

SECOND EDITION



Hello,

MY BUSINESS NAME IS...

A GUIDE to Building Entrepreneurial Networks in North Carolina

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MAY 2008

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BY Erik Pages with Rural EDS Partners

This publication is made possible by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

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Printed by Cary Printing | North Carolina, USA
Designed by Cassell Design

Acknowledgments

The North Carolina Rural Entrepreneurship Development System (EDS) is a project funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and led by the N.C. Rural Economic Development Center (Rural Center). The EDS project is seeking to develop a system that has no wrong door for any entrepreneur in rural North Carolina to information and services they need; no closed doors to racial and ethnic minorities, women, dislocated workers or any other citizen who has an entrepreneurial mindset, a market-driven product, and the willingness to develop the skillset to be a business owner; and keys (or information) to entering the doors most relevant to them.

The EDS project is a state-wide effort that has developed collaborative partnerships with many state, regional and local partnerships, including the Council for Entrepreneurial Development (CED). This guide is a product of the EDS project through the collaboration with the Rural Center, CED, Entworks, Good Work, NC REAL, East Carolina University, Western Carolina University, High Country Business Network, Piedmont Triad Entrepreneurial Network, Blue Ridge Entrepreneurial Council, and Uptown Business and Professional Association.

The team involved in creating this how-to guide to building a business network for rural entrepreneurs included Erik Pages, Robert Albright, Leslie Scott, John Parker, Michelle Hall and Barry Ryan. We would like to personally thank Monica Doss, Chilton Rogers, Jim Roberts, Mary Peterkin, Lisa Blakley, Marty Hackney, Greg Walker-Wilson, Frank Lockwood and Matthew Shulman for their time and wisdom. The team would also like to thank Chilton Rogers and Mary Peterkin for helping us gather case study information, and Kelly Castor for helping us take this guide on the road around the state in April 2008.

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Why
DO NETWORKS MATTER?

We often hear that networking is the key to success in life. This is likely true in every field, whether you're a nurse, a teacher, a factory worker, or a corporate executive. It's especially true if you're an entrepreneur. The myths of the entrepreneur as the "mad scientist" working in his garage, or the lone genius who single-handedly perseveres against the odds are just that—myths. The lone entrepreneur who just wants to be left alone will likely be a failed entrepreneur.

Entrepreneurs should network not just because it's fun to exchange business cards. Networking is about building relationships. In fact, it will be tough for a new business to survive in the 21st century without effective networking where entrepreneurs find customers, investors, partners, service providers, and even mentors.

Yet, for an entrepreneur based in a small rural community, networking can often be easier said than done. Strong networking groups exist throughout North Carolina, but they are mainly based in larger metro areas. Rural entrepreneurs do participate in such programs, but it can be a challenge to drive 50 or 100 miles on a regular basis for such events. North Carolina's rural entrepreneurs need and deserve effective networking opportunities closer to home.

Entrepreneurs should network not just because it's fun to exchange business cards. **Networking is about building relationships** with customers, investors, partners, service providers and potential mentors.

This guide offers some tips on how to create networks closer to home. **It is designed for entrepreneurs and community leaders** who see the need for a local entrepreneurship network, but don't know where to begin or how to proceed. There is no single "right" way to build a local network, so this guide should not be viewed as a simple menu for action. Instead, it offers some general guidelines for what to do and what to avoid doing. The rest is up to you!

Why Do Networks Matter?

In the so-called old economy of the early to mid-20th century, networking occurred through organizations like the Rotary or the Grange. Meeting other business owners could help your company, but it also had a strong community service orientation. The networks emphasized their community service within their mission and business development was less critical. This was both laudable and feasible as most people's careers seemed to follow a clear path: get a job, rise within the organization, and retire. With this kind of career pattern becoming obsolete, we'll all have to network to get ahead. Today, the business development role of networks is becoming more important.

