



Commuter-Led Development

*A Likely Entrepreneurial Development Opportunity
Strategy Guide*

By Don Macke with Kimberlee Spillers

November 2021

Our 40 years of rural community economic development work in North America is a rich learning experience. At e2, we have worked in nearly every rural region in the continental United States and many of the Canadian provinces. Our [Development Opportunity Profile](#) analysis has surfaced reoccurring likely entrepreneurial development opportunities universally available to most rural communities.

Strategy Defined

Oxford Languages defines strategy as “*a plan of action or policy designed to achieve a major or overall aim...*” Any strategy is a point-in-time plan for action. Just as startup entrepreneurs are encouraged to develop a venture plan, communities exploring entrepreneurial development should do the same. Your community’s development strategy will change and evolve over time as new opportunities, priorities, and challenges emerge.

About our e2 Strategy Papers. At e2, we have been conducting opportunity analysis for rural communities and regions throughout North America for decades. This field-rooted work has identified and led e2 to create our 10 common and [Likely Entrepreneurial Development Opportunities](#), for many rural communities.

This strategy paper focuses on **commuter-led** development, organized into the following sections:

- e2’s Likely Entrepreneurial Development Opportunities
- Commuter-Led Economic Development Introduced
- Defining Commuters
- Why Is Commuter-Led Development Important?
- Understanding the Commuter Life Cycle:
 - Younger Adult Commuters
 - Older GenXers and Retiring Boomers
- Development Opportunities:
 - New Resident Attraction and Bedroom Community Development
 - Entrepreneurial Talent Attraction and Development
 - Allied Community Economic Development Opportunities
 - Energizing Your Entrepreneurial Talent
- Understanding and Appreciating Regional Communities
- Opportunities for your Rural Community

Remember Regional Development. While regional development is not one of our top 10 likely entrepreneurial development opportunities, we strongly recommend every rural community embrace, with other communities in their region of America, larger-scale regional development. When more communities in a region are thriving, opportunities are created for your community and your entrepreneurs. For more information, check out our paper, ***Regional Development***.¹

Additionally, growing entrepreneurial ecosystems is best done regionally, hopefully with state-level support. We recommend a top-down and bottom-up entrepreneurship strategy as outlined in our paper, ***Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building in Rural America, Four Decades of Learning***.²






¹ Located in our website’s [resource library](#).



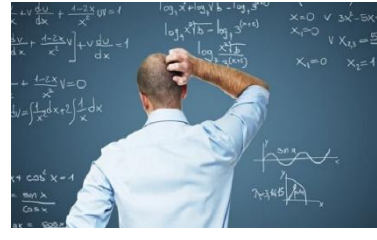


² Ibid.

e2's Likely Entrepreneurial Development Opportunities

Too many rural economies and societies are failing because of their narrow economies rooted in one to two changing economic sectors. Our paper, [Economic Crashes, Mini-Case Studies](#), illustrates the consequences of undiversified economies. Conversely, our story, [Ord, Nebraska, An Entrepreneurial Community](#), illustrates when a community diversifies its economy, it drives transformative change. Our likely entrepreneurial development opportunities can create genuine and robust strategies to grow a more diversified economy.

The following provides brief descriptions of each of the top 10 development opportunities, followed by a link to a relevant strategy paper, either completed and available, or under development.

	<p>Natural Resources. Much of rural America depends upon single natural resource industry economies (e.g., farming, mining, forestry, energy, etc.). While there are limited entrepreneurial development opportunities related to these international market industries, there are opportunities rooted in diversifying within these sectors and increasing sector related spending capture.</p>
	<p>Transportation Corridors. Urban America is connected by transportation corridors that run through rural America. Services are required to support those traveling these corridors, creating entrepreneurial development opportunities.</p>
	<p>Tourism. While the vast majority of Americans live and work in urban America, rural America provides important places to play. For a wide range of rural communities and regions, tourism represents a way to diversify area economies.</p>
	<p>Retirees. When thinking of new residents, keep in mind the tidal wave of retiring Boomers. This group represents a significant likely entrepreneurial development opportunity for most rural communities, from high amenity places to rural villages adjacent to metro centers.</p>
	<p>Commuters. Upward of 50 percent of rural workers live in one community and work in another community. These outbound commuters have embedded entrepreneurial development opportunities in creating bedroom community-related development and entrepreneurial opportunities when they end their commuting.</p>

	<p>Hub Cities. America’s landscape is still defined by a hierarchy of places based on size. In rural America, there are regional and area hub cities and towns that provide critical services like healthcare, shopping, and entertainment to rural areas. These communities are the “downtowns” of vast rural regions to smaller areas.</p>
	<p>Larger Employer Retention and Expansion. Many rural communities are home to large manufacturing plants, fulfillment centers and institutions including hospitals, regional universities, and parks. Ensuring the future of these larger employers is an entrepreneurial opportunity.</p>
	<p>Growth-Oriented Entrepreneurs. Nearly every rural community has growth-oriented entrepreneurs with the motivation and capacity to reach external markets with their products and services. Electronic commerce empowers this kind of entrepreneurship.</p>
	<p>Area Spending Capture. Competition is intense from box stores, franchise, and electronic commerce, but opportunities exist to increase local venture competitiveness and recapture some of these spending leakages. In doing so, rural communities can empower growth-oriented entrepreneurs.</p>
	<p>New Residents. Since the 1900s, the primary migration pattern has been from rural to urban. Today, there are counter (e.g., urban-to-rural) migration trends among 30-year-olds, retiring Boomers and others. These new residents represent a huge opportunity to energize area entrepreneurial talent.</p>

To learn more about these top 10 Likely Entrepreneurial Development Opportunities and our evolving collection of associated strategy papers, please visit our website’s [resource section](#).

When transportation was limited and less safe, we tended to live close to where we worked. In many cases, our work was within walking distance. As the modes of transportation improved with commuter rail, motor vehicles and highways, and even commuter air services (e.g., those operating along both U.S. coasts), living in one community, and working in another has become much more common. Now with remote work, a new dimension to commuter work is evolving rapidly in the United States of America. There are clear rural community and entrepreneurial development opportunities associated with commuters.

For many, if not most rural communities, they are part of larger regional economies and societies. In these regional communities, people live in one community, shop in other communities, and work in another community. Commuters in rural America are often among the top 10 economic drivers, based on household earnings generated, and, in many cases, among the top five drivers. This is a huge development opportunity for many rural communities.

