

Energizing Young Entrepreneurs in Rural Communities



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for **RURAL**
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Helping Rural America Realize
Its Entrepreneurial Potential



HOME TOWN COMPETITIVENESS

A Come-Back/Give-Back Approach to Rural Community Building

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Helping Rural America Realize
Its Entrepreneurial Potential

RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship strives to be the focal point for entrepreneurship development in rural America. We achieve this mission by collaborating with individuals and organizations engaged in the study, practice and policy of rural entrepreneurship. The Center conducts practice-driven research and evaluation to develop insights into model practices and other learning. The Center shares this learning with practitioners and policymakers to foster new approaches to rural economic development.



HOME TOWN COMPETITIVENESS
A Come-Back/Give-Back Approach to Rural Community Building

HomeTown Competitiveness (HTC) is a comprehensive approach to long-term rural community sustainability. This approach goes beyond the traditional tunnel vision of economic development. HTC helps the community to focus on four interrelated strategies that depend on each other for ultimate success:

- Developing Leadership
- Energizing Entrepreneurs
- Engaging Youth
- Increasing Charitable Giving

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About this Publication

This publication brings together significant work on youth entrepreneurship completed by the staff of the RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship and the staff of HomeTown Competitiveness (HTC), a partnership between the Nebraska Community Foundation, the Heartland Center for Leadership Development, the Center for Rural Affairs and the RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship. Any time we conduct a workshop or training, or visit with community practitioners, interest in youth entrepreneurship is always high. We have gained some valuable ideas from youth and their communities across rural America, and thought it was time to share those lessons along with some tools and strategies for engaging young people. We have done this by creating one online publication that can be easily accessed by community practitioners and policymakers alike. In this guide, we will particularly focus on the HTC model. You will also find some snapshots and stories of young entrepreneurs and the communities that support them so you can experience the passion and creativity that we see in rural places all across the country. We hope you are inspired to invite a young person in your community to lunch and really listen to his or her dreams of becoming an entrepreneur!

More resources for entrepreneurship development can be found at www.energizingentrepreneurs.org and www.htcnebraska.org.

The View from Rural America

Based on our field work, we have learned that a growing number of young people in America view entrepreneurship as a desirable career path. They recognize that the economy has changed dramatically over the past decade, and that the Internet is creating new opportunities for small businesses to compete and be real wealth generators. Rural youth recognize that markets that were not accessible before the advent of the World Wide Web can now be successfully reached even from the most remote community. As a result, they are seeking out entrepreneurship classes in their schools and starting micro-businesses as early as elementary school.

Who are these young entrepreneurs? They range from an elementary school student operating a successful lemonade stand on a hot summer afternoon, to a recent graduate who starts a new venture or begins to revitalize an existing business. Young entrepreneurs exhibit a passion to create. When channeled and combined with entrepreneurial education and real world experience, they can found businesses with significant wealth and job creation potential. Engaging, equipping and supporting young entrepreneurs are keys to long-term vitality and sustainability of rural communities.

We are witnessing another trend in our work with rural communities – a growing number of high school and college students would prefer to return to their rural hometowns if good career opportunities were available. The burgeoning interest in entrepreneurial careers combined with the desire to “come home” create significant opportunities for rural leaders to begin to reverse historic out-migration trends and revitalize their communities.

Characteristics of Young Entrepreneurs

As a starting point, it is important to understand that there is no single definition of a young entrepreneur. Each young person is unique, with strengths, weaknesses, relationships and experiences that shape who he or she is. However, there are certain traits or characteristics that can help identify an entrepreneurial young person.

Finding Young Entrepreneurs

Understanding characteristics of young entrepreneurs is important because entrepreneurial youth often do not come to mind when we think about young people in our community. Instead, we might name the student body president, the star football or volleyball player, or the honor roll student. While some of these young people may be entrepreneurial, there is another group of youth that is less visible so you need to seek them out.

Why don't these young people come to mind? They may spend their free time in Dad's shop inventing or in Mom's craft room creating, so they are “invisible” to you. They may work in their parents' business after school because they enjoy it, or they may be busy operating their lawn care or web design business. Young entrepreneurs enjoy the creative process so much that, while others are focused on sports and extracurricular activities, young entrepreneurs are focused on their business dreams.

Entrepreneurial youth may appear introverted because they know they are wired differently than their peers and, at this age, fitting in is a big deal. Remember, in the adult population, only one in 10 Americans is an entrepreneur. The percentage may be higher among young people, but they are still a minority among their classmates.

- **Entrepreneurial youth may not be the high academic achievers.** You may have heard the phrase, “A and B students work for C and D students”. Perhaps a more positive statement would be, “Smart people work for visionaries”. Young entrepreneurs can get lost in class because they are daydreaming about the project they are working on at home. They may

not see how what they are learning in the classroom relates to their entrepreneurial interests and lose focus in school.

