



Building a Thriving Entrepreneurship and Digital Economy Ecosystem in Ada, Oklahoma

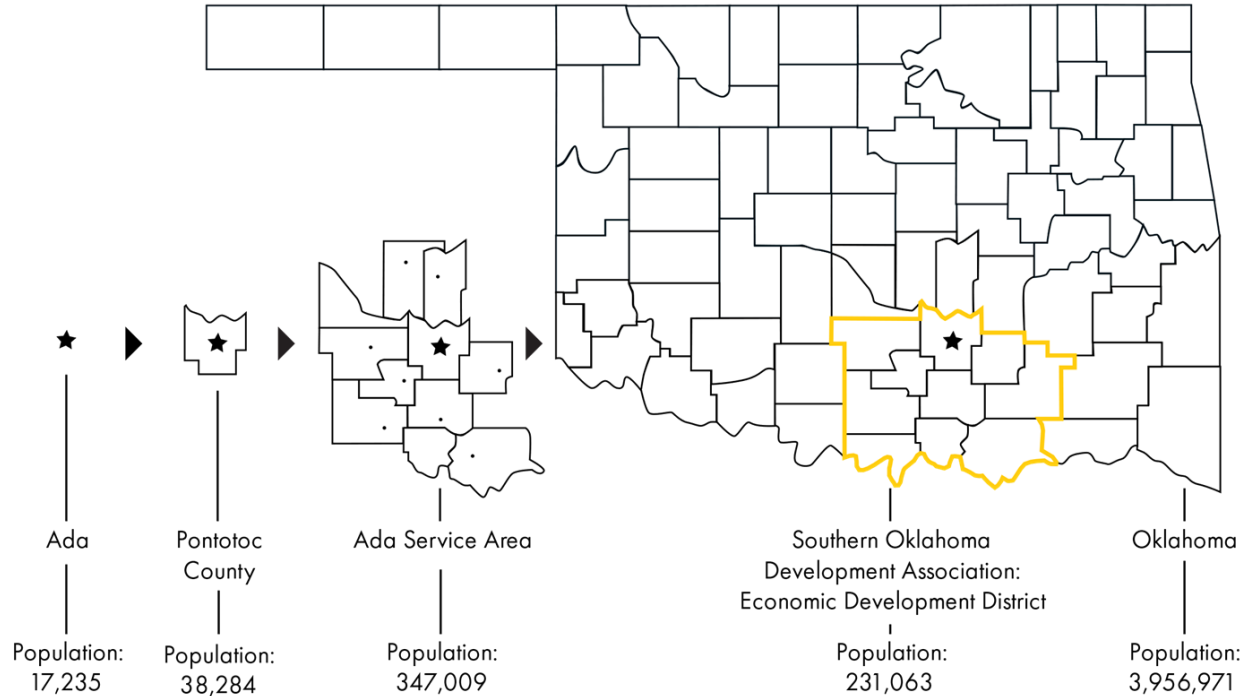
IEDC Webinar – Entrepreneurship via ESOs

Presented by – Srijita Dia Ghosh, Entrepreneurship Specialist, AJF

Thursday, March 18th, 2021

www.growada.com

Regional Context



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program (PEP), July 1, 2019
SODA Population, Source: American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, 2016



Who Are We?

The Ada Jobs Foundation (AJF) contracts with the City of Ada to promote and recommend economic development opportunities with the city. We were established in 1998 to create and retain quality jobs for the Ada area.

We serve as a "one-stop-shop" for economic development by coordinating with the city and other entities for the community's benefit.

We are also one of 68 economic development organizations accredited by IEDC as an Accredited Economic Development Organization (AEDO).

Areas of Focus

Entrepreneurship & Digital Tech Economy

Create a thriving entrepreneurial culture and ecosystem to increase the number of startups + Support digital tech talent and companies.

Business Retention & Expansion

Assist existing businesses + Help them grow.

Business Attraction

Bring in new export industry businesses.

Community Development

Improve quality of life + Attract and retain talent.

