

# Skowhegan Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Development Plan



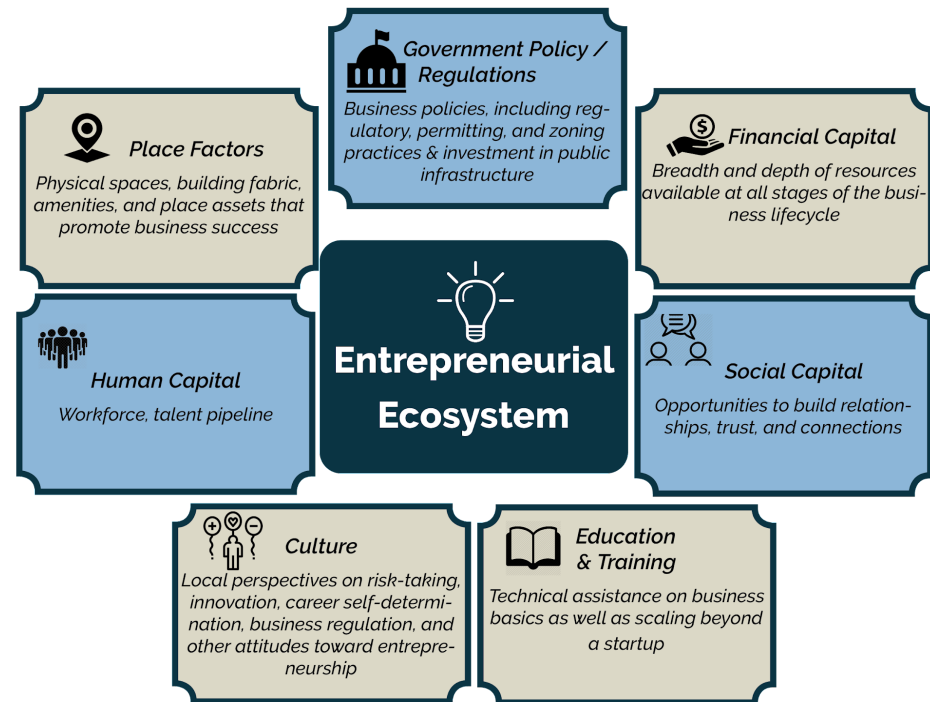
Prepared by Main Street Skowhegan on behalf of the Skowhegan Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Team; based on findings and recommendations from Matthew Wagner, VP of Revitalization Programs at the National Main Street Center

## Program & Assessment

In March 2020 after a competitive application process, Skowhegan was selected by the *Maine Community Foundation* (MCF), *Maine Downtown Center* (MDC), and *National Main Street Center* (NMSC) as one of three Maine communities to participate in the pilot community entrepreneurship program.

Throughout the summer and fall of 2020, the Skowhegan Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Team—led locally by Main Street Skowhegan, with guidance and mentorship from MDC, NMSC, and MCF—compiled data and gathered feedback via surveys and focus groups from entrepreneurs, economic development leaders, and consumers to assess all elements of Skowhegan's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Matt Wagner, VP of Revitalization Programs at the NMSC, delivered his assessment report in December 2020. His findings and recommendations are summarized below, followed by the Skowhegan team's strategic implementation plan for cultivating a thriving and connected business community in Skowhegan.



# Skowhegan's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Findings

(Summary; see Appendix A for full report)

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Funding available; low-interest loans, facade &amp; TA grants</li> <li>→ Many regional training opportunities and 1:1 counseling available</li> <li>→ Good technology infrastructure</li> <li>→ Good geographic location; proximity to outdoor recreation and service providers</li> <li>→ SCORE is present and actively engaged</li> <li>→ Supportive local business community</li> <li>→ "Entrepreneurial spirit" is alive and well</li> <li>→ Several third spaces utilized by community</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Lack of pipeline programming/ed for future entrepreneurs</li> <li>→ No dedicated facility/space for entrepreneurs</li> <li>→ Downtown lacks move-in ready commercial space</li> <li>→ Lack of non-traditional funding for scaling businesses (investing/crowdsourcing)</li> <li>→ No incentives or funding available for interior building renovations (commercial or residential)</li> <li>→ No formalized welcome/connector group for new entrepreneurs; difficult to know where to go for help</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Run of River represents a game-changer for recreation-oriented startup activity</li> <li>→ Establishment of a multi-use entrepreneurship facility was a top goal among entrepreneurs surveyed—more than ½ looking for startup/incubator/maker space or coworking space.</li> <li>→ Entrepreneurs desire more opportunities to connect and cross-market</li> <li>→ Creative incentives for rural real-estate development popping up around the country</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Poor building conditions; lack of regular maintenance</li> <li>→ No perceived financial ROI for historic building renovations</li> <li>→ Minimal second floor housing means fewer people living and shopping downtown</li> <li>→ Challenges with skilled workforce attraction &amp; retention</li> <li>→ Lack of affordable, quality housing contributes to workforce scarcity and makes new would-be residents look elsewhere</li> <li>→ New entrepreneurs struggle locating technical assistance</li> </ul>