Commuter-Led Economic Development Introduced

Living in one community and working in another, whether in large metropolitan areas or in rural, regional communities, is universal in North America. In this strategy paper, we focus on the entrepreneurial development opportunities with respect to commuters. We introduce this strategy paper with an illustration from Denver, Colorado, and its vast footprint that includes rural communities.

As one flies into Denver over the eastern plains, new sprouting subdivisions can be seen. Both Evergreen and Limon are commuter communities to the Denver metroplex, enabling thousands of workers to live in rural communities in this region. These commuters, working in the urban areas of Denver, bring income to their rural hometowns, contributing to community vitality and opportunities for entrepreneurial development, as explored in this strategy paper.

The Denver metroplex runs from Cheyenne, Wyoming in the north, to Pueblo, CO in the south, and extends deep into the foothills of the Rocky Mountains and out onto the Eastern Colorado Great Plains. This is a dynamic and growing region where rural communities can thrive because of commuters and work opportunities in the urban areas. The Denver Front Range metroplex is one of America's fastest growing regions. Denver (median house price of \$505,516) provides significant and diverse job, career, and living options.



Rural Denver metroplex,
Out There Colorado, Sean Pavone



Downtown Evergreen, CO

Evergreen, Colorado, (2019 population 8,885 – median house price of \$733,752) is just 29 miles from downtown Denver with a typical commute of about one hour. It is a beautiful community, rooted in the front range of the Colorado Rocky Mountains. Many residents live in Evergreen but have economic relationships with Denver companies, nonprofits, and government agencies.

Limon (2019 population of 1,105 – median house price of \$259,900) is located on Colorado’s eastern plains, about 90 miles from downtown Denver and just an hour travel time from the eastern portions of the metro area.



Train depot in Limon, Colorado. Uncover [Colorado](#)

Next, we explore what we mean by commuters. Chances are good this is a more complex development opportunity than your community might first consider.

Commuters are a non-traditional (versus manufacturing, agriculture, business attraction, etc.) development opportunity and strategy. Commuters are foundational in our economy, where people live in one community, and work in another. Historically, commuting was physical where a worker lived in a rural community and drove into a larger area community for work. Today, there is also the rise of remote workers who may choose to live in a rural community and have work relationships with employers across the country or around the world.

Defining Commuters

Before we explore commuter-related development opportunities for rural communities, we lay out some definitions and how available data can help your community better understand the role commuters play in your community’s economy and society. Figure 1 provides a quick commuter typology.

Figure 1. Quick Commuter Typology

Physical Commuting		Electronic Commuting	
Traditionally, commuting involved the physical activity of living in one community and traveling to another community to work by motor vehicle, commuter train, carpooling, and even by commercial air.		With the rise of the world’s knowledge economy , this is a dramatic increase in electronic commuting, where a person lives in one community, and is engaged in economic activities remotely.	
Hybrid Commuting	Remote Workers	Outsourced Workers	Contracted Workers
Hybrid commuting includes both physical and electronic commuting.	More and more Americans are part of remote work employing information technology.	Major employers are using outsourced workers, empowering remote work opportunities.	Major employers are also using contract workers, enabling remote work and the ability to live in rural communities.
U.S. Census Bureau	Outbound	Inflow	U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis
	Inbound	Outflow	
The U.S. Census Bureau generates outbound and inbound commuter activity for every county in the United States. Samples of this data are provided later in this strategy paper. This information can help your community understand your connections within the regional economy and society.	Outbound commuters live in your community and work in another community.	Outbound commuters bring income into the community or inflows of income.	The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis provides time series data on household income related to outbound (inflows) and inbound (outflows). This data can help your community better understand the scale of commuting in your community.
	Inbound commuters live in another community and come into your community to work.	Inbound commuters take income from your community to their hometowns.	



Commuter Data Examples – Dawes County & Chadron, Nebraska



Nebraska's Pine Ridge Region, Wrangler Network

Dawes County and its lead community of Chadron is located in extreme northwestern Nebraska. The Pine Ridge, part of the Rocky Mountain uplift, which also includes the world-famous Black Hills of South Dakota to the north, is a remarkable landscape of buttes, pine forests, and grasslands. This region is home to federal grasslands and forests, state parks and a rich history of both Plains Indian culture and European American pioneer settlement. As is the case in much

of the west, residents and workers are accustomed to travelling longer distances for work, recreation, healthcare, and shopping. Across the South Dakota state line is the Pine Ridge Reservation.

Chadron is a hub city in this very rural and often frontier region that includes northwestern Nebraska, southwestern South Dakota, and western Wyoming. Chadron is home to locally owned and big box stores, a regional hospital, and Chadron State College. Chadron's economy is driven by agriculture, tourism, higher education, regional retail trade and services, and its commuter economy. As one of the largest



Downtown Chadron, NE, Wikimedia Commons

communities in a vast rural region, Chadron is home to many residents who commute outside this community for work, meeting the workforce needs of an entire region.

In metropolitan areas, there are the core cities with a central business district, regional commercial center, industrial zones, and a diversity of residential neighborhoods. Surrounding the core city are suburbs, often incorporated as their own municipalities, which are strongly interconnected with the core city. Beyond the suburbs are the exurbs, or more rural countryside, with acreages and home to smaller cities, towns, and villages. Beyond the exurbs is the larger region that this metroplex anchors economically and socially. Similar patterns exist in more rural areas, where a micropolitan community like Chadron serves the same function as a core city. But in this case, there are no suburbs or exurbs, but communities and countryside where people live and work. A community like Chadron may draw workers from 25, 50, or even 75 miles away. The same is true for shoppers or patients seeking medical services. Smaller cities, towns, and villages in this rural region function like neighborhoods do in more urbanized landscapes. Understanding the role of both outbound and inbound commuters is important and represents opportunities for community economic development, not only in hub cities like Chadron, but the entire region.

Our next stop is an illustration of some available federal commuter data.

The following data illustrates the role of commuting for one community of Chadron (2019 population of 5,591) and Dawes County, located in extreme northwestern Nebraska. Commuters play an important role for many communities. Some local residents sometimes travel to other communities for work but spend their wages at home. In other cases, workers from other locales may come to your community and acquire goods and services around their workday. In the era of remote work, some residents may even be employed by an out-of-state company but have strong engagement in your community as they work from home. Figure 2 highlights the primary communities and states where Dawes County residents work and, conversely, where workers in Dawes County reside.

