



Northern Kentucky Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Strategy

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Executive Summary

The Blue North Board of Directors engaged TechGrit to conduct qualitative research within the Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial community and to develop evidence-based recommendations for a customized entrepreneurial ecosystem strategy that would promote a culture of innovation and build a community based upon an entrepreneurial mindset for all ages 2 - 102 ([Section 1](#)).

This report summarizes TechGrit's methods ([Section 2](#)), findings ([Section 3](#)), and recommendations ([Section 4](#)), which were formulated using the Human-Centered Approach (HCA™): a derivative of design thinking that explicitly incorporates the perspective of the community one wishes to serve and engages them at every step of the development process. TechGrit conducted over 100 empathy interviews with Blue North's regional entrepreneurs and stakeholders to develop a deep understanding of NKY's regional struggles, barriers, strengths and opportunities and an awareness of the community's true needs ([Appendix A](#)). These empathy interviews provided a large qualitative dataset from which TechGrit drew insights ([Appendix B](#)) - statements about what truly matters to the community, as defined by the interviewees - and used those insights to develop a problem statement, delineated herein.

TechGrit combined insights from our empathy interviews with our experience in this space and national best practices to form the basis for our recommendations. TechGrit's ecosystem strategy for NKY has a three-part foundation: [Building](#), [Engaging](#), and [Branding](#) the NKY Entrepreneurial Community. The strategy includes seven (7) branded initiatives whose value was determined directly by our 100+ interviewed stakeholders. The following program initiatives, which we have named "Navigate NKY," focus on communication, education, and access to resources/expertise:

- [NavNKY Community Engagement Group](#)
- [NavNKY Navigator](#)
- [NavNKY Formation](#)
- [NavNKY Network & Events](#)
- [NavNKY Entrepreneurial Funding Network](#)
- [NavNKY Entrepreneurial Mindset Education Council](#) (see also [Appendix D](#))
- [NavNKY Corporate Collaboration](#)

Navigate NKY is more than just another ESO; it sets the NKY region apart by convening and weaving together all regional ESOs and innovation resources under one branded umbrella, providing opportunities for coordination and collaboration that contribute to a culture of innovation. Additionally, TechGrit has mapped regional assets to further assist community members in navigating resources available in the Northern Kentucky region ([Appendix C](#)). Finally, TechGrit's recommendations for implementation, timing, personnel, and a draft budget are included ([Section 5](#)).

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1. Introduction

The Blue North Board of Directors engaged TechGrit to conduct a study culminating in recommendations for an entrepreneurial ecosystem strategy for Northern Kentucky. The Board specified an interest in cultivating a culture of innovation and building a community based upon an entrepreneurial mindset for all ages 2 - 102. The vision is to include a broad base of community members not only through conventional entrepreneurial channels but also through schools, organizations, and businesses.

TechGrit transforms communities by leveraging existing assets, minimizing capital outlay, and utilizing local talent to design customized entrepreneurial ecosystems. The purpose of this report is to share TechGrit's recommendations for a customized entrepreneurial ecosystem strategy for Northern Kentucky. TechGrit assessed community resources, talents, capabilities and interests to develop a strategic initiative, vision, and blueprint for the future of the region using our Human-Centered Approach (HCA™), which incorporates the human perspective into all stages of the process.

2. Methods

TechGrit utilized its Human-Centered Approach (HCA™) methodology to conduct this study. A derivative of design thinking, HCA™ utilizes the human perspective of those one wishes to serve (i.e. Blue North's regional entrepreneurs and stakeholders) and engages them in every step of the development process. Toward this goal, TechGrit conducted over 100 interviews to develop a deep understanding of NKY's regional struggles, barriers, strengths and opportunities.

TechGrit's human-centered approach (Fig. 2.1) pulls the human perspective into every step of the problem-solving process. We started by conducting 100+ one-on-one empathy interviews with members of the Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial ecosystem ([Appendix A](#)). The purpose of empathy interviews is listening to gain insight, which TechGrit can then use to create a problem definition, ideate with community members, and design a customized entrepreneurial ecosystem based on what the community truly needs. The human-centered approach emphasizes the perspective and the participation of community members at each step toward the goal of building a more productive, efficient, and accessible ecosystem that resonates more deeply with its members and promotes increased feelings of wellbeing and belonging.

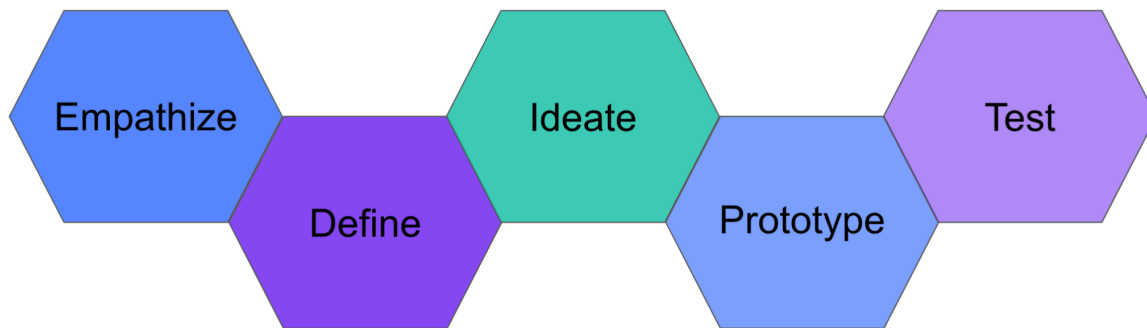


Figure 2.1

TechGrit's Human-Centered Approach (HCA™) is a non-linear process that begins with empathy and incorporates the human perspective throughout. After the empathize stage, the next step is to define the problem, then work with the community to ideate, create a prototype, and return to the community to test. Though these stages may appear distinct from one another, they are bound together by empathy, which is a critical component of each.

3. Findings

After conducting 100+ empathy interviews with members of the Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial ecosystem, we compiled a list of insights ([Appendix B](#)). The insights from key stakeholders led to one general overarching theme: the current system is failing to meet the needs of the entrepreneurial community in several key ways. This umbrella finding was based upon the following key insights. First, entrepreneurs are confused about how to enter the ecosystem, where to go with questions, what resources exist, and how to navigate resources ([Section 3.1](#)). Second, entrepreneur support organizations (ESOs) are characterized by infighting, political toxicity, lack of coordination, not listening to what entrepreneurs need, and poor leadership ([Section 3.2](#)). Third, NKY entrepreneurs lack opportunities to network with other entrepreneurs, create a support network, and get inspired by local role models ([Section 3.3](#)). Fourth, Main Street businesses, gazelles, makers and creatives, social enterprises, minority communities, and non-tech startups are underserved by the NKY ecosystem ([Section 3.4](#)). Fifth, Blue North is perceived as a damaged/unrecognizable brand, and regional entrepreneurs feel that NKY has no identity for them to rally around ([Section 3.5](#)). Sixth, entrepreneurs in the region face obstacles to funding access and lack funding options for all stages of building a business ([Section 3.6](#)). Finally, NKY has three key regional strengths upon which to build, including: growth potential in the logistics and healthcare/biotech industries, potential to see Cincinnati as a collaborator with whom we can share resources rather than a competitor, and potential for regional sharing of strong pre-K through 12 programs ([Section 3.7](#)).

3.1 Ecosystem Confusion

We learned that there is a general sense of confusion within the ecosystem, which is a barrier to entry and prevents community members from being able to take full advantage of resources.

Key insight:

Entrepreneurs are confused about how to enter the ecosystem, where to go with questions, what resources exist, and how to navigate resources (Fig. 3.1).

Subinsights:

- The ecosystem lacks a “front door”
- Community members are unsure where to ask questions
- The ecosystem lacks resources
- Community members are not aware of the resources that do exist
- Resources are challenging to navigate because no resource map exists

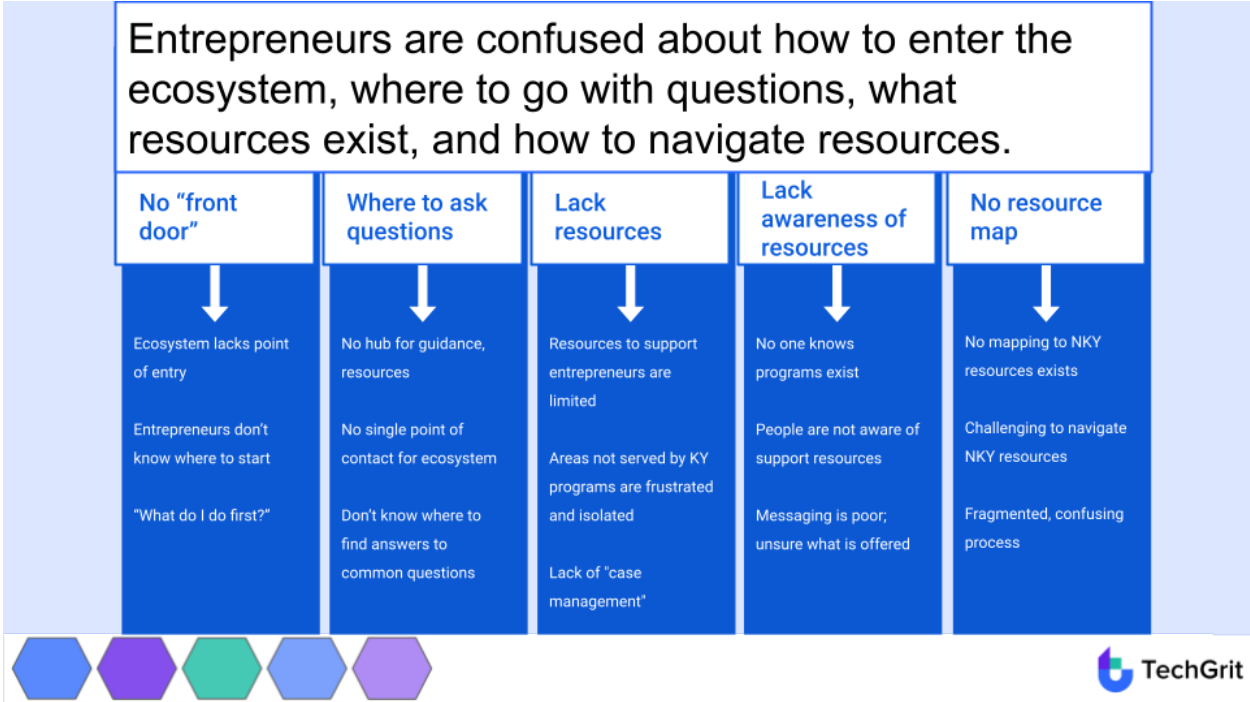


Figure 3.1

The development of the insight statement “Entrepreneurs are confused about how to enter the ecosystem, where to go with questions, what resources exist, and how to navigate resources.” The insight statement is based on five subinsights, shown here in blue text within white boxes, which are based on the categorization of feedback from 100+ one-on-one empathy interviews with members of the Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial ecosystem, shown here in white text within blue boxes.

3.2 Entrepreneur Support Organizations

We found that there is plenty of good work going on in Northern Kentucky, but entrepreneur support organizations (ESOs) are not meeting community needs.

Key insight:

ESOs in Northern KY are characterized by infighting, political toxicity, lack of coordination, not listening to what entrepreneurs need, and poor leadership (Fig. 3.2).

