



ECAP (ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITY ACTIVATION PROCESS)



A holistic approach to help communities support innovation and entrepreneurship by understanding their unique characteristics, community assets and potential opportunities.

By engaging in the ECAP program, communities embrace visionary thinking, endorse entrepreneurial leadership, build synergy, and are able to leverage resources to attract and retain a working-age population, which will empower community economic growth.

Communities that become aware of and embrace concepts from the following eight Entrepreneurial Community Characteristics will move toward positive change.

COMMUNITY VISION



Communities with a strong vision must have clearly identified and articulated goals if the vision is to become reality. A vibrant strategic plan provides focus and moves the community on a pathway to success.

COMMUNITIES WITH VISION ARE CHARACTERIZED BY:

- A strong sense of purpose and of identity.
- Knowing who they are, who they want to be and having a strong commitment to the future.
- Rather than being tied to the past, the community's history serves as a launch pad for the future.
- Open communication channels are inclusive of all members of the community.
- Opportunities exist for all residents to be included.
- Embracing the ever-changing strategic planning process.
- Supporting innovation and embracing new enterprises in the community.
- Sustainability of the community is a part of the vision and plan.

Entrepreneurial communities will market their advantages and opportunities to potential new residents, creating marketing strategies that are connected to a community's longterm vision. They must welcome population diversity – recognizing the positive aspect of new ideas, creativity and innovation provided by new residents. Introducing youth to entrepreneurship is another essential means of creating a ready supply of entrepreneurs for the community. A successful entrepreneurial community will also create strategies to retain current residents and include them in the community vision and plan.

CULTURE OF CHANGE



Culture of change and community vision are closely connected. Communities with a strong culture of change are those that can see value in creating a community vision and a strategic plan to accomplish it. There is a strong determination to succeed in a culture of change and everyone within the community has an opportunity to be involved.

Communities with a strong culture of change support innovation and embrace new enterprises. In a true culture of change, risk takers are valued and many within the community have a passionate commitment to the community's future.

COMMUNITIES WITH A STRONG CULTURE OF CHANGE ARE THOSE THAT:

- Are open to new ideas and opinions.
- Exhibit a willingness to change.
- Have leaders who see the value of creating a community vision.
- Know that their strategic plan is ever-changing.
- Have a strong commitment to the future.
- Value innovation.
- Embrace new enterprises and innovation in the community without ostracizing those who fail.

LEADERSHIP



The leadership environment in entrepreneurial communities is described as open and creative. Leaders are motivated to improve the economic and social well-being in the community. This focus will be seen in the community and organizational visions as elected officials, government employees, business leaders, educational institutions, community organizations and others work together to address challenges and establish goals. Engaging the community in the process will identify resources and talents to achieve the goals. More importantly, by working collaboratively, trust will be established and that trust is essential for a community to grow and develop.

Each entrepreneurial community will develop its own approach to leadership, building on the unique assets and strengths of the community.

EXAMPLES OF ELEMENTS THAT MAY OCCUR WHEN ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP IS PRESENT:

- **Resources available to entrepreneurs:**
 - ◇ Networking opportunities to connect entrepreneurs to resources.
 - ◇ Coaching/mentoring the entrepreneur at all life stages of the business from start-up to business transition.
- **Collaborative efforts to address and move forward the economic and social well-being in the community.**
- **Value leadership development for both youth and adults.**
 - ◇ Potential leaders are Identified, developed and nurtured.
 - ◇ Leadership programs incorporate innovation and entrepreneurial discussions in the training.
 - ◇ Leaders will understand how to build upon the strengths and talents within the community.
 - ◇ Leaders emerge to accomplish the community vision and goals.
- **Public policies and guidelines to encourage an "entrepreneur friendly" atmosphere.**
 - ◇ Create local policies supportive of entrepreneurial development.
 - ◇ Access to local economic development incentives.
 - ◇ Favorable tax structure, public policy and regulations for growth.

