

## **Community Vitality Center Pilot Demonstration Project Proposal**

**Name of Proposed Project:** Wright County Entrepreneurial Consortium  
**Local Fiscal Agent/Applicant Organization:** Wright County Economic Development  
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### **What is the concept and approach that you propose to implement?**

Many programs exist to help train entrepreneurs but only a few exist to help communities develop action plans for entrepreneurial growth. Prosperous, dynamic communities need to design strategies for embracing the idea of generating new jobs as a tenet of economic development and wealth generation. Wright County intends to create an informed **entrepreneurial consortium**. It will start in the three largest communities and the surrounding rural area initially, and then it will become a countywide program. The goal is to help identify and support area entrepreneurs and new business owners.

Collaborative networks with facilitated planning can anticipate seeing results in the future. But, as Peter Drucker says, “Plans are only good intentions until they degenerate into hard work.” Obviously, planning is the first step and not the end. Knowledge is needed first and then action is needed. Plans must be dynamic and implemented.

The demonstration project is to deliver a series of two informational, working sessions entitled “Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Economic Development” in each of the three largest towns in the county over the first 6 months. Communities in Wright County will develop and implement plans to embrace the entrepreneurs who create new jobs for themselves and others. The efforts will create a community culture that can welcome new business owners. The towns will join their efforts into a county plan at the third session, about 9 months after the first sessions.

### **How will your project improve the vitality of your community or rural area?**

Our mission statement is: *Retain what we have. Expand and grow. Seek out the future.* This demonstrates our interest in all facets of development work. Traditionally, economic development focused on industrial recruitment as a cornerstone program. Nationwide, 140 rural factories closed last

year as globalization squeezed rural America. Nearly 500,000 manufacturing jobs were lost in February and March of this year<sup>1</sup>. Wright County has a strong industrial base now and looks to enlarge it. Towns in the county have successful locally-grown manufacturers. Clarion has a new industrial park that needs tenants. Belmont and Eagle Grove also work toward industrial recruitment. Industrial recruitment is important but focusing on entrepreneurship is another strategy. Combining those two programs with job retention and expansion programs gives the county more opportunity to succeed.

If communities can capture the intelligence and creativity of their existing residents who hold aspirations of starting new businesses, they will create jobs from within. These potential employers and business owners will have ownership and loyalty to the town. An investment in entrepreneurial development strategies complements other economic development initiatives. It builds on relationships and the social capital that exists already. It is a cost effective tool beyond investing in marketing the town to outside businesses.

### **Do you have specific objectives for your project?**

During the year, the program participants will be able to:

- Define economic development from a “new” perspective.
- Describe entrepreneurs and business life cycle.
- Design strategies to identify (scout for) and assist potential new business owners and entrepreneurs.
- Create a plan of work and “work” the plan.
- Understand which additional resources may be available or what may be needed.
- Target entrepreneurial talent and potential.
- Identify additional needed skills to enlarge the steering committee.
- Develop regional strategies to build a larger network.

### **Do you have specific outcomes that you are hoping to achieve or measurable indicators that you will be using to evaluate the success of your project?**

- Create a steering committee in each town and then a county consortium for entrepreneurial development.
- Build a resource library that all residents can access.
- Reduce competition between towns so that residents understand “we’re all in this together” and we benefit from the successes in each town.
- In the course of a year, identify at least ten county residents interested in starting a business and supply them with resources to further explore the concept.
- As one strategy, design and deliver a marketing program to inform all county residents of the benefits of supporting those who start new businesses.

### **What important factors were considered in determining the approach to use?**

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<sup>1</sup> [www.qconline.com](http://www.qconline.com) May 17, 2003

Wright County's three largest towns are at varying degrees of readiness for entrepreneurial development. By offering the first two seminar sessions in each town, residents will have a chance to design programs specific to their town first. The combined session will involve all residents. The energy from leaders in the three towns and outlying areas meeting together will create synergy and a larger support network. New or expanded programs can be developed for mentoring those with potential.

**Are there unique community characteristics, unique features, or key factors regarding the approach planned that led you to conclude the approach selected is most appropriate for your community?**

As noted earlier, Wright County is somewhat unique in that it contains three towns roughly the same size. Usually there is one major town in a county. In addition, Wright County is served by two different community colleges, two different area education agencies and two different councils of government. There still exists the perception by some people in the towns that competition should exist between the communities. By working individually first, the separate school districts, city councils, chambers of commerce can be incorporated into plans. Then, once they have a taste of success individually, they can join together. A regional economic development effort has been started. A multi-county regional collaboration may be the natural next step once the County program has been started.