- **Some young entrepreneurs perform poorly in core subjects such as math, English or history, but excel in art, vocational courses, music, or computer programming where they can apply their creative skills more directly.** While not all entrepreneurial youth express the same traits, this may be an indicator that teachers and school administrators can use to help identify young people with entrepreneurial aspirations. These examples are not excuses for doing poorly in school. Rather, low academic achievement may be an indicator of a young entrepreneur, suggesting that we need to engage these students in ways that make core subjects more relevant for them. For example, an entrepreneurship class could incorporate math, accounting, language arts, or library research into the curriculum. Standard classes could integrate entrepreneurial issues, such as a math class that offers problems related to business operation. When entrepreneurial youth combine core subjects with an idea they are working on, or a problem they want to solve, academic achievement may improve because students connect the importance of learning with their creative talent and curious nature.
- **Young entrepreneurs may already be in business.** They may have one or more micro-businesses and even employ several of their classmates or siblings. Teachers and fellow students are good sources of information about these young people. Or, ask around town to see if people know young people with small businesses; look for their flyers in the local coffee shop.

Needs (and Wants) of Young Entrepreneurs

Young entrepreneurs have some needs similar to those of adult entrepreneurs. They need space to be creative. They need help creating a business plan around their idea. They are not likely to be proficient in all three of the primary functions of business: production, management and marketing.

There are some important differences as well. Youth have limited real world experience to lean on. Typically, students are not well connected to adults in economic development roles and so they may not know where to go for help. They may also find it difficult to get adults to take them seriously.

Perhaps most importantly, adults want to protect youth from failure. If their ideas seem unrealistic, teachers and parents may try to discourage them from even trying. But, when we ask adult entrepreneurs if they learned more from their failures or their successes, we get a smile with the reply, "From my

failures.” Why, then, are we afraid to let our youth fail? Instead, we should be supporting our young people as they try and, yes, fail, so that they learn and avoid bigger mistakes later in life.

So, what do young entrepreneurs want? First and foremost, they want to be taken seriously and to have the opportunity to develop and test their ideas. They would like to learn from adults with the experience to help them and want regular and continuing encouragement – even if they fail on their first, second or third attempt. Many of them want to come back to their hometowns and see entrepreneurship as a way of enabling their return.

Just like adult entrepreneurs, young entrepreneurs want opportunities to come together with their peers, to feel part of a group of like-minded young people and to share their experiences with others who “get it.” They want the freedom to be creative but in a supportive, nurturing environment.



Moving Forward

You may have looked around at your rural community and found some young entrepreneurs and others who are dreaming about their businesses. You may have heard from friends and neighbors about a daughter who would like to come home and start her dental practice or about a nephew who would like to return and take over the family’s small manufacturing plant. You have seen the interest and the potential, but how can the community support the aspirations of these creative young people? This section provides some ideas for moving forward and supporting youth entrepreneurship in your community.

Engaging Young Entrepreneurs

To be successful in youth entrepreneurship, you need to start young and implement a comprehensive strategy that ties together education, real world experience and community support. You need to develop effective ways of engaging with young entrepreneurs. Let's take a moment to look at the roles of schools, the community and adult mentors in this engagement strategy.

Role for the Schools. Making education relevant to young entrepreneurs – the earlier, the better – is important to their academic success and preparation for adulthood. An essential element in this work is entrepreneurship education.

Ideally, entrepreneurial concepts should be integrated into curriculum from elementary school to post-secondary education. Starting early is important because young entrepreneurs begin expressing their traits at a very young age. Waiting until the junior or senior year of high school is really too late for these students. Either they try to figure things out on their own, and in the process take their focus off school, or they will give up and join the mainstream path of college prep classes with the hope of finding a job that allows them to use their creative entrepreneurial talents. College may indeed be the proper path for a young entrepreneur but it needs to be an enhancement to their entrepreneurial development, not a substitute because alternatives are not available.

On a practical level, making products to sell in kindergarten, learning about local entrepreneurs in elementary state history curriculum, and offering entrepreneurship classes in junior high and high school are great ways to enhance the K-12 curriculum for entrepreneurial youth. Importantly, entrepreneurship does not need to be a stand alone class. It can be integrated into existing courses and benefit all students through hands-on exercises and community-based projects. Even those that are not entrepreneurial will gain a better understanding of small business ownership and operation, possibly grooming them for entrepreneurial support roles within their communities.

Role for the Community. Community support of young entrepreneurs can take several forms. The community can serve as a learning laboratory in concert with the local school – an apprenticeship can provide real-world, practical experience to enhance the classroom learning experience. Apprenticeships also help expose young entrepreneurs to potential adult role models. Another approach is a Youth Entrepreneur Fair where young entrepreneurs are recognized and their products are sold.

Some young entrepreneurs may be interested in applying their entrepreneurial skills in non-profit and public sector roles. One of the best ways to do this is to provide space for youth in local organizations and on civic boards. However, this

is not just a learning experience for youth. Young people have valuable insights about their community and what may be needed to make it a better place for young people to live. By engaging young people in community leadership and service roles, we also help them develop healthy self-esteem and a sense of community “ownership” through service to others.

Positive experiences tied to entrepreneurship education may lead more young people to consider returning to the community after college and some career exposure. Their experience during high school helps them feel that the community is a supportive environment and they have developed the skills to be successful there. Some young entrepreneurs believe they have a better chance of being successful in a small community where everyone knows them, versus a large city where they are just one of many people competing for customers.

