here if you need me but force yourself to work on it." That's been really exciting ... because who's not motivated by money. But it is definitely a different kind of

motivation. I also think they just get such tunnel vision into day-to-day operation, that I think it's hard to forethink, you know marketing and PR. A lot of us didn't go to school for that. It doesn't come naturally to everybody, but we know that without it you can only do so much in my opinion.

That's been interesting to me. Just the conversation. It may not be a website. It may not be a person that I'm connecting them to. I had a session where we sat for an hour and all we did was just talk about event ideas and just troubleshoot off of them, "Potter did this..." And then I can bring in some other communities, try and get those outside Cheyenne County communities involved too. There are five communities in our county and Sidney is the majority of what I do, but I do have clients in all the other communities too. It's just one versus fifteen. That's been exciting to be trusted in that way. They just need to talk out something to an audience that gets it. Then I can go and find a like business in Nebraska, Colorado or wherever and say, "check out this website. Take a look at their events. Let's do this." Some will come in and they really want help. Time is a real issue. That is a real issue. I'll come back and say, "What can I do to assist with that?" Or "I have given you the options. Once you decide how you want to move forward, will you please let me know." Then I follow up. Depending on what it is, "Can I follow up in two weeks? Can I follow up in four weeks?"

I talked with somebody today and she's responsible for their community event. Then she has a wedding, and she says, "I can't do this right now." So, I said "How about we touch base in October?" She's eligible for the grant, but she just does not have time to do a business plan right now. So even just setting up a plan and not a full-on business coach, but just trying to make sure they don't forget me as a business resource when they are ready.

Today Alisha is able to articulate for herself just what a navigator is and does and why the role is important to entrepreneurs and the community...

Up front [the navigator role] is a lot of work since it is a lot of firsts. Once I go through that process, it's going to become more natural and more routine. I'm very honest, "you know, I don't know, but I'm going to look into it and let you know what I find out." It's a lot on me, my note keeping and my systems that my mentors have given me. Being diligent about taking notes with clients because it might take four months for something to come up ... [is time consuming], but once it does, I have a whole list of people that applies to. ... Commercial space is a big one right now. People want to expand, or people are ready to ... [move their business] ... out of their home and into a store front. So, I have a whole list of resources that have openings for space. It might be their neighbor or... you know nothing's posted. Coming back to that network piece, how much I use people to help fill resource gaps when I don't know where to turn.

*Along the lines of the term Navigator and how I explain it to people, especially if they have no idea what E3 is or what a navigator means, I say..., "I am a Navigator. I point in the right direction. A navigator is a compass." I stole SourceLink Nebraska's phrase **getting you the right resource at the right time**. "It is going to change as you go through your business life cycle. When it does, you can come back for the next thing."*

Alisha has examples to illustrate the balancing act between being a go-getter and taking time to do the necessary spade work for success. Alisha's role is to know when to get out of the way and when to encourage someone to tap the brakes a bit...

That's been cool because this gal in town that was a business coach [Jill Sauder], now she's running her own business. That's always been her dream. She did the business plan all by herself. She is an E3 supporter. She is allowing me to use her business plan as an example for people that come in in person. She is very supportive of other businesses as well. She didn't necessarily need our help, but she learned about resources because of E3. Now that she is in an expansion stage, she reached out to me. I was like, "Yes!" This is someone that is a go-getter. We use her as an example in all our conversations because she has shown true grit and passion about what she is doing and has been very strategic in her phases. That's why we use her business plan as an example because it is this beautifully written document. She did her market research. She took the time to make sure she was doing exactly what she wanted to do while working a full-time job and launching a new business. I think if you're passionate about something, "let's get there." BUT "pump the brakes a little bit. Take a step back. Let's think through all this." What about when things don't work out? There are still multiple benefits. Well done, the process is always a win, maybe just not the way Alisha envisioned at the start.

One of my first clients did use the Personal Action Plan through SourceLink Nebraska, which gave a list of resources, trainings, and checklists. She did all the things. She ate it up. As she did the business plan through NBDC, she figured out all the financial obligations that were going with the business – and it was just something she saw as being a need for the community as a mom, and she wanted to provide it for other kids in the community. As we went through ... [it proved to be] ... too much of a financial burden, and she didn't move forward.