## Skowhegan Recommendations from the National Main Street Center

1. Conduct feasibility analysis for remote work/neutral-location entrepreneurship facility
2. Conduct housing barriers analysis
3. Develop a target entrepreneurs "wish list" based on Skowhegan's niches; align local programs and funding
4. Explore KIVA-related crowdfunding program via conversation with Rural LISC
5. Conduct entrepreneur education and training needs assessment; convene ED groups to prioritize & design programming
6. Host focus group and convene discussion on "Stage 2" training and counseling needs; prioritize & execute w/ partners
7. Develop a formalized programming pipeline for emerging entrepreneurs (i.e. pop-ups, Entrepreneurial Challenge)
8. Catalog local & regional TA/ financial resources & programming; create webpage & promote
9. Analyze Maine Grains' supply chain, customer groups, and ideation around potential complementary businesses
10. Formalize partnerships via the creation of a joint work plan (this doc!) focused on ecosystem development; meet regularly

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# Skowhegan Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Development Plan

## Goal

Cultivate a thriving and connected business community in Skowhegan

## Objectives

# New startups

% Growth of "Stage 2" businesses

% of businesses in Skowhegan niche markets

\$\$ Investment in historic buildings

Business retention

## Timeline

ADD

## Strategies

### Cultivate Local Entrepreneurs

- Assess education, training, funding, space, and mentorship needs of existing and emerging entrepreneurs
- Develop TA/programming tracks for emerging and existing entrepreneurs
- Formulate plan for entrepreneurial facility
- Facilitate networking activities and mentorship program
- Launch Skowhegan spoke of Dirigo Labs regional accelerator program

### Connect Entrepreneurs to Resources

- Strengthen local & regional economic dev. partnerships
- Catalog & promote entrepreneurial resources
- Maintain current & add new business funding opportunities

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Promote Niche Business Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Study Skowhegan's niche industries &amp; market clusters</li> <li>→ Promote business opportunities &amp; target entrepreneur "wish list"</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Build Foundation for Economic Growth</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Implement creative solutions &amp; incentives to encourage commercial &amp; residential development</li> <li>→ Focus on place-based projects that will catalyze economic development in the region</li> </ul>
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## Collaborators

- Main Street Skowhegan (MSS) Staff & Fellows
- Skowhegan Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Team (SEET)
- MSS Business Enhancement Committee (BEC)
- Community Economic Resource Council (CERC)
- Town of Skowhegan (Town)
- KV Connect

See Appendix B for a complete list of members and organizations/businesses represented.

## Implementation Plan

### STRATEGY: CULTIVATE LOCAL ENTREPRENEURS

→ Assess education, training, funding, space, and mentorship needs of existing and emerging entrepreneurs

<u>Implementation Steps/Tactics</u>	<u>Responsible Group(s)</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
Review entrepreneurial ecosystem survey responses & focus group notes as assessment starting point	MSS Fellows / SEET / CERC	February 2021
Convene partners to develop specific interview questions that will dig deeper into current and future needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Segment interview questions for emerging vs. existing entrepreneurs</li> </ul>	MSS Fellows develop draft SEET / CERC review	February 2021 March 2021
Create scripts with targeted needs-assessment questions for each group	MSS Fellows develop draft	February 2021

