

# Strategies

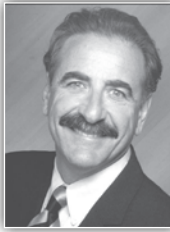
## for Sustainable Small Town and Rural Development

It is necessary for citizens and their leaders to be actively engaged in shaping the destiny of their communities. Often, simple, yet powerful actions are all that are necessary to start the momentum in a community toward a new and more promising future. Consumers Energy asked leading experts from around the country the strategies they recommend for individual communities.

*“We want our future to be our choice and not something that happens to us.”*

– A small-town resident

**Consumers Energy**



**Ernesto Sirolli**, author, chairman and CEO of the Sirolli Institute for International Enterprise Facilitation

**Q. What do you see as important for communities, their citizens and leaders to recognize and address to improve their chances of shaping a better future?**

We need to genuinely respect and support entrepreneurs and let them know they don't have to do it all. While this sounds pretty elementary, it is surprising how we fail in these two simple areas.

The greatest assets we have in our communities, regardless of size, are the dreams of our citizens to use their respective talents and passions to improve themselves. If you talk with someone for a period of time and earn their confidence, you'll often learn they have a dream to apply their talents and passions to a new endeavor, one with the potential to earn a living, and with some degree of success, the chance to create jobs for others. These diamonds in the rough are the potential entrepreneurs who often will never advance their idea because they lack true support. ***Imagine if we could be successful in helping these people transform their dreams into meaningful work that provides a rewarding livelihood and the opportunity to employ others, we would profoundly change the economic fortunes for the entire community.***

Many communities are adopting concepts of economic gardening ... growing their economies from within, from their own resources and from the entrepreneurial talent right in their towns. Undeniably, having infrastructure is essential, but we need more locally motivated entrepreneurs using this infrastructure rather than waiting for outsiders to discover it. Winning communities are building from the assets they have, and when it comes to the passion and creativity of a town's own people, these assets are significant, but largely untapped.

When first meeting with a community, I have literally told a group that I could see millions of dollars of business and hundreds of jobs in just the unrealized dreams of those in the room. Then, just a few years later, I was able to point to people that were there at that first meeting and indeed demonstrate the jobs and business activity that had occurred, all from the

talents and passions of these local people. We truly have the wherewithal in our communities to grow from our own ability and assets. We need to commit ourselves to making this happen.

How can communities develop these assets? They can provide a level of honest and nonjudgmental support for entrepreneurs. For us, in an approach we call Enterprise Facilitation<sup>®</sup>, we encourage those with ideas to come to a trusted adviser (the Enterprise Facilitator<sup>®</sup>) to be coached, not led, in a quest to realize a dream. Too often those with ideas are not taken seriously. Sensing a lack of support and enthusiasm by others, potential entrepreneurs either suppress their ideas or stop seeking advice and strike out on their own without a supportive network. And, quite understandably, they are more easily discouraged and begin to doubt their instincts. Enterprise Facilitation<sup>®</sup> is nonjudgmental and takes all concepts seriously and openly, allowing the potential entrepreneur to freely and fully pursue their ideas.

In addition to honest, caring and nonjudgmental assistance, the community can best serve its entrepreneurs by recognizing that going it alone is often the death sentence for the new enterprise. Tragically, many entrepreneurs start with the notion they have to do it all, and we have not been particularly good as communities in showing them another, better way. There are three essential elements of a successful enterprise, providing the product or service, marketing it and managing the finances. An enterprise is often doomed when an entrepreneur attempts to undertake all three when they are only skilled at or passionate about one.

Specifically, Enterprise Facilitation<sup>®</sup> subscribes to a Trinity of Management<sup>®</sup> approach which recognizes it is practically impossible, and actually foolish, for one individual to hope to undertake and skillfully produce the product, market it and manage the finances. Rather, virtually every successful entrepreneur, right from the business-plan-writing stage, forms a team of people who complement each other's capabilities. Interestingly, clients with serious doubts about their ability to run a business have expressed great confidence once they have been "relieved of their duty" to perform all essential business functions. They had believed or understood they needed to be able to do it all! Our Trinity of Management<sup>®</sup> approach gave them the confidence to go out to find people whose strengths complement their own and who are equally passionate about making the endeavor successful.

The potential entrepreneurs in our community can have a significant impact on our future economic prosperity. We need to nurture the passion and creativity of our citizens and genuinely support the enterprises they can create.

*This material is copyright 2008 by The Sirolli Institute and used, with permission, by Consumers Energy. Any other use or reproduction of the material requires the express approval of The Sirolli Institute.*

**Additional Resources:**

- *Ripples from the Zambezi: Passion, Entrepreneurship and the Rebirth of Local Economies* by Ernesto Sirolli.
- *Sirolli Institute for International Enterprise Facilitation*, [www.sirolli.com](http://www.sirolli.com)