As sad as it was for me as a mom because I wanted that business to work too, Sarah said, "This is a win. We prevented somebody from losing their house or whatever because they did all the steps to make sure it was the right thing." Now I have all the research she did. If someone were to come in and say, "I want to do this type of business," I have permission to give it to them. So, it's still a beautiful ending even though that is not what we intended when we started. Again, just having someone that is neutral and who will talk through things and make sure that you are looking at every aspect of a business before you dive into it.

Since this client was a mom and spending a lot of time at the playground, we (E3) were getting more exposure ... because she talked about it while she was going through the process.

No Wrong Door – A motto for E3 Sidney

Throughout our interviews E3 team members kept using the phrase... "No wrong door." We encouraged Alisha and the team to adopt it as the E3 team motto. "You should seize it, own it, and put it right out there. No Wrong Door should be wedded to E3 Sidney." Alisha's response was enthusiastic.

*I love that you say that because I say that at every E3 meeting we have. "No wrong door. No wrong door." I don't care where an individual goes, whether it's a county office, a city office, the Chamber office, Tourism, your neighbor's back yard..." **No Wrong Door.**" The more informed we can get people to know who we are and how we can help them, everybody wins. ... It will spread on its own, it's organic. ... [Big smile]. I love that because I learned that off of one of Don's trainings, the no wrong door concept. That's why I steal one liners from Don and ... SourceLink Nebraska, because they click, and they make sense. I try to leave the group with those little one liners that really help.*

*I always say the word “movement” because I have a hard time saying, “we’re a program or an organization.” No, **we’re a movement.** ... I’m more comfortable with that word ... because we always lead by passion, I think that’s why I feel it’s a movement. All these networks that I’m learning about, we’re all moving in the same direction. We all see the potential of communities. We’re always very positive thinkers, creative problem solvers. I love visiting other communities and seeing co-sharing spaces because then I can come back and say, “Have you thought of this? You can afford it.” I give them examples; shoot them a site they can look up and explore. Now when I travel, I feel confident enough to ask business owners questions about their spaces and tell them who I am and where I’m from, and “Would you be comfortable if I shared your information with someone in Cheyenne County.”*

I think “no wrong door” should be expanded beyond our community because Nebraska wants to see Nebraska succeed. For those of us that are so determined to stay where we are, there’s people like that in other communities that have the same drive and passion. They would love the opportunity to connect with someone who just wants to talk. I’m looking for those people because it’s so fun to talk to likeminded people.

Peer Learning, Resources, and Investment in Herself

At its core E3 was designed as a peer-learning model. We reminded Alisha that over time she needs to stay fresh and not lapse into an “*I know everything that’s out there*” view. She needs to keep looking on the horizon for resources and information and building new relationships. Equally important is her need to prevent becoming isolated from her team. It is not her job to do it all. For many reasons, the E3 team must stay active partners in the ongoing process for things to work well. Finally, she needs to develop and maintain active relationships with other navigators and resources as conversation partners. These are things Alisha recognizes as evidenced here...

Two things with Don’s model: you have the community and then the leadership team. My E-navigator team is Sarah, Cory, Melissa Norgard, and Paula Abbott here at the college. With that team I can go over client profiles, and I can finally talk it out loud, but they are not the one responding to the client ... and there are hard conversations. Sometimes you just need someone that can understand the excitement as much as the letdown. “Well, how do you handle these clients?” I’ve definitely had a couple where I’m like, “This is new, and I need to be coached on this. Things are not going right.” [Ord navigator] ... Caleb Pollard has said, “You will have to fire a client now and again. It just happens. It’s their accountability. You are a free resource and can’t be taken advantage of. It will happen.” And guess what, it has happened already. People need help and sometimes they just don’t understand, “I can’t just give you the financial resources that you need. And I can’t give this miracle answer, or you would have found it already.” That’s been an eye-opening thing. I need to do better.

I would say that is a challenge for me, that I am investing in myself as much as I am investing in everybody else. It was set up originally for me to have consistent meetings with Don and Tara. Caleb said I could reach out at any time. Really, Don and Tara with E3 were supposed to be more of a consistent cadence, and I got so busy we fell out of that. But I have gotten into a cadence with some resource partners that have helped me stay on track. SourceLink Nebraska is a great example. Great website, but if you ever try to plug anything in there for western Nebraska, the results are not there. Because of that, I’m able to give them feedback and they can ... fix their website. Otherwise, they would

have had no idea. That's been really good, making connections like that where I'm really comfortable going to them.

