

Every state and community has entrepreneurial talent and resources that can help this talent thrive. Most states and communities lack robust and comprehensive entrepreneurial ecosystem strategies employing proven “top down” and “bottom up” development game plans. Nebraska is now committed to a cutting edge and innovative **entrepreneurial communities’** initiative called E3 or Energizing Entrepreneurial Ecosystems.

## Background and Introduction

Nebraska has a rich history of entrepreneur-focused community economic development (CED) including pioneering initiatives in both urban and rural Nebraska:

- REAP or Rural Enterprise Assistance Project – Center for Rural Affairs (<https://www.cfra.org/lending>)
- Nebraska Business Development Center (<https://www.unomaha.edu/nebraska-business-development-center/>)
- NEF or Nebraska Enterprise Fund (<https://nebbiz.org/>)
- SourceLink Nebraska (<https://sourcelinknebraska.com/>)
- Nebraska Extension’s Entrepreneur Coaching Project (<https://extension.unl.edu/>)
- University of Nebraska Entrepreneurial Initiatives (<https://www.unl.edu/>) including:
  - Raikes School (<https://raikes.unl.edu/>)
  - Engler Agribusiness Entrepreneurship Program (<https://engler.unl.edu/>)
  - Johnny Carson Center for Emerging Media Arts (<https://arts.unl.edu/carson-center>)

*Note – This list of Nebraska entrepreneurial resources and initiatives is not comprehensive. There are other local, regional and statewide resources and initiatives. Our intent is to just highlight some of the more recognized initiatives and resources based on e2’s familiarity with Nebraska.*

Nebraska’s entrepreneurship strategies have been largely focused on traditional microenterprise and small business development and capital access for such ventures. Both Omaha and Lincoln have active entrepreneurial ecosystem building focusing on underserved entrepreneurs, microenterprises, small- and high-growth businesses.

Overall, Nebraska (e.g., both public and private) has not significantly supported more comprehensive entrepreneur-led development and entrepreneurial ecosystem building. The recent development of SourceLink Nebraska is a step towards greater commitment. Like most U.S. geographies, Nebraska has a diverse array of largely hard to find entrepreneurial resources. SourceLink Nebraska is a powerful step in the right direction to make resources more available, transparent and accountable to both entrepreneurs and their communities.

### ***Nebraska’s Dominate Economic Development Strategies:*** ***#1 - Corporate Attraction, Retention and Expansion*** ***#2 – Real Estate Project Development***

However, Nebraska's commitment to economic development is rooted in traditional larger business attraction, retention and expansion and planned real estate developments. The State of Nebraska invests billions in tax abatements including job and investment tax credits, tax increment financing for real estate projects and other inducements focusing on corporate versus rooted entrepreneurial development.

#### Agriculture – A Major Development Focus

Nebraska is a major commodity agricultural state leading the U.S. in beef production, corn, ethanol, wheat and other farm and ranch products. Nebraska has a large input and processing allied agricultural industry. Agriculture also enjoys strong state support.

In this paper – ***E3 Energizing Entrepreneurial Ecosystems*** – we introduce this new “bottom’s up” entrepreneur-focused community economic development initiative capable of furthering both community and statewide support for and investment in entrepreneurship strategies. Our E3 paper is organized into the following parts:

- About E3
- Collaborative Partnerships
- E3 Partner Communities
- Use of the e2 and NetWork Kansas Models
- Conclusion – Other Promising Entrepreneurship Initiatives
- Attachment 1 – E3’s Grant Application to the Kauffman Foundation
- Attachment 2 – E3’s Development Push Strategy

#### Questions and Information

Don Macke – Senior Vice President

e2 – Entrepreneurial Ecosystems – Hosted by NetWork Kansas  
Cell 402.770.4987 - [don@e2mail.org](mailto:don@e2mail.org) – [www.energizingentrepreneurs.org](http://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org)



Willa Cather (1873-1947) is a famous writer calling Red Cloud, one of the E3 communities, home. Many of her books and essays are set in Red Cloud and South Central Nebraska. Cather continues to have a significant international following attracting thousands of visitors, annually. Red Cloud is home to the Willa Cather Foundation (<https://www.willacather.org/>) located in the historic Moon Block in downtown Red Cloud. While Red Cloud’s primary economic driver is commodity agriculture, Cather and Red Cloud draw destination tourists diversifying both Red Cloud’s economy and society.

*Willa Cather pictured left.*

Our next stop is **About E3**.

