
The Northeastern Regional Center
for Rural Development

National Coalition for Rural Entrepreneurship Listening Session Notes

Location: Annapolis, MD

Date: September 9, 2005

Hosts: NERCRD, the University of Maryland
and the Rural Maryland Council

Number attending: 24

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Annapolis Listening Session

Discovering the Positive Elements of What is Working Well

- There is great value to rural entrepreneurship but it is not being recognized by local, state and federal government
- Networking and communication
- Good training and technical assistance
- Need to identify a communities niche and strength
- State efforts are working well - MABIDCO set up to help MD meat/seafood, etc. sales; networking; early business years, is a muddy experience, there is a learning curve, and people don't know WHAT they have done at the beginning.
- Lots of individual creativity of entrepreneurs
- Some sector development activities are working well; also informal networks (need more of this).
- More focus can be given to Rural Entrepreneurship; from taking to making a job.
- Dan Keunnen is doing great at determining good entrepreneurs (he looks at the person -- no red tape) and providing seed money to the right/best entrepreneurs.
- Lots of/excessive paperwork is deterrent to process.

Designing the Future – What Do We Need To Improve Upon What Is Working?

- Cultivate entrepreneur mindset
- Formalize networks across organizations and agencies on a community basis
- Respect the vision of the entrepreneur
- More research
- Need better measures of success of programs addressing entrepreneur needs – based on community goals and traits
- Train providers better
- Need more cluster specific analysis
- Need more education for local decision makers with respect to the needs of entrepreneurs
- Increase access to funding
- Broaden understanding of entrepreneurship (importance as a profession) to students.
- Increase access to information
- Sustainability is important
- Choose what's needed among agencies and programs (do not duplicate efforts)
- Inclusion focus
- Need to provide seamless services to all five levels of entrepreneurship – education system is currently based on factory system (everybody is the same, but they are not)
- Built education system; people have to fit in/accept this program
- Most women entrepreneurs get their information on-line, since it's available 24/7
- Enhance mentoring
- Need timely access to securing funding
- Need a “give back” expectation of entrepreneurs that have taken part in programs
- Effective strategies include: policy; education/training; recognition/appreciation; resources and funding; and access to information

- Be sure to articulate what kind of entrepreneurship one is talking about (small business, microenterprise vs. large business/etc.
- Access/Policy: Need to compile list of available resources
- Strengthen connection between high school education, college education, businesses – things are territorial (for whatever reason); different groups of people do not talk.

Designing the Future – What Needs To Happen at the State Level:

Define and increase the awareness of the entrepreneur what he or she contributes

- Governor can create an interagency council – show government the benefit of community development
- Need a way to measure the benefits of entrepreneurs (white male, technology/capital investments, jobs perceived as all business); public perception needs to be changed (if they don't have good impression of entrepreneurs)
- Most MD businesses employ fewer than 5 people; how do you get the word out on this? Farming important in west and eastern shore MD.
- How can more money be allocated for microenterprise?
- Need a declaration/proclamation for entrepreneurship!!! (Difficult even for this group to come to a consensus)
- Entrepreneurship is too often technology based.

Organized Network

- Prepaid legal network to help entrepreneurs for a couple of years)
- Inventory of who the providers are
- Somebody who coordinates effort (sectional based) – legislation/task force to convene all
- Survey a focus group (state-wide)
- Have to see where Rural Entrepreneurship fits into rest of state's business (just piece of total MD economy)
- What can MD do to improve access, etc.?
Annual conference
Regional councils
- Many fail to recognize rural entrepreneurship as important economic sector (expand outreach to recognize economic dev (?))
- Training/simulation programs
- Mini Grants

Improve Access

- Unified intake system (regional or state)
- Funding for Micro-enterprise systems
- Funding for ag and natural resources based products
- Need access to people (face to face); somebody locally
- Confidentiality is a concern – people are afraid that somebody will tell the idea (give it away). SBDC assures confidentiality/waives blame as well.
- Accountability and follow-up
- Need quality information – especially as this relates to sector specific needs
- Need to structure training (business training – not all people see this as useful)

- Need peer networks (not all entrepreneurs are comfortable with Chambers of Commerce)
- Possibly an on-line “chat room” or web-based “ask a question”/toolkit
- Have roundtable discussion of entrepreneurs (not from competing businesses)
- Developing network (MD/VA/DE) umbrella for Delmarva group; meet regularly, have speakers, original group brought more entrepreneurs. (multicultural, multiracial); has speakers; young “budding entrepreneurs” also come; bring covered dish (no cost); alliance continues to grow.
- Survey sector specific needs
- Build flexibility into training