Or Jamie Bright (Extension Educator with Rural Prosperity Nebraska), "who would you guys send me to first?" They navigate me before I can navigate my client. So, I need to do better about investing in my own development as much as I'm investing in everybody else's business development. Coming up on my six months' mark that was something I had written down for my opportunities for my own personal development. I'm so excited about helping other people, but if I'm not constantly learning and being coached myself, I'm not going to improve on either side of that relationship.

Alisha clearly recognizes that performance reviews, goal setting and concern for her own development are central to being effective in her role as navigator. As she put it, *"You can't fill from an empty cup."* In other interviews, Sarah Sinnett raised the issue of performance reviews as an obligation for the E3 team as they developed their relationship with the E-Navigator position. They were not supposed to be a rubber-stamp board or a micro-managing task master. They were supposed to operate in partnership with the navigator and undertake constructive reviews as an ongoing responsibility. Alisha well understands this...

Both Sarah and I worked at Cabela's, so we both have been in corporate settings. Even before Cabela's I worked in retail where I had to do performance reviews with my HR background. That was something I talked to [Sarah] about, "I need that. In order for me to take this role, I require performance reviews of myself because I don't take this position lightly." I've learned more about these individuals by being in this role. Even though Cheyenne County looks like this tight knit place, really communities have their own [circles]. "Why would I have to be a part of Sidney's [circle] when I am already a part of Potter's?" That's been really eye-opening and helpful because now I have that craving to really connect everybody together. I didn't realize that I was really an outsider in all of this.

Structural Issues in Sidney

We asked Alisha her thoughts on two controversial structural issues in Sidney: the restrictive covenants on former Cabela's buildings that restricts their availability to businesses needing space and second the rigid distribution formula for LB480 funds in Sidney that limits its use for gap financing. Alisha starts with her public stance...

I will be honest when it comes to those topics, I have withdrawn. The reason being is that I am a neutral party, and I am not a citizen of Sidney.

That said, Alisha goes on to express a more complex personal view as it affects her navigator role and the people with whom she works...

From my personal perspective, it's extremely unfortunate that those deals were made prior to any of us. It was prior to any of these things we wanted to do. Who would have thought that it was going to be that big of a deal that we couldn't have those types of businesses in those buildings. That's super unfortunate. Because where we live, that is the industry that we appeal to, hunting and outdoors.

The problem of **commercial space** runs deeper than Cabela's buildings, however. As Alisha explains...

Outside of Cabela's owned buildings we still cannot figure out why there are owners that are so proud of their buildings that they're not ready to let them go. I don't know those individuals, whereas Sarah and Cory ... have really really tried to get connected to the right people to have the conversations. They have been doing this so much longer than me. ... Now these buildings have been vacant for so long, they are going to be dilapidated. It is a sad state. ... As creative as we are and all of us believe in creative solutions, when it comes to the buildings there is a miss. That is one huge obstacle, and it is continuing to be an obstacle for us. It is sad because I have people come in ... that have these amazing business ideas. They're willing to take on construction costs, but they can't get the owners to come down on their price in order for it to be even feasible.

I don't know what it is, or what it's going to take. Even ripped awnings. The economic development office has these great incentives, and there is just this huge miss. I don't know what it is... a personality difference? ... people that just don't see potential? I don't know what it's going to take to get some of those people to change their mind, but we have so many businesses ready, just looking for space. If they could just think creatively with all of us for once.

Advice

Alisha wraps up providing advice for new navigators coming into the position.

This is a tough one...

Building relationships is a priority and gaining trust. And trust goes into the confidentiality piece. You have to show that you are someone worth trusting, and you have to hold yourself to the same standard as them. All of that combined into just building a relationship.

I would say always build your networks because that looks different. It's not just ... with resource partners. It's the moms at the playground. It is your neighbor's barbeque. It is the youth counselors and schools. There are so many networks. You have to always stay in the loop with networks. There's always something new. There's always something changing. I would just say, always building your network because that's how you get the resources to the entrepreneurs.