	SEET / CERC review	March 2021
Review Skowhegan business & entrepreneur list to add missing entrepreneurs	SEET / CERC review; MSS Fellows update	March 2021
Conduct interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Ensure best way to reach entrepreneurs for future communication</li> <li>b. Update contact information as needed</li> </ul>	MSS Fellows / SEET	March/April 2021
Engage growth-minded "Stage 2" businesses in a focus group to narrow focus on specific needs (for use in developing accelerator curriculum, etc.)	MSS Fellows / SEET / CERC	April/May 2021
Draft needs assessment report	MSS Fellows develop draft; SEET / CERC review	May 2021 Due June 1, 2021

→ **Develop TA/programming tracks for emerging and existing entrepreneurs**

<u>Implementation Steps/Tactics</u>	<u>Responsible Group(s)</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
Utilize needs assessment report to design TA/programming tracks for each group	MSS Fellows develop draft; SEET / CERC review	June/July 2021
Prioritize & segment programming <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. For emerging entrepreneurs pipeline: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Business planning, legal, insurance educational resources &amp; trainings</li> <li>ii. Pop-up space and pitch contests</li> <li>iii. Networking &amp; mentorship activities</li> <li>iv. Funding resources</li> </ul> </li> <li>b. For existing entrepreneurs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Specialized trainings</li> <li>ii. Networking &amp; mentorship activities</li> <li>iii. Funding resources</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	MSS Fellows develop draft; SEET / CERC review	June/July 2021

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>c. Specialized track for growth-minded "Stage 2" businesses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Business accelerator/growth curriculum</li> <li>ii. Consider segmentation based on market (i.e. local food, outdoor rec)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
Review available CARES Act funding through SBDC for additional resources	CERC	June/July 2021
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Tweek as needed and reassess annually</li> </ul>	All parties involved; MSS to plan/host event	September 2021 Ongoing

→ **Formulate plan for entrepreneurial facility**

<u>Implementation Steps/Tactics</u>	<u>Responsible Group(s)</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
Utilize needs assessment report to determine potential opportunity for Skowhegan entrepreneurial facility	SEET / KV Connect / BEC	June/July 2021
Analyze feasibility of facility/space via a series of programming tests, including trainings and networking events	SEET / KV Connect / BEC	June/July 2021 or as COVID regulations allow
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Assess available space in Skowhegan's commercial district</li> <li>a. Should allow for flexible, multi-use</li> </ul>	SEET	June/July 2021
Draft business plan for facility	MSS Fellows develop draft; SEET review	July/August 2021
Raise additional funding	MSS	Fall 2021
Launch! [Coincide with kick-off of accelerator if possible & appropriate]	MSS / MSS Fellows / SEET	Fall/Winter 2021

→ Facilitating networking activities and mentorship program

<u>Implementation Steps/Tactics</u>	<u>Responsible Group(s)</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
Research mentoring programs in other rural communities	MSS Fellows	June 2021
Draft structure for mentorship program	MSS Fellows develop draft; SEET review	July 2021
Launch mentorship program	MSS / MSS Fellows / SEET	Fall 2021
Plan regularly scheduled networking activities for regional entrepreneurs a. Plan activities and events that connect Waterville & Skowhegan area entrepreneurs; enable cross-over with Dirigo Labs accelerator groups	MSS / KV Connect / BEC	When allowed (per COVID guidelines)

→ Launch Skowhegan spoke of Dirigo Labs regional accelerator program

<u>Implementation Steps/Tactics</u>	<u>Responsible Group(s)</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
Work with Central Maine Growth Council to prepare for Skowhegan's accelerator a. Incorporate appropriate programming, learnings, and resources	MSS / MSS Fellows	Ongoing
Collaborate with Maine Grains where possible to ensure success of grain accelerator a. Consider separate track for grain-based businesses	MSS / MSS Fellows	Spring 2021
Prepare space (equipment, tech needs, office / conference space, etc.) [Ideally same space as entrepreneurial facility]	MSS / MSS Fellows	Fall 2021
Raise additional funding	MSS	Ongoing
Launch! [Coincide with opening of entrepreneurial facility if possible & appropriate]	MSS / MSS Fellows	Fall/Winter 2021

## STRATEGY: CONNECT ENTREPRENEURS TO RESOURCES

### → Strengthen local & regional economic development partnerships

<u>Implementation Steps/Tactics</u>	<u>Responsible Group(s)</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
Increase collaboration by inviting additional partners to join the Community Economic Resource Council (CERC) a. Review draft of entrepreneurial needs assessment and list of entrepreneurs to contact at first meeting	BEC / CERC	Host first full group meeting in early March 2021
Convene regular meetings of the CERC	BEC / CERC	2021 & beyond
Work together to meet the needs of entrepreneurs via shared information, resources, and regular communication	CERC	2021 & beyond

