

Arkansas Economic Acceleration Foundation Enterprise Center Frequently Asked Questions

What is an Enterprise Center?

The mission of the Enterprise Center is to garner the involvement of the people within the region and the state, develop an ongoing and comprehensive long-range planning process that encourages economic growth, human resource development and improvement of quality of life through homegrown companies. It will foster a spirit of caring, an attitude of 'Arkansas pride,' and a process of participatory decision-making based on information sharing and awareness. This mission ties in with the vision to create an "entrepreneurial ecosystem" that will enhance the economic climate within each region by enhancing, invigorating, networking and streamlining the link between Arkansas entrepreneurs and resources available to them.

Each Enterprise Center across the state will offer programs and/or assistance with entrepreneurship education at all ages, business development counseling, technology assistance, develop and support regional collaborations focused on entrepreneurship economic development and assisting businesses with access to capital. The Enterprise Center will address the "Five Pillars of Entrepreneurship" that are involved in developing an Entrepreneurship Development System or ecosystem. This ecosystem not only provides services that compliment the ones offered by other agencies across the state, it engages in the culture/mindset change that is needed in rural communities that supports entrepreneurs.

Who does an Enterprise Center Serve?

The Enterprise Center serves the citizens of the identified region in which the center is located. From teaching children to young adults about entrepreneurship to working with adults of all ages to start, grow, or troubleshoot all types of businesses and business functions, the Enterprise Center should be considered a business community resource center.

However, the Enterprise Center is not to compete with any local Chambers or other service providers. It is a resource to aid in the growth and retention of small to medium sized businesses.

What is involved with starting an Enterprise Center?

The Arkansas Economic Acceleration Foundation intends to implement the center in four phases. Each phase will build a solid foundation for planning, opening and sustaining entrepreneurship support centers that will boost the economic development engine within each region.

Phase I begins the process by working with the identified Enterprise Center host

organizations in clarifying the region's natural boundaries, inviting additional leaders and economic development agencies to the table to foster support and integration into the surrounding communities and engage in the fundraising that is needed to open the center. Additionally, AEF will engage in series of public speaking opportunities intended to begin educating and informing the general population about entrepreneurship and the vision for the Enterprise Center in each region.

Phase I will also consist of engaging each region in strategic economic development planning for the Enterprise Center's operation as well as the overall fit into the economic development plans for that region, counties and townships. Meanwhile, an advisory board of local and small business leaders will be assembled to develop specific organizational plans for the Enterprise Center, which will also turn into the Center's business plan.

Once the business plan is developed, AEF will enter into Phase II with each region. In Phase II the "nuts and bolts" of building a new Enterprise Center will occur. From the strategic planning phase, the overall use of the Center shall be identified, this will lead AEF to identify and obtain the appropriate office space and location for each Center. The needs of the region may incorporate the start and operation of a business incubator as well as counseling and other business services.

In addition to preparing the physical Enterprise Center space, AEF will engage in writing, advertising and searching for a full time director for each location. Since the Director is a critical component to the success of the Center, the hiring process will be stringent yet very structured.

Lastly during Phase II, AEF will begin to develop tailored programs and services to best address the strategic plan that will result in a twelve month plan of work for the new Director. This plan of work will include community outreach and marketing strategies, implementation of technical assistance and education programs, implementation of client intake and tracking systems as well as begin to connect the Centers to a state-wide business resource website (a.k.a. Virtual Enterprise Center).

Phase III will begin once the Enterprise Center Director is hired. At this point AEF will begin training and mentoring the Director in implementing the Enterprise Center's programs as well as how to effectively work one-on-one with the wide variety of entrepreneurs that will use the Center.

Through Phase III, the initial programs of the Enterprise Center will be implemented in the regions. Starting with Entrepreneur Support Services, the Director, along with AEF, will begin coaching/counseling pre-venture/start-up entrepreneurs as well as growth and retention entrepreneurs. These counseling services will also include assisting the needs associated with research and development, technology as well as innovation. Eventually, the Director will hire full-time staff counselors, at which time AEF will also assist in the hiring and training of the additional staff members.

Additional Entrepreneur Support Services include assisting business owners with the appropriate referrals to additional state and regional resources (such as the Small Business Technology Development Center, local community colleges or universities, the World Trade Center, etc.). The Center will offer peer-to-peer learning groups, where entrepreneurs are matched by their maturity in business to discuss business issues or opportunities in a confidential group where each member is able to learn from each other. Lastly, the Center will build business-to-business networking opportunities in conjunction with regional partners.

