City of Ypsilanti

21c3 Pilot Project – Entrepreneurship

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Why Entrepreneurship

- Past narrative? Factory town
- New success story?

- Pockets of new entrepreneurs starting businesses all over the City.

- We also had just partnered with Ann Arbor SPARK to host a business incubator in our Historic downtown.
Why Entrepreneurship

- Ann Arbor SPARK, EMU College of Business, the Chamber of Commerce and The Michigan Small Business & Technology Development Center formed an “Entrepreneurship Campus” focused on small business development.

- Private arts incubator
- No govt. support
  - (except cheering)
  - at capacity
Interesting Findings

- A study was completed by Michigan State University with the intent to create a baseline assessment on our entrepreneurial resources. The purpose was to focus on the identified gaps and utilize the grant funding to provide support.

- Interesting findings…
Lessons Learned

- Just because it is identified as a gap doesn’t mean it’s a gap.

- When your service providers don’t want to take your money…ask why!

- If it’s not broken…
  - don’t touch it!
After realizing we needed to detour, we refocused our energy on what was really happening in our community.

Urban Farming was becoming one of our larger success stories. We had recently passed a chicken ordinance and a bee ordinance. The Farmer’s market was exploding and Growing Hope was continually expanding.
Life Happens When You Plan

Growing Hope is an Ypsilanti–based nonprofit dedicated to helping people improve their lives & communities through gardening and healthy food access. Among GH’s programs are managing the 6–year old Downtown Ypsilanti Farmers’ Market.

The vendors and customers at the DYFM are diverse in race, class, age, and gender, and GH works to help them grow and sustain their small (and often new) businesses. Many of them were interested in expanding but didn’t have the money or the expertise.
The timing was appropriate, as cottage industry laws had just passed making it easier to start a small business focused on food.

As we engaged Growing Hope in further conversations we realized this was a section of Entrepreneurship that had great potential, particularly as demand for local food sources continued to rise.
Welcome to the Downtown Ypsilanti Farmers’ Market
Welcome to the Downtown Ypsilanti Farmers’ Market

The DYFM was established in 2006 to increase healthy food access while helping to revitalize our downtown and support our local food and agricultural economy.

- 19% of Ypsilanti residents participated in food assistance programs and 24% lived below poverty level compared to 11% and 13%, respectively, at the state level (U.S. Census 2006-08).
Welcome to the Downtown Ypsilanti Farmers’ Market

Total sales 2006=$22,000; 2007=$28,000
2008=$65,000; 2009=$108,000; 2010=$96,000
Welcome to the Downtown Ypsilanti Farmers’ Market

Yearly Comparison of EBT Sales at the Downtown Ypsi Farmers' Market

- 2006: $378
- 2007: $462
- 2008: $2,757
- 2009: $6,113
- 2010: $9,437
“Growing” Entrepreneurs

- Project Outcome: Build capacity of low-income vendors at the Downtown Ypsi Farmer’s Market.
  - Develop Vendor Directory
  - Offer business workshops for vendors (starting a business, marketing, legal, cottage food)

Half of DYFM vendors make less than $25,000/yr, and 80% make less than $50,000/yr
“Growing” Entrepreneurs

- Project Outcome: Develop new farmer’s market opportunities through feasibility analysis and planning for a market gardener co-operative

*Our Aim: Create joint marketing opportunities for small backyard and urban growers to generate household revenue.*
Lena, a regular customer and Growing Hope volunteer, will likely be one of the pilot market gardeners. We’ll provide some accessible beds that she can grow in at our urban farm.
“Growing” Entrepreneurs

The DYFM has many women farmers, both from farming backgrounds and those brand new to the profession.
“Growing” Entrepreneurs

MML grant was part of a broader project funded by the MEDC. The broader project also aimed to increase capacity of vendors, and build capacity/sustainability of the market overall. This included, in part:

- Professional vendor signage
- Improved market signage
- Key infrastructure for market & co-op (truck and trailer)
- Developing tent rental service
- Friends of the Market program
“Growing” Entrepreneurs

Our teen interns shopping in preparation for teaching Nutrition at younger youth programs
“Growing” Entrepreneurs

New tent rental service has allowed many vendors to be at the market more affordably, and has removed logistical/physical barriers.
“Growing” Entrepreneurs

Healthy food and other health programs at the market make it a resource for all citizens
Vendor signs, paired with the vendor directory, help to professionalize our vendors’ booths and businesses.
“Growing” Entrepreneurs

Our growers come from both tiny urban lots and large family farms.
Civic Engagement

- Civic Engagement is the reason that the City is successful.
- Use these informal networks to reach the goals you might have, but lack in the funding to support.
- The City eliminated recreation in 2004, however, we still have recreation through “friends groups”...Friends of the Pool, Parkridge Community Center, Freighthouse and Senior Center.
Civic Engagement

- Civic Engagement is the reason why we still have recreation facilities, grants, clean parks, streets and roads, festivals, etc.
- This grant opportunity solidified what these networks of engaged citizens could accomplish.
- We can now watch our local farmer’s market grow and expand and breed jobs, all with a network of residents!
Come visit! Be in touch!

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