E3 is an “entrepreneurial communities” initiative focusing on reaching out to area entrepreneurs, learning about their needs and wants and connecting them to relevant resources for assistance. This is called the “ground game” and is best undertaken at the local level. In working with entrepreneurs, a community can optimize entrepreneurial ecosystem building and operation rooted in what is called the “demand driven” development approach. For most rural communities, a vast majority of entrepreneurial needs and wants can be met within the region from development programs and area business services.

## About E3

E3 is a classic **entrepreneurship communities'** initiative rooted in the decades-long NetWork Kansas E-Communities Partnership Program (<https://www.networkkansas.com/ecommunities>). E3 has the following key design attributes:

- Bottom-Up entrepreneurial community ecosystem-building approach
- Three-year funding and program commitment
- Growth opportunities from a demonstration project with a vision of statewide build out
- Community selection rooted in readiness
- Peer-learning organized around six, two-day gatherings
- More than \$1 million in initiative investment
- Statewide support and policy-making envisioned from the bottom-up approach
- Follows the Ord, Nebraska ecosystem-building effort

### First E3 Community Gathering, 2021



The first of six planned E3 community gatherings is organized around peer learning and support. The first E3 gathering was appropriately hosted by Valley County in Ord in the fall of 2021.

On the next page is a 2021 article developed by the Nebraska Community Foundation sharing E3 with its vast in-state and international audience.

Valley County is both a program and community partner. It is both a model for other communities, and seeking to further develop its already demonstrated

entrepreneurial development game plan. For more about Valley County check out...

<https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/library/theme-papers/subjects/ord-nebraska.html>

**The Historic Moon Block – Red Cloud  
Home of Author Willa Cather**



**2021 Nebraska Community Foundation Story About E3...**

A new statewide initiative known as Energizing Entrepreneurial Ecosystems is strengthening six Greater Nebraska hometowns. The three-year community-building experience will work to bolster entrepreneurial ecosystems in Valley County, Holt County, Keith County, Sidney, Red Cloud and McCook through extensive training, education and peer learning opportunities.

Through the generous support of the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, Nebraska Community Foundation, NetWork Kansas and Valley County Economic Development worked closely to design and launch the Energizing Entrepreneurial Ecosystems (E3) program. While six communities form the initial E3 cohort, participating local leaders and entrepreneurs will each be asked to reach out to neighboring hometowns to join the effort, resulting in a total of 20 Greater Nebraska communities that will forge new connections to resources, training and peer networking and, ultimately, boost local prosperity.

On September 30 and October 1, dozens of local leaders representing all six cohort communities met in Ord for the first time. This convening allowed for all participants to witness for themselves the entrepreneurial successes of Valley County, a community that is continually lifted up nationally as a model for what a thriving rural economy can look like. Members of the E3 cohort enjoyed a tour of Valley County's business community as well as access to a cadre of local entrepreneurs. During the tour, visitors also heard about the ingredients that have been central to Valley County's approach to community and economic development: leadership, entrepreneurship, philanthropy and youth engagement.

Importantly, they learned a critical lesson that will be embraced by all involved with the E3 network over the next three years: when a community is strong, its economy is strong.

“There’s no one person responsible for economic development,” said Sarah Sinnett, Vice President of Marketing and Technology at G.L. Huyett in Sidney. “Not one individual. It takes the whole community rallying around the cause.”

“This works,” said Don Macke, a consultant to the E3 program. “There are communities like Valley County all across rural Nebraska.”

Organizers say the program is different from past efforts aimed at growing entrepreneurship because it is locally-driven, community-centric and framed with an abundance mindset—a philosophy known worldwide as asset-based community development.

“E3 addresses today’s reality, recognizes what has changed and is taking advantage of an extraordinary opportunity,” said KC Belitz, Chief Operating Officer of Nebraska Community Foundation.

Belitz says this opportunity is afforded to many people working in a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy who because of technology, have more options than ever before when it comes to choosing where they want to live, work and play.

Success of the E3 program will be measured by the implementation of new entrepreneurial development strategies by participating communities, connections made between entrepreneurs and resources, as well as business launches and expansions. The cohort’s next gathering is scheduled for April 2022 in Holt County.

E3 is employing e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems and NetWork Kansas’ models. Later in this paper we share the attributes of these models.

**Big Mac or Lake McConaughy in Keith County, Nebraska**



Our next stop is an exploration of the **Collaborative Partnerships** embedded in E3.