The community has an important role and existing resources it can opt to use to support young entrepreneurs. However you choose to engage, this work is most effective through open communication with individual young people about their unique goals and how the community can help make them a reality. When this dialogue is connected to adult role models and mentors, it can have profound impact upon young people.

Role for Adult Mentors. As you think back on your experience as a young person, are there one or two adults that you remember fondly? We ask each group of adults we work with this question and the responses are often moving and heartfelt. We hear stories about a teacher, a grandparent, a business person or a neighbor. We hear, “They helped me figure out who I am” or “They helped me believe in myself.” We have never had an adult say, “They told me the right answers” or “They put me down all the time.”

Young people today need the same kind of support and encouragement that we needed as youth. However, some youth are not getting enough time with the adults who can help them figure out who they are, how the world works, and what their role is in society. Whatever the reasons for this change, what is important in our discussion about the role of mentors is to understand that adults are important in the lives of youth and that we should make time to be positive role models – to listen, encourage and support the young people in our lives.

Encouraging Young People to “Come Home”

The likelihood of young entrepreneurs returning to their home communities can be enhanced by connecting them with specific business opportunities, either a new business start up or purchase of an existing business. Community leaders working in concert with teachers can open a dialog with young entrepreneurs to determine their career goals and then work to match local business opportunities with those goals. For example, a community leader could approach a young person interested in owning a contracting business and let her know that the community needs such a business and would support her. There may even be an older owner of a contracting business who might consider working with that young person to purchase the business – with community support through a revolving loan program or the use of business succession tools such as life insurance.

College scholarships are other resources rarely used to attract young people home. While most communities provide scholarships to graduating seniors, these often go to students who perform exceptionally in academics, sports or another extracurricular activity. However, if a community wants to encourage entrepreneurial students to return home, a scholarship is an excellent way to convey this message. Scholarship applications can also provide the community with information about students who have an interest in returning home, and can include stipulations about coming home to work.

HTC Scholarship Example. One of the private sector HTC sponsors provides college scholarships to students in the communities where they have facilities. For years, applicants have been asked if they have an interest in returning home in the future. Before youth were engaged through HTC, responses were typically vague and non-committal. In the three years since HTC, applicants are much more positive and specific about their plans for coming home. One young woman wants to get a degree in journalism and return to the region as a newspaper owner. This information was conveyed to local leaders and a dialogue was opened with this young person about how her community could help make her goal a reality. This example demonstrates how a scholarship, connected with community engagement, can have a real impact on young entrepreneurs and the future of the community.

There are adults in your community who want to be role models and mentors to young entrepreneurs. Perhaps it is a business person who had a mentor and

wants to give back by helping a young entrepreneur learn about business at an early age. Perhaps it is a retired teacher who wants to stay involved with students and has great skills as a mentor. Maybe it is a pastor, a grandmother, the Mayor, or even you!

Adult mentors...

- Help identify and engage entrepreneurial young people in the community.
- Listen to their ideas and questions in encouraging and supportive ways.
- Reinforce the value of young people to adults in the community.
- Emphasize small town values and benefits to young people.
- Connect youth with community, business and career opportunities.

Because this is a new approach to community development, we have shared some insights from our HTC fieldwork and adult mentor workshops in the box below.

Being a Successful Adult Mentor

To be effective, adult mentors need to engage youth in ways that build character while providing pathways to community involvement and economic opportunity. The following six elements are critical to being a successful adult mentor:

Meet the young person where he or she is. An adult mentor will rarely "connect" with a young person in how they think about most issues. However, the adult mentor must make the effort to understand the young person's perspective. This does not mean the mentor must agree with the young person. Rather this is the starting point in building a relationship between the mentor and a young person who is discovering who they are as an individual and what they believe about the world around them.

Actively listen to the young person. Listening is hard work, especially when a young person sees things from a very different perspective and uses unfamiliar phrases to express him- or herself. However, it is critical that the adult mentor actively listen to the young person when they talk about their ideas, dreams, and also their frustrations. Make eye contact and don't interrupt – do ask questions that probe deeper. Take the time to really get to know the young person as an individual.

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Being a Successful Adult Mentor *(continued)*

Take questions seriously and resist the temptation to provide a young person with the "right answers". Young people value individual discovery over hard and fast answers, especially when they are communicated by another person as the only right answer. The better approach is to encourage young people to find the right answers by asking exploratory questions and offering perspective when appropriate. This is hard and it takes practice. Being honest in the beginning that this is challenging can actually open up the lines of communication between mentor and youth. It sends the message that the adult mentor recognizes that a "generation gap" does indeed exist and that it takes work on their part to overcome it.

Help the young person find new opportunities to learn and grow. This is perhaps the most rewarding part of being an adult mentor – the chance to help a young person realize their full potential! Once you understand a young person's interests and talents, the natural next step is to help the young person find ways to put them into practice. This does not necessarily mean that the adult mentor and young person will do these activities together. Often a mentor can best serve as a "bridge" that helps the young person to cross into new territory while still providing needed guidance along the way.

Serve as a positive role model for the young person. An adult mentor needs to be constantly aware of the impact they have upon a young person through their actions and words. Mentors should therefore conduct themselves in such a manner that not only earns a young person's respect, but also serves as a guidepost for them as they mature into adulthood.

