



EVENT REPORT





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Report compiled in compliance with Kauffman
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INTRODUCTION

Mission Meets Vision

Emerging Prairie is a nonprofit organization located in Fargo, ND that believes in and nurtures the potential of our community. We have made it our mission to celebrate the entrepreneurs, artists, and creators, specifically in the high-technology space. Recognition of our community's potential, development of an environment for social connectivity, and the act of highlighting the risk takers and changemakers is vitally important, as they are the key accelerators of growth and development. To do this, Emerging Prairie believes in:

- Educating our city
- Infusing the arts
- Building on our bright spots
- Practicing radical inclusivity
- Accelerating entrepreneurs

To this end, Emerging Prairie pitched an idea to the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the largest foundation in the United States that focuses on community entrepreneurship, to ask for grant funding in order to organize the first ever Entrepreneur Day at the State Capitol (EDSC), an event to connect entrepreneurs in ND with state legislators.

Our vision for this event was to have a day where doers and thinkers from across the state could travel to Bismarck, ND at low cost to themselves to meet with state representatives to discuss ways the state could partner with the private industry to create jobs and wealth.

We didn't have particular legislation we wanted passed or a hidden agenda. We simply wanted to get two very different groups of people together to discuss how we could make North Dakota the greatest state in the nation for entrepreneurs.

As a first-time event for Emerging Prairie, the planning process for EDSC would prove to be challenging but the results of the day were more than worth the effort to organize it. It is our hope that this report can be used by those reading it to find similar success in their events while avoiding some of the same pitfalls that we faced.

02 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ENTREPRENEUR DAY AT THE STATE CAPITOL

2019

82 PEOPLE
ATTENDED THE
TWO DAY EVENT


70% MALE
30% FEMALE



55% OF
ATTENDEES HAVE
NEVER VISITED
THE STATE
CAPITOL BEFORE



90% OF
ATTENDEES TALKED
WITH THEIR STATE
LEGISLATORS

I enjoyed engaging and connecting with other like minded individuals whom shared the same point of view in the highs and lows of what it truly means to believe in your dreams.

- 2019 ATTENDEE



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NORTH DAKOTA
CITIES WERE
REPRESENTED

AN EVENT CONNECTED BY



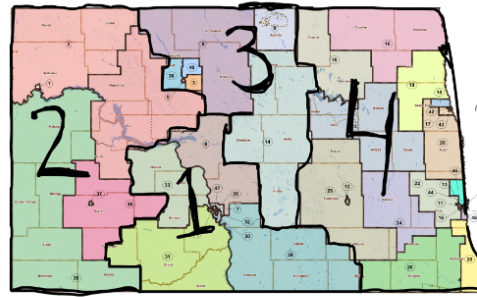
EMERGING PRAIRIE

LOGISTICS

Getting Started

In order to make it as easy as possible for entrepreneurs to get to Bismarck for Entrepreneur Day at the State Capitol, we knew that we would need to provide transportation, meals, and lodging to those who would participate. In order to do this though, we would need funding. We turned to the Kauffman Foundation's "Zero Barriers" grant and applied on the basis of connecting entrepreneurs from all backgrounds, specifically including women and Native American entrepreneurs, with their state representatives.

After officially being awarded the grant, we then started to gather a small team of like-minded individuals from across the state that could help us recruit the 75 entrepreneurs we would need to meet our goal. The majority of these individuals were known to us beforehand through other state-wide programming we had conducted and most of them had some experience in community organizing or economic development. In order to better organize our efforts, a map of the state was split into four quadrants and each community organizer from our planning committee was assigned a territory based upon the area / city where they work.



Once these quadrant captains were assigned, each was tasked with reaching out to their own local networks to recruit early-stage entrepreneurs to EDSC with the promise of free lodging and transportation via bus. The initial idea was to have three buses drive across state to pick people up from the various towns where they resided in. These "bus hubs" would be Fargo, Minot, and Watford City — essentially allowing anyone from those sections of the state to attend. In addition to having quadrant captains recruit from their local networks, we also used the Small Business Administration's database to find small businesses owned by women and Native Americans and sent individual invitations to them.

While we initially believed it would be difficult to hit our goal of having 75 entrepreneurs attend, we quickly realized that we might have the opposite problem of having too many people RSVP without the resources to support them.

Buses, Food, and Hotel Rooms

Due to the amount of entrepreneurs who were signing up for EDSC, the Emerging Prairie team immediately faced three challenges. The first was figuring out how many people would be utilizing the free buses for transportation. In North Dakota, it's not uncommon for people to drive long distances to attend events, and roughly 75% of the attendees decided to use their own transportation. Because of this, we realized we would only need one bus instead of three buses and that the single bus would just need to depart from Fargo since that was where the largest portion of riders would be coming from. For those from places outside of Fargo who wanted free transportation to the event, we suggested carpooling with the option of being reimbursed for mileage.

Up to the day before the event, the numbers of confirmed attendees were rapidly changing. From well-known entrepreneurs signing up the week of the event to people emailing that last minute issues had come up and they wouldn't be able to make it, fluctuations made it difficult to nail down exactly how much food we should order for events we planned at the ND Governor's Residence and at the State Capitol.