Subinsights:

- Infighting over power and money
- Politics of ESOs are described as toxic
- There is a lack of coordination among ESOs
- There is a frustrating lack of empathy and entrepreneurial mindset
- Lack of leadership prevents collaboration

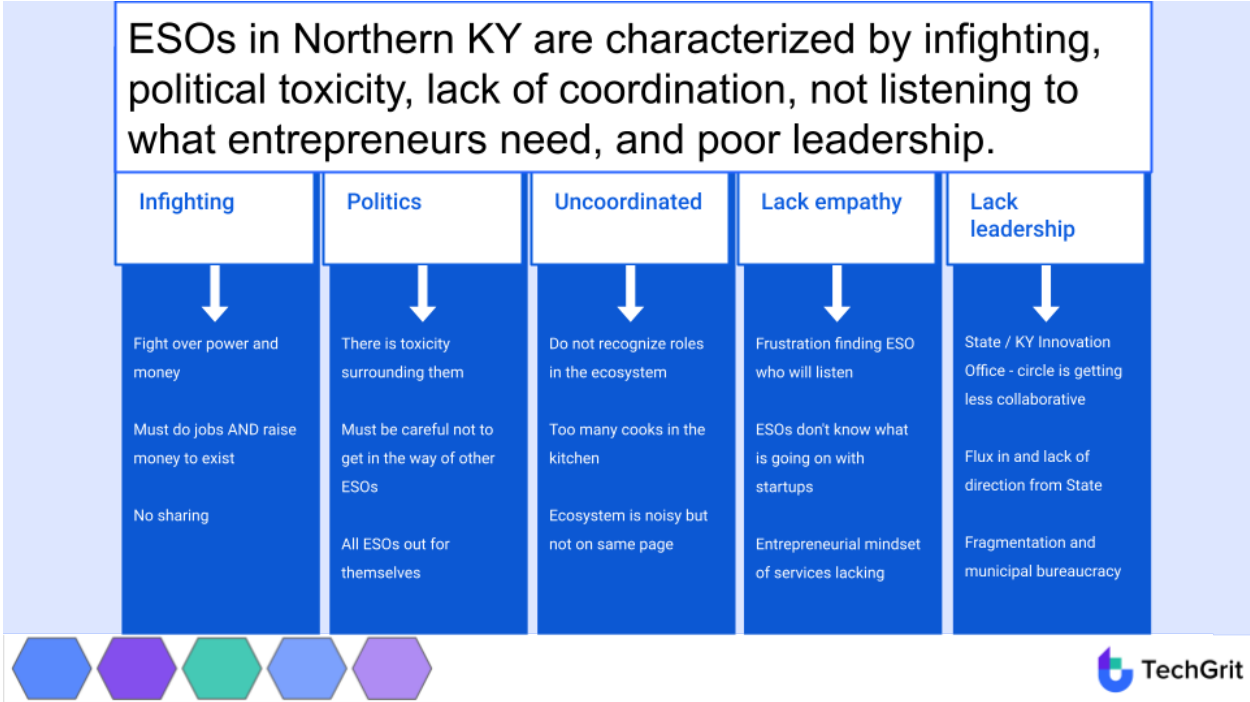


Figure 3.2

The development of the insight statement “ESOs in Northern KY are characterized by infighting, political toxicity, lack of coordination, not listening to what entrepreneurs need, and poor leadership.” The insight statement is based on five subinsights, shown here in blue text within white boxes, which are based on the categorization of feedback from 100+ one-on-one empathy interviews with members of the Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial ecosystem, shown here in white text within blue boxes.

3.3 Networking Opportunities

We found that networking opportunities are lacking within the ecosystem, and we identified what types of networking opportunities community members desire most.

Key insight:

NKY entrepreneurs lack opportunities to network with other entrepreneurs, create a support network, and get inspired by local role models (Fig. 3.3).

Subinsights:

- NKY entrepreneurs want to hear from other entrepreneurs
- Entrepreneurship is described as lonely - entrepreneurs lack a support network
- Aspiring entrepreneurs lack local role models to look up to and learn from

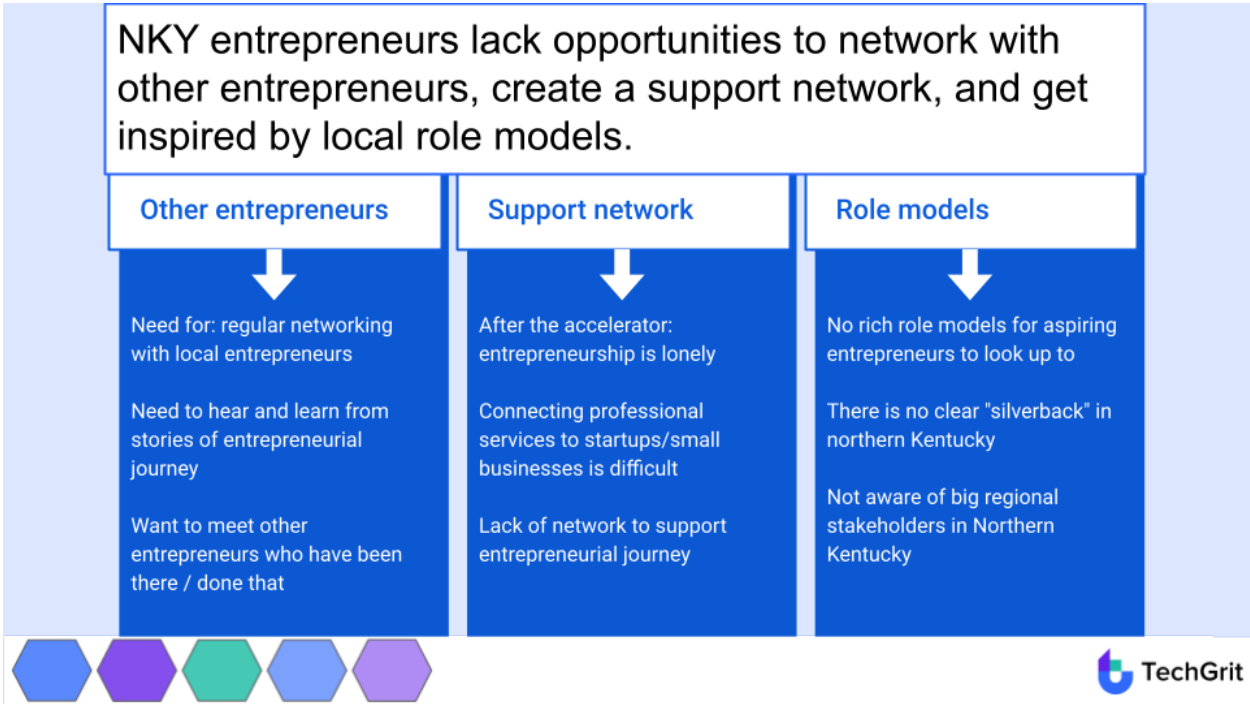


Figure 3.3

The development of the insight statement “NKY entrepreneurs lack opportunities to network with other entrepreneurs, create a support network, and get inspired by local role models.” The insight statement is based on three subinsights, shown here in blue text within white boxes, which are based on the categorization of feedback from 100+ one-on-one empathy interviews with members of the Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial ecosystem, shown here in white text within blue boxes.

3.4 Underserved Communities

We learned that the NKY ecosystem is failing to serve certain types of businesses, and we identified which businesses are underserved.

Key insight:

Main Street businesses, gazelles, makers and creatives, social enterprises, minority communities, and non-tech startups are underserved by the NKY ecosystem (Fig. 3.4).

Subinsights:

- Main Street businesses are being left out
- Gazelles, makers and creatives, social enterprises, and minority communities lack the resources they need to succeed
- Non-tech businesses, especially startups, are not getting enough attention

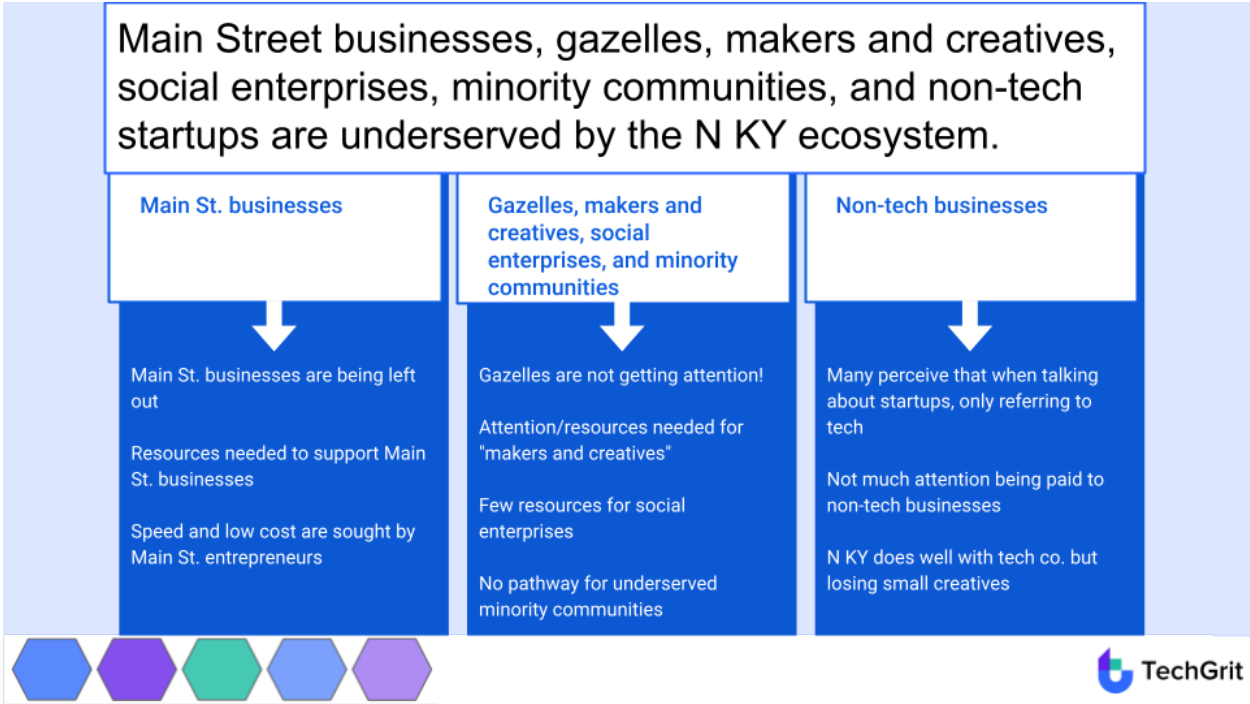


Figure 3.4

The development of the insight statement “Main Street businesses, gazelles, makers and creatives, social enterprises, minority communities, and non-tech startups are underserved by the NKY ecosystem.” The insight statement is based on three subinsights, shown here in blue text within white boxes, which are based on the categorization of feedback from 100+ one-on-one empathy interviews with members of the Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial ecosystem, shown here in white text within blue boxes.

3.5 Branding

We found that community members do not know what Blue North does or have a negative opinion about it, and that NKY lacks recognizable brand identity.

Key insight:

Blue North is perceived as a damaged/unrecognizable brand, and regional entrepreneurs feel that NKY has no identity for them to rally around (Fig. 3.5).

Subinsights:

- Community members are not aware of Blue North’s purpose - it has lost identity and visibility
- Perceptions of Blue North are that it is either dormant, on pause, or damaged
- Northern Kentucky is described as lacking brand identity

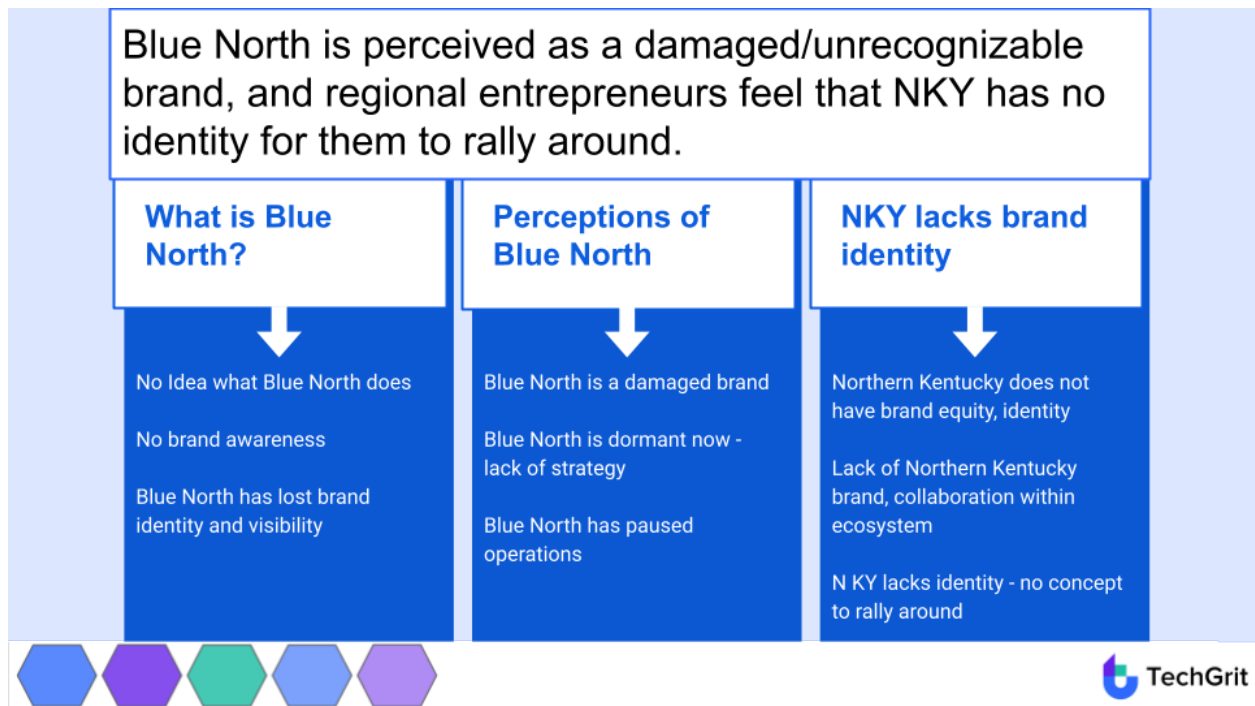


Figure 3.5

The development of the insight statement “Blue North is perceived as a damaged/unrecognizable brand, and regional entrepreneurs feel that NKY has no identity for them to rally around.” The insight statement is based on three subinsights, shown here in blue text within white boxes, which are based on the categorization of feedback from 100+ one-on-one empathy interviews with members of the Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial ecosystem, shown here in white text within blue boxes.