### → Catalog & promote entrepreneurial resources

<u>Implementation Steps/Tactics</u>	<u>Responsible Group(s)</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
Identify resources offered by each CERC partner	CERC	March/April 2021
Document on somersetbusinessresources.org a. Add TA/program tracks when finalized	MSS Fellows	May 2021
Connect entrepreneurs to resources a. Website to serve as primary tool for entrepreneurial support; one-stop shop for resources & contact info	CERC	Start May 2021, ongoing
Promote resources regionally & to prospective entrepreneurs	MSS / other CERC partners	Start May 2021, ongoing

### → Maintain current & add new business funding opportunities



<u>Implementation Steps/Tactics</u>	<u>Responsible Group(s)</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
Maintain entrepreneurial funding resources offered by regional economic development organizations	CERC partners	Ongoing
a. Fundraise for & promote Main Street Skowhegan TA Grant Program (2021 is 2nd yr)	MSS / BEC	Feb fundraiser; April/May RFP
b. Promote Historic Commercial District Revolving Fund	MSS / BEC	Ongoing
Convene a conversation with Rural LISC around opportunities to establish Main Street Skowhegan as a "Trustee" for KIVA-related crowdfunding program at the local level	MSS / SEET	April 2021
Research other non-traditional funding sources, i.e. angel investors, etc.	MSS Fellows / SEET	April/May 2021
a. Work with Central Maine Growth Council for regional funding		Ongoing
Compile all funding resources and promote via somersetbusinessresources.org	MSS Fellows	May 2021
a. Continue to assess, research & promote		Ongoing

## **STRATEGY: PROMOTE NICHE BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES**

### → Study Skowhegan's niche industries & market clusters

<u>Implementation Steps/Tactics</u>	<u>Responsible Group(s)</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
Finalize and publish Skowhegan Industry Marketing Analysis	MSS / Camoin Associates	February 2021
Analyze local food cluster businesses and Maine Grains supply chain, customer groups, and ideation	MSS Fellows / SEET	March/April 2021

### → Promote business opportunities & target entrepreneur "wish list"

<u>Implementation Steps/Tactics</u>	<u>Responsible Group(s)</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
Develop list of complementary businesses, new product and service opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Include list of complementary local food businesses that span the supply chain</li> <li>b. Create "wish list" that is aligned with niches within outdoor recreation, foods, and extensions of Maine Grains</li> </ul>	MSS Fellows draft; SEET / CERC review	May 2021
Align specific TA, programming, funding, and other resources with Skowhegan-specific, targeted "wish list"	SEET / CERC / KV Connect / BEC	June 2021
Share data and entrepreneurial opportunities with Maine's business community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Promote opportunities quarterly</li> </ul>	MSS / CERC partners	Summer 2021 Ongoing

## STRATEGY: BUILD FOUNDATION FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

### → Implement creative solutions and incentives to encourage commercial and residential development

<u>Implementation Steps/Tactics</u>	<u>Responsible Group(s)</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
Hire firm to conduct real estate study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Examine barriers and assess challenges for real estate development in historic rural communities</li> <li>b. Review case studies and other state/local programs designed to incentivize development</li> </ul>	Firm / MSS / SEET	Interview firms March 2021; conduct study Spring & Summer 2021
Assess creative solutions, ideas, and incentives; review within the context of Skowhegan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Prioritize &amp; test</li> </ul>	SEET / CERC / BEC / Town	Start testing Fall 2021; continue as needed

Implement most successful solutions and/or incentives	MSS / Town / others TBD	Pending testing outcomes
Share findings with other rural Maine communities a. Collaborate where possible (i.e. regional funds)	MSS	Pending testing outcomes

→ Focus on place-based projects that will catalyze economic development in the region

<u>Implementation Steps/Tactics</u>	<u>Responsible Group(s)</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
Construct Run of River whitewater park & grow downtown trail network	MSS / Town	Ongoing / 2022
Assist where possible with private development initiatives (i.e. Maine Grains & Bigelow Brewing)	All groups	Ongoing
Evaluate and consider projects & opportunities as they arise	All	Ongoing

## Appendix A: Skowhegan Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Assessment Results

Full report, including findings and recommendations from Matthew Wagner, VP of Revitalization Programs at the National Main Street Center, [can be found here](#).