Figure 2. Dawes County Resident and Worker Destinations (2018)

Note: figures are a sampling for illustrative purposes.

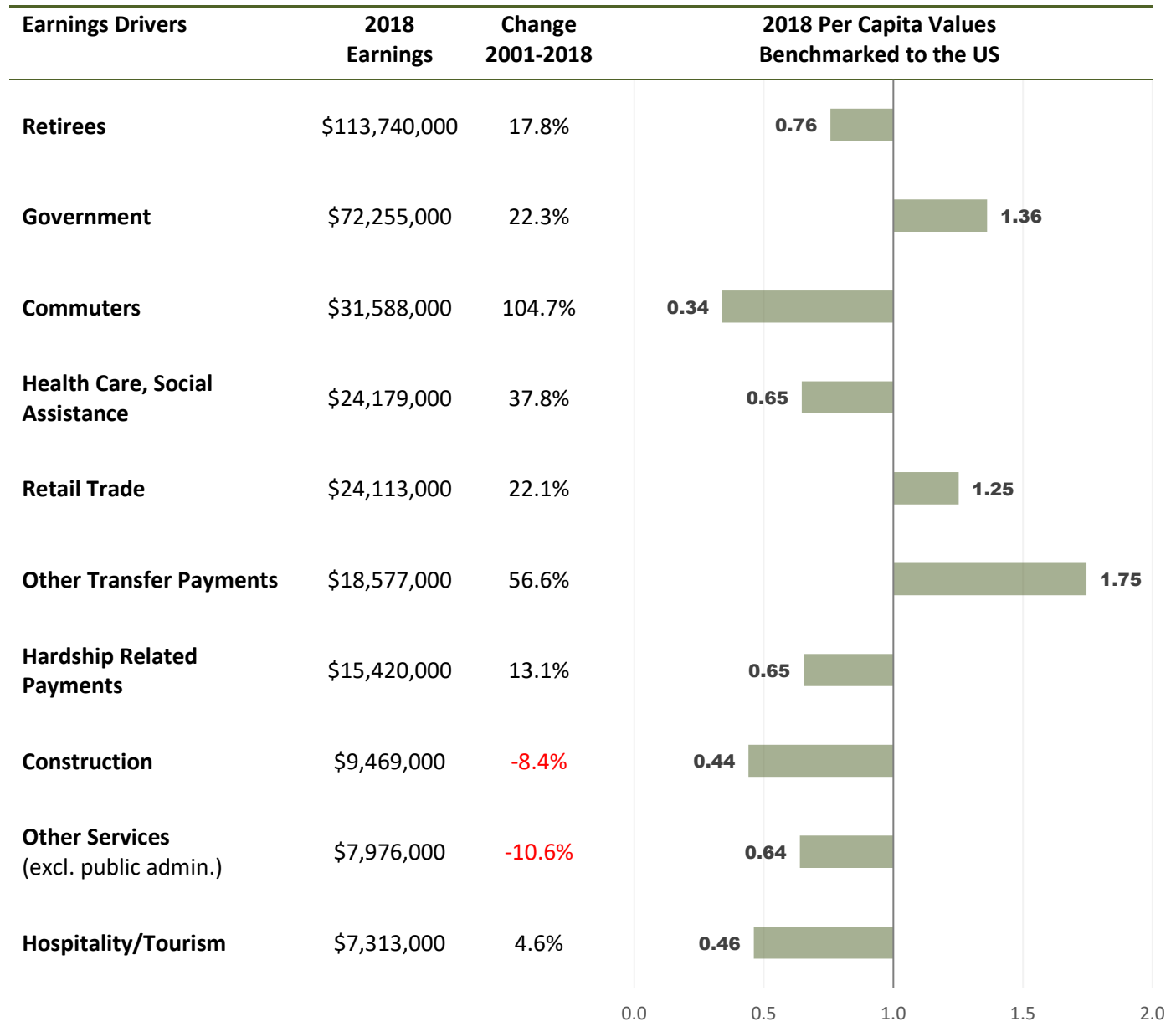
Where Residents Work			Where Workers Live		
Total Jobs	3,408	100.0%	Total Jobs	3,204	100.0%
Cities			Cities		
Chadron city, NE	1,771	52.0%	Chadron city, NE	1,437	44.9%
Crawford city, NE	228	6.7%	Crawford city, NE	228	7.1%
Scottsbluff city, NE	121	3.6%	Alliance city, NE	78	2.4%
O'Neill city, NE	116	3.4%	Scottsbluff city, NE	51	1.6%
Alliance city, NE	88	2.6%	Gering city, NE	34	1.1%
Lincoln city, NE	80	2.3%	Lincoln city, NE	30	0.9%
Omaha city, NE	74	2.2%	Sidney city, NE	30	0.9%
Sidney city, NE	41	1.2%	Gordon city, NE	27	0.8%
North Platte city, NE	33	1.0%	Omaha city, NE	26	0.8%
Rushville city, NE	31	0.9%	Rushville city, NE	23	0.7%
States			States		
Nebraska	3,188	93.5%	Nebraska	2,905	90.7%
South Dakota	120	3.5%	South Dakota	127	4.0%
Wyoming	32	0.9%	Wyoming	68	2.1%
Colorado	24	0.7%	Colorado	47	1.5%
Kansas	12	0.4%	Iowa	8	0.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2018 Data.



In Figure 2, note the areas highlighted in yellow where Dawes County residents live in the community, but work for entities outside the community. Figure 3 provides the economic drivers for Dawes County, based on household earnings generated by both traditional and non-traditional economic sectors. Outbound (live in Dawes County but work outside of Dawes County) is this community's #3 economic driver, generating nearly \$32 million in household earnings in 2018 and experiencing strong growth of nearly 105 percent between 2001 and 2018.

Figure 3. Earnings Drivers



Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis



The following charts and data are from www.headwaterseconomics.org and their Socio-Economic Profile for Dawes County, Nebraska.