Local Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Partners

City of Ada

Chickasaw Nation Small Business Network

East Central University – School of Business

Pontotoc Technology Center – Fab Lab/Maker Space

Ada Main Street

Ada Chamber of Commerce

Digital Economy, Entrepreneurship & Broadband Action Team

Ada's Entrepreneurship Support

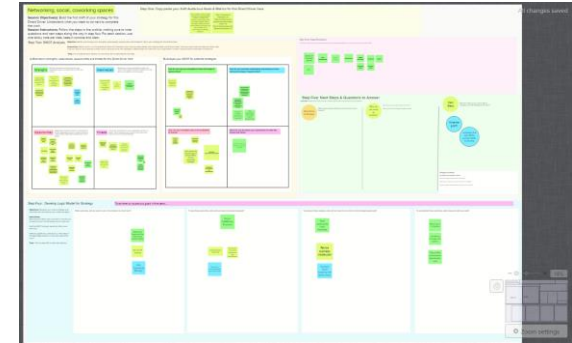


Current Programs:

- Startup Ada Bootcamp
- The Big Pitch
- Community ESHIP Hour
- Entrepreneurship consultancy (business plan guidance etc.)



Community-based strategic initiative with Public Input & Action Teams

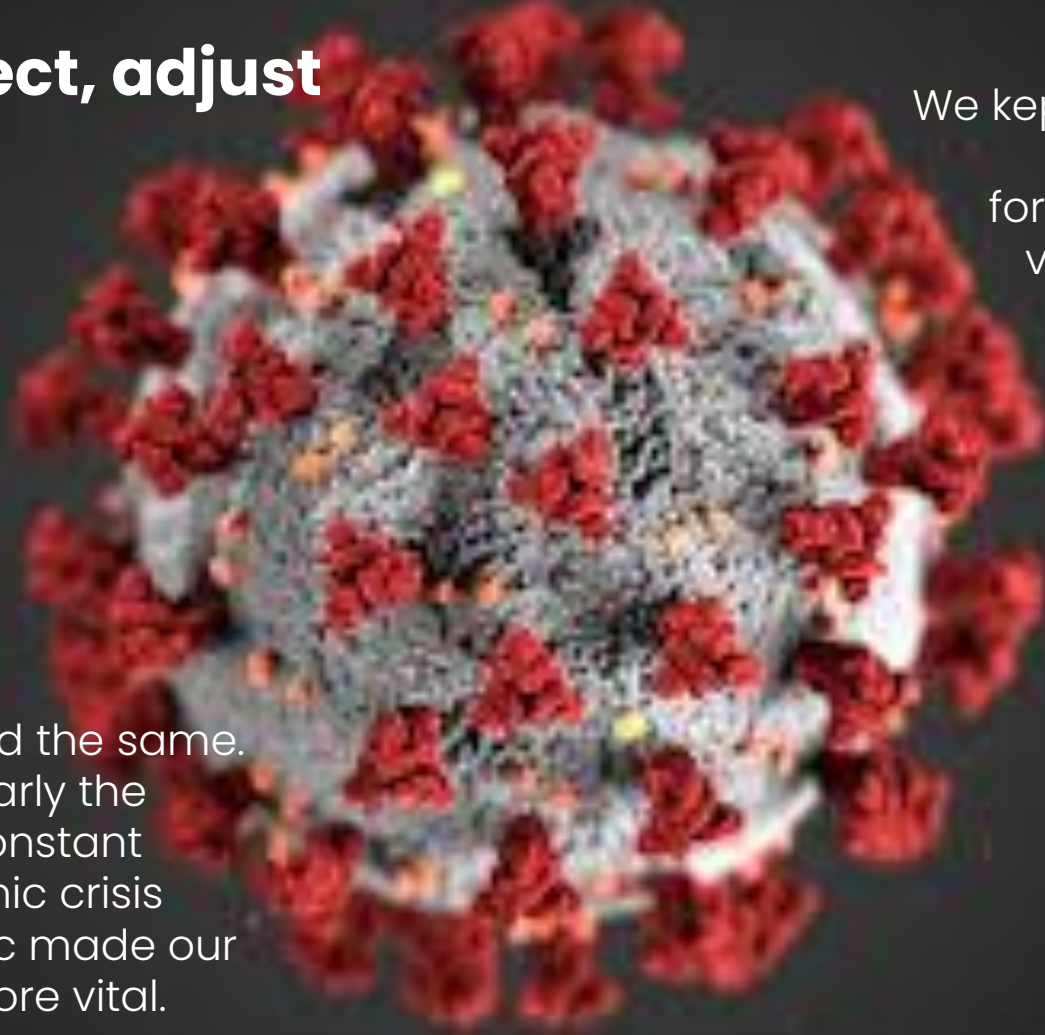


Rural Innovation Initiative Technical Assistance/Rural Innovation Network

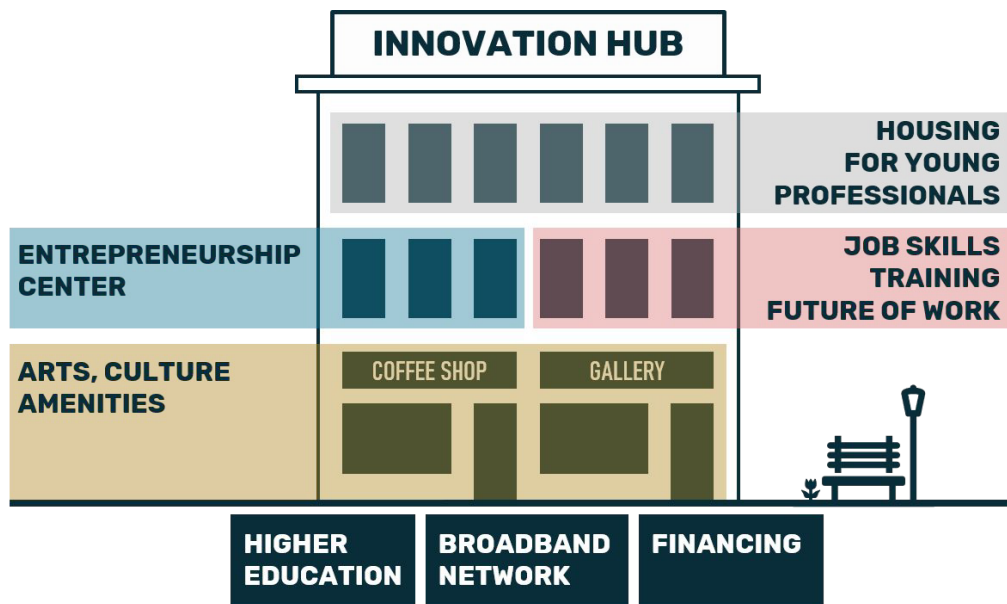
Pause, collect, adjust

We kept our strategy and programs moving forward while working virtually through the COVID pandemic.

Some things stayed the same. A lot changed. Clearly the uncertainty and constant change of economic crisis from the pandemic made our work that much more vital.



Rural Innovation Initiative: Origins & TA approach



CORI/RISI works with rural communities to build **digital economy ecosystems**