Help the young person use his/her talents to serve the community. The last step for the adult mentor is to help the young person become an active and engaged member of his/her community. This process involves helping the young person match his/her interests and skills with opportunities for service – becoming a local business owner or a leader in a community organization. It may involve an apprenticeship or leaving the community for a period of time to earn an education and gain experience. In any case, this is a deliberate process of helping the young person mature into a productive member of society as an adult. Hopefully, they will also choose to mentor another young person along the way and continue the cycle.

Leading Practices

From our work with communities engaged in youth entrepreneurship we are identifying traits of successful programs. These “leading practices” can help inform other communities about how to develop an effective youth entrepreneur engagement strategy. The themes include:

- Quality Entrepreneurship Curriculum
- Supportive Community Environment
- Peer Networking
- Pathways from Education to Opportunity

Quality Entrepreneurship Curriculum

Successful youth entrepreneurship programs are built on a foundation of quality curriculum taught by teachers who engage their students in the discovery and development of their entrepreneurial talent. Teachers have a variety of teaching styles and entrepreneurship is taught in many different subject areas. Curriculum that is already certified to meet national testing standards, content rich and well organized is a high priority for the teachers with whom we work.

Most rural schools do not have the resources to dedicate an entire course and teacher to entrepreneurship so it is often presented as a section of Business Law, Family Consumer Science or Current Events. There is also the challenge of fitting Entrepreneurship into the class schedule along with the other required electives for college-bound students. Again, incorporating entrepreneurship into an existing class has been the solution to these constraints in many schools.

The HTC website, www.htcnebraska.org/youtheship, has links to several excellent entrepreneurship curriculums and supporting resource materials. Before you engage in a conversation with the school administration or faculty about offering a class, we recommend that you review the curriculum descriptions so you are familiar with what is available.

Supportive Community Environment

Successful communities work in partnership with the school as a “learning laboratory” where students can practice the knowledge they are gaining in the classroom. This may involve apprenticeships, selling products at school events, interviewing local entrepreneurs or doing a community service project.

Another very important element is utilizing local experts to work with young entrepreneurs. For example, in Ord, Nebraska, two local bankers worked with students in preparing loan applications for their class projects. A marketing

professional based in the community helped students develop their marketing plans. The radio station owner worked with the students in producing advertisements that played on the air. Engaging these types of people makes entrepreneurship “real” for students and it is also a lot of fun for the adults!

In addition to these roles, community leaders taking an interest in young entrepreneurs can change attitudes among young people about the community and their future. Many entrepreneurial youth express frustration that the community seems to only focus on star athletes or “problem kids”. They also tell us, “There is nothing for us to do here”. Building relationships with students who want to get involved in the community, supporting their efforts, and celebrating their community and entrepreneurial projects can help them develop into productive citizens and also make your community more attractive to young people as a place to stay or return – a win-win scenario!

Peer Networking

Just as with entrepreneurial adults, young entrepreneurs need a “place” to hang out with other kids that think the way they do. Fitting in is a big deal when you are a young person. Young entrepreneurs know they think differently and that often causes them to go off by themselves to experiment with their ideas. However, if you provide a space for them to interact with other young entrepreneurs, they can feed off of each other’s energy and create even better ideas and inventions. This space may be a parent’s garage or basement family room on Tuesday evenings with pizza and soda. Keep it simple!

Pathways from Education to Opportunity

Ultimately, successful communities help young entrepreneurs transition from the learning process to tangible business and civic opportunities. This is a deliberate process to help a young person clarify their goals, connect with opportunities that are a good fit, and then to stay with them as their enterprise develops. This work may involve doing an inventory of soon-to-retire business owners looking to sell their businesses over the next several years. It may include help in writing a business plan or using an existing revolving loan fund to help a capable young person without equity or cash get started. Each young entrepreneur is unique. Finding out what help they need to move ahead and filling the gaps in resources and services are key.

Bringing the Pieces Together – The HomeTown Competitiveness Model

Now we want to take the concepts we have laid out and talk about empowering communities with tools and resources that will develop and enhance their youth engagement work, specifically in the context of HomeTown Competitiveness (HTC). This application is founded on a youth engagement system to create and strengthen youth opportunities through:

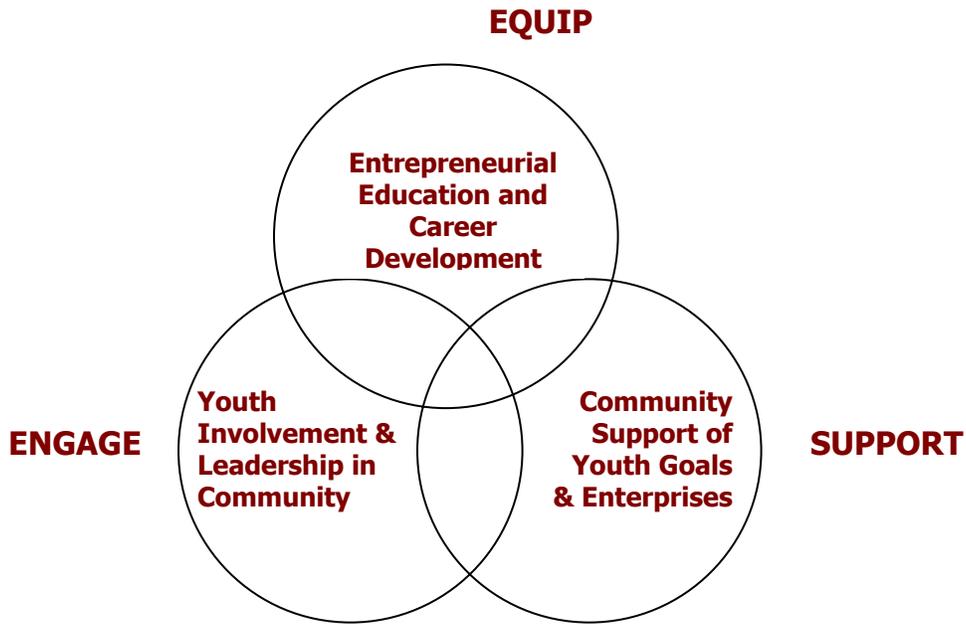
- Leadership roles and responsibilities
- Entrepreneurship education and career development
- Adult mentoring and support of youth and young adults

We need to start with an understanding that it is not just the call of the city that compels young people to leave their rural communities; it is also a perceived lack of opportunity and encouragement to “not come back” that drives young people away from their hometowns. HTC helps adults learn how to engage youth in positive ways to create career opportunities through business transfer and entrepreneurship and to nurture a sense of ownership and vested interest in the community’s future as leaders. Community leaders who work with young people can begin to change attitudes among students about the community and their future aspirations.

HTC provides a positive environment for communities to engage youth and attract new residents to their hometown through an integrated Youth Engagement Process (see diagram below). The goal of this interconnected approach is to bring balance and integration among the important parts of youth engagement and attraction activities. Each of the three elements is very important, but falls short without the other two. Examples of this include:

- Having a strong entrepreneurship program, but no connection to the community - youth experiences do not go beyond the classroom.
- Involving youth in community leadership positions and events, but not entrepreneurship and career development – youth may fail to see the career opportunities in their own hometown and take their leadership skills elsewhere.
- Adults talking about the importance of youth to the community’s future but not providing venues for youth to get involved or pathways to career or business opportunities within the community – youth are encouraged to leave and build their careers and businesses in other places.

Integrated Youth Engagement Process



The foundation behind the Youth Engagement Process is that communities will engage in an initial investigation to gather information, data and perspectives regarding youth engagement in their hometown. From that assessment, the community will set goals – for example, a community may discover that there is a need to better engage youth in community leadership. With that in mind, a community just starting out might set the goal of having youth representation on the local Economic Development Board. This is a great goal to work towards, but there is work to be done to get to this level and have it be effective. Without laying a strong foundation for youth engagement, your hometown may find itself creating confusion and frustration rather than partnerships and clarity. Stories of how HTC is working in small towns in the Midwest are illustrated in the following case studies. The case studies from HTC communities included here provide insights into how this strategy could be used in your community.

About HomeTown Competitiveness

This comprehensive community economic development strategy focuses on four pillars – developing leaders, engaging youth, energizing entrepreneurs and charitable giving. For more general information about HTC, visit www.htcnebraska.org.

Case Studies from HTC Communities

Moving Too Fast. A rural town of 1,500 engaged with HTC and hit the ground running. With early successes in charitable giving campaigns and community support, this rural community was excited to jump into the youth engagement component of HTC.

After learning about the youth engagement strategy, a local leader saw the opportunity to better engage youth in the community through representation on the local Economic Development (ED) Board. He got the Board to make the necessary membership changes in their by-laws. The board picked two youth representatives and invited them to join the Board. Soon, it was time for the board meeting. Here sat a group of adults that did not know how to effectively work with youth and two youth that did not understand their roles. Additionally, because of the way the youth were chosen, they had no organized group or constituency to represent and were left instead simply representing themselves as individuals rather than a group of their peers.

What this leader did was not a bad thing. Engaging youth in community leadership positions is a great way to build youth/adult partnerships, give youth a voice in the community, and create sustainable youth engagement. What the group failed to do was the legwork necessary to prepare everyone for this new engagement.

Recently, this community has re-evaluated its youth goals and has engaged in an "intergenerational dialogue," implemented entrepreneurship education in the schools, and has made purposeful efforts at engaging youth in community events and activities. These events and roles for youth are laying the groundwork for long-term youth engagement and the community is now ready to re-visit its long-term goal of youth on the ED Board.

This example shows that instead of jumping straight to the final goal, a process is needed to set up the necessary elements that can lead to long-term integration of youth in leadership roles.

Laying a Strong Foundation. Another rural town, population 1,000, began this process with a visit conducted by the HTC site coach to gather information and conduct an initial assessment. Based on this visit, the site coach highlighted five key development issues, one of which was the community's youth opportunity. Specifically, the results of teen surveys completed by youth identified two primary opportunities – focusing on young adults and youth engagement and attraction.