INFRASTRUCTURE



Typically infrastructure refers to roads, water supply, sewers, electrical grids and telecommunications. In order to be competitive globally, entrepreneurial communities must include systems and services to help businesses expand their markets. If the services are utilized to the fullest extent possible, entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial businesses in the community will benefit.

Distribution of goods and services to markets is the main purpose of a community's infrastructure. These basic structures are needed for social services, schools, hospitals, etc. In order for a community's economy to function, these technical structures must be in place.

BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS:

- Public sewer system and water system
- Utilities – dependable, affordable, up-to-date power supplies, etc.
- Medical and emergency services
- Transportation – roads, proximity to major highways or by-ways
- Distribution mechanisms and resources, access to airports, rail public and private distribution resources
- Public services such as post office, government, schools, libraries, etc
- Housing - Affordable housing and adequate transitional housing
- Economic Development – available lots and/or storefronts for business development or expansion
- Telecommunications – Internet, broadband connectivity and reliable cellular phone service

DIGITALLY CONNECTED



Entrepreneurial communities understand the importance of creating a vision that includes increasing broadband adoption, usage and connectivity.

SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES WILL INCORPORATE BROADBAND IN SECTORS INCLUDING:

- Leadership and support
- Economic development and e-commerce
- Telecommunications infrastructure
- Technology literacy and access
- Advanced technology training
- Community services and information
- Health care
- Agriculture
- Social capital
- Quality of life

Internet connectivity is necessary for many political, economic and social transactions – in everything from contacting elected representatives, to filing insurance papers, to taking classes offered at the local community center.

Broadband is expected – by employers, job seekers and businesses looking to bring goods to markets. It is fundamental to economic development in the most complete, long-term sense. For libraries, schools, health clinics, businesses and hospitals, broadband is a basic need.

ENTREPRENEURIAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS



Creating effective support structures within an entrepreneurial community will generate benefits for local business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs. It can stimulate a transformation for economic development by promoting collaboration, improved productivity and program effectiveness, while generating improved out-comes in terms of jobs, existing businesses, new business development and overall quality of life.

Support services are designed to provide a range of support to entrepreneurs of all types when they need it and in the way that is most useful for them.

THIS INCLUDES NETWORKING WITH PEERS AND MENTORS THROUGH SERVICES:

- Economic development entities
- Chamber of commerce
- Local community foundation
- Banking and financial support
- Business incubation services
- Individual mentoring, coaching and champions
- Youth entrepreneurship education
- Adult entrepreneurship education and networks

A COMPREHENSIVE ENTREPRENEURIAL SUPPORT SYSTEM INCLUDES:

- **Access to capital**
 - ◇ Banks and financial organizations open to entrepreneurial ventures
 - ◇ Matching funds through local economic development district or other entities
 - ◇ Angel investors or local foundations
 - ◇ Legislative financing opportunities such as LB840 and others
 - ◇ Local knowledge and support for grant writing, workshops, contracts etc.
- **Access to support structures**
 - ◇ Opportunities to network with peers such as entrepreneurship and leadership groups
 - ◇ Mentoring/coaching for start-up, growing businesses and businesses in transition
 - ◇ Strategic alliances within the community
- **Entrepreneurial Culture**
 - ◇ Community supports and embraces entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial vision
 - ◇ Media support
 - ◇ Business and local culture that celebrates new business development
 - ◇ Willingness to think regionally
 - ◇ Willingness to accept new residents with new ideas
 - ◇ Support for youth entrepreneurship
 - ◇ Marketing plan and support for entrepreneurs within the community or region
- **Favorable Public Policy**
 - ◇ Economic development incentives for expansion and support of existing businesses
 - ◇ Local entrepreneurial friendly tax structure, regulations and zoning ordinances

SENSE OF PLACE



According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, “sense of place” encompasses “those things that add up to a feeling that a community is a special place, distinct from anywhere else.” In the context of entrepreneurial communities, it would include characteristics that make a place special and unique, and that creates an identity; a bond of pride; and a sense of history and belonging among residents of the community.