3.6 Funding

We learned that members of the Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial ecosystem do not know when and how to access funding, and that they do not have the funding options they need most.

Key insight:

Entrepreneurs in the region face obstacles to funding access and lack funding options for all stages of building a business (Fig. 3.6).

Subinsights:

- Community members lack clear direction to funding sources
- Pre-seed funding, mid-stage funding, and help identifying and obtaining investors is needed

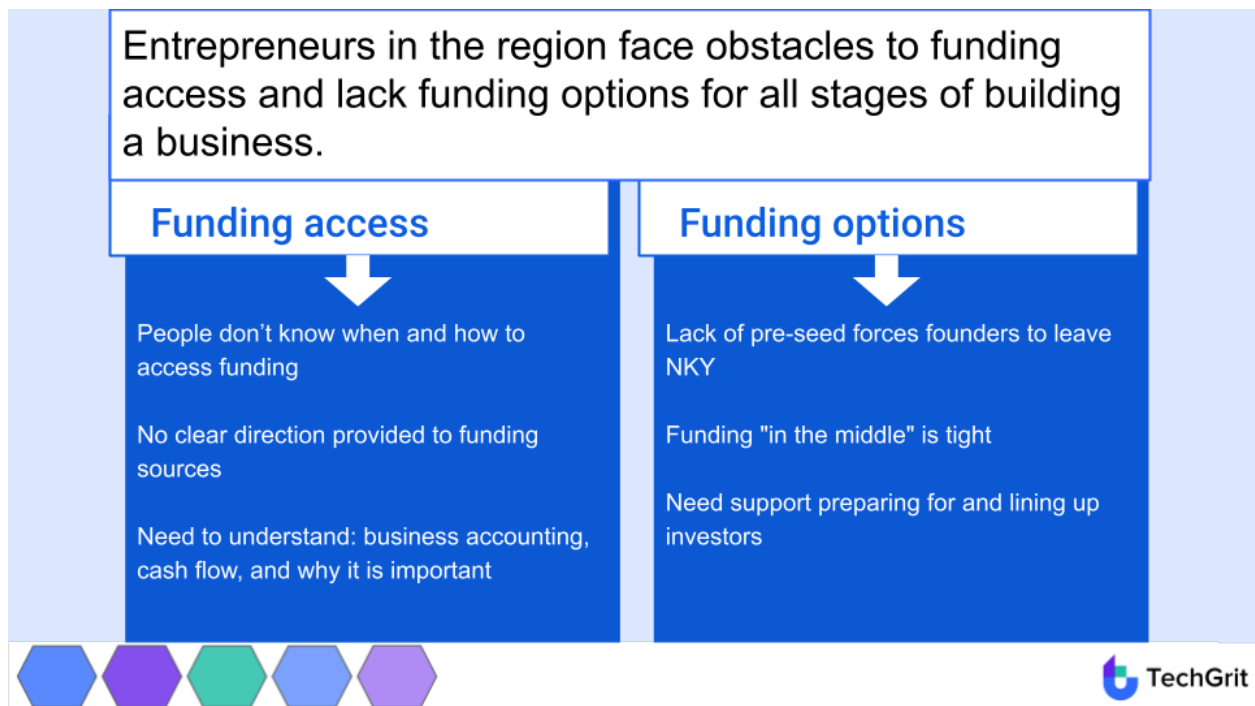


Figure 3.6

The development of the insight statement “Entrepreneurs in the region face obstacles to funding access and lack funding options for all stages of building a business.” The insight statement is based on two subinsights, shown here in blue text within white boxes, which are based on the categorization of feedback from 100+ one-on-one empathy interviews with members of the Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial ecosystem, shown here in white text within blue boxes.

3.7 Regional Strengths

We identified three key strengths within the Northern Kentucky Region: industries of focus (3.7.1), our neighbor Cincinnati (3.7.2), and strong pre-K through 12 programs (3.7.3). NKY can capitalize on these regional traits to strengthen marketing and branding efforts.

3.7.1 Industries of focus

Key insight:

The NKY Region can build upon existing resources and talent to focus on two main industries: logistics and healthcare/biotech (Fig. 3.7.1).

Subinsights:

- The NKY Region has the resources and talent needed to focus on the logistics industry
- The NKY Region has the funding and organic strengths to focus on the biotech industry

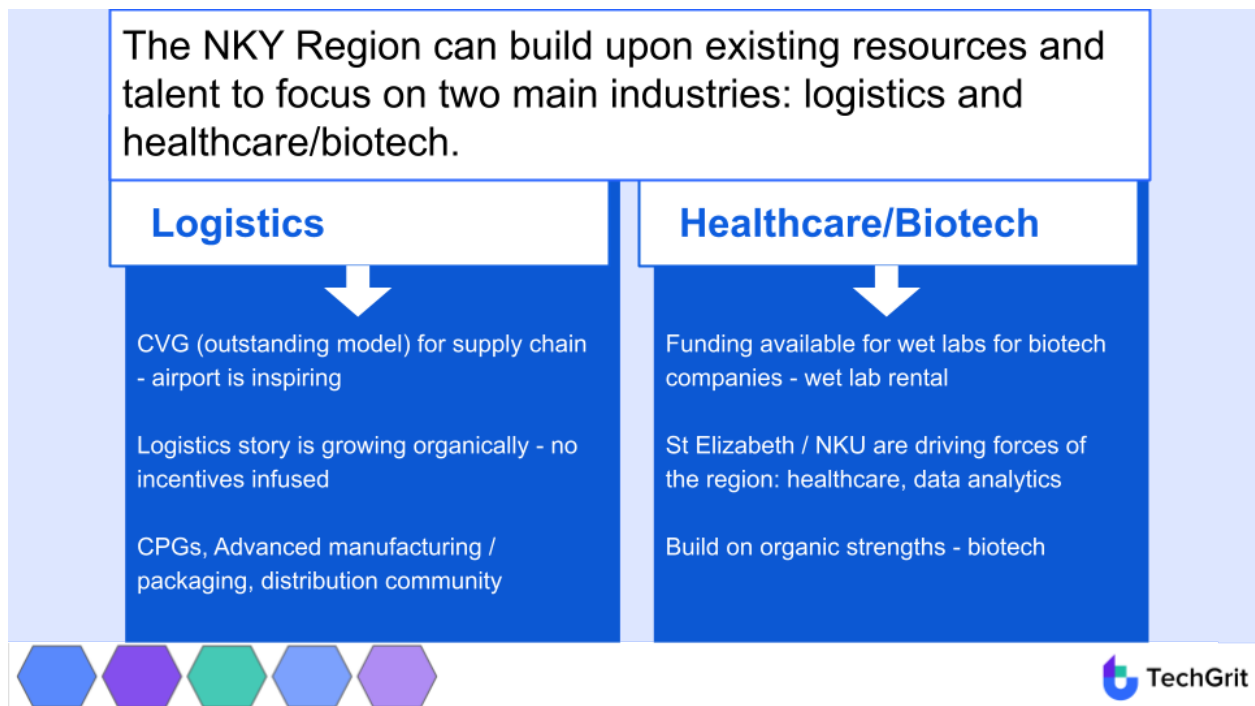


Figure 3.7.1

The development of the insight statement “The NKY Region can build upon existing resources and talent to focus on two main industries: logistics and healthcare/biotech.” The insight statement is based on two subinsights, shown here in blue text within white boxes, which are based on the categorization of feedback from 100+ one-on-one empathy interviews with members of the Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial ecosystem, shown here in white text within blue boxes.

3.7.2 Our neighbor Cincinnati

Our findings suggest that viewing our neighbor Cincinnati as a potential collaborator and inspiration rather than as our competition would benefit the NKY region in multiple ways. NKY has its own identity, separate from Cincinnati. Instead of focusing on competing with our neighbor, we recommend that NKY focuses on doing what only NKY can do. The uniqueness of the NKY ecosystem is detailed in the subsequent Recommendations section ([Section 4](#)).

Key insight:

Cincinnati provides a strong neighboring entrepreneurial ecosystem with effective programs and positive cultural perceptions (Fig. 3.7.2).

Subinsights:

- Our neighbor Cincinnati has effective programs that are well-funded and attract entrepreneurs
- Community members perceive Cincinnati as “cool” and associate it with positive cultural attributes

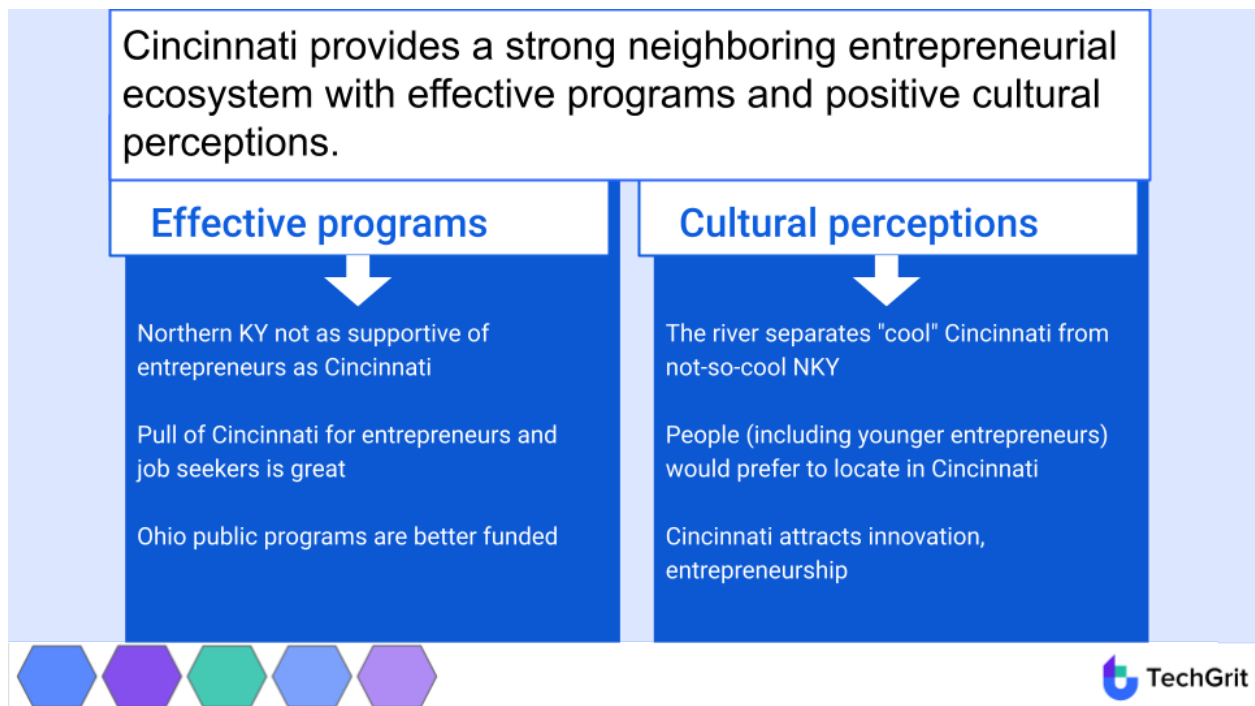


Figure 3.7.2

The development of the insight statement “Cincinnati provides a strong neighboring entrepreneurial ecosystem with effective programs and positive cultural perceptions.” The insight statement is based on two subinsights, shown here in blue text within white boxes, which are based on the categorization of feedback from 100+ one-on-one empathy interviews with members of the Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial ecosystem, shown here in white text within blue boxes.