Figure 4. Commuter Inflow and Outflow Trend Data for Dawes County, Nebraska

Personal income in thousands of 2019 \$s

	1990	2010	2019	Change 2010-2019
Total Personal Income	227,014	300,800	331,223	30,423
Cross-County Commuting Flows				
Inflow of Earnings	14,456	18,904	31,904	13,000
Outflow of Earnings	3,982	12,854	12,561	-293
Net Residential Adjustment (In - Outflow)	10,474	6,050	19,343	13,293
Percent of Total				% Change 2010-2019
Net Residential Adjustment Share of Total Personal Income	4.6%	2.0%	5.8%	3.8%

Data are only available at the county level (i.e., this page will be blank for aggregated geographies, states, and the U.S.). Total personal income is reported by *place of residence*.

Figure 4 above indicates 1990 through 2019 trend data for both inflow (e.g., outbound commuters) and outflow (e.g., inbound commuters) data for Dawes County. While there is growing outbound commuter activity, note the dramatic rise in inbound commuters, who live outside the county and come into the county to work. An employment hub, Chadron draws a regional workforce to support its growth and development.

Figure 4 also provides the net residential adjustment for Dawes County, adjusting for both inflow (outbound commuters) and outflow (inbound commuters) from 1990 to 2019. In the late 2000s, Chadron and Dawes County became a both a regional employment hub drawing workers into the community and a growing bedroom community where commuters live but are working through this vast region, including into Wyoming and South Dakota. This illustration of Dawes County highlights the regional community settlement and work pattern in rural America today.

Why is Commuter-Led Development Important?

There are at least five major reasons why commuter-led development is important and should be considered as a development strategy:

1. Economic Driver
2. Economic Diversification
3. Source of Entrepreneurial Talent
4. Hometown Development
5. Regionalization

Outbound and Inbound Commuter Considerations

Our primary focus of this strategy is outbound commuters - those who live in your community and work outside your community. But there are also development opportunities related to inbound commuters, including providing critical workforce, consumers, and opportunities for new resident attraction. The commuter lifecycle topic addressed soon, works both ways as younger commuters, over time, seek to

get off the road and live and work in the same community. An inbound commuter - a worker who provides labor force in your community but lives in another community, may choose to move into the community where they are working to eliminate the commute and simplify one's life, assuming there are the right amenities (e.g., costs, housing, schools, parks, etc.) and culture (e.g., welcoming culture to new residents and particularly new residents who are more diverse).

We explore each of these five rationales for pursuing commuter-led development next.

Economic Driver. With every commuter – both inbound and outbound – there is typically a household that needs housing, schools, healthcare, shopping, and contributes to entrepreneurial ventures and a community's needed workforce. Commuters are an important economic driver. Outbound commuters are particularly important, as they contribute to the base economy (e.g., bringing income into the community from the outside) and provide diversification (e.g., working in a wider range of both ventures and economic sectors).

Economic Diversification. Economic diversification is key to more resilient and prosperous rural communities. A regional economy typically is more diverse than a local rural economy, as there is often a wider range of businesses and economic sectors at play. When residents of your community are working regionally, particularly those working remotely with economic connections across the state or nation, your economy is inherently more diverse, resilient, and likely to be more prosperous.

Source of Entrepreneurial Talent. Like almost all other entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs begin their journey working for someone else. For commuters, we often use the example of a diesel mechanic commuting down the road from their home in a rural village to the interstate truck stop to make a living. This is a starting point for a potentially long career. In three to seven years, that same nascent diesel mechanic has acquired experience and skills. Chances are good there is also a motivation to be one's own boss and make more money by owning their own shop. This shift from employee to entrepreneur is possible with a wide range of commuters that can enrich a rural community's entrepreneurial talent starting new businesses, buying existing businesses, or becoming part of the entrepreneurial team within a well-established local venture.

Hometown Development. By definition, commuters live in one community and work in another. Often times, the communities hosting these outbound commuters are called **bedroom communities**. While these commuters are contributing to the local labor force, they are local consumers supporting area businesses, sending their kids to local schools, and paying property and sales taxes that support municipal, county, and school districts.

Miami County, Kansas is now part of the exurban geography of the Greater Kansas City metroplex, or KC, for short. As this mid-sized metropolitan area has grown, it has pushed south and west. The KC communities of Overland Park, Olathe, and Lee's Summit have been particularly robust in their growth and prosperity. While Miami and its communities, like Paola, continue to be rural in character, they are urbanizing, given this growth. People are choosing to live a more rural lifestyle while maintaining economic connections to KC. Highway improvements with U.S.



Paola, KS. Photo: Travel Artsy

169, U.S. 69, and Interstate 35, have made commuting between the southern parts of KC and Miami County more feasible.

Regionalization. In our in-depth story capture of Ord, Nebraska, we focus on an area hub city of just more than 2,300 residents that anchors a very rural region of about 10,000 residents. For years, while Ord was distressed, more residents travelled outside of Ord for work. Today, due to Ord’s remarkable diversification from a two-sector to a seven-sector economy, it has more regional workers coming into Ord to make a living. Ord’s region has always existed, but it has become more robust and intentional. Collaborative development within the entire region is more common. There is also an appreciation that when development occurs in Burwell, North Loup, or Greeley, Ord – and the region - benefit. Because Ord’s economy is so dynamic and growing, it has not only stabilized its own population, but that of the entire rural region.



Ord, Nebraska

Ord (2,310 residents in 2019) anchors a very rural region of about 10,000 residents. Ord and its region have grown from a two-sector economy (e.g., commodity agriculture and Ord as a hub city) to a seven-sector and much more diverse economy. Ord and its region, relative to other parts of the Central Great Plains, is thriving.

At e2, with our partners, we are capturing a 50-year story of Ord’s transformation from crisis and hopelessness to growth and prosperity. Check out *The Ord Story Collection* in our website’s [resource library](#) for more information.

Our next stop is an exploration of the commuter life cycle.

Every human being has a life cycle with some unique, but also predictable, life events from the time we are born to when we pass from this earth. Our early years are lived within a family and our focus is on going to school and growing up. We then move out of our family's home, often pursuing higher education, starting a job, and, hopefully, a career. For many of us, we find that special significant other and start a family. We work hard to create a life and estate. By our 50s and 60s, we are at our peak within our career and as we approach that arbitrary, but magical age of 65, we contemplate, and often enter, retirement. We pass through early retirement when we are healthy and active to our elderly years. Commuters also have a lifecycle that has important implications for rural development.