Once the entrepreneur direct services are established, the Enterprise Center will focus on developing entrepreneurship education opportunities or programs. Here the Center will engage with public and private schools within the region to engage students in one of the state run business plan competitions (Y.E.S. for middle school and the Reynolds Governor's Cup for collegiate students). The Enterprise will also work with the university or community college located within the region to promote their entrepreneurship courses that are available to the public. Connect entrepreneurs to additional courses, workshops or seminars that are available within the region as well as to the state. If there are special topics that can be covered, the Center will host workshops as needed to fill any needs or gaps.

Phase III will also see the Enterprise Center engaging in assisting entrepreneurs find access to capital needs. The Center will promote the resources and tools needed to access capital for an entrepreneurial business, including addressing issues related to personal finance as may be needed before an entrepreneur is "bankable." The Director will work with capital resources locally and on a state level to guide the entrepreneur to various potential sources of capital. AEAFF will also work with the Director on identifying and developing a local angel investing network.

Lastly in phase III, the Director along with AEAFF will develop a regional Service Provider and Economic Development Professional Network. This network will focus on meeting at least quarterly to develop closer working relationships, learn more about the work and services offered through the various agencies and seek additional grant opportunities together. The traditional silos that still exist in the rural areas of the state can begin to break down in these regions by working together through the Enterprise Center.

Finally, Phase IV will address the long term sustainability for the Enterprise Center. Once the Center is open and developing a successful track record of services and public support, this phase will allow AEAFF, the Director and the active stakeholders in the organization to develop long term sustainability plans. From developing sliding-scale fee for service with the clients to creating yearly fundraising goals. This final step in the start-up of the center will allow for the time that is needed in implementing a long term economic development engine.

What is the timeline for starting an Enterprise Center?

The following table outlines the timeframes for each phase of the project:

Phase	Month	Action(s)
I	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss and agree upon the relationship between each region and AEAF (create a Scope of Work) that outlines the work to be completed by each entity. • Begin community outreach and education efforts. • Identify additional community and business leaders to further involve as supporters or advisory board members.
I	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin the strategic planning process with the leads in each region looking at the overall economic development needs. Integrate strategic plans that may be in place either in the region, county or community and tie entrepreneurship into the plans. • Begin developing the strategic plans for the Enterprise Centers integrating local needs and assets.
I	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the Enterprise Centers' business and detailed budget plans.
II	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop job description and begin hiring process for each Center's Director. • Begin each Center's organizational and office start-up steps.
II	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in interviews, etc. for finding and hiring the Directors. • Begin to develop the Enterprise Centers' marketing plans and advertising collateral. • Develop client intake forms, processes, tracking metrics and confidentiality forms.
II	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire Center Directors and begin training/preparing them to begin working with clients. • Develop Directors first 12 month plan-of-work. Also develop and refine the guidelines for each program to initially be offered by the Enterprise Center.
III	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announce and host the grand opening of each Center. • Begin reaching out to the region's entrepreneurs and providing services through the programs.
III	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host the first regional Service Provider/Economic Development Professional Network meeting. • Continue community outreach and advertising efforts.
III	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in reaching out to K-College students in regards to entrepreneurship and the available business plan competitions. • Assist the Director in year two planning that includes developing a staffing plan.

IV	10-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage the advisory board to develop and implement a sustainable funding plan for the Center.
IV	11-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey the Enterprise Center development and implementation plans and seek additional regions to implement future Enterprise Centers.

What sort of outcomes can be delivered from an Enterprise Center?

There are two excellent existing models within the state of Arkansas. The first is Alt.Consulting who has engaged in entrepreneurship development services for over 20 years in the Delta region. Their record of services has grown to reach greater number of entrepreneurs each year. Secondly, the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center (IEC) in Fort Smith has been in operation for two years. Within the first 12 months of operation, the IEC has counseled over 150 start-up and existing businesses with over 30 jobs being created and over 15 jobs being retained from troubled businesses restructuring their operations.

While each region will have different results, the bottom line is that jobs will be created and over time those initial jobs will turn into even more job creation as the companies grow. While the process of entrepreneurship may take a little more time to create the same number of jobs that a manufacturing plant will create in one announcement, entrepreneurship services cost less money in support per job than a recruited job. Additionally, entrepreneurial communities are more successful at retaining their youth population as more opportunities in quality of life are available to them.