3.7.3 Strong pre-K through 12 programs

We learned that the Northern Kentucky Region is home to numerous pre-K through 12 programs which provide unique learning opportunities for students, and we recommend that these programs be shared throughout the NKY region.

Key insight:

NKY entrepreneurial pre-K through 12 programs are growing, but no mechanism exists for regional sharing (Fig. 3.7.3).

Subinsights:

- Community members mentioned specific programs by name and reputation
- These programs have potential for regional success but are not currently being shared

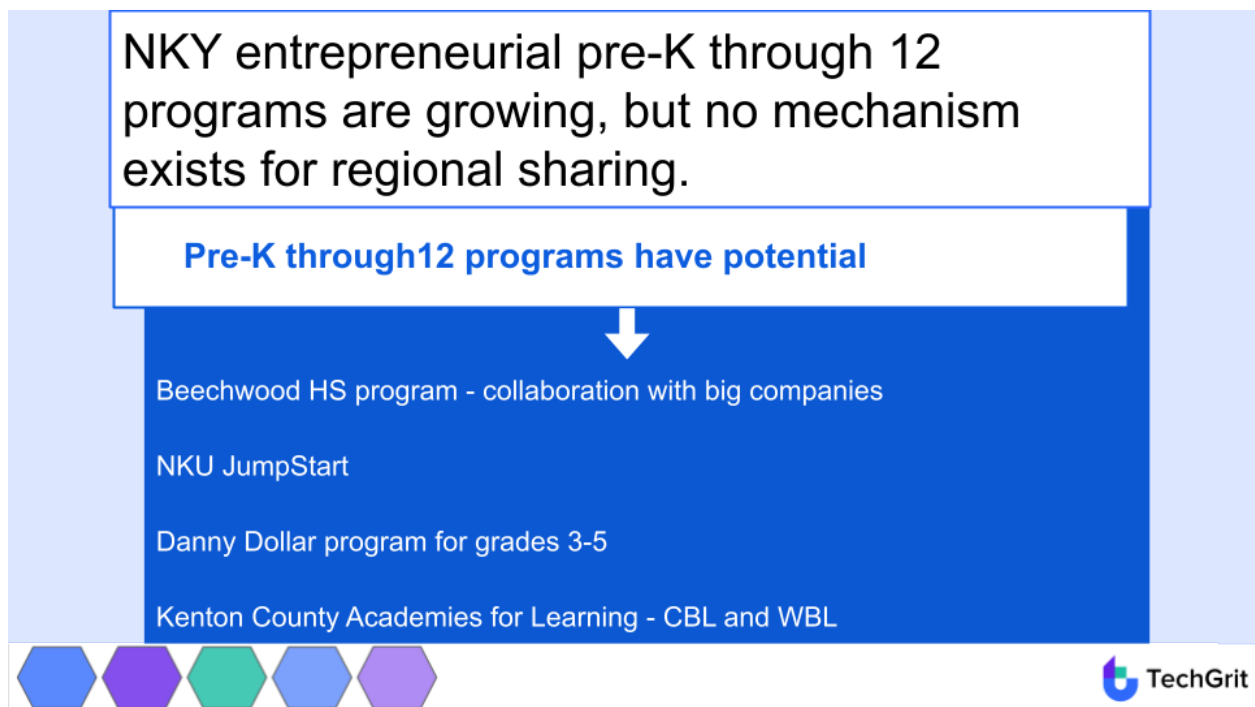


Figure 3.7.3

The development of the insight statement “NKY entrepreneurial pre-K through 12 programs are growing, but no mechanism exists for regional sharing.” The insight statement is based on the subinsight, shown here in blue text within a white box, which is based on the categorization of feedback from 100+ one-on-one empathy interviews with members of the Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial ecosystem, shown here in white text within a blue box.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

After listening to the needs of the community and drawing upon our knowledge and experiences, we formulated a problem definition.

NKY Problem Definition: How might we create a Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial ecosystem that is:

- Recognized as the first stop for entrepreneurs ages 2 -102
- Well-coordinated
- Responsive and empathetic
- Integrated seamlessly (with regional assets)
- Comprehensively inclusive

Ideation was drawn from 100+ empathy interviews with members of the Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial ecosystem, TechGrit's experience building customized ecosystems, and our knowledge of nationwide best practices within the industry.

TechGrit's prescription for developing a thriving Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial ecosystem that meets or exceeds the above requirements is, in short, to create a culture of innovation by building an ecosystem around the entrepreneurial mindset, which is a way of thinking that enables individuals to overcome challenges, be decisive, and accept responsibility for outcomes.

We believe there is a clear and differentiating opportunity for the NKY region to become the convener and weaver of all ecosystem resources - not just another ESO face in the crowd. This positioning makes each resource stronger, more accessible/beneficial to the community, and highly attractive to new supporting entities. The positioning is one of strong advocacy for entrepreneurs and innovators of all ages - a truly distinctive advantage that will foster a culture of innovation growing more organic startups, social enterprises, educational and innovative initiatives. Furthermore, the strategy will be a magnet to other innovators outside the region seeking a supportive, innovator-first, advocacy and support ecosystem.

We propose that creating this culture involves the following steps: (1) build, (2) engage, and (3) brand the community. Our plan for carrying out each of these steps is tailor made for the Northern Kentucky region based on insights we gained through our empathy interviews.

4.1 Build the Community

Through our empathy interviews we gained the insight that individuals did not know how or where to enter the ecosystem. There was no “front door,” or main point of entry, which left people wondering “what do I do first?” We propose creating a front door to give people a welcoming place to start. The need is clearly a call for a personal touch. This would entail providing community members with physical locations where they can tell their story to a seasoned entrepreneur; where they can learn about what resources exist for entrepreneurs and how to access them. In Kenton county this location would be open during business hours; in all other counties this resource would be available in person by appointment or during office hours. Additionally, this resource would be available by phone 6 days a week, 10 hours per day to more effectively meet the needs of community members who do not wish to or have reduced ability to travel. Furthermore, individuals shared that they find it confusing to navigate the ecosystem once they have entered; to address this we have created an asset map ([Appendix C](#)) that NavigateNKY personnel can use to assist community members in navigating available resources.

To address the insight that there is an empathy deficit within the NKY ecosystem, we propose explicitly dialing empathy into the process through individual, in-person consultation with an accomplished entrepreneur, so that entrepreneurs entering the ecosystem have the opportunity to tell their story and receive customized follow-up that is tailored to fit their unique needs. In addition, we propose an entrepreneurial relationship management (ERM) system. The mission of this tool would be to explicitly incorporate a focus on one-on-one consultation and would include an interview scheduling tool, tracking of client metrics, and automated communication customized to meet the needs of each individual. During one-on-one listening sessions, entering entrepreneurs would have the opportunity to consult with accomplished entrepreneurs. This would create an opportunity for empathy, wherein individuals entering the ecosystem feel heard and have their stories acknowledged. This is a need that came through loud and clear from our interviews. Lack of empathy, described in various ways including lack of listening and lack of understanding/caring, is the main reason people we talked to didn't feel a part of anything. Renewed, sustained efforts toward empathy are sorely needed to create a sense of community where individuals feel they matter. From these one-on-one sessions we can also gather further insights for engaging the Northern Kentucky community by continuing to listen to what members of the community truly need. Additionally, the ERM would provide documentation and facilitate customized follow-up with entrepreneurs.

4.2 Engage the Community

To address the Problem Definition primarily that the current Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial landscape is not meeting the needs of the community, we propose a multi pronged strategy for community engagement consisting of seven (7) branded initiatives that will strengthen the identity of NavNKY while providing varied opportunities for community members to share their perspectives and shape the ecosystem according to their needs. The branded initiatives will be as follows:

4.2.1 NavNKY Community Advisory Group

NavNKY Community Advisory Group (Fig. 4.1): The NavNKY Community Advisory Group will be made up of representative community members in order to keep the pulse of what's needed, what's of value, and what's missing. The NavNKY Community Advisory Group will provide input as a method for continued engagement and continual improvement, including but not limited to the following:

- Programs & services
- Events & education
- Amenities & food
- Communications
- Connectivity to higher ed.
- Performing artists

ENGAGE: NavNKY Community Advisory Group

NavNKY has connected and empathized to design the community.
It doesn't stop there. The NavNKY Community Advisory Group will provide input on what's needed / a method for continual improvement!

- Programs & services
- Events & education
- Amenities & food
- Communications
- Connectivity to higher ed.
- Performing artists




Figure 4.1

Recommended structure for NavNKY Community Advisory Group.

4.2.2 NavNKY Navigator

NavNKY Navigator (Fig. 4.2): this resource will provide engaged and sustained communication and connection in the form of customized guidance for Northern Kentucky entrepreneurs, which will be provided in the number of ways:

- Consultation and assessment with a seasoned entrepreneur
- Key story components captured by the NavNKY ERM
- Development of a customized course of action
- Direction to NavNKY events, programs, networks, and regional resources
- Dedicated NavNKY navigation guide
- Ongoing follow up (facilitated by ERM), which will include:
 - Keeping the pulse on members' progress
 - Creating awareness of regional events/networking/programs
 - Appropriately preparing and connecting to regional resources



ENGAGE: NavNKY Navigator

Providing customized guidance for NKY entrepreneurs

- Consultation and assessment with a seasoned entrepreneur
- Key story components captured by the NavNKY ERM
- Development of a customized course of action
- Direction to NavNKY events, programs, networks, and regional resources
- Dedicated NavNKY navigation guide
- Ongoing follow up (facilitated by ERM):
 - Keeping the pulse on members' progress
 - Creating awareness of regional events/networking/programs
 - Appropriately preparing and connecting to regional resources

TechGrit

Figure 4.2

Recommended structure for NavNKY Navigator.

4.2.3 NavNKY Formation

NavNKY Formation (Fig. 4.3): this resource will provide targeted, foundational learnings of entrepreneurship and awareness of ecosystem programs & services that truly meets community needs in the following ways:

- Branded ideation programs for prospective entrepreneurs
 - A foundational innovation course - meant for everyone of all ages

- 8-10 week ideation based upon Design Thinking
- Introduction to NKY and community programs & resources
- Targeted learning - in person and on-demand video:
 - On demand NavNKY branded videos - Team with ESOs and accomplished entrepreneurs to provide brief targeted informational videos
 - Targeted & focused subjects
 - SMEs cover topic and reference their resource
 - NavNKY sets the standard for videos and maintains creative control
 - ERM tracks and triggers customized follow-up - triggered suggestions for a customized entrepreneurial experience
 - (e.g. legal, cash flow, taxes, payroll, operating agreement, eCommerce, CRM's, customer engagement, business model canvas, grant writing)
- Weekly virtual gathering - learning from others' experiences; active dialogue among community members; sharing of success stories; and resource education.
 - Hosted and facilitated by NavNKY
 - Entrepreneurs introduce themselves and their startup
 - Each has an "ask" to the group
 - Rotation through the group; all have a voice; all get a response
 - NavNKY opportunistically mentions events and resources
 - (not the leader - not the person with the answers)

ENGAGE: NavNKY Formation

Foundational learnings of entrepreneurship and awareness of ecosystem programs & services.

- **Branded ideation** programs for prospective entrepreneurs
- **Targeted learning** - in person and on-demand video
(e.g. legal, cash flow, taxes, payroll, operating agreement, eCommerce, CRM's, customer engagement, business model canvas, grant writing)
- **Weekly virtual gathering** - learning from others' experiences; active dialogue among community members; sharing of success stories; and resource education.