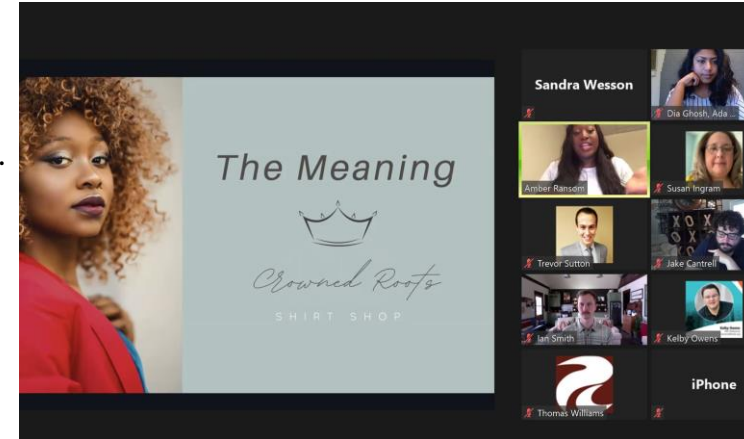
- Focus on tech-enabled, innovation-based jobs and businesses
- Focus on scalable entrepreneurship
- Ecosystem requires intentional development of assets across multiple domains



Community Entrepreneurship Hour

The Community Entrepreneurship Hour is a monthly event for local entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurship community to educate, engage and support new business.

We meet every second Wednesday of the month to hear local entrepreneurs pitch their businesses and provide an opportunity to the ESHIP community to engage in Q&A and provide feedback that will strengthen the speaker's business.





The Big Pitch – Ada

The Big Pitch Ada is a business pitch competition that provides a platform for entrepreneurs to pitch their business ideas to a panel of judges and compete for cash prize money. Companies can apply to compete in two categories: revenue generating companies and idea-stage companies.

- In 3 years, 35+ early-stage entrepreneurs participated in the program with a 54% successful launch rate.
- Lesson learnt: taking a step back to provide more educational opportunities.