Compared to traditional corporate attraction economic development which is inherently competitive, entrepreneur-focused development is inherently collaborative. Instead of communities and organizations competing for an ever constricting attraction opportunity with very high costs, entrepreneurship-based development works best when community, organizations and even entrepreneurs collaborate.

## Collaborative Partnerships

The primary initiative partners include:

1. Partnering E3 Communities
2. Valley County and Ord
3. The Nebraska Community Foundation
4. e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems
5. NetWork Kansas
6. Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation
7. Nebraska SourceLink and the Nebraska Business Development Center
8. Nebraska Extension
9. GROW Nebraska

Figure 3 provides key roles for the primary E3 collaboration partners:

**Figure 3. Key Roles of E3 Initiative Partners**

<p><b>Nebraska Community Foundation</b> NCF is the host partner and the manager of grant funding including the Kauffman Foundation Central Standards grant. NCF has the primary relationship with all six partner communities. It is providing staffing and resource networking.</p>	<p><b>e2 &amp; NetWork Kansas</b> e2 and NetWork Kansas are providing the development framework, community coaching, advising and networking to resources. Senior staff from e2 and NetWork Kansas are engaged in this initiative.</p>
<p><b>Kauffman Foundation</b> Providing financial support. This grant is part of the larger four-state Heartland Initiative including Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa and Missouri.</p>	<p><b>Valley County</b> Both an initiative partner and partner community. Valley County is sharing its two plus decades of experience with other communities.</p>
<p><b>Partner Communities</b> The partner communities are field testing and innovating on E3.</p>	<p><b>Resource Partners</b> There a growing cohort of resource partners supporting both statewide and community work.</p>

To learn more about these partners, check out the following:

- Partnering E3 Communities:
  - Sidney... <https://www.visitsidneyne.com/>
  - McCook... <https://visitmccook.com/>
  - Keith County... <https://www.explorekeithcounty.com/>
  - Red Cloud... <https://www.visitredcloud.com/>
  - Holt County... <https://growholt.com/>
  - Valley County... <https://www.visitvalleycounty.com/>
- Nebraska Community Foundation... <https://www.nebcommfound.org/>
- e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems... <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/>
- NetWork Kansas... <https://www.networkkansas.com/>
- Kauffman Foundation... <https://www.kauffman.org/emk/>
- SourceLink Nebraska... <https://sourcelinknebraska.com/>
- Nebraska Business Development Center... <https://www.unomaha.edu/nebraska-business-development-center/index.php>
- Nebraska Extension... <https://extension.unl.edu/>
- GROW Nebraska... <https://grownebraska.org>

*Note... There are other resource partners engaging in E3 as it progresses.*

Main Street, Ord, Nebraska – Valley County



Next, we provide an overview of the first cohort of rural **E3 Partner Communities**.

The Nebraska Community Foundation (NCF) is a national leader in the use of peer learning and support, as well as peer gatherings to motivate, inform and support rural community economic development. E3 is employing a standard NCF tactic focusing on a cohort of peer communities. Peer groups are a proven demonstration and scale up strategy.

## E3 Partner Communities

The first cohort of E3 communities include the following rural hometowns in Nebraska:

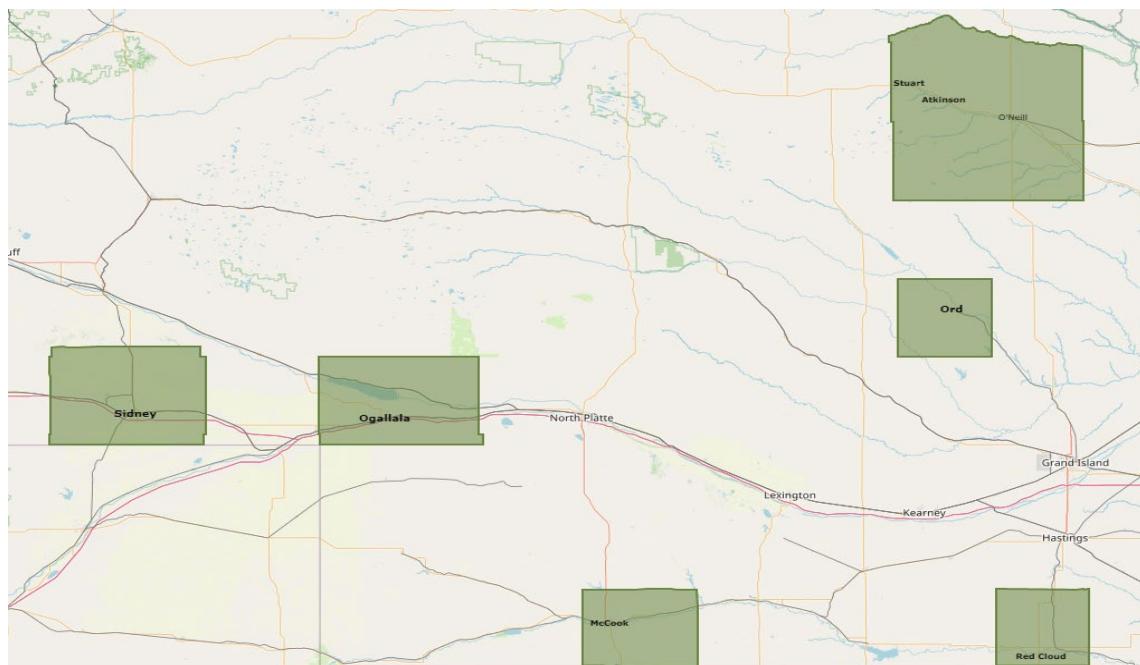
1. Sidney
2. McCook
3. Keith County
4. Red Cloud
5. Valley County
6. Holt County