Figure 4.3

Recommended structure for NavNKY Formation.

4.2.4 NavNKY Network & Events

NavNKY Network & Events (Fig. 4.4a): our insights were very specific about the lack of networking events and included suggestions for how such events would ideally be conducted. People want to know beforehand what will be discussed, groups should be focused around a topic of interest and more is not always better in terms of attendance. Having a smaller number of more engaged founders may help these events run according to expectations. TechGrit proposes meeting these explicitly stated community needs by providing quality, well thought-out meetups and events, such as:

- NavNKY Meetups - entrepreneurs meeting entrepreneurs, NavNKY branded format
 - Make it about the attendees - people with questions & concerns
 - Target attendance to entrepreneurs (customized ERM groupings)
 - Conduct at NavNKY bar & restaurant affiliates
 - Represent the brand and get out of the way
- NavNKY Annual Gala Event - sunup to sunset panels, instruction, success stories, competitions, food & drink
- Events will follow branded NavNKY format (Fig. 4.4b): developed based on our problem statement ([Section 4](#)) which was developed using insights ([Appendix B](#)) pulled from empathy interviews with members of the NKY community.
 - NavNKY Founders' Forum: opportunity for networking and discussion based on a panel including three seasoned entrepreneurs
 - NavNKY Founders' Lab: opportunity for networking and discussion based on a local entrepreneur who will tell their story

ENGAGE: NavNKY Network & Events

- NavNKY Meetups - entrepreneurs meeting entrepreneurs, using NavNKY branded format
 - Make it about the attendees - people with questions & concerns
 - Target attendance to entrepreneurs (CRM groupings)
 - Conduct at NavNKY bar & restaurant affiliates
 - Represent the brand and get out of the way
- NavNKY Annual Gala Event - sunup to sunset panels, instruction, success stories, competitions, food & drink



Figure 4.4a

Recommended structure for NavNKY Network & Events.

Sample NavNKY Network & Events Formats

NavNKY Founders' Forum

- Free discussion (30 min.)
- Welcome & NavNKY Resource (3 min.)
- Panel: three seasoned entrepreneurs (10 minutes / 3 min. ea)
- Q&A from facilitator. Solicit questions ahead of event. (15 min.)
- Open Q&A / dialogue between founders/entrepreneurs (15 min.)
- Free discussion (? min.)

NavNKY Founders' Lab

- Free discussion (30 min.)
- Welcome & NavNKY Resource (3 min.)
- Local entrepreneur telling their story - open ended (10 min.)
- Open floor for commentary and suggestions (15 min.)
- Dialogue between founders/entrepreneurs (15 min.)
- Free discussion (? min.)



Figure 4.4b

Recommended format for NavNKY Network & Events.

4.2.5 NavNKY Entrepreneurial Funding Network

NavNKY Entrepreneurial Funding Network (Fig. 4.5): through empathy interviews, TechGrit learned that there are many obstacles to funding within the Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial ecosystem that prevent entrepreneurs from feeling empowered to succeed. We propose addressing this community need through forming an entrepreneurial funding network, which would provide community members with opportunities to:

- Learn about funding, granting, and lending organizations in the region
- Enlist community providers
- Get customized direction and advice
- Access targeted learning topics:
 - angel/equity investors
 - startup grants
 - borrowing options
 - pitching to investors / speaking their “language”
 - Where to find your first \$25,000?
- Learn from regional case studies

ENGAGE: NavNKY Entrepreneurial Funding Network

- Learn about funding, granting, and lending organizations in the region
- Enlist community providers
- Customized direction and advice
- Targeted learning topics:
 - angel/equity investors
 - startup grants
 - borrowing options
 - pitching to investors / speaking their “language”
 - Where to find your first \$25,000?
- Regional case studies



Figure 4.5

Recommended structure for NavNKY Entrepreneurial Funding Network.

4.2.6 NavNKY Entrepreneurial Mindset Education Council

NavNKY Entrepreneurial Mindset Education Council (Fig. 4.6): the key insight that the Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial ecosystem suffers from an empathy deficit also suggests it would benefit from education in the entrepreneurial mindset, a collection of traits that includes empathy and empowers individuals to learn and grow in ways that contribute to a healthy community. TechGrit proposes the formation of the entrepreneurial mindset education council to address this need. The council would:

- Convene, facilitate, and communicate an intercounty Entrepreneurial Mindset (EM) Education Council representing the region’s schools
- Open to all pre-K through 12 / opt-in
- Learn of the best existing programs and share them with other regional schools
- Collaborate with school systems to enhance and promote their offerings through branded curriculum or extra-curricular models
- Connect with corporations and gain sponsorship
- Share the best existing programs with other schools in the region
- (e.g. Beechwood HS EDGE, Danny Dollar, NKU Jumpstart, CBL, and WBL)
- Collaborate with pre-K through 12 programs to enhance and promote their entrepreneurial offerings through branded curriculum or extra-curricular models.
 - Square1 regional programs & competitions
 - NKU’s vision for HS academy - “Start Academy”

- Introduce branded programs & curricula ([Appendix D](#))
- Instill mindset & teach innovation
- Create awareness of ecosystem
- Meet local entrepreneurs
- Conduct regional programs and competitions

ENGAGE: NavNKY Entrepreneurial Mindset Education Council

Fostering a Culture of Innovation, Mindset, Creativity, and Curiosity in NKY Schools

- Convene, facilitate, and communicate an intercounty Entrepreneurial Mindset (EM) Education Council representing the region's schools
- Open to all pre-K through 12 / opt-in
- Learn of the best existing programs and share them with other regional schools
- Collaborate with school systems to enhance and promote their offerings through branded curriculum or extra-curricular models
- Connect with corporations and gain sponsorship



Figure 4.6

Recommended structure for NavNKY Entrepreneurial Mindset Education Council.

4.2.7 NavNKY Corporate Collaboration

NavNKY Corporate Collaboration (Fig. 4.7): big companies are part of the ecosystem. They provide pilots, funding, and are customers for new innovations from startups. We propose the Northern Kentucky region capitalize on the presence of big companies by taking advantage of opportunities for collaboration, such as:

- Enlisting/convening corporate innovation and tech development leaders
- Convening 1:1 empathy interviews
- Keeping corporate partners abreast on new innovations
- Providing opportunities for startup entrepreneurs to gain understanding of industry needs
- Facilitating pilots, trials, and follow ups.

ENGAGE: NavNKY Corporate Collaboration

Big companies are part of the ecosystem. They provide pilots, funding, and are customers for new innovations from startups.

- Enlist/convene corporate innovation and tech development leaders
- Convene 1:1 empathy interviews
- Corporate partner keeps abreast on new innovations
- Startup entrepreneur gains understanding of industry needs
- Facilitate pilots, trials, and follow ups.



Figure 4.7

Recommended structure for NavNKY Corporate Collaboration.

4.2.8 Entrepreneurial Relationship Management System (ERM)

Finally, a featured element of NavNKY will be TechGrit's proposed entrepreneurial relationship management (ERM) system, which was developed to facilitate clear, empathetic, user-friendly case management through an online hub for Northern Kentucky Entrepreneurs. Features of the ERM will include:

- Essential information that is clear to understand / user friendly.
- Easy for entrepreneurs to feel connected and heard (web chat, forms, auto-responses)

The ERM also allows for the streamlined handling and effective usage of data to provide better quality services through a variety of smart data management techniques:

- Tag and segment lists, keep client documents/essential information
- Manage and track projects (Take notes, assign tasks)
- Schedule appointments
- Unified client communication - call, text, email, Facebook, google, etc.

Additionally, the ERM maximizes the efficiency of a small team by automating certain tasks, such as:

- Send check-in emails to business owners
- Assign tasks to certain users when particular forms are submitted
- Set up missed-call text backs
- Keep the pulse on member's progress & devise custom responses to client status
- Direct to NavNKY events, programs, networks, and regional resources

4.3 Brand the Community

Navigate NKY is not just another Entrepreneurial Support Organization (ESO). It will become the convener and the weaver of all of Northern Kentucky's ESOs, funders, and educational organizations. The collaboration with and connectivity to entrepreneurs, ESOs, educational institutions, corporations, and funding organizations will make each of these organizations stronger and the region attractive to more (and better) entities. This structure will clearly differentiate the Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial ecosystem. Boldly branding the Navigate NKY identity and its strengths will internally grow and externally attract new entrepreneurs along with support and funding. TechGrit proposes capitalizing on these strengths by improving the region's branding in a number of key ways:

- Strategic Messaging - a clear, strong, and continual message must be delivered through multiple channels.
 - Consistency in name and message.
 - Continual (daily!) messaging of programs, offerings, events, accomplishments, community metrics.
 - Amplification and promotion of startups in the NavNKY community.
 - Development of synchronized messaging channels (organization of ours and others' social media channels to convey messages close to "real time")
 - Press releases
 - Talk Radio / NPR
 - Podcasts
 - Ecosystem cards (capabilities and metrics)
- Leadership - the significance of this position in the overall growth and attraction to the region through strategic messaging cannot be overstated. It requires a "senior level" position to be filled by an individual immersed in NKY programming and operations and highly skilled in communications. This leader must truly empathize (listen and care!) from within the community to tell the story while being an actual part of it.
 - Senior position
 - Immersed in programs and operations
 - Tells the story / conveys the experiences
- Building a community identity - NKY is a unique place, and we can carve out a niche by being the best at what we uniquely do (rather than trying to compete with others). Sharing why 400,000 people call the region home is a perfect complement to the branded NavNKY entrepreneurial scene (Section 4.2).
 - The NKY ecosystem is a place people enjoy calling "home"
 - Covington appeals to key demographics
 - NKY can do things only NKY can do!
 - Be genuine: authenticity is key

5. Implementation

TechGrit's recommendations for a customized Northern Kentucky entrepreneurial ecosystem will need to be implemented in stages. TechGrit's role in these stages include prioritization, staging, resourcing, communication, and program development & launch. With seven branded program lines, it will not be practical to launch all of them simultaneously. TechGrit can work with NKY to prioritize and time the launch of each program. We can work with you to schedule personnel and skills you will need to carry out each program. The timing we will schedule will ensure that your financial resources are spent wisely. We can assist in selecting and hiring the right people and play an assisting role in securing funding. Most importantly, we will work directly to create the programs and launch them including the logistics. Our team will create the website and accompanying unique Entrepreneurial Relationship Management (ERM) tool. A draft of the TechGrit collaboration and rollout schedule is laid out below.

Q1 TechGrit will collaborate with NavNKY to:

- communicate with ecosystem resources/partners/stakeholders
- convene the NavNKY Community Advisory Group
- conduct county visits and identify site locations
- build the website
- launch the ERM
- develop a three-year detailed budget
- Support NavNKY efforts to seek funding partners

Q2 TechGrit will collaborate with NavNKY to:

- continue building awareness and support among partners/stakeholders
- continue regular meetings with the NavNKY Community Advisory Group
- secure funding partnerships
- hire a director, communications specialist, and EIRs,
- launch the website and automate the ERM (NavNKY Navigator)
- begin 1:1 entrepreneur consults and engagement (NavNKY Navigator)
- launch the Founder's Forum (NavNKY Network & Events)

Q3 - Q4 TechGrit will collaborate with NavNKY to:

- begin remote site office hours and consultations (NavNKY Navigator)
- launch weekly virtual gathering (NavNKY Formation)
- launch branded ideation programs for prospective entrepreneurs (NavNKY Formation)
- create video content for targeted learning (NavNKY Formation)
- launch the Founder's Lab, and begin meetups. (NavNKY Network & Events)
- convene the NavNKY Entrepreneurial Mindset Education Council

Q5 - Q8

- Identify partnerships and launch NavNKY Corporate Collaboration
- Launch NavNKY Entrepreneurial Funding Network

5.1 Budget

The estimated budget to launch and get NavNKY on track in the first two years is summarized below (Fig. 5.1). The budget line item for TechGrit includes team expertise for operations/direction featuring a full-time in-person presence. The two current Blue North positions, Executive Director and Program Assistant, are included as well as a Communications Specialist to meet the strategic messaging objectives described in [Section 4.3](#). The Entrepreneur-in-Residence (EIR) positions will consist of several contracted role players.