New networks are a bit different from traditional groups like the Chamber of Commerce or the Lion's Club. These established groups provide networking opportunities, but also serve other roles such as providing member benefits (like insurance) or political advocacy. Entrepreneurial networks are single-minded. Their

Networking has a clear impact

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more profitable.

primary purpose is relationship-building. In these groups, entrepreneurs seek to build linkages to others involved with starting and growing new businesses. Each individual enters the network for idiosyncratic reasons, but the primary causes include a desire to learn from peers and to gain access to local expertise about how to succeed in business.

Entrepreneurs gain numerous competitive advantages through their participation in these networks. By sharing information via networks, business owners get a better understanding of the marketplace and their niche within it. The information sharing can be about new contracts or new technologies, or it can be as simple as sharing perspectives with someone else who's "been there and done that." Membership in networks varies, but the groups tend to include entrepreneurs, aspiring entrepreneurs, investors, professional service providers, and other community leaders. They should always welcome new participants.

Networking has a clear impact on the bottom line. Firms that are embedded in active networks introduce more products, have more success in finding investors and customers, have a more diversified customer base, and are more profitable.



It's pretty easy to understand how entrepreneurs benefit from networks, but communities also benefit. At the basic level, communities benefit from the fact that networked entrepreneurs tend to be more successful and thus generate greater benefits in terms of wealth and job creation.

Entrepreneur networks make it easier for communities to identify local entrepreneurs and offer help if needed. This in turn helps service providers to target and streamline their support services, reducing inefficiencies and helping programs better serve local needs. Finally, the presence of an entrepreneur network can help “brand” a community as “entrepreneur-friendly.” This is more than good public relations; it can help encourage others in the community who are thinking about taking the leap to entrepreneurship. This, in turn, helps nurture an overall entrepreneurial culture in the region.

The logo features the text "Networks" in a large, white, sans-serif font, with "FOR RURAL NC" in a smaller, white, sans-serif font below it. The text is centered within a blue dotted rectangular border that is slightly offset to the left and top.

Networks
FOR RURAL NC

Creating and managing an

entrepreneurial network is

hard work—in large metros and

in rural regions.

While the bottom-line effects of networks are pretty clear, many entrepreneurs fail to join such groups and many communities fail to support such efforts. Non-networked entrepreneurs fail to join local networks largely due to time constraints or to the fact that they don't really understand the benefits of these activities. For communities, the main challenge is that they don't know where to start or what to do.

These problems can be especially challenging in small towns. Creating and managing an entrepreneurial network is hard work—in large metros

and in rural regions. The most established networks tend to be based in cities that have a large population of business owners, and lots of locally-based services and resources. The traditional network model (used in larger metro areas) can be transported to rural communities, but it must take account of the unique perspectives and needs of rural entrepreneurs. These include the following:

Distance | Entrepreneurs in rural regions must travel farther to do business, to network with fellow entrepreneurs, and to obtain needed services.

Scale | Entrepreneurial networks work best with large numbers of participants and the regular introduction of new players. Small towns sometimes lack this ability to involve large numbers of participants.

Services | Many essential business services cannot be found in rural regions—due to the issues of distance and scale cited above.

None of these challenges should be considered as deal-breakers for rural networks. They are constraints, but they do not imply that rural networks cannot be successful. They simply mean that rural networks will be a little different—they must be created and managed with a recognition of the unique needs and the unique environment facing rural entrepreneurs.





How

TO PROCEED?

A successful network can be traced to the leadership of one person (or a handful of folks) who stepped up and said: **“We need to do this!”**

The best and most effective networks emerge naturally as local entrepreneurs see such activities as critical to business success. In most cases, a successful network can be traced to the leadership of one person (or a handful of folks) who stepped up and said: “we need to do this!” For example the Research Triangle’s Council for Entrepreneurial Development (CED) was started by a group of lawyers, service providers, and corporate executives who were concerned about the absence of home-grown start-ups in Research Triangle Park in 1984. Now the region is known for its entrepreneurial culture.

