THE PROBLEM

Rural Kansas communities have been struggling for some time with economic development issues such as: declining number of businesses and available jobs, vacant main street storefronts, lack of business succession planning, workforce, youth retention and other long term negative business and demographic trends. We recognize a recruitment-based strategy has merit in many communities. However, in most rural Kansas communities, this isn’t a viable strategy due to limited resources of time and dollars, as well as insufficient housing and infrastructure. Therefore, how can these communities support a “grow your own” entrepreneurship-led economic development strategy by identifying and engaging the right local, state and federal resources – Expertise, Education and Economic Resources – in a manner that will foster a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem?

THE SOLUTION

NetWork Kansas is devoted to the growth of entrepreneurship and small businesses throughout the state of Kansas. Established by the Kansas Economic Growth Act of 2004 (KEGA) as the Kansas Center for Entrepreneurship, NetWork Kansas became operational at the beginning of the 2006 fiscal year.

The E-Community Partnership, now in its 11th year, has grown from six communities in 2007 to sixty in 2018. A NetWork Kansas E-Community has made a decision to proactively pursue entrepreneurship as an economic development strategy. The following components are present in all 60 E-Communities:

INNOVATION: NetWork Kansas Entrepreneurship (E-) Community Partnership
• Locally controlled loan fund ($250K, $100K, $75K, depending on level of access provided) to provide matching loans to entrepreneurs and small businesses. (Note: This loan fund is the trojan horse. It gives us a seat at the table with the local leadership team).

• Local leadership teams, committed to meeting regularly to provide the overall direction and to discuss ways to create a flourishing entrepreneurial environment.

• Access to entrepreneurship programming designed to benefit different types of businesses (mindset, startups, existing main street, high growth, transition).

• Local financial review board, tasked with acting as the loan committee.

• E-Community coach – in person presence to guide strategic thinking and assist with implementation of programs and initiatives.

• Access to a statewide network of over 500 partners, focusing on connecting entrepreneurs and small business owners to the resources they need.
Rural Kansas communities have been struggling for some time with economic development issues such as: declining number of businesses and available jobs, vacant main street storefronts, lack of business succession planning, workforce, youth retention and other long term negative business and demographic trends. How can these communities consider supporting an entrepreneurship-led economic development strategy as a viable option in order to thrive/survive?

Launched Entrepreneurship (E-) Community Partnership in 2007. This partnership increases capital in rural communities in a way that doesn't involve typical state bureaucracy (i.e. utilizing a state issued tax credit to spur the creation of a locally-controlled revolving loan fund). This loan fund gives our E- Community coaches a "seat on the bus" with the local leadership team to plan strategically, as well as discuss and implement initiatives to develop a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Loans: over 10 years, 455 businesses have received loans totaling $14.19M, which has leveraged $70.4M of private/public capital. 44% are startups, 34% expansions. 26% retail, 19% restaurant. 48% in towns <5K pop.

Leadership: 60 E-Communities embracing this strategy. 650+ local leadership team members meeting regularly to discuss entrepreneurship.

Programs: Directed to startups, existing, high growth, main street, and transition.

The Lean Public Policy Canvas is adopted from the Lean Canvas by Ash Maurya.
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Excel implementation by: Neos Chronos Limited (http://neoschronos.com/)

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