Designing the Future – What Needs To Happen at the Federal Level:

- Federal funding has not been for long enough period of time (often for just one year). Funding is too shallow – programs take longer to develop.
- Need state efforts, and regional efforts for funding (local, state – separate programs for funding each group)
- Better measurement of success (federal and state level)
- More \$\$ should be put in SBA loan system, and changing allocation requirements/expanding knowledge base.
- Targeted sectoral entrepreneurial support.
- Hurdles: matching money and experience (these requirements are deterrents)
- Getting the language of entrepreneurship “out there” – make it understood.
- Need affordable health insurance (plus other insurance, like liability)
- Don’t let the description of entrepreneurship exclude some rural small businesses (make generic). (Apply to all MD counties.)
- More incentives for small business, not just big business.
- Develop and fund common set of benchmarks
- Every child an entrepreneur!
- Minimize regulatory burden
- Increase relending programs
- Incorporate language of entrepreneurship in economic development legislation

Designing the Future – How Can the Northeast Center Help

- Sponsor annual conference to engage faculty in this discussion (geared toward rural entrepreneurship).
- Needs from state, fed, information, etc - . the center can coordinate, share information, success stories, legislation from other states, national information.
- Other states (Nebraska, etc.) are doing this well. RRDCs can share this information with others.
- Connection to ERS
- NERCRD can define what is rural?
- Give this group information on rural issue focus
- Coordinate with high school business programs
- Provide survey of disability businesses (availability)
- Intake forums – first step, registering for information.

**Entrepreneurship Listening Session:
Worksheet 1
Discovering the Positive Elements of What is Working**

Please select someone from your group to take notes and submit them to us at the end of the workshop. Thanks!

1. Share what you learned from your interview partner the examples of how rural entrepreneurship activities/efforts are working well in their community/state. *Go round-robin asking each participant.*

Group A

- Partnerships – regional councils – long range community development not through city government
- Youth entrepreneurship
- Co-op. developed/corporations??
- Growth RSI/co-op – problem to entrepreneurship
- Technical assistance
- Advocates find resources, leadership
- Capital \$

Group C

- Losing community banks hurts rural areas
- Lack of support institutions – capacity

Group D

- SBDCs are available
- Forming groups of entrepreneurs/networks
- Farmers beginning to form groups & co-ops
- Dan Kuennen, Rural Dev. – not red tape

2. As you listened to the examples provided by participants in this group, did you hear any common themes regarding activities and efforts that have helped to generate and sustain rural entrepreneurship? What were they? *Ask the small group.*

Group A

- Technical assistance/education support also a challenge – time and money
- Training business – SCORE – tech assistance
- Creative response to external problem solving
- Community focus, identify strength in community
- Main street programs
- Marketing promotion

Group C

- Ag industry help – State agencies not working well for small farmers (health dept., economic development, ag department, DNR, etc.)
- Support services needed for the disabled
- Government support for e-ship takes too long and too much paperwork

Group D

- Ag. community not supported well
 - State agencies need to work together to help farmers
 - Takes too long to help
3. Identify three common themes to share with the larger group? *Look for group consensus.*

Group A

- a. Tech. assistance, educational support of community for needed resources
- b. Strength of community – niche development
- c. Individual creativity of entrepreneur, access to experts, how to's for marketing support

Group C

- a Ag. /resource based industries not well served yet.
State Ag. Development Corp. "MARBID" would be a big help when it is funded
- b Struggle to say what is working well
- c Service providers not accessible; training & workshop developed & delivered new focus on coop. development for farmers – network enhancement
- d Small business needs lots of help with government financial planning

Group D

- a SBDCs and MDOs where exist often provide
- b Farming groups & networks
- c New ag??. structures
TEDCO
Promising - MARBIDCO

**Entrepreneurship Listening Session:
Worksheet 2
Dreaming/Visioning for the Future**

Please select someone from your group to take notes and submit them to us at the end of the workshop. Thanks!

1. Thinking back to the interviews, share any thoughts and ideas you have regarding opportunities for enhancing rural entrepreneurship. *Go round-robin asking each participant.*

Group A

- Education – need to educate local decision makers & agencies about the importance of entrepreneurship to the economy
- More funding & more access to it
- Broaden the message of entrepreneurship as a career to students in schools & colleges
- Communities to make resources, buildings, etc. available to entrepreneurs.