This spirit can occur in your community, too. If your region does not have such a network in place, several things might be happening. Local business owners might be too busy, or might not be aware of how networking can help their business. In other cases, your town might have lots of networking but it occurs in closed circles at the country club, the local coffee shop, or church. A new business owner may have trouble breaking into these circles or may not even know that they exist. In any case, you face a situation where local business owners cannot easily find a “safe space” to interact with fellow entrepreneurs.

You have two options in this circumstance: continue waiting for something to naturally occur, or step in and make it happen yourself. Not surprisingly, we suggest you consider option #2. If a network has not

spontaneously emerged in your town, it probably won't happen without your leadership. You will need to jumpstart the network, but doing this is often easier said than done.

Entrepreneurs have unique needs and interests when it comes to networking. They don't want to be involved in an economic development initiative, and they don't want to just have another meeting. They want opportunities to interact with fellow entrepreneurs, and learn specific tips and ideas for improving their business. As a community leader, you can't do this for them. Your job is to provide opportunities where they can help themselves.

This requires new types of leadership skills. It's not just about making something happen. Instead, effective networking requires a commitment to listening and collaboration. It also requires a willingness to "let go," that is, to let a network go where entrepreneurs want to take it. Below, we offer some tips that can help you get a local entrepreneur network started, maintain its operations, and then, hopefully, let go as it blossoms and local entrepreneurs take ownership of the process themselves. The typical entrepreneur will more easily trust and respect a fellow entrepreneur as opposed to a public official, no matter how well-meaning you are.

These tips are just that—tips. There is no single template or menu for this process. Some of these ideas may make sense in your town; others may not. Choose what works best for you, but always remember the bottom

line: **the network should be by and for entrepreneurs.** Their needs and interests—not yours—must drive all decisions.

Tips for Getting a Network Started

Talk to Entrepreneurs | As in all tasks, it helps to do a little research first. Interview local entrepreneurs—alone or in small groups—to assess what’s happening with businesses in your community. These interviews should take an indirect approach. Don’t ask “would you like a local network” or “what can government do to help you?” Instead, talk to business owners about their current challenges, i.e., what keeps them up at night? Then, do an independent assessment of whether networking might help.



Remember that the ultimate goal of networking is to help local firms succeed. Networking can be fun, but entrepreneurs are really looking for opportunities to build their companies. Networking is the means, not the end. An entrepreneur attends a networking event not because he/she wants to exchange business cards, but because it will teach the entrepreneur about a topic (e.g. government contract opportunities, what



banks want in their loan applications) related to his/her company. Your interviews will help you identify these hot-button topics.

Talk to Service Providers | Effective networks can include service providers (lawyers, accountants, etc.) as long as these players recognize that the network is helping entrepreneurs build relationships that will help them build THEIR business. Service providers can't view the network as a personal marketing opportunity; they must be committed to the idea that if local entrepreneurs prosper, everyone in

the community will do better. If they embrace this message, they can be important network partners. Some networks even require that service providers provide some *pro bono* services to network members.

Because service providers serve multiple local businesses, they can also provide a unique perspective on key issues. As you interview local business owners, you should pursue a similar process with local service providers. Also ask them to help identify other entrepreneurs or aspiring entrepreneurs who live in your community.

Create a Leadership Team | After your interviews are completed, you can begin to create a local leadership team to drive the network's creation. This step is critical. The network works best if local leaders

step back and let entrepreneurs take the reins. Creating an effective leadership team allows this to happen. With that team in place, your role can shift to the background. You can provide office and logistics support, and any other forms of encouragement or staff support. But, let the leaders lead the group.

The group's composition will vary by community. At the outset, the group should remain somewhat small (5-10 people), but it can grow as the network evolves. **The founding group should reflect the diversity of your community;** this step is important as you develop and broaden your network.

The personalities of network leaders will vary by community, too. However, a few characteristics seem to be common among effective network leaders:

- ▶ They have been successful in business—perhaps more than once.
- ▶ They are community-minded. They want to see your town succeed.
- ▶ They have a wide range of contacts. They are open-minded and comfortable with many types of people and in many types of settings. The group should be diverse and include individuals from varying backgrounds.
- ▶ They are recognized in the community. If they call a meeting, people will attend.