Understanding the Commuter Life Cycle

There is a wide range of commuters, based on both socio-economic characteristics, and where they are at in their life cycle. The first group are younger adults who choose to live in one rural community, when one or more spouse works in another community. The second group is more recent and involves older Generation X (born in the mid-1960s to early 1970s) and younger Retiring Boomers (born in the 1950s). Let's explore each of these commuter cohorts next.

Younger Adult Commuters

There are three types of younger adult commuters based on rural demographic trends:

1. Those who grew up rural and never left.
2. Those who grew up rural, left, and have come home.
3. Those who grew up urban and make the choice to move to a rural community.

In many cases, these younger adult commuters, who are early in both family and career formation, may choose to live in one community where they can find affordable housing, childcare, and the right schools, but may need to travel down the road to another community for work. This situation has lots of examples, from schoolteachers to auto mechanics, motel managers to accountants, factory workers to feedlot employees, and the list goes on and on. There are two basic development opportunities, both associated with **bedroom community** development with these younger commuters:

- For **outbound** commuters (e.g., live in your community but work outside your community) you have development opportunities in providing a hometown for this household. Their spending, children, and engagement in the community are all development opportunities.
- For **inbound** commuters (e.g., live outside your community but come into your community for work) they provide a needed workforce and could be candidates as they age to move to your community, expanding your community's population and consumer market.

Early in their work and family life, this practical arrangement of living in one community and working in another fits the bill. But as children begin to get older and become more involved in activities, or as a parent ages and needs more support, commuting creates a challenge. At the same time, these life changes are challenging being a commuter (particularly for longer-distance commuting), as the

commuter is advancing in their career acquiring knowledge, skills, experiences, and greater capacity to make a living. These now older-30- and younger 40-year-olds are looking to live and work in the same community. There are three development opportunities when these older commuters decide to live and work in your community:

1. They can become experienced employees in existing ventures in your community, enhancing your workforce.
2. They can acquire existing ventures, energizing them with their energy and talent, and ensuring these hometown ventures continue to thrive.
3. Finally, they can start new ventures contributing to your community's economy and offerings, often providing new investment, jobs, and expanded local tax bases.

In understanding your commuters and opening doors for them to fulfill their dreams, while contributing to your community's development, is a huge opportunity. Now we look at a second commuter group offering increasing development opportunities, with a rising number of older GenX and Retiring Boomers calling communities like yours their new hometown.

Electronic Commuting

Until recently, the only way to be a commuter was to get in your car, train, or even an airplane to commute from your home to where you worked. Today, there is **electronic commuting** where one can live where they want and work throughout the world via technology like the Internet, video conferencing through the use of smart devices. Electronic commuting, for those rural communities with robust and universal broadband, is a major new development opportunity to enable new residents, diversify your economy, and connect you to new networks and development opportunities.

Older GenXers and Retiring Boomers

Like with younger adults, there are those who grew up in your community and never left, those who left and are returning, and those who have discovered your community and are now calling it their home. There are three major groups relative to "electronic" commuting:

- Those who are still working full-time but have moved to rural because of electronic commuting.
- Those who are working part-time and continue to stay connected to work elsewhere.
- Those who are fully retired but continue to have networks and connections.

There are four essentials for becoming a commuter outpost for electronic workers, rooted in our rapidly growing knowledge economy:

1. A welcoming community that sees diversity as an asset with cultural sensitivities.
2. A wired community that can support robust and universal broadband and smart devices.
3. Affordability and quality in housing, education and other desired and wanted amenities.
4. Peers with gathering places to create human connections and support groups.

With this information in mind, we move on to review development opportunities.

For most rural communities, every possible likely development opportunity should be explored and pursued, given a community’s assets, opportunities, and development preferences. Nearly every community has commuters – both physical and electronic. Exploring this non-traditional economic development opportunity can lead to a more vibrant community with greater economic diversity and resilience.

Development Opportunities

As addressed briefly in other sections of this paper, there are three primary entrepreneurial development opportunities:

1. New Resident Attraction and Bedroom Community Development
2. Entrepreneurial Talent Attraction and Development
3. Allied Community Economic Development Opportunities

New Resident Attraction and Bedroom Community Development

Most rural communities are either struggling to sustain their populations (e.g., more rural, and isolated communities) or manage urbanization and associated population growth (e.g., rural communities in the exurban footprints of growing metropolitan areas). Regardless, new residents and their households, often employed through either physical or electronic commuting, represent significant entrepreneurial development rooted in bedroom community development.

There are two potential opportunities for rural communities with bedroom development opportunities. First, there are current residents who live in your community, calling it home and working outside the community. Second, there are others in your region who could become new residents while maintaining work in other communities. Either way, these existing and potential residents can grow your community’s population, consumer market, students for your schools and create opportunities for strengthening your community’s workforce and entrepreneurial talent pool. More on these items later in this section of our paper. Check out our e2 [Community Quality of Life Placemaking](#) paper.



Ravenna is located in what is called the Tri-Cities Region of Nebraska. Historically, Ravenna’s economy was rooted in commodity agriculture and railroad services. Peaking in population in 1920 (1,703 residents) Ravenna, like other farm communities, steadily eroded and lost population. But, beginning in 1990, Ravenna began to grow again, driven by commuter residents with work in adjacent Grand Island (51,147 residents in 2019) and Kearney (33,464 residents in 2019).

When more residents do not depend on your community for their employment, the following entrepreneurial and community economic development opportunities and impacts are enhanced:

- New housing development and existing housing redevelopment
- A larger household consumer market for local ventures
- More students for local schools
- More members for area churches
- Broader local tax bases
- Non-commuting spouses for the local labor force
- More leaders, volunteers, and charitable givers

Diversification

When a community has lots of outbound commuters (e.g., live in your community and work outside your community) economic diversification is increased. Where we have residents working in a wider range of ventures tied to different economic sectors, we have greater diversification. Additionally, chances are good when your community becomes a “go to” bedroom community for commuters working in a regional economy, there are opportunities for growing a more diverse society. Diverse societies create greater social capital, foundational for rural community success in today’s environment.

Entrepreneurial Talent Attraction and Development

Earlier in this paper we addressed the commuter life cycle and its dynamic where workers transition to becoming entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurial talent in our community emerges in an amazing range of ways, from those who have always wanted to be entrepreneurs to those who are driven into entrepreneurship because of the lack of good jobs or are just tired of working for someone else. Commuters are a significant potential source of new and capable entrepreneurial talent that can ensure existing businesses transition, new ventures start, or existing ventures achieve greater growth.