Eventually an executive decision had to be made to cap the number of attendees at 92. For those 92 attendees we reserved around 75 hotel rooms and negotiated with the hotel to only pay for the rooms that would be filled.

For food for a reception we planned for the Governor's residence we planned for appetizers for up to 100 people (92 entrepreneurs + Emerging Prairie staff and the Governor's staff).

For a luncheon we were planning to do with the entrepreneurs and their local state representatives we planned for 150 attendees (92 entrepreneurs + Emerging Prairie staff + 50 legislators). For the luncheon we assumed that one legislator from each of the 30 districts represented would show up.

Once the issues of food, hotel rooms, and the bus were solved we then had to come up with content for the event, as well as a communications strategy to effectively communicate details of the event to both attendees and the legislators they would be meeting with. While the content side of the event would prove to be the easiest to organize, the communications strategy was more difficult. It turns out that both legislators and entrepreneurs are pretty busy at all hours of the day and don't fully read their emails, meaning the Emerging Prairie team needed to repeat information multiple times.



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AT THE CAPITOL

An Evening Social

In the late afternoon hours of January 20, 2019 the attendees of Entrepreneur Day at the State Capitol arrived in Bismarck. After checking into their hotel rooms everyone gathered together in the lobby to board a bus to Governor Doug Burgum's private residence. Once there, EDSC attendees ate appetizers and socialized with each other, as well as with the Governor, the governor's staff, and the staffs of officials from the ND Department of Commerce and the Bank of North Dakota. During the evening multiple people gave speeches praising entrepreneurship and the work being done in the state to remove barriers for small business owners.

After spending a couple of hours at the Governor's residence, EDSC attendees were then transported to the Starving Rooster, a bar / restaurant located in downtown Bismarck that Emerging Prairie staff were able to get to open that night specifically for EDSC. This portion of the planned EDSC activities was probably one of the most enjoyed by attendees. After a couple of more hours of socialization, the EDSC attendees then returned back to the hotel to retreat to their rooms for the rest of the night.

A Day in Session

On Monday morning, attendees of EDSC woke up to a full day's worth of activities. Right away in the morning, entrepreneurs could attend an "orientation session" with a lobbyist to learn about how best to communicate with their legislators on bills important to them. Then, attendees spent the morning grabbing coffees with representatives from their districts. While Emerging Prairie gave the entrepreneurs the contact information for their legislators, these meetings were set up independently by the entrepreneurs themselves. During the noon hour, more than 150 entrepreneurs and legislators then gathered for a luncheon where five prominent entrepreneurs gave short speeches about their businesses and the state programs / resources they utilized when first starting out.

The end of the day was capped by entrepreneurs sitting with their representatives on the house and senate floors during the daily session, going on tours of the capitol building, as well as attending committee hearings on bills. Finally, all EDSC attendees gathered for a group photo before leaving Bismarck to go home.



"This trip made the barrier between lawmaker and citizen less daunting..."

According to a post-event survey that 40 Entrepreneur Day at the State Capitol attendees took, more than half had never been to the North Dakota State Capitol outside of a field trip that they or their children took for school. About 90% said they would be willing to engage more with their legislators in the future.



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CONCLUSION

After EDSC

The bus ride from Bismarck back to Fargo was quiet as exhausted entrepreneurs slept. In the days after the event though, attendees from Entrepreneur Day at the State Capitol raved about their experiences. One told his friends about how his local representative let him cast votes on the house floor. Another talked about how she was so inspired that she decided to start a weekly meetup of entrepreneurs in her city. A post-event survey sent out to attendees confirmed what the Emerging Prairie staff already knew — entrepreneurs loved EDSC.

Out of 40 responses, 70% gave it a 10/10 rating. More than 90% said they were able to meet or talk with a state legislator, and more than 70% said they would be likely to engage in advocacy efforts for issues important to entrepreneurship with lawmakers in the future. Favorite memories included hearing from the Governor the night before, meeting with fellow innovators, and being able to get a front seat to witness the state's government in action. Many spoke about how easy it was to speak with their state representatives about issues important to them and their businesses.

When it came to complaints, they were few and far between. Most centered around having a greater variety of food available for meals. Some mentioned that there should have been some sort of orientation before the entrepreneurs arrived at the Capitol so they could learn more about interacting with their legislators. (Little did these entrepreneurs know that an orientation did, in fact, take place. However, it took place early Monday morning — the morning after the social at the bar).

Entrepreneur Day at the State Capitol was an innovative solution to the communications gap that sometimes exists between legislators and innovators. It proved that there's a substantial interest in events such as these that seek to remove barriers to entrepreneurs and make it easier for them to learn more about the policymaking process. EDSC also proved that a small nonprofit with no previous experience with interacting with a state legislature can organize an event that brings value to both entrepreneurs and policymakers. It is our hope that this event serves as a template and case study for the Kauffman Foundation and others who seek to increase entrepreneurship throughout the United States.