The best programs are “hands-on,” and provide stories and real-life examples of issues facing a business owner.

Entrepreneurs like to hear from successful entrepreneurs, so create this type of opportunity whenever possible.

Develop Programs Based on Local Needs | After you’ve done your interviews and formed a leadership team, it’s time to run some programs. Having “good” programs is especially important in a network’s early stages before entrepreneurs begin to effectively network with one another. The actual content of network meetings always varies, but most meetings run according to a similar format. The meeting begins with some period of time devoted to networking, and is then followed by a “program” on a specific topic or issue. In some cases, a local business owner might discuss a pressing issue, such as problems in worker retention, or an expert might do a presentation (e.g. issues in incorporating a business). The best programs are “hands-on,” and provide stories and real-life examples of issues facing a business owner. Entrepreneurs like to hear from successful entrepreneurs, so create this type of opportunity whenever possible.

Most networks run programs on a regular basis—monthly or quarterly meetings seem to be most common. The timing and frequency of meetings will depend on your own local needs. In large cities where transportation is easier, monthly meetings are common. When network members must drive long distances, quarterly meetings may make more sense.

Let your leaders make this determination based on their preferences. In Washington, DC, for example, most networks meet over breakfast as traffic and other meeting commitments complicate planning for evening meetings. In Fargo, ND, the 5:01 Entrepreneur Society meets at 5:01 PM—a good time for business owners in that area. The key issue is to make the meeting times transparent and regular (e.g., the first Monday of every month)—network members should know the schedule far in advance so that they can plan accordingly.

In terms of content, let the network members choose. Ask them to identify key topics or issues and then help them identify good speakers or resources related to the topic. Regular phone calls with members or formal surveys are two methods for gaining such input.

One major “no-no” involves using network meetings to publicize new government programs or economic development initiatives. This is the kiss of death for a successful entrepreneurial network. Few entrepreneurs want to spend their time hearing a marketing pitch for a government program. If your network is used for this purpose, entrepreneurs will vote with their feet and stop attending. If you want to publicize a new initiative, do it with a handout, newsletter or elsewhere. Networking events need to remain frantically focused on the bottom line: helping local businesses do better in business. Usually that means your speakers are experienced entrepreneurs.

In a rural community, **expanding the network requires that you think differently...**

Build the Network | You've started the network, and started to run programs. Now, it's time to build the network itself. This can be a big challenge in smaller areas where the sheer number of entrepreneurs is smaller. While the job is tough, it's important. Research indicates very clearly that network success comes when networks grow and evolve over time.

How do networks grow? By bringing in new players. If your network always includes the same people with the same issues and similar ideas, it will become stale very quickly. Bringing in new members is a proven way to fire up the network and introduce new ideas into the process.

In a rural community, expanding the network requires that you think differently and reach out to "non-usual suspects." You cannot simply include established well-known businesses. These entrepreneurs must be a part of your network, but they can't be the only part. Your network will not succeed if it simply replicates the Chamber of Commerce under a new name. Your success will depend on your ability to interest "new" people to engage in the network.

How to begin? Again, each community will vary. Non-usual suspects might include aspiring business owners,

the self-employed, minority entrepreneurs, new residents, or youth. In Fargo, ND, the local network includes students from business programs at North Dakota State University. This young cohort brings lots of energy and new ideas to the table.

**Think about ways that you can
keep the network fresh...**

Your purpose in engaging “non-usual suspects” is not simply to embrace diversity for diversity’s sake. These new players bring new ideas, new perspectives, and differing areas of expertise to the table. By reaching out to new partners, your members and their businesses will become more effective in reaching out to new markets as well.

Execute | The network is running, and things seem to be proceeding smoothly. Now, it’s time to focus on execution. A key challenge is to keep the network fresh. This means bringing in new players, but it also means developing good programs. Often, a good program topic or a good speaker sells itself. But, sometimes, a little more creativity is needed. Think about ways that you can keep the network fresh with interesting and innovative program ideas. Here’s some tips that you might want to consider:

❶ **Make the members stretch.** Don’t make all the program topics focused on mundane business issues (e.g. incorporation, protecting intellectual property). Include some topics that seem a little “off the wall,” (e.g.



what does a historical figure like Lincoln tell us about entrepreneurship). Consider other different ideas like assigning books for the group to read.