This draft budget is not intended to be exhaustive. The figures below do not include any capital expenditures, rent, supplies, and materials that will be necessary. Finally, TechGrit finds that the “Executive Director” role is debatable as to when the position should begin.

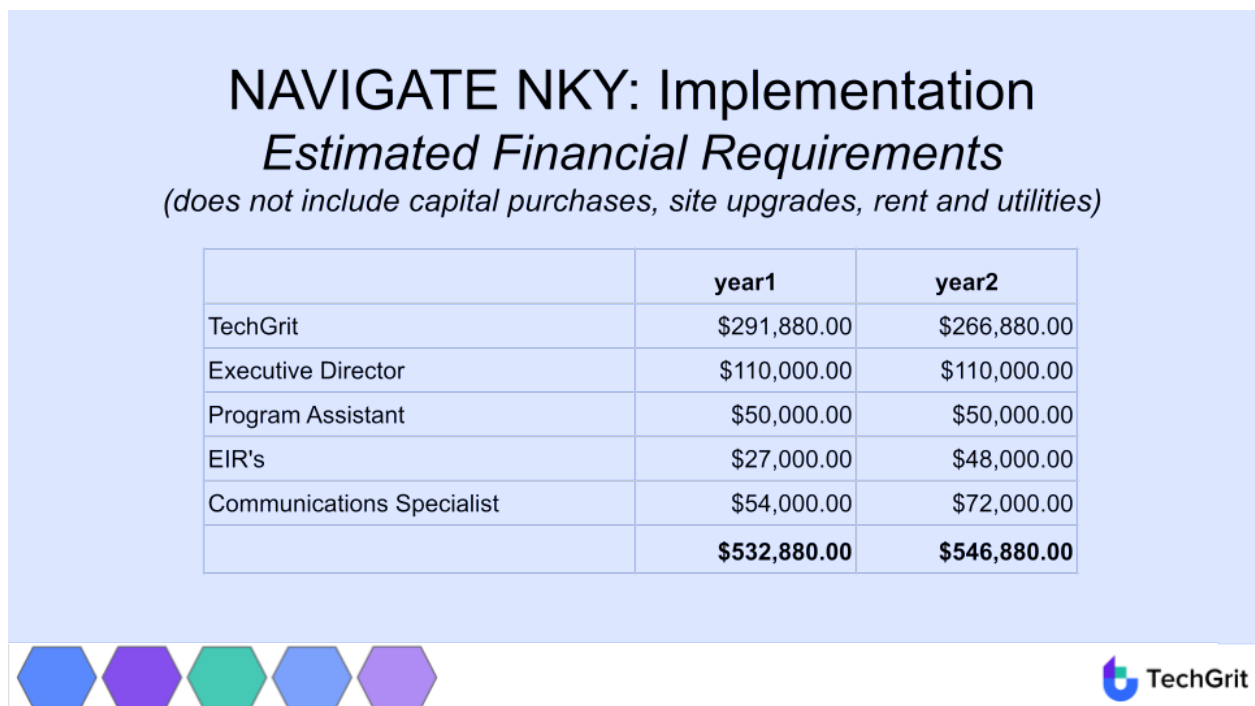


Figure 5.1

Estimated Financial Requirements for implementation of Navigate NKY programming.

Appendix A: Interviewees

Below is a list of members of the NKY entrepreneurial community with whom TechGrit conducted empathy interviews as part of our human-centered approach.

<u>Name of interviewee</u>	<u>Organization / Company</u>
Christine Russell	Tri-Ed
Abby Ober	Blue North
Stephen Saunders	CVG
David Schneider	NKU
Zac Strobl	NKU
Phil Wiseman	Analytics That Profit
Jill Schneider	Renaissance Covington (City of Covington sponsor)
Abby Ober	Blue North
Matthew Hollenkamp	Main Street Ventures
Doug Ladd	Northern Kentucky University
Karla Boldery	La Mega Media
Carmen Hickerson	NKU
Valerie Hardcastle	NKU Institute for Health Innovation / also The Collaborative
Nick Wade	Renaissance Covington
Zac Strobl (2)	NKU Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship
Dave Knox	Brandery
Lee Crume	Northern Kentucky Tri-Ed
Kara Willis	SoCap Accelerate
Lisa Brann	Univ of Kentucky
Blake Stevens	ZapTrain
Kelly Bonnell	Main Street Ventures
Scott Jacobs	Queen City Angels
Scott Jacobs	Queen City Angels
Correy Eimer	Brighton Centers

Matt Strippelhoff	Red Hawk Technologies
Jeff Ginn	Prolanthropy
Jeff Varonne	Northern Kentucky U, Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship
Elizabeth Shrout	Avasha Style
Mavis Linneman	Kickstart Kitchen Incubator
Jeni Al Bahrani	El District
Rico Grant	SoCap
Dave Heidrich	Zalla Companies
Catrena Bowman-Thomas	Northern Kentucky Community Action Commission
John Stanton	Kenton County
Janet Harrah	Northern Kentucky University
Trey Grayson	Frost Brown Todd
Joshua Reid	Inphlu
Tasha Sams	Keen Start
Kim Banham	Connetic & WENDAL
Nick Brophy	NKU Center for Family Business and Small Enterprise
Lacy Starling	LINK Media
Will Weber	Southbank Partners
Keith Schneider	Square1 Inc
Brittan Grubb	ABS Communications
Jesse Simmons	Supply Chain OKI
Normand Desmarais	TiER1 Performance
Ashish Vaidya	Northern Kentucky University
Wendy Sedler	El Chevito Food Truck
Jason Jackman	Johnson Investment Counsel
Chuck Scheper	Bexion
Maura Bassman	Maura Bassman Events
Lee Cahill	The Bark Park & Patio

Daneika Farmer	Angelic Sphere
Dan Whitacre	Dan Whitacre Consultants
Andy Venneman	Regal Maid
Craig Carlson	Truist
Chad Summe	eGateway Capital
Chad Summe	E Capital Gateway
Justin Kaiser	Beechwood HS
John Steinman	Forge Lumber
Trevon Bruch	Safe Wave Technology
John Cain	Wiseway Supply
Karen Finan	OneNKYalliance - President & CEO
Shannan Boyer	Scooter Media
Pat Frew	Covington Business Council
Molly Berrens	Spotted Yeti
Sarah Allan	The Center for Great Neighborhoods
Mike Venerable	CincyTech
Joshua Hunt	City of Florence
Marty Boyer	3D Corrugated, Theatre House
Pete Blackshaw	Cintrifuse
George Wilson	Tikiz
Gary W Moore	Boone County Govt
Ross Patten	City of Covington
Shannon Glover	Legendary Eatz
Anthony Zembrodt	Kentucky Upstream
Dan Humpert	Kentucky Upstream
Tony Milburn	Milburn Group
Mary Willenborg	Kentucky PTAC
Chris Ward	Entry Point

Nancy Aichholz	Aviatra
Harrison Craig	Archive Studios
Ed Wimmer	ROADID
Loren Wolff	DBL Law
Mike Sipple	Talent Magnet Institute
Kris Knochelmann	Schneller Heating, Air Con & Heating
Emily Wolff	Otto's Restaurant
Brad Kirn	Astronomer.io
Adam Koehler	CovWorx
Brian Cobb	CVG
Stephen Saunders	CVG
Thomas Prewitt	Graydon Law
Trevon Bruch	Safewave Technology
David Heidrich	
Karen Finan	OneNKY Alliance
John Hawkins	
Thomas Prewitt (2)	Graydon Law
Trevon Bruch	Safewave Technology
David Heidrich	Zalla Companies
Karen Finan (2)	OneNKY Alliance
John Hawkins	Indratech
Valerie Hardcastle (2)	NKU Institute for Health Innovation / also The Collaborative
Marty Boyer	3D Corrugated
Nick Wade	Renaissance Covington
Keith Schneider	Square1
Nancy Aichholz	Aviatra

Appendix B: Insights

Below are excerpts gathered from TechGrit's empathy interviews with members of the NKY entrepreneurial community, grouped by major insight. These insights are a collection of the "why's" and "because" that paint the portrait of the current NKY Ecosystem. There are also examples of solutions interspersed with the collection of insights.

Topic 1: Confusion

- No "front door:" NKY entrepreneurs lack a point of entry to the regional ecosystem and are unsure how to get started.
 - Point of entry - lacking this for companies to enter ecosystem
 - Entrepreneurs, generally, have some difficulty determining the best place to start search for assistance.
 - Not enough structure/assessment for entry of companies into ecosystem - where does newco go? How to place companies?
 - Point of entry - lacking this for companies to enter ecosystem
 - ENT support entry can be intimidating
 - There is no front door
 - ENT What do I do first? What are the resources?
- Unsure where to go with questions: N KY entrepreneurs lack a centralized hub where they can go to ask questions and get support.
 - INT "doesn't know what's going on in northern KY". There is "no lead voice" for the region.
 - Not knowing what they didn't know. Not knowing where to find solution to what he knew he didn't know.
 - There is no universally recognized source (hub) for entrepreneurship guidance, resources.
 - Lack of strategic clarity for the region as a whole (entrepreneurial)
 - ENT have many vulnerable moments (where do I go for answers to basics?)
 - No one / no place offered an assessment of what my understanding was
 - No one / no place offered "here is what you need to understand"
 - Good messaging is needed of where to find help.
 - There is no single point of contact for ENT ecosystem
 - Not being able to find answers to questions re common ENT pillars (payroll, tax, op. agreements etc)
 - Where to go with new idea? How far along should I be to expect help?
 - No central place for ENT support! What roles each play? Confusing! Fragmented!
 - "who should I turn to"
 - Not sure of The Collaborative role - empty.
- Lack of resources: N KY entrepreneurs perceive resources as limited and hard to access.
 - Resources to support entrepreneurs is limited.
 - Lots of frustration and isolation in south - most KY programs don't reach there

- Lack awareness of resources: N KY entrepreneurs are unaware of existing resources because of poor messaging and confusing websites.
 - LINK Media - N KY information channel
 - No one knows programs exist
 - Messaging is poor; websites don't indicate what is offered
 - "five basic questions" should be answered in website - they are not.
 - Lack of awareness of ecosystem resources
 - Was not aware of programs the ecosystem has.
 - People are not aware of support resources / where to go.
 - Finding resources.
 - Lack of knowledge ("feeling clueless") and focusing on building business in face of unrelated issues (personal, family, etc.)
 - People don't know about what's available in Covington.
 - Awareness of resources is limited.
- Confusing to navigate resources: N KY entrepreneurs find that navigating resources is a confusing process.
 - Fragmented nature of N Kentucky (entrepreneur resources, county administration, municipal governments)
 - No mapping to the many northern Kentucky resources.
 - ENT are pulled in multiple directions.
 - Lack of "case management" resources
 - Lots of good resources exist. Access is difficult.
 - Navigating resources of ecosystem.
 - It is challenging to navigate N KY / NKU resources
 - Great ENT and ED assets - but fragmented confusing process to find them.