## Appendix B: Partners, Collaborators, Staff

### Main Street Skowhegan (lead organization)

- Kristina Cannon, Executive Director
- Eliot List, MS Fellow
- TBD, MS Fellow

### Skowhegan Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Team (SEET)

- Christine Almand, Manager of Town of Skowhegan | [calmand@skowhegan.org](mailto:calmand@skowhegan.org)
- RJ Anzelc, Owner of Bricks Coworking & Innovation Space | [rj@brickscoworking.com](mailto:rj@brickscoworking.com)
- Samantha Burdick, Marketing Director of Hight Family of Dealerships | [samantha.burdick@gmail.com](mailto:samantha.burdick@gmail.com)
- Kristina Cannon, Exec. Director of Main Street Skowhegan | [kristina@mainstreetskowhegan.org](mailto:kristina@mainstreetskowhegan.org)
- Cole Clement, Marketing Coordinator at Skowhegan Savings Bank | [CClement@skowhegansavings.com](mailto:CClement@skowhegansavings.com)
- Patrick Dore, Owner of Old Mill Pub and Branch Manager at Franklin Savings Bank | [dorep3@gmail.com](mailto:dorep3@gmail.com)
- David Dorr, Director of Somerset Career & Technical Center | [ddorr@msad54.org](mailto:ddorr@msad54.org)
- Matt DuBois, President of MSS Board of Directors and owner of The Bankery & Skowhegan Fleuriste | [mpdubois16@gmail.com](mailto:mpdubois16@gmail.com)
- Jason Gayne, Exec. Director of Skowhegan Regional Chamber of Commerce | [exdir@skowheganareachamber.com](mailto:exdir@skowheganareachamber.com)
- Sam Hight, Principal of Hight Family of Dealerships | [samuel.hight@gmail.com](mailto:samuel.hight@gmail.com)
- Amber Lambke, Owner of Maine Grains & The Miller's Table | [amber@mainegrains.com](mailto:amber@mainegrains.com)
- Lisa Landry, HR Director at Redington-Fairview General Hospital | [LLandry@rfgh.net](mailto:LLandry@rfgh.net)
- Jeremy Lehan, Director of MSAD 54 Adult & Community Education | [jlehan@msad54.org](mailto:jlehan@msad54.org)
- Danielle Libby, Owner of Butler's Car Wash | [butlerscarwashes@gmail.com](mailto:butlerscarwashes@gmail.com)
- Christian Savage, Exec. Director of Somerset Economic Development Corp. | [csavage@somersetcounty-me.org](mailto:csavage@somersetcounty-me.org)
- Molly Woodward, Business Development Officer at New Dimensions Federal Credit Union and President of KV Connect | [mwoodward@newdimensionsfcu.com](mailto:mwoodward@newdimensionsfcu.com)

### MSS Business Enhancement Committee (BEC)

- Molly Woodward, New Dimensions Federal Credit Union (Chair)
- Samantha Burdick, Hight Family of Dealerships
- Patrick Dore, Franklin Savings Bank

- Vicki Alward, Skowhegan Savings Bank
- RJ Anzelc, Bricks Coworking & Innovation Space
- Danielle Libby, Butler's Car Wash
- Chad Partridge, Al's Pizza
- Sam Hight, Hight Family of Dealerships
- Karen Smith, Bangor Savings Bank
- Bev Knapp, Franklin-Somerset FCU

**Community Economic Resource Council (CERC)**

- Sam Hight, Hight Family of Dealerships
- Vicki Alward, Skowhegan Savings Bank
- Jason Gayne, Skowhegan Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Jeff Hewett, Skowhegan Economic Development Corporation & Town of Skowhegan
- Christian Savage, Somerset Economic Development Corporation
- Seeking representation from:
  - Kennebec Valley Council of Governments (Joel Greenwood)
  - Small Business Development Center (New staff member, TBD)
  - CEI Women's Business (Lorri Browne)
  - Northern Kennebec Valley CareerCenter (Margo Hanlon)