② **Teach how to network.** Networking doesn't come naturally to everyone. Some people need to be taught. A couple of basics are to find someone new, ask about their passion, and determine how you can help *them*. The spirit of mutual benefit keeps people coming back.

③ **Field Trips.** Sometimes, it makes sense to get out in the field. Some networks arrange events where members visit each others' businesses. Moving meetings around is a great way to learn about what other network members do. By understanding each other's businesses, members will also be better able to support one another.

④ **Community Engagement.** The network should not be viewed as an "economic development program," but that doesn't mean its members must ignore the wider community. Identify opportunities for the network to give back to the community, especially in areas related to business. For example, some networks have their members mentor young people who are starting businesses or who are taking entrepreneurship classes.

⑤ **Make it Fun.** Running a business is serious work, but that doesn't mean that the network can't be fun. In Asheville, the Blue Ridge Entrepreneurial Council took a page from the dating scene. During its "Speed Dating for Entrepreneurs" event, entrepreneurs spent five minutes with each other and quickly introduced their business. After five minutes, they moved to another person. By the night's end, each participant had met numerous colleagues, had honed their business pitch, and had received dozens of good ideas.

As the network evolves, you can consider branching out to include other activities. Many networks branch out by including formal training programs—like FastTrac or NxLevel—in their portfolio. Others provide investment screening and links to investors. Others develop a virtual network that complements the physical network. Iowa's MyEntreNet (myentre.net) is a good example of such a virtual network. This system provides distance learning, moderated chat groups, and access to hundreds of resources via a virtual network that targets a wide region of Northern Iowa.

As the network grows, rural network leaders face a unique challenge. A large city like Charlotte is full of excellent speakers and lots of tremendous resources for entrepreneurs. This rich array of resources just doesn't exist in small towns, which don't have the large population base needed to support them. Thus, rural networks need to reach out to other areas—for services, expertise, and program ideas. This may require creative use of podcasting or video, or other techniques that make it easier for rural business owners to join in the network on a regular basis.

Networks should also consider

creative partnerships with others

from outside the region.

The network should also consider creative partnerships with others from outside the region. This is a very effective tool for tapping into resources that don't exist close to home. For example, in Eastern Idaho, local software entrepreneurs purchased a group membership to the San Jose-based Software and Industry Information Association. This collective membership gave them a regular entrée to the association's meetings and trainings, as well as regular updates on the latest thinking in the field.

As this process continues, your role should hopefully become less prominent. As local entrepreneurs become engaged in the network, they can assume leadership and operational roles in the network, though they will still need and appreciate your administrative support. If you succeed, you should be able to step back and let the entrepreneurs lead it themselves. Like a parent whose child is heading off to college, you can congratulate yourself on a job well done!

Market | Effective marketing will be a key to the network's success. Public relations must be viewed as a core activity for the network, not as an add-on.

Marketing aids the network in several ways. At a minimum, it helps attract new members who hear about events through your communications. It also helps inform existing members about the network's events and

programs. “Selling” your programs in this manner is not a whole lot different from promoting other community initiatives. However, there are some unique issues in reaching out to entrepreneurs. First, your communications need to go where entrepreneurs are. Many entrepreneurs may not read the local newspaper or see postings at a community center. You need to identify venues and products that will be seen by local business owners. And, since you are also trying to interest “non-usual suspects,” you need to publicize the network in non-usual locations. These locations could include churches, local schools, or even local sports clubs.