Dr. Ernesto Sirolli

Individuals transitioning from working for someone else to becoming an entrepreneur have unique needs and wants from your entrepreneurial ecosystem. Ernesto Sirolli, founder of Enterprise Facilitation (www.sirolli.com) talks about the venture trinity. He makes the case that successful entrepreneurial ventures are a team sport where talent and passion are required in three key areas: production, business, and marketing. Chances are good that commuting workers who transition to becoming entrepreneurs with their own ventures, have great skills and experience in producing goods and services, but may have weaker business and marketing skills. Your ecosystem can work with these new entrepreneurs, building complete teams in creative ways. For example, connecting a production-oriented new entrepreneur with a great local bookkeeper can ensure accounts receivable are current and taxes are paid consistent with local, state, and federal regulations. Consider who in your region has experience and skills in areas of business management, human relations, and marketing capabilities.

By growing relationships between these area business service providers with production-oriented entrepreneurs, your community can (1) greatly enhance your area’s business services ecosystem - a form of development in and of itself, and (2) contribute to the success of these entrepreneurs.

Create Opportunities for Conversation and Relationship-Building

First, assume your community has commuters who are actively considering getting off the road and looking for ways to live and work in the same community. Second, assume that some of these motivated commuters are actively considering entrepreneurship as pathways to aligning where they live and work. Be creative and consider hosting breakfasts and socials working around likely commuter schedules, where you can begin to explore entrepreneurial venture opportunities in your community and how your ecosystem can provide assistance.

When your community creates organic, confidential, and comfortable opportunities for working commuters to explore entrepreneurial opportunities, you can constructively influence a decision to move forward and ensure your ecosystem is fully engaged, contributing to transition success.

Allied Community Economic Development Opportunities

We have already mentioned some allied benefits of hosting commuting workers in your community. That said, many rural communities struggle on two important fronts where commuter households can contribute to solutions:

- Work and career opportunities for a trailing spouse
- Securing workers to support a community's ventures

When a commuter chooses your community as their home, other members of their household can provide skilled, talented, and experienced workers and/or entrepreneurs for your community. When someone selects your community for both their home and work, other working members of their household who cannot find work in your community can find meaningful work in other communities within your region. Being pro-active in meeting all the work and career desires and wants of all workers in a family is foundational to attracting, developing, and retaining human talent. Commuting can be part of this solution.

Work for Two

Today families come in many forms from traditional couples who are married with children to single parent, non-married couples, multi-generational families, and the diversity of family structures goes on. For those households with at least two working members, one member may find work in your community while the other member works somewhere else. When we recognize our community is part of a much larger regional economy and community, we can begin to imagine rural communities as neighborhoods with an employment hub community. The ability of all working members of a community to find not only work, but meaningful careers with growth opportunities, we enhance our ability to attract and retain residents growing stronger economies and communities.

All three kinds of entrepreneurial ventures benefit, including for-profit businesses, nonprofit organizations, and governmental agencies as well as schools and enterprises like state parks.

Next, we explore how to energize your community's entrepreneurs to act on these commuter-related development opportunities.

When your community recognizes and develops your entrepreneurial talent in all three sectors of your community in businesses, nonprofits, and government, including education, you enhance your ability to optimize any of the likely entrepreneurial development opportunities, including commuter-related development. As this strategy paper outlines, there are a wide range of development opportunities associated with households with commuters.

Energizing Your Entrepreneurial Talent

Consider the following five steps to get started in creating an intentional, smart, and impactful commuter-led development strategy:

1. Discovery and awareness
2. Entrepreneur engagement and conversations
3. Collaborative strategies
4. Identify, build relationships with, and engage your commuter households
5. Listen, learn, test, and provide ecosystem support

Discovery and Awareness. The first step in your journey in energizing your entrepreneurs related to commuter-led development, is to have a **Development Opportunity Profile** completed. This profile will identify the level of commuter activity in your community. Remember, it is important to be both strategic and smart (e.g., efficient, and effective in development efforts) by focusing on your community's genuine development opportunities and preferences.

e2's Development Framework - e2 University Resources

Consider joining e2's [National Practitioners Network](#), where you can access our entire e2 University library of resources, including community readiness to organizing for action, from assessments to strategy, working with entrepreneurs and metrics, stories and sustainability. These sources can be used to empower your commuter-led development strategy.

Once your community has identified commuter-led development as a strategic development opportunity, form a working group or task force to lead development and execution of your game plan. The Development Opportunity Profile will provide preliminary opportunity analytics, but we recommend more detailed analytics be generated, providing necessary information for better understanding your opportunity and where to focus strategy development efforts. Use our [e2 Development Framework](#) and resources to guide your engagement process.

Entrepreneur Engagement and Conversations. Hopefully, you have included some civic-minded entrepreneurs (We strongly recommend this!) on your task force. Once your team has a much deeper understanding of your specific and unique commuter-related development opportunities, your next step is to identify and engage entrepreneurs with relevant play. For example, one development opportunity associated with outbound commuters (e.g., live in your community and work outside your community) is bedroom community development. Have intentional conversations with likely entrepreneurial stakeholders, such as investors, developers, builders, and entrepreneurs on how your community can optimize your bedroom community development.

Likely key ingredients to become a stronger bedroom community attracting commuters and their families are basics, like affordable and available housing and excellent schools, to amenities like a locally owned coffee shop with home-baked goods. For commuters, affordable high-quality childcare that offers services recognizing the work hours and commuting schedules of these workers, are a huge competitive advantage in growing out your bedroom community opportunities.