Topic 2: ESOs

- Infighting: ESOs spend too much time fighting over resources to be able to collaborate with one another.
 - Infighting among some ESOs for "scarce resources"
 - ESO's fight over power and money (not cooperative).
 - ESO infighting
 - All ESO's are competing for money to exist (not to fund startups).
 - ESO's must do jobs AND raise money to exist.
 - ESO's are spending too much time seeking funding to survive - collaborations suffer
 - No sharing amongst ecosystem partners
- Political toxicity: ESOs are infected with political toxicity.
 - ESO's / politics - there is toxicity around the people doing it.
 - Must be careful not to get in the way of other ESOs
 - "The ES needs "the brand" So disparate now - all ESO out for themselves.
 - Lack of diversity in ESO boards - similar makeup to many
 - Lots of politics

- Lack of communication/coordination: ESOs do not recognize their unique roles in the ecosystem, which leads to lack of communication and coordination among ecosystem players.
 - Multiple county, municipal governments operating mostly independently hinder strategic improvements. Competing interests.
 - Too much "rinse and repeat"
 - Duplication of effort, lack of strong leadership, and contention within ecosystem make it much less effective
 - ESOs do not appear to recognize and fill their unique roles in the ecosystem creating duplication of effort/programming, and friction.
 - Too many cooks in the kitchen. The decline of the entrepreneurial ecosystem is in direct correlation with the higher numbers of ESOs.
 - Not as much collaboration between ESO's as could be - silos formed
 - ESO ecosystem have not realized synergies - lack of collaboration
 - Lack of communication among ESOs, stakeholders.
 - Lack of coordination and cooperation among ESOs, ecosystem stakeholders
 - Current ecosystem is uncoordinated; [entrepreneurs] don't know between programs what is going on.
 - Lack of coordination between Big Business and startup community
 - Difficulty coordinating ecosystem players
 - Lack of coordinated effort by support community
 - Key stakeholders in the region are not working together / collaboratively to support a common strategic goal.
 - Collaboration [needed] - Ecosystem navigation is complicated
 - There are a glut of ENT programs and not enough ENT to use them
 - Too many ENT support "programs" - duplicative
 - N KY ecosystem is "noisy."
 - Lots of noise from ecosystem components but not on the same page
 - Many municipal interests and leaders make it difficult to collaborate for effective strategy and strong messaging.
- Causing confusion/frustration for entrepreneurs: ESOs are confusing and frustrating to work with, in part because they don't listen to what entrepreneurs truly need.
 - Entrepreneurial mindset of professional services lacking.
 - ESO's don't know what is going on with startups - don't know them
 - Need ESO to amplify startup messages
 - Definitions of "entrepreneurship" used by ESOs make it more difficult for entrepreneurs to locate resources.
 - Frustration in finding ESO who will listen to story
 - Support organizations (ESO's) in N KY are non-responsive
 - Trust has eroded with ESO's - need personal remedy
 - [Entrepreneurs are] unable to engage with N KY ESO's
- Ineffective/lacking leadership: ESOs are characterized by ineffective, directionless, or lacking leadership.
 - State / KY Innovation Office - circle is getting smaller - less collaborative

- Flux in and lack of direction from State Government
- Municipal bureaucracy
- Fragmentation - 35 city & county governments
- INT not currently connected to the ecosystem
- Lack of targeted support:
 - Weak e-ship ecosystem in northern Kentucky
 - Region does not provide ongoing support for tech startups
 - Not having tech app development support
 - Ideation phase of startups is under-supported
 - relative lack of entrepreneur support resources
- Lack of entrepreneurial education:
 - entrepreneurs need to learn terminology
 - Managing the business administration aspects of the business. Managing/negotiating.
 - Overcoming lack of experience/credibility, raising capital
 - Assess where is the best place to do business
 - Finding time (or money) to understand, create, execute social media strategy
 - Finding time to build business while working full time
 - Not understanding business (generally)
 - Confusion over "entrepreneurship".
 - ENT not always getting straight honest talk about life & financial choices

Topic 3: Networking Opportunities

- Lack of networking with other ENT: N KY entrepreneurs lack opportunities to network with other entrepreneurs, including founders, investors, corporations, and entrepreneurs in a similar field to their own.
 - Not much activity in ecosystem (networking events down).
 - Meetups (opportunities for founders to network, investors to become aware of startups, corporations to connect) would be a way to create / grow regional buzz.
 - Need for: regular networking (esp when local entrepreneurs are featured/speak/present).
 - Would have benefitted from regular gathering of ENT
 - Value in knowing other ENT (personal not just biz part)
 - Need network / People connections
 - Need more diverse networks
 - Connecting to network needed
 - Need to hear ENT stories of journey / can learn from that
 - No intros to other ENT
 - Want to meet other ENT and ENT who have been there / done that
 - Tough doing this (video production) alone - needs community [Harrison Craig]

- Lack of support network for ENT: N KY entrepreneurs lack opportunities to build a support network, including post-accelerator support, professional services, area corporations, and social capital.
 - lack of network to support entrepreneurial journey
 - Local Accelerators provide "community" for ENT (content value may questionable)
 - After the Accelerator: entrepreneurship is lonely
 - A "Co-hatch" type program is needed to N KY
 - Connecting professional services providers to startups and very small businesses is somewhat difficult.
 - No intros to area corporations
 - YPO & CEO & Vestige - comfortable organizations to bounce ideas and exchange experiences --- examples of supportive communities
 - OneNKY Alliance - CEO's for better community
 - CBC - Cincinnati Business Committee (top big companies)
 - CRBC - Cincinnati Regional Business Committee (100 smaller companies)
 - UC 1819 Innovation Hub
 - Startup Week in Cincinnati provided connections to other entrepreneurs and resources
 - Northern KY mastermind group helped find business, set up her business, etc. More diverse/less competitive, seasoned business owners
 - Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce brings solutions, networking to ecosystem
 - SoCap connects companies with their social capital network and sets up meetings/performs introductions. Access to services "at their fingertips" through NKU and St. Elizabeth's. Still figuring out what to do in summer and winter (when their programming isn't running)
 - Completing SOCAP program exposed INT to other resources and tech entrepreneurs
- Lack of role models: N KY entrepreneurs lack opportunities to network with local role models who they can learn from and emulate.
 - Private money and entrepreneurial experience are huge value. No rich role models for aspiring entrepreneurs to look up to. There is no clear "silverback" in northern Kentucky.
 - Not aware of big regional stakeholders in Northern Kentucky.

Topic 4: Underserved Communities

- Main St. businesses are being left out of existing programs.
 - Main St businesses don't qualify for NKU programs
 - Main St businesses are being left out.
 - Organizations and other resources needed to support "main street" businesses
 - Speed and low cost are sought by main st entrepreneurs - enter quickly

- Gazelles, makers and creatives, social enterprises, and underserved minority communities are being left out of existing programs.
 - Gazelles are not getting attention!
 - Attention/resources needed for "makers and creatives" the community makeup.
 - Few resources are available for social enterprises
 - No pathway for underserved minority communities - need a place
- The ecosystem focuses on tech in excess and at the expense of non-tech businesses.
 - Many perceive that when talking about startups, only referring to tech
 - Excess focus on tech businesses.
 - Lack of strong, local leadership leaves northern KYians, non-tech folks feeling there is no support for them.
 - Not much attention being paid to non-tech businesses (relative to tech startups).
 - N. Ky does well with tech co. but losing small creatives
- Lack of diversity within the ecosystem is an obstacle to access.
 - There is not enough diversity in ecosystem team
 - Language (Michaela note - identified as obstacle by Spanish-speaking interviewee)

Topic 5: Branding

- Perceptions of Blue North: Blue North is either unknown within the ecosystem, or perceived in a negative way.
 - Blue North (UpTech) lost brand identity (& visibility with location)
 - Blue North is dormant now - must figure strategy
 - Blue North operation at pause - for new strategy.
 - No Idea what Blue North does
 - Blue North is a damaged brand.
 - Blue North or other org needed to make ecosystem aware of all the players/resources and what they do
- Confusion about N KY Brand: Northern Kentucky does not currently have a recognizable brand.
 - Marketing/communications is weak
 - Northern Kentucky does not have a recognizable brand.
 - There is not a strong vision/voice for entrepreneurship in the region. Northern Kentucky does not have brand equity, identity. There are not many "advantages" for entrepreneurs in Northern Kentucky.
 - Lack of Northern Kentucky brand, Collaboration within ecosystem.
 - It is not clear what N KY ecosystem mission is- what does success look like?
 - No Brand awareness.
 - N KY lacks identity (shadow of Cincinnati) - no concept to rally around
 - NKY has yet to make a name for itself

Topic 6: Funding

- Funding access: N KY entrepreneurs face obstacles to funding access such as lack of awareness of funding options and lack of appropriate entrepreneurial education in business accounting.
 - “When and how” to access funding (people don't know). The Collaborative needs better ways to reach people. Need better ways to connect with funders.
 - Business accounting / cash flow / need to understand / need to know this is important to understand (SBDC?)
 - No clear direction provided to funding sources
- Lack of funding options at all stages: At very early, early, and middle stages of business development, entrepreneurs lack funding options.
 - Wishes there was more pre-seed so tech founders would not have to leave northern KY
 - Funding for first 50-100K (not a lot of options)
 - Raising capital to build MVP and team is a challenge
 - Not enough Private Equity
 - Raising seed capital is a challenge
 - Raising capital has been hit-or-miss within the region
 - Funding for very early micro businesses / solopreneurs is needed
 - Funding "in the middle" is tight. Startups and big cos are in good shape.
 - NEED support preparing for and lining up investors (\$200,000)
- Problems with state funds: State funds are not efficiently allocated and are insufficient to support the region's goals.
 - Historically there has been a lot of difficulty with efficient flow of state funds
 - Insufficient state funding to support regional effort. Weak facilitator role in region (leadership).

Topic 7: Regional Strengths

7.1 Industries of focus

Logistics

- CVG (outstanding model) for supply chain - Airport is inspiring
- Big corporations (P&G, Kroger, Amazon) that can focus funds on core functions. Logistics, supply chain, warehousing.
- Advanced manufacturing / packaging, distribution community (expertise)
- Brighton customers represent industry segments that may hold opportunity for new businesses (advanced mfg, transportation/logistics, health care, IT/business/finance, construction/trades)
- CVG / St Elizabeth / NKU are the driving forces of the region: supply chain, logistics, health care, data analytics (how do you pull it all together)
- Organic growth story - logistics for digital commerce / movement of goods
- Logistics - CVG airport, Amazon, DHL (N Am Hub), UPS (<100 miles)

- N KY has warehousing, logistics, movement of eCommerce goods
- Favors PPP that build on organic strengths - eCommerce logistics / Bio Tech
- Logistics story is growing organically - no incentives infused
- Northern KY has HUGE opportunity in air hubs of DHL, Amazon
- transportation hub for DHL, Amazon. Concentration of logistics, supply chain businesses and talent. "Experiential" retail (bars and similar) could also attract more young workers to meet staffing needs of the city.
- Supply Chain Focus: Freight, Food, Circular Economy (Zero Waste)
- Focus Sector Areas: 1 supply chain (sustainable) 2 fintech 3 health care
- CVG/Amazon/DHL attract workers, businesses
- Airport, Amazon, logistics attract businesses and talent. NKU entrepreneur support.

Healthcare/biotech

- NKU lacks resources to compete with other universities for healthcare founders
- Orange Grove - VC for biotech firms (located at UC)
- Wet labs for biotech companies (\$10M in budget to build more next year)
- Exploit the strength of the KY SBIR match (partner with Orange Grove?)
- Provide free grant writing for SBIR (biotech + more)
- Build wet labs to support biotech startups (from UC, NKU, etc)
- Brighton customers represent industry segments that may hold opportunities for new businesses (advanced mfg, transportation/logistics, health care, IT/business/finance, construction/trades)
- CVG / St Elizabeth / NKU are the driving forces of the region: supply chain, logistics, health care, data analytics (how do you pull it all together)
- Favors PPP that build on organic strengths - eCommerce logistics / Bio Tech
- Sector driven growth has been successful in NKY - BioScience & Digital Commerce: CTI and eGatewayCapital are examples (NKU and St Elizabeth)
- Focus Sector Areas: health care
- Vexion was recruited and grown as life science co.

7.2 Our neighbor Cincinnati

- Funding difficulties: Money does not cross state boundaries and Ohio has better funding for ESOs.
 - Money does not cross state boundaries
 - Decent cooperation with Cincinnati but money stops at the river
 - Money does not cross state boundaries
 - Flow of state funds across the border.
 - Flow of money across state boundary
 - Ohio public programs are better funded
- Cultural perceptions: Cincinnati is seen as "cooler" than Northern KY.
 - Northern KY not as supportive of entrepreneurs as Cincinnati
 - The river separates "cool" Cincinnati from not-so-cool Northern Kentucky. People (including younger entrepreneurs) would prefer to locate in Cincinnati. The two are culturally distinct. Cincinnati attracts innovation, entrepreneurship.