Second, because entrepreneurs are pressed for time, they have little interest or time to visit a web page or read a long document. They want communications that are quick and simple. For this reason, email works best. It comes directly to the entrepreneur and they can read it on their schedule. In some regions of North Carolina, reliable Internet access continues to be a problem. To check the status of Internet access in your area look at the 100 County Report at http://www.e-nc.org/100_County_Report/county.asp. The absence of reliable Internet access will make it extremely difficult for local entrepreneurs to thrive. If you face



Your communications need to go where entrepreneurs are... and they need to be **quick and simple.**

this situation, your emerging network should make improved Internet access—or access to an e-NC Business and Technology Telecenter—one of your top priorities.

In addition to promoting your program with members and potential members, you must also communicate to the broader community with special emphasis on other business leaders, elected officials and educators. Here, our goal is to communicate that “our town is entrepreneur-friendly” and that “we have lots of exciting businesses and entrepreneurs in our town.” If done right, the network can be a means to get the rest of the community excited about entrepreneurship and doing their best to support local business owners.

To achieve this goal, you must “sell” your members, not the network itself. Communications should be about the great things that local firms are doing, not about the next network meeting. If you succeed, local leaders and residents should be able to identify the up-and-coming businesses in your town.

Repeat | It’s sometimes helpful to view an entrepreneurial network as a living thing that grows and evolves over time. When the network stops evolving, it grows static and will likely collapse. The network must undergo a process of continuous change and reinvention—much like a successful entrepreneurial business.



Challenges

AND CONCLUSION

We can't promise you that this is easy.

Networks are difficult to set up, difficult

to manage, and difficult to grow. **But,**

when they work, they can have

a profound impact...

We can't promise you that this is easy. Networks are difficult to set up, difficult to manage, and difficult to grow. But, when they work, they can have a profound impact—not only for individual entrepreneurs, but also for your entire community. Imagine if people in your town could easily get information on how to start a business, could easily get funding and technical support, and could easily share their ideas and lessons learned with fellow business owners. An effective network can do all this and more!

Getting from here to there is the real challenge, and, as you proceed, a couple of key problem areas may arise. They include the following:

Funding—How to pay for the network? | Paying for the network will always be a challenge. At the outset, costs are minimal and largely limited to mailings, communications, and expenses (e.g. for food) around meetings. In a rural area, one inexpensive way to start is to rotate meetings among various “front porches” and provide refreshments for a small fee. As the network grows, costs grow, too. Few existing networks rely on a single source to pay the bills. Most networks charge limited membership dues, often tied to a firm's stage of

growth or size. They work towards a diverse funding stream that combines membership dues, foundation grants, corporate event sponsorships, and small registration fees to cover food and program or training costs.

Keeping it Fresh | As we noted earlier, rural networks face a tough challenge in “keeping it fresh.” With smaller numbers of members, they must consciously work to prevent the network from becoming stale and locked into the “same old stuff.” Potential solutions include creative programming, partnerships with other networks, and including new players—such as youth or minority business owners—in the local network.

Selling Up: Convincing community stakeholders that networks matter. | A third challenge concerns engagement with elected officials who often have a traditional mind-set toward business and economic development. They are interested in new jobs and new investments. To them, an entrepreneurial network might seem like an indirect (or too fluffy a) way to achieve these economic development goals.

You can only overcome these feelings in two ways:

- 1 By showing the power of the network, and
- 2 By engaging local leaders in your work.

Thus, effective communications become critical. You need to publicize network companies on a regular basis, and put out the word when good things happen to local entrepreneurs. Similarly, you should engage elected officials and local media in the network. Invite them to attend meetings and see what's happening.

Overcoming Distance | In small towns, distance and gas prices can become the enemy of effective networking. If people have to drive very far for meetings, attendance can suffer and the network may stagnate. We've talked earlier about ways to avoid these shortfalls. In addition to effective programming and network development, rural networks should consider using electronic tools such as podcasts, videoconferencing, moderated discussion boards, and other virtual forums to supplement face-to-face networking.

North Carolina's e-NC Authority can be a real asset for the state's rural business owners. In establishing the authority, the NC state legislature charged it to "manage, oversee, and monitor efforts to provide rural counties with high-speed broadband Internet access." The authority provides yearly status updates in its 100 County Report (http://www.e-nc.org/100_County_Report/county.asp).

