

Listening to the Experts: A Report on what we heard

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Introduction

Nebraska 4-H is developing a comprehensive, experiential set of entrepreneurship curricula with the following overarching goals: to encourage youth to think like entrepreneurs at a very young age; to help youth identify business success in their own communities and encourage it to remain local as future entrepreneurs; and to inspire adults in said communities to embrace and support their youth as future entrepreneurs who can contribute to the community's future economic vitality.

Thus far, the first goal of this set has been met. The EntrepreneurShip Investigation (ESI) curriculum was written at a middle school reading level and is offered to youth in middle schools, high schools, 4-H clubs, entrepreneurship-focused camps, and communities. This curriculum has met with resounding acceptance since its May 2008 publication, and youth have started several businesses across the state.

The second goal will culminate in a community resource guide, which will be directed toward adults in communities. Its purpose is to assist local community leaders to better help youth in their communities become entrepreneurs. The guide, entitled *Community Connections*, will help individuals in the community encourage and mentor youth who are learning about entrepreneurship.

Community Connections will act as a bridge to connect youth and their entrepreneurial activities to community development efforts. The guide will facilitate interaction between communities, businesses and youth entrepreneurs in a dynamic, innovative way to create new enterprises for rural areas.

In order to give communities the tools they need, we consulted with a number of "experts" across the state in focused listening sessions to gain insight into what

this new product should encompass and what it should provide communities and youth.

A purposive sampling method was used to select participants for the eight listening sessions, which included:

1. A group who teach adults about entrepreneurship
2. An economic development group
3. A financial group
4. A leadership education for adults and communities group
5. A group that teaches youth about entrepreneurship
6. A group that helped us look at the "Big Picture"
7. Community leaders group
8. Young entrepreneurs group

Participants at each session responded to the following questions:

1. What should a guide to help communities work with and encourage young entrepreneurs encompass?
2. What should such a guide provide communities?
3. What should it look like?
4. What should we call it?
5. Do you or your agency have anything you could offer to this guide?

All notes were compiled and themes were highlighted. Each listener independently determined frequently-heard themes from each of the eight sessions. After results were tabulated, individual listeners reanalyzed them, and tabulations were compiled to determine dominant themes heard within each session. Finally, dominant themes heard across groups were identified.

The following lists of themes resulted:

Adult Education for Entrepreneurs

1. Accessibility
2. Community Assessment/Survey
3. Models, Case Studies, Templates

4. Socio-psychology – Attitude Change
5. Mentoring
6. Intergenerational – Family Involvement
7. Outside Resources/Partners

Economic Development

1. Models/Case Studies
2. Community Assessment/Survey
3. Mentoring
4. Marketing
5. Diverse Delivery Modes
6. Use of outside resources
7. Definition of Terms/Attitude Change

Financial

1. Mentors, Mavens, Coaches
2. Models/Case Studies/Templates
3. Resources
4. Diverse Delivery Modes
5. Community Cooperation and Sharing
6. Business Transition

Leadership

1. Models/Case Studies
2. Resources
3. Change of Attitude about Community Future
4. Mentoring/Relationship
5. Youth/Adult Interaction

Youth Entrepreneurship Education

1. Attitude/Respect for Youth
2. Diverse Delivery Modes/Technology
3. Models, Templates, Case Studies
4. Use of Outside Resources
5. Mentors
6. Succession Planning

Big Picture

1. Mentors
2. Leaders/Mavens
3. Business Transitioning
4. Models, Case Studies
5. Engage Youth
6. Economic Resources

Community Leaders

1. Encourage Youth/Supportive Environment

2. Intergenerational Education
3. Mentoring
4. Models/Best Practice/ Case Studies
5. Outside Resources
6. Community Assessment

Young Entrepreneurs

1. Encourage Youth /Supportive Environment
2. Educational Tools for Youth
3. Educate the Community
4. Mentors
5. Family Support

Common Themes Across All 8 Sessions

1. Mentors/Mavens/Coaches
2. Outside Resources/Partners
3. Models/Case Studies/Templates
4. Socio-psychology/Attitude Change
5. Intergenerational – Family Involvement
6. Diverse Delivery Modes/Technology
7. Community Assessment
8. Marketing

Conclusions

There is much to do and great potential for Community Connections to help communities and youth work together to build a stronger state in the future. Youth, adults and communities all benefit from mentoring. Thus, one of our main goals has been to find and develop materials to help with multi-faceted mentoring programs. Some of the main lessons we have learned in developing Community Connections and working with our listening session participants include:

- Materials developed to fit community and youth entrepreneur needs can and should come from outside resources whenever possible. This will help to develop meaningful partnerships with Community Connections and communities and their youth as well.
- Resources must be readily accessible, easy to use and turnkey. Materials need to be offered in a variety of media for differing settings and learning styles. Electronic media and technology needs to be a focus.

Community Connections will be offered entirely online and will be free of charge.


- Encouraging environments must be created to support young entrepreneurs. Communities need to be encouraged to take stock of what they have - in natural, social and business resources - and build a vision for their futures.
- Some communities are ready for this program and some are not. Begin with those communities that are ready. These communities will become successful models to encourage others.
- Education works, both for young entrepreneurs and for communities. Community Connections will help community leaders learn strategies to help youth experience enhanced economic and community awareness and develop skills that lead to enterprise development and commitment to the future of the community.
- Community members need help to appreciate the value of entrepreneurship and its relationship to economic development within the community. Establish an entrepreneur culture for the community.
- Intergenerational programming is important to engage youth with the community and to change attitudes toward youth in the community.
- Communities want to understand how to work with youth, while encouraging them to become entrepreneurs. Through Community Connections, rural communities will help youth learn to become entrepreneurs without the restrictions of what courses, clubs and civic organizations are available within their community
- Community Connections will assist local community leaders to better encourage youth in their communities to become entrepreneurs. It will be targeted for community leaders such as Chambers of Commerce

members, city and county officials, local leaders and community groups. The guide will help individuals mentor youth and provide tips as to how communities can coordinate and facilitate resources to provide a more meaningful, holistic, coordinated community effort.

This project will enhance economic opportunity and community and neighborhood revitalization efforts, create more opportunities for future generations, and improve quality of life. It will enable communities to retain their talented and educated youth. Involvement with their community will encourage youth to build their lives in rural places. 🏡

Authors' Picks for Further Reading

EntrepreneurShip Investigation (ESI)

 <http://www.4h.unl.edu/esi>

Markely, D., Macke, D. & Luther V. (2005). *Energizing entrepreneurs: Charting a course for rural communities*. Lincoln, NE: RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship and Heartland Center for Leadership Development. Website: <http://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org>

Thompson, E., and Walstad, W. (2008). *Entrepreneurship in Nebraska: Conditions, attitudes and actions*. Omaha, NE: Gallup Press.

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