

Northeast Iowa Economic Development Team

*A regional movement to foster
Economic development, entrepreneurship, and vibrant communities.*

Why work regionally?

The Northeast Iowa Economic Development Team is building our regional economic base by fostering entrepreneurship. During a time of tight local budgets, twelve economic development organizations are to working together to promote entrepreneurship in northeast Iowa. We found that by joining forces, we could reach out to more entrepreneurs and provide greater resources to new businesses. We co-apply for grant and share best practices to best meet the needs of businesses in our region. Economies don't stop at the town or county boarder. By working together we are making northeast Iowa more welcoming to small businesses.

Why now?

In 2003 we created a strategic plan to strengthen our regional economy. Our number one identified priority is to foster entrepreneurship in northeast Iowa. We identified several action steps to reach this goal. Now, one year later, we have made ground improving the level of business expertise available at every participating organization's office. We are building our business support libraries at each economic development office, and we are partnering with the UNI Regional Business Center and the Institute for Decision Making to increase business mentorship and provide MyEntrenet in each county. We have succeeded in acquiring several local and state grants to support this project and will continue to join resources and identify funding to meet our goals in the future.

What are we doing?

We are working with the University of Northern Iowa Regional Business Center and Institute for Decision Making to bring an energized program of mentoring and business education to each county in northeast Iowa.

What is the plan?

MyEntrenet in Fayette County: Fayette County led the way in entrepreneurship by acting as a pilot group to test the Fastrac and MyEntrenet training program for entrepreneurs. This program has been brought to West Union and Oelwein for over 35 area business people. Businesses are assisted with writing business plans for start up and ongoing businesses. Entrepreneurs learn valuable skills for making their businesses thrive. The UNI Regional Business Center provides the training for these classes. (see more on MyEntrenet below).

Entry-Level Business Classes: In recent months Manchester, Elkader, and Decorah have offered entry-level courses for people considering starting a business. These courses are 5 – 10 weeks long and offer excellent advise for creating business plans, identifying funding, and other important concerns regarding starting a business.

MyEntrenet: The UNI Regional Business Center (RBC) in Waterloo created this course to create more businesses in the rural areas of Iowa. This program is being offered regionally starting in Fall 2004. The counties of Howard, Winneshiek, and Allamakee began this program in August of 2004. Fayette, Clayton and Delaware are beginning the program in January 2005.

There are three primary components to this program:

- 1. Community Empowerment:** First, each county creates a task force of local business minded people to direct the entrepreneurial efforts of each county. Task Forces may identify potential entrepreneurs, create a speakers bureau, create a mentoring program, develop a marketing strategy, or other develop other strategies for promoting business.
- 2. Fastrac Business Classes:** Each County offers Fastrac, an advanced business class that runs for 11 weeks. Fastrac is offered by on-site, via ICN connection, and through Internet connections.
- 3. Sustainability:** Regional Business Center offers on-going support for business people who took the Fastrac course, they have developed MyEntrenet. MyEntrenet offers Internet exchanges, chat lines and counseling for the businesses. The RBC will also work with business after the course to provide participants access to resources, one-on-one counseling, local news, and interaction with other entrepreneurs nationwide through chats, email, and discussion forums. The RBC and the Institute for Decision Making provide support to the local Task Forces to offer onsite networking and exchanges.

Outreach: The Regional Economic Development Team is strategically reaching out to the community to increase awareness of business assistance programs. We are writing monthly economic development columns that are printed in major area newspapers. We develop brochures and flyers as well as newspaper and radio advertisements to promote the elements of the MyEntrenet program. We are also developing community task forces consisting of area business people to guide/mentor our efforts.

Train the Trainer: Each member of the Regional Economic Development Team attends “train the trainer” classes to become better resources for new business people. We are learning how to create a better business plan, how to leverage financing, and how to do market research among other skills. This allows us to offer better assistance to business people who walk through our doors.

Newspaper articles: Each member of the Regional Economic Development team shares in the effort by writing an article on economic development strategies. These articles go into the county newspapers each month.

Developing a regional venture capital group: The regional Economic Development team is researching the interest in developing a regional venture capital organization. There is support from the Iowa Department of Economic Development for any group that would like to incorporate in order to create a venture capital fund.

Building Educational Resources: We are creating small business libraries with hands-on resources for small businesses. While the Regional Business Center in Waterloo and the Small Business Development Center in Dubuque offer a depth of resources, we are working to build similar resources so that each county and each community can offer resources for entrepreneurs. Each ED Team member has printed and electronic start-up packets of information for interested business people.

Who are on the Regional Economic Development Team?

Organization	Contact Person
• Allamakee County Economic Development	Rachelle Howe ph: 563-568-2624 areadvlp@acegroup.cc
• Howard County Economic Development	Jacque Hahn ph: 800-373-6293 hcedc@iowatelecom.net
• Delaware County Economic Development	Donna Boss ph: 563-927-4201 dbossvaa@yahoo.com
• Edgewood Economic Development	Elise Bergan ph: 563-928-7036 edgewood@iowatelecom.net
• Fayette County Economic Development	Connie Smith ph: 563-422-5073 csmith@alpinecom.net
• Northeast Iowa Community College, Manchester Office	Lori Scoval ph: 563-927-6387 deleware@nicc.edu
• Oelwein Chamber and Economic Development	Sally Falb ph: 319-283-1105 sfalb@alpinecom.net
• Strawberry Point Economic Development	Darla Kelchin ph: 563-933-4417 econdev@strawberrypoint.com
• Winneshiek County Economic Development	Randy Uhl ph: 563-382-6061 wcdi@alpinecom.net
• Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission	Carolyn Corbin ph: 563-864-7551 ccorbin@uerpc.org
• University of Northern Iowa Regional Business Center	Mike Hahn ph: 319-236-8123 Mike.hahn@uni.edu
• University of Northern Iowa Institute for Decision Making	Drew Conrad ph: 800-782-9520 idm@uni.edu

Who are our sponsors?

The group applied and received the Community Vitality Center's mini grant for \$10,000 for entrepreneurial development. For more information on CVC, contact Mark A. Edelman, Ph.D. Director, Community Vitality Center, ISU Professor of Economics and Public Policy, 478 Heady Hall, Ames, IA 50011-1070. Phone: 515-294-6144 // FAX 515-294-3838; Email: medelman@iataate.edu Web site: www.cvcia.org

The Iowa Department of Public Health also sponsored three individuals to attend the Emerging Entrepreneurs conference in Nebraska City, NE. For more information, contact Patricia Kehoe, Primecarre Coordinator, Bureau of Health Care Access, 321 East 12th Street, 5th Floor SE, Des Moines, IA 50919-0075.

For more information about the Northeast Iowa Regional Economic Development Team, contact Carolyn Corbin at Upper Explorerland, 563-864-7551 or ccorbin@uerpc.org