QUALITY OF LIFE, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS A BROADER TERM THAT INCLUDES SATISFACTION OF BOTH TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE ASPECTS OF LIFE INCLUDING SERVICES, BUSINESSES AND AMENITIES SUCH AS:

- Employment opportunities
- Adequate health care
- Good schools
- Bonding places – coffee shops, community center, etc.
- A safe place to live and operate a business
- Efficient and effective government
- Availability of parks, recreation facilities, etc.

A job opportunity may encourage potential new residents to consider a new community. By looking at the community as a “product,” an entrepreneurial community understands that it can create environments to attract and retain new residents.

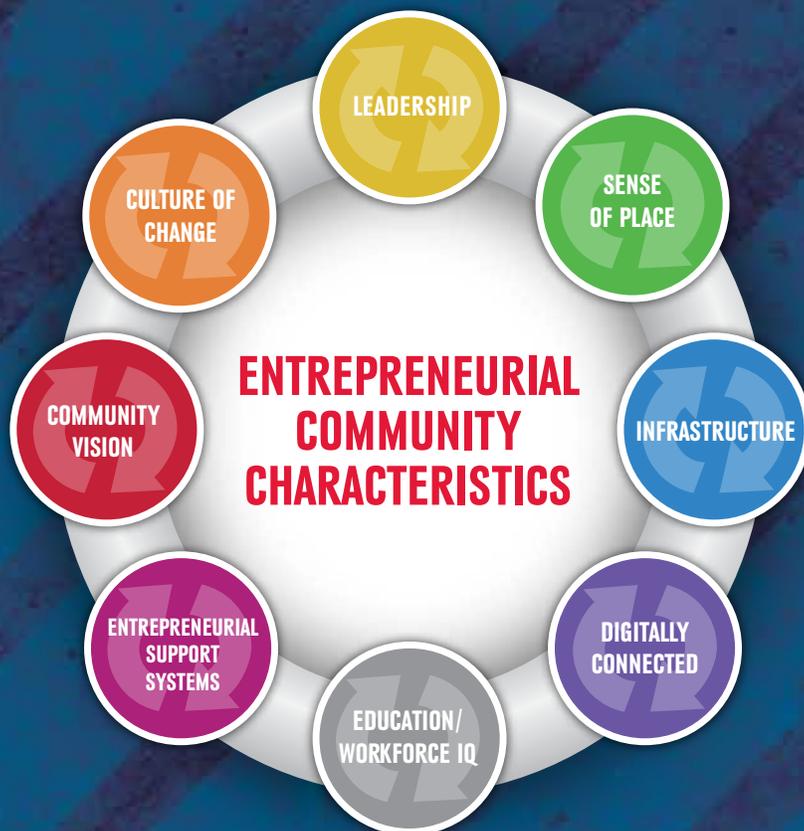
EDUCATION/WORKFORCE IQ



In today’s knowledge-based economy, a well-educated workforce is vital. Entrepreneurial communities are able to utilize the creative capital of their residents to foster innovation and entrepreneurship. A strong inflow of talented individuals provides the workforce for growing companies as well as new ideas.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN THE COMMUNITY FOR ALL RESIDENTS ENCOMPASS:

- Entrepreneurship education – The introduction of entrepreneurship concepts and skills needed for self-employment can be provided via formal and non-formal instruction. Youth entrepreneurship education is necessary to develop a steady supply of entrepreneurs in the community.
- Workforce education – A community must have a talented and educated workforce available to staff entrepreneurial companies. Future workers as well as current employees must keep up-to-date with basic and advanced skills in order to maximize creativity, productivity and entrepreneurial initiatives.
- Business transfer/transition education is needed to help business owners develop strategies for successful transition of their businesses.



For more information:

EXTENSION.UNL.EDU/ENTREPRENEURSHIP



Entrepreneurial community characteristics were identified through a scan of current research focused on entrepreneurship.