The next step for this second case study community was to explore further the youth opportunity. HTC staff conducted three focus groups – with youth, adults that work with youth, and young adults/newcomers – to better clarify the current reality of how youth and young adults were engaged in the community and what opportunities there were to provide deeper engagement of and commitment to these two groups. From these focus groups, HTC staff highlighted key findings, themes, and offered conclusions and recommendations.

By going through this information gathering process, the community developed a holistic view of their current youth reality and was given real, tangible suggestions for future work. The next step in the youth engagement process is to equip the community with tools for events and activities that invite youth to the table and help to articulate roles and responsibilities of youth for involvement in the community.

Hosting a Kick-Off Event. With information and ideas in hand, holding a kick-off event to celebrate the work so far, to recruit additional youth and adult mentors, and to inform the rest of the community is a great idea. A good example is the Thinking Outside the Box rally held in Knox County, Nebraska. Youth and adults worked together to stage a successful youth rally that invited youth to be a part of a larger community development agenda. A core group of high school students worked with HTC community and team leaders to overcome an obstacle - specifically, they were having trouble getting other youth interested. Together they came up with the idea of holding a youth rally as a way to inform and motivate their peers from communities across the county.

The core group of teen and adult leaders, with the support of school administrators and teachers in each school district, recruited 90 high school students in grades 9 through 11 to the half-day event. Youth leaders kicked off the morning and keynote speakers painted visual pictures of how young people can and should dream big about what is possible in Knox County. The students then participated in a “Welcome Back Home” exercise to demonstrate their interest in returning to the region and to encourage them in making this choice in the future. The participants then moved around stations in the gym where they visited with area entrepreneurs, local leaders and resource providers about opportunities and resources available to them.

The event wrapped up with an invitation to sign up for specific activities that the core group had prepared in advance with input they received in planning and recruiting for the event. Fifty-seven students signed up for specific activities and projects touching on all four pillars of HTC. Adults gained youth engagement skills by working with the youth leadership group and student participants at the event. Their perspectives on community collaboration were also broadened

through working with energetic young people with fresh ideas. Youth and adults then planned and conducted additional activities to bridge communication barriers and build relationships between younger and older residents in the county.

Now, with a larger group of people to engage, the process of youth engagement can continue. As communities move through the HTC process, leaders including youth begin to discuss how to achieve deeper engagement and sustainability for their work. In the youth pillar, this work will focus on key priorities that will help the community integrate youth into community leadership roles and entrepreneurship opportunities while working with adult mentors and building broader community engagement. It will also focus on creating sustainable and robust resources to support the youth agenda well into the future by involving other HTC champions such as the community foundation, economic development groups and local government.

Community Success Strategies

Due to the innovative nature of this work, measurement of the impact of this comprehensive engagement with HTC, and other approaches is still in the opening stages. However, we are learning so much from the young people and communities in which we work, and share these early lessons. These community success strategies can provide powerful lessons as you begin to energize young entrepreneurs in your communities.

Ord, Nebraska

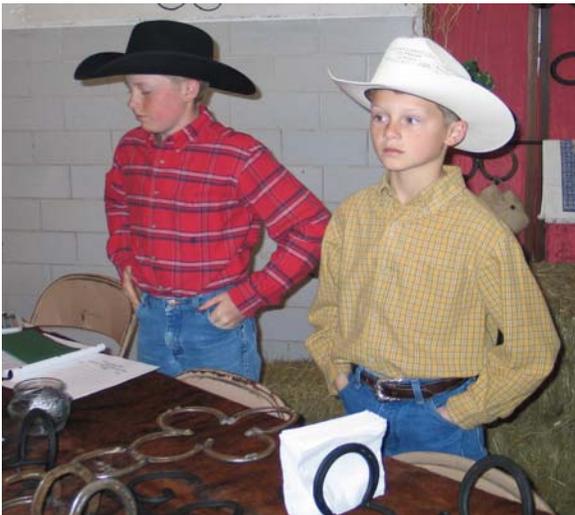
In Ord, Nebraska, the Business Development Coordinator, Nancy Glaubke, worked with 34 fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth-grade students at St. Mary's parochial school. At the beginning of the school year, the students learned how entrepreneurs take their ideas and create businesses around them.

The students were then given the assignment to come up with an idea for a product they would like to make and sell. Over the school year, they drafted business plans, applied for loans from local bankers, met with entrepreneurs, and produced their products. At the end of the school year, they held a community Youth Entrepreneurship Fair to sell their products to the public. They created radio ads, with support from the local radio station, that played daily for two weeks before the event, and the students were interviewed during the fair on a live radio broadcast. The students recently were recognized by Governor Dave Heinemann and the Kellogg Foundation for their work. This is an experiential approach to teaching entrepreneurship and community service, and the young people had serious fun while learning important business practices.



Of Note

Some of the products the students created were stepping stones, designer fertilizer, toy tops, fishing lures, dog treats, and rabbit fur koozies. Several of the students continued to sell their products and indicated an interest in ultimately establishing a business within the community. Students have also been involved in community service projects such as planting flowers at the Senior Center, teaching the importance of giving back. Their teachers deserve credit for stressing service to others as an important element of a well-rounded education.