Collaborative Strategies. Chances are good that your community will need to build strategies involving public and private collaborations. Those that engage all three sectors of your community, including government (e.g., think land for housing, schools, and parks), nonprofits (e.g., think childcare facilities), and for-profits including developers, investors, and the entrepreneurs operating that special coffee shop noted earlier. **Guide these conversations to stimulate thinking about how each of these players can (1) work together to grow a more robust commuter environment and (2) pursue mission-aligned development efforts.**



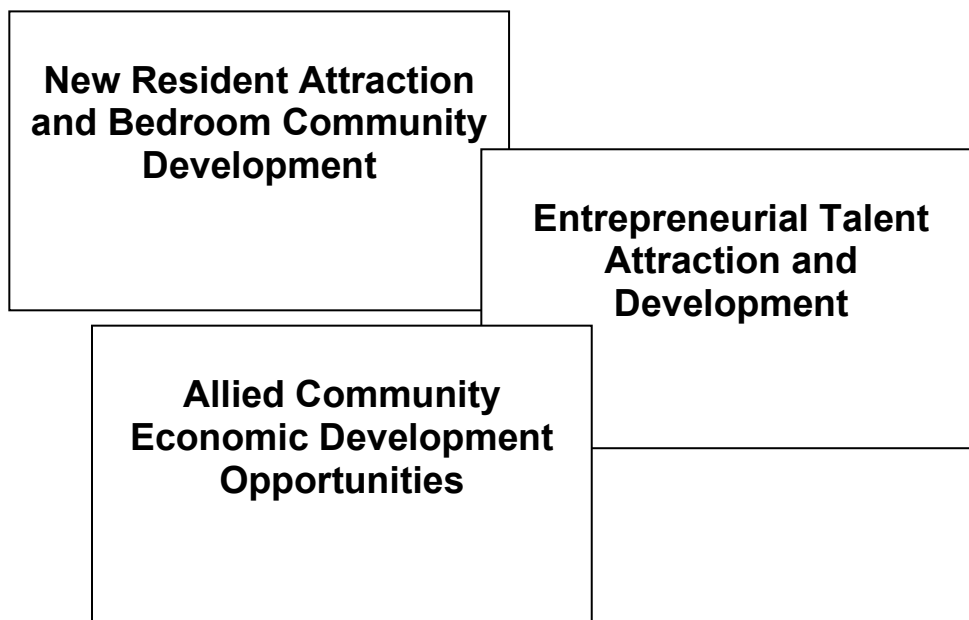
Identify, Build Relationships with, and Engage Your Commuter Households. Our advice to entrepreneurs is if you want to encourage a better venture and grow, take time to talk to your current customers and discover what

they love and what other goods and services you can provide that would generate more business. The same is true with commuter-led development. Consider creative surveys and focus groups with commuters already rooted in your community. Also consider similar activities with those inbound (e.g., those living outside your community but coming into your community for work). These activities can help your team map strengths and environment development priorities – say, in support of strengthening your bedroom community development play. By engaging your commuters in these conversations and survey opportunities, you can also begin to identify those thinking of transitioning from commuting to aligning their work and home in one community. These commuters represent both hometown workforce and entrepreneurial development opportunities.

***Spend More Time Working on Your Venture
And a Bit Less Time Just Running Your Venture***

Listen, Learn, Test and Provide Ecosystem Support. As is the case with successful entrepreneurs, they take time to work on their venture, versus spending all their time running their venture. When your community creates these opportunities for surveys, conversations, focus groups, etc. you are intentionally taking your entrepreneurs away from just running their venture to spending quality time focusing on how to make their venture better. This process and dynamic will provide your community with critical insight that can shape a strategy development agenda optimizing all three commuter-related development opportunities addressed in this paper.

Figure 5. Three Primary Commuter-Led Development Opportunities



Before we move to the conclusion of this paper, we spend a bit of time exploring the emergence of regional communities where commuting is both a metro and rural dynamic.

In our major metro areas, there are now more telecommuters (i.e., 8 million) than public transportation commuters (7.6 million), in pre-COVID health pandemic and recession data from www.smartcitiesdive.com. According to the internationally respected Brookings Institute www.brookings.edu 76 percent of all American workers commute to work via a personal motor vehicle. For rural America, where public transit options are either limited or nonexistent, the only option for commuting is personal vehicles. Americans, following World War II and the improvement of commuter infrastructure, have been choosing to live in one community and work in another.

Understanding and Appreciating Regional Communities

With climate change and associated wicked weather, and the sheer cost of commuting in terms of both dollars and time, there are movements to align work and home. Clearly, the rise of electronic commuting allows for a person to live in one community and work almost anywhere across the globe. For now, most of us continue to physically commute to work, ranging from 30 minutes or less to up to one or even two hours each way, every day.

This kind of commuting occurs in metro areas and in rural regional communities, though metro commuting is better understood and appreciated. A working couple may live in a desirable suburb community with great housing, schools, and quality of life, but commute to the downtown to work in an office or healthcare facility. Less recognized and appreciated are rural regional communities that have similar realities and dynamics. Often organized around a small and rural-based metro or micropolitan areas, commuters in a rural region are living in one place and often commuting to work in another.

Next, we explore two illustrations of a metro community and then a rural regional community and the role of commuters within these economies and societies.

Greater Columbus, Ohio Metropolitan Area

Columbus is one of America's fastest-growing, medium-sized metropolitan areas. It has grown beyond a central Ohio city anchored in Franklin County to a metro region of nearly 20 counties today. The core metropolitan area now posts a 2019 population of more than 2.1 million residents. The expanded exurban footprint is even larger.



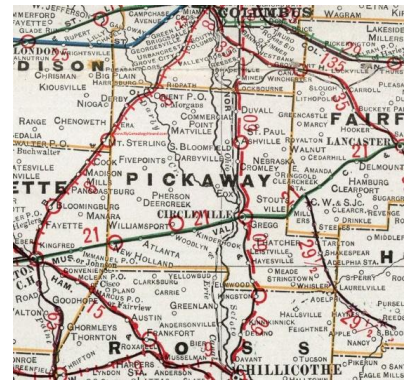
Columbus is the state capital for Ohio and home to the Ohio State University. It is a vibrant community with a dynamic and growing economy. The development of Columbus has driven both suburban and exurban development in once-predominately rural counties and communities. Over the years, we have worked with both Columbus, and particularly Pickaway County, which is now deeply rooted within the Columbus metroplex.



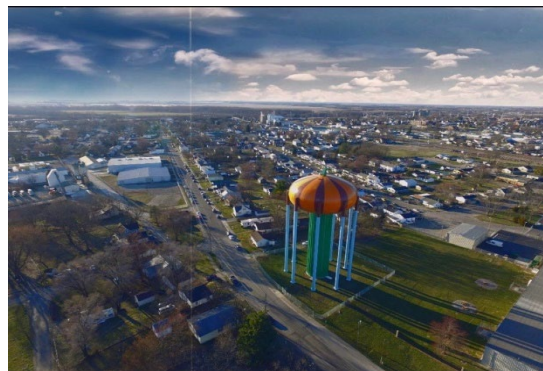
Columbus, OH metroplex

Pickaway County, and its lead city of Circleville, is located just south of Columbus' outer interstate beltway. The development of Columbus' road system has empowered dramatic geographic growth, allowing more and more central Ohio counties and communities to be part of this **regional community**.