Figure 1 provides a map of Nebraska with these six E3 partner communities located:

### Community Baselines

E3 by design is a demonstration project to determine if this kind of community economic development can empower rural communities to grow more competitive, higher value, diversified, resilient and prosperous economies and societies. e2 has prepared qualitative and quantitative baselines for each community that will be used later to support progress analysis.

**Figure 1. Nebraska's E3 Communities**



All six of these communities were identified and invited to participate in E3 by the Nebraska Community Foundation (NCF) based on their:

***Association with NCF -- Development Capacity***  
***Alignment with the Mission of E3 -- Ability to Invest in Ecosystem Building and Operation***  
***Representative of All NCF Affiliated Communities***

The Figure 2 provides quick profiles for each of these E3 communities:

**Figure 2. E3 Community Quick Profiles**

<p><b>Sidney/Cheyenne County</b></p> <p>Location – Southern Panhandle  Population – 10,083  Median Age – 41.9 Years  Households – 4,390  Average Household Size – 2.27 Persons  Mean Household Current Net Worth - \$710,248</p>	<p><b>McCook/Red Willow County</b></p> <p>Location – Southwestern Nebraska – Tri-State Region  Population – 10,969  Median Age – 42.1 Years  Households – 4,618  Average Household Size – 2.29 Persons  Mean Household Current Net Worth - \$587,743</p>
<p><b>Keith County</b></p> <p>Location – I80 / I76 Connector Region  Population – 8,377  Median Age – 49.2 Years  Households – 3,841  Average Household Size – 2.17 Persons  Mean Household Current Net Worth - \$589,962</p>	<p><b>Red Cloud/Webster County</b></p> <p>Location – South Central Nebraska  Population – 3,676  Median Age – 48.8 Years  Households – 1,539  Average Household Size – 2.29 Persons  Mean Household Current Net Worth - \$817,285</p>
<p><b>Valley County</b></p> <p>Location – North Central Nebraska  Population – 4,076  Median Age – 50.1 Years  Households – 1,857  Average Household Size – 2.17 Persons  Mean Household Current Net Worth - \$694,860</p>	<p><b>Holt County</b></p> <p>Location – Extreme North Central Nebraska  Population – 10,273  Median Age – 47.7 Years  Households – 4,476  Average Household Size – 2.27 Persons  Mean Household Current Net Worth - \$619,846</p>

Most current published data as of September 2021 Development Opportunity Profiles.

Source: Esri, 2021 & e2 2022 - County Level Data Provided.

For additional information, each community has a customized county-level **Development Opportunity Profile** providing insights on each community's entrepreneurial development opportunities. These profiles are available upon request to Don Macke at [don@e2mail.org](mailto:don@e2mail.org). Valley County and its lead community of Ord is an E3 partner and member of the original six-community E3 cohort. e2 has a substantial multi-year case study of Ord that can be accessed at <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/library/theme-papers/subjects/ord-nebraska.html>.

E3 is employing well-demonstrated **development frameworks** including those curated by e2 and NetWork Kansas. This is our next topic.