Mullen, Nebraska. Students in Mullen, Nebraska, an HTC community located in the Sandhills with a population of 554, are active on a number of fronts. They completed a consumer preference study to determine where residents purchase goods and services, and what new businesses the community would support. The local school offered an entrepreneurship class, and the students took the lead on a community betterment project by cleaning up the public park and raising money to construct a Frisbee golf course. Youth appeared before the school board to ask for help in maintaining the course once completed, and the local telephone company provided equipment for installing the new sprinkler system.

Adults in the community complimented the youth for their efforts and donated products to aid in the fundraising drive. One adult noted to the local economic developer, "This is exactly what we need to be doing to support our youth!" The work in Mullen is an excellent example of how entrepreneurship education, community service and adult engagement can come together to make a significant impact upon young entrepreneurs and youth in general.

Nemaha County, Nebraska. In Nemaha County in southeastern Nebraska, the countywide economic development board received a grant from USDA-Rural Development to support youth entrepreneurship programs in two local high schools. The program at Auburn High School has been operating for several years and ties entrepreneurship curriculum and presentations by local entrepreneurs with the development of an actual business that the students operate during the semester. The Johnson-Brock program has also been in place for several years as part of a high school accounting class. During the semester, the students explore entrepreneurial career opportunities and learn the aspects of operating a small business.

Under the USDA-funded project, adult mentors were recruited and trained to work with the teachers and students in both schools. The mentors included local business people, college business students, and economic development board members. One of the most impressive outcomes from this project was the dramatic change in several shy, quiet students who, by the end of the mentoring process, were much more confident in themselves and much more energized.

Big Stone Gap, Virginia. Big Stone Gap, Virginia, in the Appalachian region near the Kentucky border, has a strong CFED REAL entrepreneurship program involving seven high schools in four communities and the area technical college. During the eight years following the program's inception, 24 teachers gained certification in the REAL curriculum and 23 social programs contributed funding to support the program. The initiative has evolved to incorporate entrepreneurship concepts throughout the school curriculum.

The local Workforce Investment Board funds students to participate in the program as part of a strategy to help families move out of poverty through education and economic empowerment. The program is a great example of the potential for a community-based youth entrepreneurship initiative and points the way for others to follow.

Of Note

Examples of student projects include the renovation of an old corn mill that is open for tours led by students. The students also mill products available for sale to tourists. The region is rich in Bluegrass music artists, so students produced a music CD of local artists that they sell along with old tinplate photographs that they found.



In their research, students learned that bats help control West Nile virus-carrying insects, so they started building bat houses to sell to area residents. The REAL program now incorporates a beauty parlor, catering business and most recently purchased a plasma cutter for manufacturing signs and other metal products.

Northern New Mexico. In northern New Mexico, four counties have forged an entrepreneurial support organization called the EBS Initiative, Empowering Northern New Mexico's Business Spirit. The EBS mission statement is, "the public and private sectors uniting to create an environment that encourages an entrepreneurial mindset, models and rewards entrepreneurial risk-taking, and holistically supports the establishment and growth of small businesses."

The EBS Youth Entrepreneur Director has built an innovative youth entrepreneurship support structure that is already demonstrating impact. One innovative approach involves networking with established entrepreneurial firms in the region to help youth create affiliated branch businesses. The group has planned and led several community forums to help adults better connect with youth and the issues they care about. The effort is also connecting youth to their respective Spanish and Hispanic heritages to build bridges and respect for the different cultures in the communities that EBS serves.

A three-day EBS “You’re the Boss” conference was held in Española, New Mexico, at Northern New Mexico College. Twenty educators were trained and certified in YoungBiz youth entrepreneurship curriculum during the event. The educators are now teaching the curriculum to students in seven school districts and in after-school organizations, such as 4-H. Young entrepreneurs who show the most initiative will attend a Youth Entrepreneur summer camp and enter a business plan competition. The winners will receive EBS support in developing businesses. This program is well on its way to helping youth forge stronger communities and new economic opportunities in northern New Mexico.

Highlands of Scotland. An international example hails from the Highlands of Scotland – a very remote and economically distressed region. A Marketing Development Manager works with Rural Insights to sponsor the ICT (Information Communication Technology) Youth Challenge. This is an interesting initiative to help young people develop ideas for ICT innovations and successfully bring them to market. The concept of a youth inventors and entrepreneurs program was developed as a means to revitalize the economic base of the region and create entrepreneurial career opportunities in 21st century fields. The leader believes that to successfully make this transition, young people must develop ICT entrepreneurial thinking skills. This is a bootstrap program that has grown to capture the interest of partners such as Microsoft.

Of Note

Young entrepreneurs from the Highlands give merit to the approach Rural Insights is undertaking. One group of teenagers originated an idea for using Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) tracking devices in cell phones to help emergency personnel locate accident victims in a matter of minutes even in remote and dangerous terrain. They are patenting the device and negotiating with major communication firms to license the technology.

Stories of Youth

Just as a picture is often worth a thousand words, stories of young people who are engaged in their communities, as entrepreneurs and as involved citizens, can be powerful motivators for action. Here we provide some snapshots of young entrepreneurs involved in running their own businesses and in community activities. Later in this section, we include three stories that were winners of the RUPRI Center’s ***EYE*DEAS Talent Search*** – a competition to identify compelling stories of young entrepreneurs and the communities that support them. We hope you find these snapshots and stories inspiring.