The northern part of Pickaway County is experiencing urbanization as residents are locating in this part of the county to live, with associated commercial development. Both designed suburban and exurban development is occurring. The central part of the county where Circleville is located is rooted in both manufacturing and commodity agriculture. The southern part of the county is part of Appalachian Ohio.



A brief 30-minute drive takes you from northern Pickaway County to the Columbus international airport, using this city's well-developed road system. A family can choose to live in a new and modern suburban neighborhood in the northern part of the county, enabling one spouse to work at the airport, while the other spouse can work at the local school districts. Once-rural Pickaway County now has a much more diverse population and economy because of commuters and its role within the rapidly growing Columbus metro area.



Circleville, OH

Tupelo, Mississippi's Regional Community

Tupelo is likely best known as the birthplace of Elvis Presley. Tupelo and its northeastern Mississippi rural region is a very different landscape when compared to the greater Columbus, Ohio region. This is a community and region once rooted in a planter economy and slavery. Following the Civil War, this region was traumatized with segregation, Jim Crow, and share cropping, denying African Americans of full rights within this society and economy. At one time, Tupelo and this region was one of America's poorest and weakest economies in America. Vaughn Grisham in his 1999 book, *Tupelo – Evolution of a Community*, shares the remarkable transformation of Tupelo from a struggling Jim Crow southern community to a community that embraced its African American community and transitioned to a thriving rural community. Tupelo (A micropolitan area designated by the U.S. Census Bureau with a 2019 population of 38,271), now anchors an entire rural regional community and economy. Its success has

contributed to the vitality of more rural communities. One of these communities is New Albany (2019 population of 8,705), located on the interstate connecting Tupelo with Memphis. New Albany is a freestanding community rooted in a rural region. But it is also one of many smaller rural cities, towns, and villages that are part of the Tupelo regional community. People live in one community within this region and work in employment hubs like Tupelo and New Albany.



Union County, MS Courthouse



★ Designed by TownMapsUSA.com

Just as there is a regional collection of communities that are interconnected in the Columbus metro area, rural regions, like the Tupelo region, have similar relationships. Often smaller rural communities within these rural regional communities serve as neighborhoods, supporting employment hubs like Tupelo.

In rural America, when we think about economic development, we quickly focus on historically rooted natural resource industries like forestry, agriculture, tourism, and manufacturing. At e2, we also illuminate nontraditional economic development opportunities, such as retirees and commuters. Most rural communities have commuter-related development and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Opportunities for your Rural Community

Your rural community may be a neighborhood like northern Pickaway County, increasingly connected to a growing metro area. Or your community could be a micropolitan or hub-micropolitan community anchoring a rural regional community. For others, your smaller rural community may be a bedroom community with strong linkages to one of America's 543 Census-designated micropolitan areas.

Our community economic development end game is growing more vibrant and prosperous rural communities. Stimulating and supporting entrepreneurial behavior is foundational to growing an optimal economy and society in today's environment. Commuters represent a foundational economic driver in most rural communities, and there are significant entrepreneurial development opportunities. As is always the case, growing a more diverse economy and society is essential to evolving a more competitive and resilient hometown. Exploring your community's commuter development assets and opportunities is one way to achieve greater diversification and prosperity.

Understanding your community's relationship within these various regional economies and societies is important. Commuters are at play and represent development opportunities, as addressed in this strategy paper. Taking time to learn about your relationship within your regional community can inform your smart development strategy.

It is our hope this strategy paper focusing on **Commuter-led Development** can help your community envision and stand up a more impactful game plan considering commuters as one of your likely entrepreneurial development opportunities.

We want to hear from you. Send us your questions, comments, and insights by sharing with Don Macke at don@e2mail.org.

How e2 Can Help



e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems helps communities increase prosperity through entrepreneur-focused economic development and ecosystem building. Led by [Don Macke](#), e2 has a national team of practitioners who bring research, coaching, incubation, market intelligence and other expertise to this work.

What We Do

- **Mentoring.** We mentor and coach new practitioners seeking to pursue entrepreneur-led development. We provide advice and support for building eEcosystem strategies that work.
- **Analytics Support.** e2 helps communities and regions understand their entrepreneurial potential through research and data. Explore some of our research tools and reports [here](#).
- **e2 University (e2U)** is our platform for sharing more than 1,000 guides, papers, stories, tools, and resources with communities wanting a deep dive into eEcosystem building. Don Macke leads the e2U team with analytics support from **Cathy Kottwitz** and report preparation from **Ann Chaffin**. Special recognition for their e2U legacy contributions goes to **Dana Williams** and **Deb Markley**, LOCUS Impacting Investing.
- **Fostering the eMovement.** We support the national entrepreneurship movement along with our partners including the **Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City**, **SourceLink**, **Edward Lowe Foundation**, **Kauffman Foundation**, and **NetWork Kansas**. We are a founding member of [Start Us Up: America's New Business Plan](#), a coalition dedicated to strengthening entrepreneurship across America. Together, we continue to advance the foundational ideas of building entrepreneurial ecosystems and entrepreneurship-led economic development.

Contact Us

don@e2mail.org

(402) 323-7336

www.energizingentrepreneurs.org

[NetWork Kansas](#), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to developing an entrepreneurial ecosystem in Kansas, is the home for e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems. NetWork Kansas connects aspiring entrepreneurs, emerging and established businesses, to a deep network of business building resource organizations across the state.

©Copyright 2020 e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

The information contained in this document is the intellectual property of e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems and its parent organization, the Kansas Center for Entrepreneurship doing business as NetWork Kansas or has been provided by a strategic partner for e2's use. Use of these materials is restricted to community or personal use unless otherwise approved in writing by e2. The resale or distribution of this material is prohibited without written permission of e2. Inclusion of this information in other documents prepared by the user requires written permission by e2 and must include appropriate attribution. For guidance and permission, contact Don Macke at 402-323-7336 or don@e2mail.org.