One of the primary reasons too much of rural America is struggling is the systematic failure to learn from other communities developing solutions to health care, workforce, broadband, poverty and entrepreneurship-focused development. E3 by design is adapting e2's ***Development Framework and Process*** and seeking to draw heavily on NetWork Kansas' experience, models and programs. e2's model has been greatly informed by its work with NetWork Kansas over the past 20 years.

### Use of the e2 and NetWork Kansas Models

E3 is employing e2's ***Development Framework and Process*** and NetWork Kansas' experience, models and programs. To learn more about cutting edge and high performing rural entrepreneurial ecosystem building check out... <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/library/theme-papers/subjects/entrepreneurial-ecosystem-building.html>. The following are some key takeaways from these development frameworks.

**The End Game.** At the end of the day, rural communities and the people who call them home, engage in community economic development because they want their community to prosper. In the United States the primary responsibility for community economic development is with local communities. First and foremost, we have learned that the residents of communities must seriously take on this responsibility. Second, as a larger rural community, we can help communities find their "right way" forward to their own prosperity.

**Key Advice from Ord.** In a 2022 Podcast Robert Stowell, a legacy Ord leader was asked what advice he would give to other rural communities rooted in his experience with Ord's success. His response [34] was immediate and passionate...

1. ***Commit to and invest in community leadership development.*** *Ord has created and supports the world-class **Synovation Valley Leadership Academy** with deep engagement throughout the community.*
2. ***Be willing to invest.*** *Over the past 25 years this community of 2,000 residents has invested a documented \$250 million in public and public investment. Additionally, for a community historically opposed to increasing taxes, this community has consistently passed tax increases and bond issues to support its development.*
3. ***Make community-center entrepreneurship the primary economic development game plan.*** *Ord has demonstrated success with business attraction (e.g., ethanol plant and cluster) and existing venture development and expansion (e.g., Valley County Health Care system and cluster), but it has invigorated its economy and society through entrepreneur-led entrepreneurial development documented with 100 entrepreneurial development deals including both main street ventures to growth enterprises.*

The 10 key ecosystem building and operation elements employed in E3 include:

1. **A Community has a Job to Do.** The primary responsibility for entrepreneurial ecosystem building and operation rests with communities.
2. **Each Community is Both Similar and Unique.** One size does not fit all communities. E3 communities have somewhat different development histories, assets, opportunities and preferences. This work must customize to the community. With that said, these communities have a lot in common and can inspire, educate and support each other.
3. **Entrepreneur-Led Development is Foundational.** E3 is totally focused on entrepreneur-led community economic development including four development focus areas:
  - a. Working with Entrepreneurs
  - b. Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building and Operation
  - c. Community Building
  - d. Community Capacity Building for Development
4. **Community Leadership is Key.** Central to this framework is empowering community leaders and builders increasing capable of entrepreneurship-led development.
5. **The e2 Development Framework and Process.** E3 is employing, adapting and evolving the e2 Development Framework and Process.
6. **Use of Analytics and Assessments.** E3 actively employs analytics and the use of assessments including:
  - a. Community Readiness for Entrepreneurial Development
  - b. Stakeholder Mapping, Engagement and Mission Alignment
  - c. Development Opportunities
  - d. Entrepreneurial Talent Mapping and Targeting
  - e. Entrepreneurial Resource Mapping and Engagement
  - f. Community Asset Mapping and Development
7. **The Basic Transaction and the Community Ground Game.** When it is all said and done, the **North Star** within the e2 development framework is so simple – ***engage with entrepreneurs, listen, build trust and network them to resources that help.*** Closely associated with the “basic transaction” idea is the ground game. By ground game e2 refers to a community’s commitment to and capacity for regularly reaching out to entrepreneurs, engage with them and network them to assistance. E3 is employing the “basic transaction” and “e2’s ground game.”
8. **Demand Driven Ecosystem Building.** Every community has elements of an entrepreneurial ecosystem. For most rural communities their E-Ecosystems are fractured, lack access and transparency. Employing an **E-Demand Driven** approach, curating local, regional and external E-Resource Networks. Elements of this E-Resource learning includes “Go To” Resources, “Pathway Resources,” “Business Services,” and the like. E3 employs “demand driven” ecosystem building.