- N Kentucky perceived as stepchild compared to Cincinnati
- When "partnering" with Cincinnati, N KY becomes afterthought - FLOW to Cincinnati
- Cincinnati is "cooler". Covington is getting better.
- Pull of Cincinnati for entrepreneurs and job seekers is great.
- Cincinnati draws many ENT's (support and cool places "OTR")
- Low number of large corporations, long-established universities disadvantage northern Kentucky
- Lack of regional coordination: Lack of regional strategic coordination is a challenge to growth.
 - No coordinated (OH + KY) regional strategy
 - Regional focus is challenging
 - Different state funding, strategic goals, etc. pose challenges to regional growth.
- Staffing difficulties: N KY startups face difficulties building a team due to lack of access to capital, lack of space, lack of knowledge about best hiring practices, and an aging population (potentially due to lack of affordable housing for young people).
 - Recently not able to hold / hire employees against Covid \$\$\$
 - Greatest barriers for northern Kentucky entrepreneurs are access to capital and talent
 - Lack of talent. Lack of space.
 - how figure staffing and needs to run new business (SBDC?)
 - Hesitation to hire employees. Knowledge of HR policies, best practices.
 - Staffing difficult throughout the region
 - Aging population exacerbates staff shortages. Incentivizing development of more affordable housing might attract more young workers.
 - Lack of talent.
 - Human Capital! Big Co experience within region is great talent pool
 - Economic activity, human capital that has capacity to "reach" either coast
- Support for startups:
 - NKY community energetically support startups and has lower barriers to entry compared to other metro areas
 - Big company buy in is stimulating to startup community (P&G, Kroger, Amazon)
- Buttermilk Pike is built for Interstate Access and lots of surface parking (Kenton)
- NKU: NKU provides resources, training, and networking opportunities.
 - Experience and knowledge of professors, students, researchers with NKU leadership could bring better leadership to ecosystem.
 - NKU provides plenty of paid internships (to startups and small companies). Strong chemical knowledge base. Opportunity for manufacturing?
 - NKU Inkubator 12-wk program for students, faculty, alums. NKU Inkubator lots of web & mobile companies. NKU offers 3 core courses for students: EM, Opp recognition, & Idea Validation. NKU Ent Institute started by nat known Rebecca White & Rodney DeSuza. NKU Inkubiz student exp in companies. NKU was top 5 ranked (previously)
 - NKU programs are highly student focused.

- Qualities/features/programs offered by NKU might be leveraged to increased entrepreneurial diversity in northern Kentucky
- NKU entrepreneurship program professors. NKU e-ship program. Design of program put her in action. Hands on. Professors helped create network, get her connected to critical/valuable information
- NKU for looking at / revising business model.
- NKU connected them to other support orgs, pitch competitions, etc.
- NKU - fed grants, support, and thinking outside Univ campus
- NKU for its role as connector
- NKU entrepreneurship center helped build network and direct them to resources
- NKU is not surrounded by people with deep ENT experience
- Covington: Covington is seen as a “cool” place where entrepreneurs can start something new.
 - Covington could be next destination - needs OTR type (Over the Rhine)
 - Covington needs development & momentum
 - Interviewee [Trevon Bruch] relates STRONGLY to Covington. Wants to be city's first unicorn. Harnessing that degree of love of place might be impactful.
 - Great Neighborhoods, City of Covington => Put together TA and funding to get entrepreneurs started
 - "Covington is area where you can start something new."
 - Covington is very supportive of small business.
 - Covington economy is good. Great for entrepreneurs.
 - City of Covington invests substantially into the entrepreneurial ecosystem
 - Corporex - Riverfront Development - Bill Butler
 - **Covington is a walkable city - who knew? Wayfinding??**
 - **3 cool districts: MainStrausse, Roebling Point, Central Business District**
 - **Residential / apts: Dovenek Square, John R. Greene,**
 - Riverhouse and John R. Greene - 300+ new housing units in Mainstrasse
 - Innovation Ally and Main Strausse: Innovation Ally and Main Strausse are perceived as “cool.”
 - Covington ENT bar and residential scene: Duveneck; MainStrausse; and Roebling Point
 - Innovation Ally and Main Strausse are 5 min walk apart (programs + cool spaces)
 - Main Strausse has good restaurants and bars (competitive to Cinci OTR)
 - Main Strausse is great place for young ENT w many newer units
 - Main Strausse has great proximity to Innovation Ally
 - Pike St (Covington) is not built for Hub access

7.3 Strong pre-K through 12 programs

- The Beechwood HS EDGE Business/Entrepreneurship minor integrates college prep curriculum with experiential learning to provide students with a unique and personalized career development experience
- Square 1 has not been effective with high school work (Covid related)

- NKU has vision for HS Academy in Entrepreneurship on campus 9-12.
- Grant county teach after hours HS program.
- The Danny Dollar Project is great ENT intro to grade 3-5 to install in schools
- High Schools are teaching CBL and WBL in Kenton High Schools
- Past High School competitions for CBL and WBL prototypes have worked well.
- Academies for Learning (Kenton County High School)

Appendix C: Asset Map

Link to full asset map:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1SzNtIROEwf7ZXhpMu7jtAq-Zjlxm5D1bMMQI9_Plvxg/edit#gid=0

Listing of organizations and their websites:

ORGANIZATION	WEBSITE
Advantage Capital	https://www.advantagecap.com/post/what-access-to-capital-means-in-rural-kentucky
African American Chamber	https://www.african-americanchamber.com/
African American Chamber	https://www.african-americanchamber.com/
Allos Ventures	https://allosventures.com/
Amber Grants for Women	https://ambergrantsforwomen.com/%20get-an-amber-grant/
Aviatra	https://aviatraaccelerators.org/get-started/cincinnati-programs/
Aviatra	https://aviatraaccelerators.org/get-started/cincinnati-programs/
Beechwood Independent Schools	https://www.beechwood.kyschools.us/
BioLOGIC	https://www.biologicglobal.org/
BioLOGIC	https://www.biologicglobal.org/
Blacks in Technology	https://www.linkedin.com/redirect/redirect?url=https%3A%2F%2Ffoundation%2Eblacksintechnology%2Eent%2F&urlhash=WFNG&trk=about_website
Blue North	https://bluenorthky.com/
Boone County Govt (Tri-County Economic Development)	https://northernkentuckyusa.com/
Boone County Small Business Development and Support	https://boonecountyky.org/business/small_business_development.php
Borderlands	https://www.facebook.com/borderlandsLLC/
Brandery	https://www.mainstventures.org/brandery
Brighton Center	https://www.brightoncenter.com/
Campbell County Business Support	https://campbellcountyky.gov/subject/index.php?structureid=4
Catalytic Development Funding Corp	https://www.thecatalyticfund.org/
Center for Great Neighborhoods	https://www.greatneighborhoods.org/

CincyTech	https://www.cincytechusa.com/
Cinrifuse	https://cinrifuse.com/
Cinrifuse	https://cinrifuse.com/
Cinrifuse	https://cinrifuse.com/how-it-works/syndicate-fund/
City of Covington	https://www.covingtonky.gov/
City of Florence	https://florence-ky.gov/businesses/
Connetic	https://connetic.ventures/
Covington Business Council	https://cbcky.com/
Covington Business Council	https://cbcky.com/
CovWorx	https://covworx.com/
Danny Dollar	https://www.dannydollar.academy/
ECDI	https://www.ecdi.org/
ECDI	https://www.ecdi.org/
E-Gateway Capital	https://www.egatewaycapital.com/
EI District	https://www.eidistrict.com/
EO	https://hub.eonetwork.org/
FreshLo program	https://www.greatneighborhoods.org/freshlo/
Governor's School for Entrepreneurship	https://kentuckygse.com/
Horizon Community Funds	https://www.horizonfunds.org/
Incubator Kitchen Collective	https://www.incubatorkitchencollective.org/locations/the-hatchery-newport/
Incubator Kitchen Collective	https://www.incubatorkitchencollective.org/locations/the-hatchery-newport/
Kentucky PTAC	https://www.kyptac.com/
Kentucky PTAC	https://www.kyptac.com/
Kickstart Kitchen LLC / The Delish Dish	https://www.kickstartkitchenky.com/
Main Street Ventures	https://www.mainstventures.org/
Mastermind Groups (generally)	
Mortar Covington	https://www.rcov.org/mortar-covington
Mortar Covington	https://www.rcov.org/mortar-covington
NKU (Ctr for Innovation and Entrepreneurship)	https://www.nku.edu/academics/cob/centers/cie.html
NKU Center for Family Business and Small Enterprise	https://www.nku.edu/academics/cob/centers/cfesb.html

NKU Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship	https://www.nku.edu/academics/cob/centers/cie.html
NKU Haile US Bank College of Business	https://www.nku.edu/academics/cob/centers/cie/programs/inkubator.html
NKU Haile US Bank College of Business	https://www.nku.edu/academics/cob/centers/cie/programs/etap.html
NKU Health Innovation Center	https://www.nku.edu/ihi/health-innovation-center-2.html
NKU Institute for Health Innovation	https://nku.edu/ihi/focus-areas/innovation/collaborative-for-economic-engagement.html
Northern Kentucky Community Action Commission	https://www.nkcacovington.org/
Northern Kentucky Tri-ED	https://northernkentuckyusa.com/
Northern KY Chamber of Commerce	https://www.nkychamber.com/
Ocean (Accelerator)	https://business.uc.edu/centers-partnerships/entrepreneurship/community-partners/ocean-accelerator.html
Office for New Economy (One)	https://jsc.eku.edu/NewEconomy
OneNKYalliance	https://onenkyalliance.com/
Queen City Angels	https://www.qca.com/
Renaissance Covington (City of Covington sponsor)	https://www.rcov.org/home
SBDC Covington	https://kentuckysbdc.com/covington/
SBDC Miami Univ	https://www.miamioh.edu/regionals/sbdc/
SCORE	https://greatercincinnati.score.org/?_ga=2.83862614.1788114900.1643493791-1628135412.1643493790
SoCap	https://www.nku.edu/socapaccelerate.html
Southbank Partners	https://www.southbankpartners.com
Square1	https://ideastartgrow.com/next/about/
Square1	https://ideastartgrow.com/
St Elizabeth Healthcare	https://www.stelizabeth.com/
TiER1 Performance	https://tier1performance.com/
Univ of Kentucky	https://vace.uky.edu/
Urban League	https://www.cincinnatiieec.com/ohio-sbdc-hamilton-county/
Urban League	https://www.cincinnatiieec.com/wbec-orv/
Incubator Kitchen Collective	

Appendix D: NavNKY Entrepreneurial Mindset Education Council

Fostering a Culture of Innovation, Mindset, Creativity, and Curiosity in NKY Schools

Examples of NavNKY branded developed curriculum

Grade 9 - Entrepreneurial Mindset & Innovation

- The entrepreneurial mindset
- Everyone is an innovator
- Design Thinking
- Application project

Grade 10 - Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and Community Building

- What is an ecosystem?
- The NKY ecosystem
- The BNB Community
- Accelerators, incubators, investment, coworking, corporations
- Field trips to NKY assets
- Case studies of local entrepreneurs

Grade 11 - Problem-Based Learning

- Corporate introduction to challenges
- Application of Design Thinking
- Solutions and findings (Event)

Grade 12

- Regional virtual accelerator
- Experience of developing and advancing one's ideas

Examples of Existing Educational Programs

- Share the best existing programs with other schools in the region (e.g. Beechwood HS EDGE, Danny Dollar, NKU Jumpstart, CBL, and WBL)
- Collaborate with pre-K through 12 programs to enhance and promote their entrepreneurial offerings through branded curriculum or extra-curricular models.
 - Square1 regional programs & competitions
 - NKU's vision for HS academy - "Start Academy"
 - Introduce branded programs & curriculums
 - Instill mindset & teach innovation
 - Create awareness of ecosystem
 - Meet local entrepreneurs
 - Conduct regional programs and competitions

- Beechwood HS EDGE:
 - The EDGE Program (<https://www.beechwood.kyschools.us/Content2/edgeprogram>) is a Pre-K through 12 initiative of the Beechwood Independent School District.
 - The overview document (<https://www.beechwood.kyschools.us/userfiles/120/my%20files/edge/edge%20overview%20document.pdf?id=5073>) explains the design.
 - One of the eight minors offered by the high school program is entrepreneurship and business. This video (https://video.cdn.schoolpointe.com/KY_BeechwoodISD%2f2020%2f02%2fvideos%2fd72e0ca1-6612-429f-ada6-33eb942ca4e4.mp4) talks about that minor.
 - Principal Justin Kaiser has put a huge amount of research and thought into the design of the program, which has attracted an impressive list of partners that Beechwood, including Northern Kentucky University (some additional featured in the video above).
 - The design process the Beechwood team used was based on Stanford University's work.