The e-NC Authority has established a system of Business and Technology Telecenters in the most distressed rural areas of the state. These centers serve as technology hubs for their areas and provide small business development services, videoconferencing, free public Internet access, training, and at some centers, incubator space. More information about the centers and their locations can be found at: <http://www.e-nc.org/elImprovement/telecenter/telecenters.asp>.

Conclusion

As more North Carolina communities recognize that home-grown entrepreneurs are a key part of the recipe for future prosperity, networks will begin to develop across the state. This process is already underway and lots of exciting experiments are bubbling up throughout the state. Your region can and should be part of this exciting process. With this guide and your commitment to your region's future, we hope you get out there and start networking!!!

QUICK

Do's AND Dont's

TO BUILD A NETWORK



Do's

Engage Local

Entrepreneurs | Your network will fail without leadership from local business owners. Leverage their expertise to build credibility.

Be Open | “Cliquish” networks don’t work. The network must welcome all who share a sincere interest in building entrepreneurial business in the community.

Have Fun | Networking can and should be enjoyable. Make it fun!

Tell Your Story | You can never tell your story too many times! If no one knows about your network, it will have trouble succeeding.

Take Risks | If you do the same old thing, your network will stagnate. Take risks and try different things. The worst that

can happen is that you’ll say: “we won’t try that it again.”

Use Virtual Tools | On-line communication—especially email—is the most effective way to link the network.



Don'ts

View the Network as an Economic Development Program

| The program must be “by and for entrepreneurs.” It is about building businesses. Hopefully, this process helps the community, too. But, that must be a secondary goal.

Don't Let Members Sell Their Own Services

| The network is about collaborative learning opportunities. If members want to do business together, they can do it outside of the network. When they come to meetings, they must “leave their guns at the door.”

Don't Market Government Programs

| Don't use the network to “sell” your initiatives. Entrepreneurs don't want to hear your pitch. Do that elsewhere.



Networks:

CASE STUDY REPORTS FROM N.C. COMMUNITIES

The HCBN is a **regional support system for small business and entrepreneur development...**

High Country Business Network

The High Country Business Network (HCBN) offers a good example of how local networks can get started in North Carolina. The HCBN is a regional support system for small business and entrepreneur development in the High Country. It is committed to promoting a culture of entrepreneurship by providing networking and educational opportunities to the region's emerging and established business communities. HCBN came out of a wider strategy that was designed to promote entrepreneurship development throughout the region (including Wilkes, Alleghany, Ashe, Watauga, Avery, Mitchell, Yancey and Caldwell counties). This effort was originally led by citizens in Watauga County, including the Watauga County Economic Development Commission and Appalachian State University's Appalachian Regional Development Institute.

These groups convened an initial meeting in April 2005. This event was open to all and was designed to assess interest among local business owners. The response was overwhelming, and two dozen local entrepreneurs volunteered to help build a regional entrepreneurship network. This large group brings a lot of energy and contacts to the table. But, they must work, too. Each member is a part of work group with an assigned role (e.g. membership development, marketing, sponsorship) for building the organization.

So far, HCBN has held bimonthly meetings around the region, covering topics like small business finance and how to network. The group is building momentum and gaining public attention—from existing businesses and from those who have long dreamt of starting a business.

To learn more about the High Country Business Network, visit <http://www.ardi.appstate.edu/hcbn>.

Uptown Business and Professional Association Inc.

As North Carolina's coastal communities have revitalized themselves, New Bern has been among the region's leaders. Beginning in the late 1970s, New Bern has sponsored a host of successful downtown revitalization efforts. More recently, New Bern's entrepreneurs have entered the fray via the Uptown Business and Professional Association, Inc.

The Uptown Business and Professional Association was started by a group of entrepreneurs in New Bern's Five Points District, a historically African-American neighborhood. Five Points had not been included in past downtown redevelopment efforts, but the neighborhood was full of successful business owners. In an effort to revitalize Five Points and grow their businesses, Mary Peterkin and several other business owners started the association. Their belief was that the successful businesses are the real key to a neighborhood's health.