9. **Community Peer Learning.** An innovation to the most current e2 Development Framework is a stronger focus on community peer learning. This is a fundamental strategy employed by the Nebraska Community Foundation. Peer learning enhances and accelerates individual community and portfolio progress and success.
10. **Scaling and Sustained Effort.** Communities, their residents and their ventures operate in a very dynamic and ever-changing world economy and society. For communities to realize sustained and broadly shared prosperity they must sustain at a smart and elevated level their development. We employ the case that **Community Economic Development** or CED requires a 24-7-365 forever commitment. CED is never ending, and in rapidly changing economic, social and environmental climates, continuous CED is required for ensuring community relevancy and success. [41]



**Sidney, Nebraska – 1870s Fort Sidney**

*Central to Sidney's identity, branding and development history is its association with the U.S. Army including various stages of Fort Sidney during the frontier era and later the Sioux Ordinance Depot from World War II through the Vietnam War.*

Time to wrap up and explore **Other Promising Entrepreneurship Initiatives**.

Many rural regions and communities are still challenged with understanding the case for entrepreneur-focused community economic development. For those communities who are ready to embrace entrepreneurship as a foundational development game plan, there is the huge challenge of how to proceed. It is one thing to embrace entrepreneurship, and another thing to optimize its potential.

### Conclusion – Other Promising Entrepreneurship Initiatives

Helping rural communities answer the “why” question and figure out their own unique formula to optimizing their entrepreneurial potential, are experiences from other more advanced and successful rural regions and communities. There are many inspiring and informing rural communities. We recommend the following:

1. Hanna Grimes Center – Keene, NH... <https://www.hannahgrimes.com/>
2. Klamath IDEA in Klamath Falls, OR... <https://www.klamathidea.org/>
3. Ord, NE... <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/library/theme-papers/subjects/ord-nebraska.html>
4. NetWork Kansas... <https://www.networkkansas.com/>
5. REV, Southern Minnesota... <https://smifoundation.org/rev/>

Take some time, gather some of your community builders, and explore these amazing leaders in the arena of rural entrepreneurship development and ecosystem building.



**Holt County Economic Development Offices**  
*Holt County is Physically Large with Multiple Communities*

**Attachment A - Kauffman Foundation Grant Proposal**  
**E3 – Energizing Entrepreneurial Ecosystems**  
**March 2021**

**Project Summary.** Nebraska Community Foundation, e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems, NetWork Kansas and Valley County Economic Development are collaborating on the “Energizing Entrepreneurial Ecosystems” project. This will allow us to establish a core cohort of six communities/counties that will go through a three-year peer learning experience to build locally-driven, community-centric entrepreneurial ecosystems. This will include travel to these Nebraska communities and one trip out of state.

As the core cohort goes through the experience, they will connect to a total of 8-12 neighboring communities to peer mentor. That builds a cohort of 20 communities that will then be connected to other entrepreneurial programs/initiatives/groups in Nebraska (Extension, Business Builders of Nebraska, SourceLink, etc.) with the ultimate goal of building critical mass to change the statewide approach to economic development in our state to a more entrepreneurial focus.

**Background:**

**Hometown Competitiveness**

Beginning in 2003 the co-applicants in this proposal conceived of and co-produced the HomeTown Competitiveness (HTC) framework. HTC helps communities to focus on entrepreneurship as their primary economic development strategy, build new leadership capacity, engage youth, and mobilize charitable giving to support these community economic development efforts. We believed that if these four pillars were done simultaneously and in mutually supportive ways, this new community capacity would magnetize hometowns to be more successful with people attraction. Our theory of change has proven true.

In 2008 HTC was chosen by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation as one of six entrepreneurial development system grantees nationwide and the next year HTC was recognized by the International Community Development Society with the Innovative Program of the Year award. NCF and HTC community success stories have been written up in many local, statewide and national publications.

In the past 15-years elements of the HTC framework have been adopted by dozens of affiliated funds in the NCF network and a handful of funds have made significant progress on all four pillars. Holt County, McCook, Valley County, Red Cloud, Imperial, Columbus, Norfolk, and Butler County are some of the most successful. The HTC framework continues to fuel the NCF community building practice today.

Even though our HTC theory of change has proven true, building local capacity to focus on all four HTC pillars simultaneously has taken many years. But it IS happening. 46 NCF-affiliated funds now have at least \$10,000/year of payout from their unrestricted endowment. More community leadership capacity has been built in Nebraska hometowns through the NCF peer learning practice. Youth survey results mirror this shift toward positivity and opportunity. In 2020, only five percent said they hope to live in a major metropolitan area. And now E3 will propel forward the entrepreneurship culture across the network.

### Peer Learning

Peer learning is a cornerstone of the NCF community building practice. In a volunteer-driven system like NCF, learning from other community volunteers who can relate to and empathize with your circumstances is a difference maker.