Group B

- Systems appropriate – business planning/technical assistance, incubator or network participation, quick review.

Group C

- Help with application process – efficient processing – loan
- Access to capital – 30 days from application to check; flexible options
- Easy access to help on a need to know basis (coaching/mentors)
- Give back “good deeds”

2. Were there any common themes regarding what opportunities might enhance rural entrepreneurship. *Ask the small group.*

Group A

- Educating the entrepreneurs and getting them the support they need.

3. Identify 3 key insights into building and expanding successful programs to generate and sustain entrepreneurship in Rural America to share with the large group. *Look for group consensus.*

Group A

- a. Education/increased awareness
- b. Access to resources: financing, building, technical assistance
- c. Increased coordination to maximize effectiveness

Generating and Sustaining Entrepreneurship in Rural America: Interview Questions for Partner Teams

Please hand in this sheet at the end of the workshop

Please ask your partner the following questions and record the responses:

1. Can you think of some specific examples of how rural entrepreneurship is working well in your community/state? Please describe these efforts/activities.
 1. Develop regional councils across state(s). Mainly economic development work in communities to create synergy. Mid-shor ? council successful in developing center. Resources of government are limited. Difficult to do long term planning and capacity building – councils can do this.
 2. Lack of staff, lack of funding—so not working now. Home business rep; but she's limited.
 3. Larger vision helped; county inactive for art entrepreneurship; “sector development” such as art, healthcare.
 4. Tourism support; SHA funding; signage pillars
 5. Not working well for small farmers – infrastructure and funding such as health department regulations and zoning.

2. What made it possible for these efforts/activities to be so successful?
 1. Councils provide long-term planning and capacity building.
 2. N/A
 3. Need financing opportunities i.e. ARC Micro Council had. Capacity to get funding and great community interest.
 4. N/A
 5. Relationships with health department (state) and outreach to farmers. Getting all parties to the table (zoning, agriculture and farmers all together).

3. What role did the larger community play in strengthening these efforts/activities?
 1. Local government recognizing the limitations are willing to work with area councils.
 2. Had a group in next county Rural Development Coalition hash out ideas, help entrepreneur find assistance; production questions researched by local USDA office.
 3. University & state arts councils with 2 counties to provide resources they saw as important of ED &CD.
 4. N/A
 5. State agencies coming together, USDA value added funding.

4. If we were able to make rural entrepreneurship even stronger than it already is, what would effective rural entrepreneurship activities/efforts look like? What would people be doing? How? Why?
 1. New for major educational effort on entrepreneurship. Many small businesses but few think of themselves as entrepreneurs. Focus day to day. Need to educate them on other resources available.
 2. All agencies would know which services each other are offering and sending folks to the appropriate agencies & entrepreneurs. Ask for help and get it.
 3. Regionally developed but locally driven, focus on people's needs than just a model; flexible to support all types of entrepreneurship, connect existing services & fill needs gaps. Supported \$ policy and environmentally.
 4. Heritage tours – great opportunity for entrepreneurship and great return on public investment.
 5. County planners and zoning people. SBDC focus should go back towards farming and land preservation. There are conflicting goals at the county level.
5. What role(s) would you see communities playing in these efforts?
 1. Greater understanding by the local government of entrepreneurship to community and economic development.
 2. State and county offices would support ag. efforts with their zoning etc. Offer literacy programs to the folks that need it.
 3. Communities are key players – embrace entrepreneurs; have to understand entrepreneur makes rural communities viable – adopt policies to foster entrepreneurs
 4. Need to help business with business planning and grant writing.
 5. More state and local planning professional need to see range of goals and include a healthy rural environment
6. If you had 3 wishes for strengthening entrepreneurship in Rural America, what would they be?
 1. Online incubators without walls; people ask questions of experts; access to capital at local banks & capital sources need education.
 2. Increase education levels for entrepreneurs & their workers; entrepreneurs are able to pursue their dreams; entrepreneurship be a mandatory subject in middle and high school.
 3. State needs (each region different) to recognize & support center; many not at table not just disadvantage, need to stop out migration; effort to include different people. Financing is key - NGOs need sustainable \$ - shallow ARC funding.

4. Farmers to recognize selves as entrepreneurs and a an economic value to community; outside recognition of them and more consumers buy and support local products.