**What led you to believe this concept is needed or doable in your community or region?**

The County has worked to create a marketing/branding message *The Wright Direction*. The County must market and sell itself to area residents in addition to outsiders. An entrepreneurial consortium incorporates that concept nicely – “we help our own in addition to helping others.”

Help does not need to be financial support. It can be technical and moral support. One impediment to rural entrepreneurs is the lack of role models. People-based entrepreneurial infrastructure with formal and informal networks of people is available but has not been recognized. Lawyers, accountants, consultants or other service providers who understand and work with entrepreneurs are important resources. In addition, rural residents often are afraid of failure and ridicule those who try a new business and don't succeed the first or second time. Doing means learning and learning means making mistakes. Entrepreneurs must be willing to take calculated risks and community leaders must understand and appreciate those risks.

We know other programs - E-Myth Turnkey Operations, the Sirolli Institute's Economic Facilitation and the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship workshops in Nebraska - exist but they are much more expensive and out of the reach of smaller communities. Wright County can afford to invest modestly in this program. It will guide us to create our own plan and take advantage of our local talent and interests. We can use money to build our own resource library

**Where did you get the idea for your project and have you visited or found information about other communities in Iowa or other states that have used similar concepts? If so, please list them.**

At the fall meeting of Professional Developers of Iowa, a program on entrepreneurship was presented. Following the program, ideas emerged from discussions with other developers in the public and private sector about the need for communities to encourage people to start businesses.

Wright County staff is familiar with Kossuth County's funding from the Community Vitality Center for its internship project. That led to brainstorming about other ideas. PlanScape Partners will be hired to deliver the program and guide the work. PlanScape Partners has a long relationship with cities in Wright County and have served Clarion City Council as the city's planning consultant. PlanScape Partners is a small entrepreneurial firm, with offices in Iowa and Minnesota. They have extensive experience in

economic development, community planning and training. Based on the needs of the market place, they have created a seminar series which they are delivering in the Midwest. This program was originally designed to be presented in one session to any group interested in fostering entrepreneurship. It has been tailored to fit Wright County’s needs and provide more hands-on facilitation for the creation and implementation of the plan. It is cost effective.

**Are there specific steps & procedures that are planned for implementation?**

1. Publicize the program to gather interested names.
2. Hold first seminar session.
3. Create initial plan and identify steering committee members.
4. Implement plan-create a culture of action with support.
5. Gather for 2<sup>nd</sup> session to assess what is working and what needs fine tuning-“enlightened trial and error.”
6. Gather for combined session to celebrate successes and learn from one another.

**Who will be involved in making the decisions and implementing the steps?**

The effort will start with the Wright County Economic Development Board of Directors and quickly move to the town level. The local steering committees will initially make decisions and the County Consortium Committee will continue with input from the Wright County Economic Development Board.

**How many existing and potential collaborators, local affiliates, or entrepreneurial enterprises or service providers do you anticipate being involved?**

We hope to attract many partners in the program. The Wright County Bankers Association, area service clubs, city council leaders, chambers of commerce and local economic development corporations, the SBDC offices at NIACC and ICC, Wright County Extension, Wright Medical Center, the Pappajohn Center at NIACC, the schools, AEA267 and AEA9 are all potential collaborators.

**Describe the Source, Type (\$ or In-Kind), and Amount of any Local Matching Resources.**

Wright County Economic Development will put in \$1000 and each town will contribute \$500 for a total of a 1:1 match request. Wright County and each town will provide in-kind staff support from the chamber of commerce and economic development group.

**Please provide a brief budget description of plans to spend CVC funds.**

**Fiscal agent: Wright County Economic Development  
FEIN #:42-1509495**

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Local Match</u>	<u>Grant Request</u>
Contracted services - Delivery of seven, three-hour sessions	\$1750	\$1750
Supplies & materials: room rental Copies, mailings, participant workbooks Begin resource library	\$500	\$750
Travel	<u>\$250</u>	
<b>Total Direct Costs</b>	<b>\$2500</b>	<b>\$2500</b>