In the past five years NCF has convened and organized three separate peer learning cohorts, each lasting three years and engaging at least five volunteer leaders from four or five NCF affiliated funds. Each CBAF hosts their cohort at least once and each cohort takes at a multi-day out-of-state trip to learn together. Many of the peer mentors in the NCF network today are leaders from these 13 CBAFs that participated in these multi-year peer learning cohorts. This is the model that will be employed in E3.

**Core Cohort Commitments.** Six initial core communities will form the “Core Cohort.” Cohort members will be expected to provide consistent participation of at least five people at peer learning sessions with at least three people attending all six. Participants are expected to have community conversations with stakeholders in their place.

Cohort members commit a minimum of \$50,000 per member of new and continuing investment, to include in-kind and cash, to support entrepreneurial ecosystem work per year. This should include commitment of at least \$10,000 per year in new investment, with final amount based on what creates sufficient new resources to move forward the local entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Core members commit to connect with and mentor 1-2 additional Nebraska hometowns, creating a cohort of up to 20 Nebraska communities engaged. Core members commit to align what the CBAF is already doing with an entrepreneurial mindset and e-ship pursuits in their place.

### **Core Cohort Benefits/Outcomes:**

- Core cohort members receive entrepreneurial training and content from NetWork Kansas/e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems and other world-class peer learning curated by NCF.
- Cohort members receive training in inclusive practice, asset mapping of entrepreneurial resources, and building of attractive communities from NCF. These resources will build on, in part, experiences learned through the Hometown Competitiveness Program (HTC).
- Cohort members receive training in online sales from GROW Nebraska.
- Cohort members receive the benefit of learning from and engaging with the people who have built a successful entrepreneurial ecosystem in Valley County.
- Cohort members receive analytics of their community’s entrepreneurial assets and opportunities from NetWork Kansas/e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems.
- Cohort members receive a community demographic and economic snapshot.
- Cohort members receive training in, and access to, SourceLink, a new statewide e-ship resource platform.
- Cohort members will have access to other entrepreneurial resources, i.e. Nebraska Extension, Nebraska Public Power District, and others.

**Timelines.** The grant period is 7/1/21 through 6/30/24. Final signed agreements will be due to NCF by 6/30/21, though preparatory work will likely begin before that date as commitments are made.

The first peer learning session will be held in Ord, tentatively scheduled in September 2021. Two peer learning sessions will be held in each NCF fiscal year including one out-of-state trip.

Connections with other cohorts and partners will begin by the end of 2021.

**Project Outcomes.** This project will address three goals defined by the Kauffman Foundation: Foster Inclusive Development; Transition to Entrepreneur-Led Economic Development; and Foster Rural Revitalization.

1. Communities in the Core Cohort will evolve their local approach to economic development to the extent that they will have identifiable activities taking place with local entrepreneurs by the end of the project. Through the impact of peer mentoring within the expanded cohort, this larger group of communities will see identifiable entrepreneurial activity in the next five years.
2. A more connected, symbiotic, and effective “entrepreneurial community” will be built statewide with the ability to attract and sustain entrepreneurs. The success of these initiatives and the new relationships formed will provide a platform from which real change can be affected at a state level to create an ecosystem more-friendly to entrepreneurs, as evidenced by changes in economic development policy and practice in communities and in the Neb. Department of Economic Development.

**Outputs:**

1. Grantee will form a cohort of at least 6 communities by 7/1/21 as measured by program records.
2. Grantee will report that all participant communities have completed at least one asset map by 6/30/22, as measured by program records.
3. By June 2024, Grantee will report that at least 4 participant communities will have implemented the first phase of their smart next stage entrepreneurial development strategy, as measured by program records.
4. By June 2024, Grantee will report that at least 3 entrepreneurs per community have been connected to a resource including capital, training, technical assistance, or mentoring, as measured by program records.
5. By June 2024, Grantee will report that at least three community stories will have been released, as measured by program records.

**Outcomes:**

1. Creation of a statewide network of entrepreneurs, service providers and entrepreneurial communities in Nebraska, as measured by SourceLink activation in 90% of core cohort and secondary cohort communities by 7/1/24.
2. Community culture shifts to a more positive self-fulfilling prophecy, as measured by a pre- and post-project survey of core cohort members.