The Association is now a major player in local development activities, and new businesses are springing up in Five Points and throughout New Bern. Association members have organized training classes for the group, and they are serving as mentors for the neighborhood's up and coming entrepreneurs. The Association also sponsors a financial literacy class for young women. The Association is succeeding in building businesses and building a community. As Mary Peterkin notes, "We need to get back to helping each other."

Linking Latino Entrepreneurs in Eastern North Carolina

An emerging group of Latino community leaders and support organizations (including Self-Help, Lenoir Community College, City of Wilson, AMEXCAN, Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments, and East Carolina University) are working to build bridges and a network for Latino Entrepreneurs in Eastern North Carolina. They are planning a Latino small business conference for the fall of 2008.

Appendix:

A SAMPLING OF ACTIVE ENTREPRENEURIAL
NETWORKS IN N.C.

Blue Ridge Entrepreneurial Council (BREC)

- ▶ Target audience: Aspiring and existing high-growth entrepreneurs
- ▶ Region served: 23-county region in Western North Carolina
- ▶ Contact information: www.brecnc.com; 828-687-7234

Business Innovation & Growth Council (BIG)

- ▶ Target audience: Aspiring and existing high-growth entrepreneurs
- ▶ Region served: Greater Charlotte metro region
- ▶ Contact information: www.bigcouncil.com; 704-927-8064

Council for Entrepreneurial Development (CED)

- ▶ Target audience: Aspiring and existing high-growth entrepreneurs
- ▶ Region served: North Carolina, especially Research Triangle
- ▶ Contact information: www.cednc.org; 919-549-7500

e-NC's Business and Technology Telecenters

- ▶ Target audience: Technology and entrepreneurship hubs offering employee training, office space, technology expertise and business advice.
- ▶ Region served: 7 telecenters located across North Carolina's rural communities
- ▶ Contact information: www.e-nc.org; 919-250-4314

Good Work

- ▶ Target audience: Retail, service and social entrepreneurs
- ▶ Region served: Under-served communities across North Carolina
- ▶ Contact information: www.goodwork.org; 919-682-8473

High Country Business Network

- ▶ Target audience: Emerging and established entrepreneurs
- ▶ Region served: 8-county High Country region of Wilkes, Alleghany, Ashe, Watauga, Avery, Mitchell, Yancey and Caldwell counties in North Carolina
- ▶ Contact information: www.ardi.appstate.edu/hcfn; 828-262-6662

Mountain Bizworks

- ▶ Target audience: Aspiring and existing entrepreneurs in underserved communities
- ▶ Region served: Western North Carolina; offices in Asheville, Hendersonville, and Sylva
- ▶ Contact information: www.mountainbizworks.org; 828-253-2834

NorthEastern Entrepreneur Roundtable (NEER)

- ▶ Target audience: Established entrepreneurs
- ▶ Region served: 4-county region of Edgecombe, Halifax, Nash and Wilson counties in North Carolina
- ▶ Contact information: www.rockymountchamber.org; 252-973-1212

Piedmont Triad Entrepreneurial Network (PTEN)

- ▶ Target audience: Aspiring and existing high-growth entrepreneurs
- ▶ Region served: 12-county Piedmont Triad region of Alamance, Caswell, Davidson, Davie, Forsyth, Guilford, Montgomery, Randolph, Rockingham, Stokes, Surry and Yadkin counties in North Carolina
- ▶ Contact information: www.pten.org; 336-533-0025

Upper Coastal Plain Rural Entrepreneurial Network

- ▶ Target audience: Small businesses and service providers who assist small businesses
- ▶ Region served: 5-county Upper Coastal Plain of Wilson, Nash, Edcombe, Halifax, and Northampton counties in North Carolina
- ▶ Contact information: Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments, 252-234-5951

Uptown Business and Professional Association

- ▶ Target audience: Minorities and other under-served entrepreneurs
- ▶ Region served: New Bern, especially Five Points area
- ▶ Contact information: 252-638-4131

