

RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAMMING

Overview

DISCLAIMER

This collection of case studies is designed to highlight ideas of programs or services that municipal governments and/or local community organizations might use to help support entrepreneurship development throughout rural Ontario. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list of entrepreneurship programs currently in operation.

HOW IS ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEFINED?

A common discussion often surrounds our collective understanding of what entrepreneurship entails – who is an entrepreneur and what do they do that constitutes entrepreneurship?

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines entrepreneurial activity as "enterprising human action in pursuit of the generation of value, through the creation or expansion of economic activity, by identifying and exploiting new products, processes or markets." Industry Canada writes that "entrepreneurship is a process that starts with someone – the entrepreneur – recognizing an opportunity to create something new."

In addition to these ideas of innovation and value creation, entrepreneurship is also seen as a mindset or an attitude. Entrepreneurs are those who see opportunity and are willing to take risks to realize that opportunity. Entrepreneurship thus also involves creativity, risk taking and perseverance.

WHAT CAN BE DONE IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

There are many different ways communities and/or organizations might choose to engage with entrepreneurship development. Entrepreneurs need the right kind of support at the right time – there is no one-size-fits-all solution. The supports and programs an entrepreneur will need to help build a thriving business vary depending on the entrepreneur's stage of development.

Communities and local organizations should take time to identify how they can best fit into the existing entrepreneurial ecosystem. How a community chooses to engage with entrepreneurship depends on their existing capacity (i.e., expertise and experience, human capital and financial capital). Some questions worth asking include:

- What can we (the municipality or community organization) do that others cannot?
- Have we talked to our entrepreneurial community (current and aspiring entrepreneurs) to better understand what they need?
- What is missing from our region and what needs to be improved?
- Should we develop a new program or help connect entrepreneurs to existing service providers?

Leadbury Bat Co.
<https://leadburybatco.com/>
Walton, ON

Leadbury Bat Co. is a custom baseball bat manufacturer from Walton, Ontario, using proprietary wood-drying techniques to create a bat that outperforms the leading competition. This company has garnered much attention recently as a promising new business poised for success. Leadbury Bat Co. has received well-meaning offers for support, however in speaking with the founder and CEO, Mitchell Godkin, these types of support are unfortunately not what the business currently needs.

Participation in an accelerator centre, for example, would take time away from the R&D work currently underway, and the connections to be made in an accelerator are not the kinds of connections they are looking for.

Because Leadbury Bat Co. is in the business development and product-testing phase, and their target market is professional baseball players, working with elite-level professional or semi-professional baseball players is crucial for product testing and marketing. Connections with elite-level baseball players would be the strongest support for this up-and-coming business, though something not often found in any traditional entrepreneurial programming.

ECOSYSTEM BUILDING

The concept of ecosystem building recognizes the importance of a whole community coming together to leverage individual expertise and collectively strengthen the value proposition for entrepreneurship programs. Rural Ontario has a wealth of not-for-profit organizations, volunteer associations and citizen groups with an interest in community development and economic development processes. Entrepreneurship is looked to as an important component of community building as it creates opportunity for both economic and social development. Entrepreneurs build businesses that create employment opportunities and add value to local economies while also providing opportunities for recreation, social connections and an overall improvement in quality of life.

WHO ARE THE KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN RURAL ONTARIO?

An entrepreneur cannot start a business in a vacuum – there are important relationships that are cultivated, funding leveraged, markets targeted, consumers informed and sales made.

In the field of rural entrepreneurship development in Ontario, key players may include:

- Small Business Enterprise Centres
- Municipal Economic Development
- Regional Economic Development Organizations
- Community Futures Development Corporations
- Regional Innovation Centre
- Business Improvement Associations`
- Chambers of Commerce
- Schools and Schoolboards
- Youth Centres
- Churches and Service Organizations
- Volunteers

Ecosystem Building - Community Futures Development Corporations

In many of the Case Studies explored in this series, regional Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDCs) have been an important stakeholder in supporting entrepreneurship programming. Whether this is through direct investment and connecting financing for business retention in Huron County, business planning in Elgin County, or coaching and mentoring in Norfolk County, Community Futures organizations are a consistent thread in the fabric of rural entrepreneurial ecosystems. While the role of a Community Futures office varies from community to community, they are often a leading champion of entrepreneurship and small business development.

Learn more about CFDCs and an office near you: <https://cfontario.ca/>

The Kauffman Foundation: Exploring Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building

Where many major urban centres have become robust entrepreneurial ecosystems in the past, “such ecosystems can grow anywhere today” says the Kauffman Foundation. “In the modern economy, every community has the opportunity to become a thriving ecosystem.”

The ecosystem building model recognizes that the whole of a community is far greater than the sum of its parts. It means starting with what a community has and connecting the pieces. The potential of “ecosystem building”, is to create sustainable and thriving economies regardless of a community’s size, demographics, socioeconomic context or geography.

The Kauffman Foundation identifies these key elements for a thriving ecosystem:

- Entrepreneurs and those who support entrepreneurs.
- Talent to help companies grow.
- Knowledge and resources to support entrepreneurs.
- Champions of entrepreneurs and the local ecosystem.
- On-ramps – the facilitation of open participation in entrepreneurial activities.
- Intersections that facilitate the interaction of people, ideas and resources.
- Stories people share about themselves and their ecosystem.
- Culture rich in social capital – collaboration, cooperation, trust, reciprocity

The Kauffman Foundation has developed a resource called Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building Playbook 2.0. To read more about the ecosystem approach, visit:

<https://www.kauffman.org/entrepreneurial-ecosystem-building-playbook-draft-2/introduction>

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