Youth Entrepreneur Snapshots

Cody Foster. When Cody Foster was 16 years old, he founded what has grown into a very successful business, Backporch Friends. Cody grew up in Valentine, in the Nebraska Sandhills. He began his artistic pursuits when he was very young. His grandma, an avid quilter, taught him the skills needed to design and create his unique and whimsical folk art dolls. As his business grew, he employed other quilters in the region to help produce his dolls under his close supervision and creative involvement in final production. Cody's early success eventually led to regional, and soon, national popularity. As a high school student, he was invited to New York City to create holiday window displays for a well-known upscale retail store. Cody's designs are now distributed nationally and featured in the American Folk Art Museum. He has also been featured in Country Home Magazine and Country Living Magazine. Today, Cody's products are highly prized by collectors.

Tom Chvala. A student at Atkinson Public School in North Central Nebraska, Tom and his two cousins, Andrew and Michael Krotter, operate a very successful lawn care business, called ATM, their first initials. When asked if they have a lot of competition, his response is, "Not really, other kids aren't willing to work as hard as we are". Tom is a very engaging young man. He is a member of the community's HTC Youth Task Force and is encouraging his community to create an entrepreneurship program beginning in the fourth grade. Tom comes from a family of entrepreneurs and civic leaders. His family owns several local businesses and is involved in all aspects of their community.

Katie Madsen. Tom Chvala's cousin, Katie Madsen, is a recent graduate of Stuart High School, just up the road from Atkinson. In her senior year, she served as a National Vice President of Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA). Katie was also elected Governor by her peers at Girls State. Katie ran for both prestigious positions with a message she is passionate about: "*Youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow, we can be leaders today!*" Katie and Tom are growing up in nurturing families that encourage their entrepreneurial development and stressed the importance of community service. Katie tells a story about when she was little and played "Town" with her cousins. Most kids play house, school or store, but Katie and her cousins were big thinkers as toddlers and they ran the entire community! They named their town, Greenville, because their playroom had old green shag carpet. They each took turns operating the various businesses, school, library and public utilities in their small town and, in the process, learned what it takes to make a real community work. There is no doubt that Greenville, and parents who encouraged their role playing, had a lasting impact on Katie and her cousins!

Neal Ely. Neal Ely started growing and selling asparagus as a FFA project at the age of 17. Soon Neal began using his mother's pickled asparagus recipe to reach additional customers and expand his market. Neal is now a college student majoring in Agribusiness, and Ely Farms-Pickled Asparagus has grown into a nice business. Neal now sells jars of his unique snack food in Nebraska and surrounding states. He says he plans to grow his business at a steady annual pace. When interviewed by Congressman Tom Osborne's office about his early success, Neal explained, "I am just an average Nebraska farm kid, not a genius. Anybody is capable of beginning their own business if they have the desire to. I would just encourage students to be creative in their business endeavors. Diversity is a very important part of our state's agricultural future". Most recently, Neal was awarded the prestigious honor of being named the national Star in Agribusiness by FFA at their annual convention.

Energizing Young Entrepreneurs Stories

As part of the Center's EYE*DEAS Talent Search, Lisa Bauer produced three youth entrepreneurship-focused stories. These stories reflect what we have been saying throughout this publication – young people have great ideas and can flourish as entrepreneurs given some support from the community.

Minnesota Youths become "Eco-preneurs" with Putting Green. Laurel Gamm, a busy mom and physician from New Ulm, Minn., had no plans to start a mini-golf business. But on the way home from a family vacation, she had an "A-ha" moment.

http://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/content/cr_3/2_000201.pdf.

One Youth's Desire to Inspire Spurs National Organization in Support of Mentoring Girls. After a morning meeting, 20-year-old Haley Kilpatrick catches her breath for yet another phone call in the string of appointments related to running a nonprofit organization.

http://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/content/cr_3/2_000233.pdf

Young Entrepreneurs Rejuvenate Gym to Restore New Harmony. In the fall of 2002, a group of high school students got together to brainstorm ideas for community projects. Young people talked of planting gardens, cleaning up roads and highways and battling water pollution – all worthy causes. But the students of New Harmony Local School District in New Harmony, Indiana, had grander visions, much like the founders of their small town.

http://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/content/cr_3/2_000239.pdf

Concluding Thoughts on Youth Entrepreneurship

We have a powerful potential in our youth, and we must have the courage to change old ideas and practices so that we may direct their power toward good ends.

Mary McLeod Bethune

What Mary McLeod Bethune had to say to members of the WWII generation are no less relevant to those in rural communities who are struggling with the out-migration of youth and the desire to engage those same young people in building more sustainable communities for the future. We find hope in many places – stories of communities successfully engaging youth and of young entrepreneurs building businesses in their rural hometowns. This publication shares what we have learned over years of working in and with rural communities generally and more specifically with those communities that are embracing HomeTown Competitiveness. These lessons and stories can help guide other communities as they begin the tough but rewarding process of working with their young people to build a more prosperous, sustainable future for hometowns across the rural landscape.