3. Development of distributed community leadership that is more inclusive, understands their place and culture, and is intentional about leadership succession, as measured by a pre- and post-project survey of core cohort members.
4. Commitment of staffing and budget by public or private funds in all core cohort communities to support their entrepreneurial ecosystem by 7/1/2024, as measured by program records.
5. Three communities in the core cohort will increase their unrestricted endowments or restricted endowments to support economic development by 25% by June 2024 and three increase the number of confirmed planned gifts by 25% by June 2024, compared to 7/1/21.
6. Increase in number of jobs and the average salary from small businesses in core cohort communities by 7/1/2024 as measured by business survey
7. Increased revenue for small businesses in core cohort communities from e-commerce/non-local markets by 7/1/2024 as measured by ESRI data and business survey.
8. At least one business start-up or recruitment in each core cohort community by 7/1/2024 is based on a community asset identified in the asset mapping done as part of the project
9. Communities feel empowered to host, sustain and grow entrepreneurial development efforts, as measured by a pre- and post-project survey

**Project Lead Contact:** K.C. Belitz, [kbelitz@nebcommfound.org](mailto:kbelitz@nebcommfound.org) , 402-270-9119

## Attachment B - E3's Push Strategy

**Background and Introduction.** E3 is employing a design element from e2's ***Development Framework and Process*** called "pushes." With E3 the three-year initiative life is organized into six six-month pushes anchored by six two-day gatherings hosted by each of the six E3 community partners. Pushes create expectation pacing stimulating engagement, action and impact. The following provides the E3 ***Push Strategy*** as of July 2022.

### **Push 1 – Commitment and Getting Started – Summer to September 2021 Gathering**

- Community Cohort Selection and Formation:
  - Recruitment by NC
  - Community Commitment
- Early Organizing:
  - E3 Community Lead
  - E3 Community Team
  - Coach Assignment
  - Stakeholder Mapping and Engagement
  - Stakeholder Role Preferences

#### ***September 30 & October 1, 2021 – First Gathering – Valley County***

- E3 Orientation
- Community Networking
- Community Team Building
- Valley County Introduction
- e2 Development Framework and Process Introduction

### **Push 2 – September 2021 through April 2022**

- Opportunity Assessments:
  - Entrepreneurial Development Opportunities
  - Entrepreneurial Talent Mapping and Targeting
  - Entrepreneurial Resources Mapping and Engagement
  - Community Asset Mapping
- Entrepreneurial Outreach
- Preparation for E3 Gathering #2 and Presentations

#### ***April 7-8, 2022 – Second Gathering – Holt County – The Big Pivot!***

- Community Progress Presentations
- Holt County Introduction
- Peer Counseling
- Three Buckets Action Planning

- SourceLink Nebraska Introduced
- Introduction of Capacity Building

**Push 3 – April through September 2022**

- Three Buckets Action Planning
- Creation of Action Teams focused on Development Priorities
- Capacity Building – Needs – Commitments
- Working with SourceLink Nebraska
- Entrepreneurial Outreach, Engagement and Networking to Assistance

***September 29-30, 2022 – Third Gathering – Sidney\****

- Community Progress Presentations
- Peer Counseling
- Sidney Introduction
- Capacity Building
- Action Planning

\*Agenda development still in progress.

**Push 4 – September 2022 through April 2023 Proposed**

- Working with Entrepreneurs – Energized and Sustained Ground Game
- Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building
- Community Ecosystem Building
- Capacity Building:
  - Dedicated Funding
  - Staffed Resource Networker
  - Implementation of the Hub and Spoke Organizational Model
  - E3 Volunteer and Partner Organization Engagement and E3 Team Building

***Fourth Gathering – To be determined***

- Community Progress Presentations
- Host Community Introduction
- Peer Counseling
- Content Session(s)
- Introduction of 6 to 36 E3 Communities
- Action Planning

**Push 5 – April through September 2023 Proposed – Focus on the Ground Game!**

- Working with Entrepreneurs – Energized and Sustained Ground Game
- Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building

- Community Ecosystem Building
- Capacity Building:
  - Dedicated Funding
  - Staffed Resource Networker
  - Hub and Spoke Organizational Model – High Performing Teams
  - E3 Volunteer and Partner Organization Engagement and E3 Team Building

***Fifth Gathering- To be determined***

- Community Progress Presentations
- Host Community Introduction
- Peer Counseling
- Content Session(s)
- Progress on 6 to 36 E3 Communities Strategy
- Action Planning

**Push 6 – September 2023 through April 2024 Proposed**

***Sixth Gathering – To be determined***

- What Comes Next for the First 6 E3 Communities
- Celebration
- Introduction of New Cohort of E3 Communities