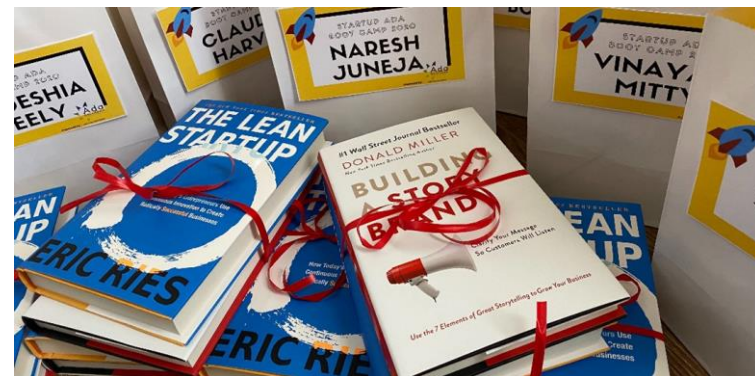
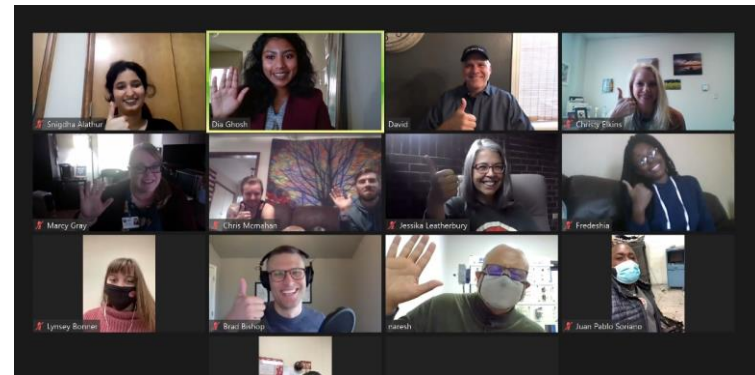




Startup Ada Boot Camp

The **Startup Ada Boot Camp** is a 6-week cohort-based program designed to equip entrepreneurs with the education and resources needed to take their businesses from the idea stage to being ready to pitch. SABC brings together early-stage startups and small businesses in the rural Oklahoma region for six consecutive Tuesday afternoons leading into “Demo Day” at The Big Pitch Ada event.

Each class includes expert speakers, topic-based curriculum, active work periods for hands-on learning, and networking. Topics include Customer Discovery, Legal Basics, Creating a Minimum Viable Product, Financing, Marketing & Branding, and How to be Pitch Ready.





Startup Ada Boot Camp

- In 3 years, the program was attended by 25+ entrepreneurs with 12 early-stage companies successfully graduating the program
- 6 companies have already launched and are generating revenue in its first and second years of business.
- 2020 IEDC Entrepreneurship program awards category – Silver award winner.





Udacity – Future is Digital Challenge

The Future is Digital Challenge is an initiative focused on upskilling rural Americans in learning new digital skills to help them participate in the nation's growing tech economy.

AJF partnered with the Center On Rural Innovation, and Udacity, a worldwide digital career advancement education platform, to make Udacity Nanodegree Program scholarships (three learning tracks: business analytics, digital marketing or front-end web development) available for residents of Pontotoc, Garvin, Seminole, Coal, and Johnston Counties in Oklahoma.

Center On Rural Innovation's



**Future Is Digital
Challenge**



Udacity – Future is Digital Challenge

- Achieved 26 total enrollments, 40% foundational course completion rate.
- 8 Nanodegree scholarship awardees.
- 3 Nanodegree program graduates.
- Looking at piloting similar digital skilling programs in partnership with CORI and local tech center.

"I fell off track earlier on in the program due to personal and work stuff, but got back on track thanks to Udacity staff members checking-in and providing accountability, especially after the holiday season. I loved the multiple short-videos format of the program—this helped break down the curriculum and made it less overwhelming. I also loved exploring and learning more about 'Tableau' as a part of the curriculum. I am grateful to the Future Is Digital Challenge Program and the Ada Jobs Foundation for this scholarship opportunity; it has allowed me to complete an expensive course for free and I am excited to use what I have learnt from this program in my day-to-day job".

Snigdha Alathur

Business Analytics Nanodegree Graduate
Data Warehouse Engineer Contractor, Chickasaw Nation, Ada, OK



Program Goals & Target Audience

Through our entrepreneurship support programs we aim to provide **educational opportunities** to entrepreneurs & help create a **culture of innovation & openness** where new ideas can be developed, pitched, & improved.

The target audience are **entrepreneurs, early-stage startups & small business owners** looking at launching a new product line or revisiting their target customers. The goal is to reach individuals in **rural communities** who do not have equal access to entrepreneurial educational opportunities.

Our Approach

- Collaborate with local partners and regional organizations to build a diverse and sustainable program.
- Lean on resources, community-centric, and quickly adaptable to new circumstances.
- Commit to: **inclusion** by design, and being consistent.

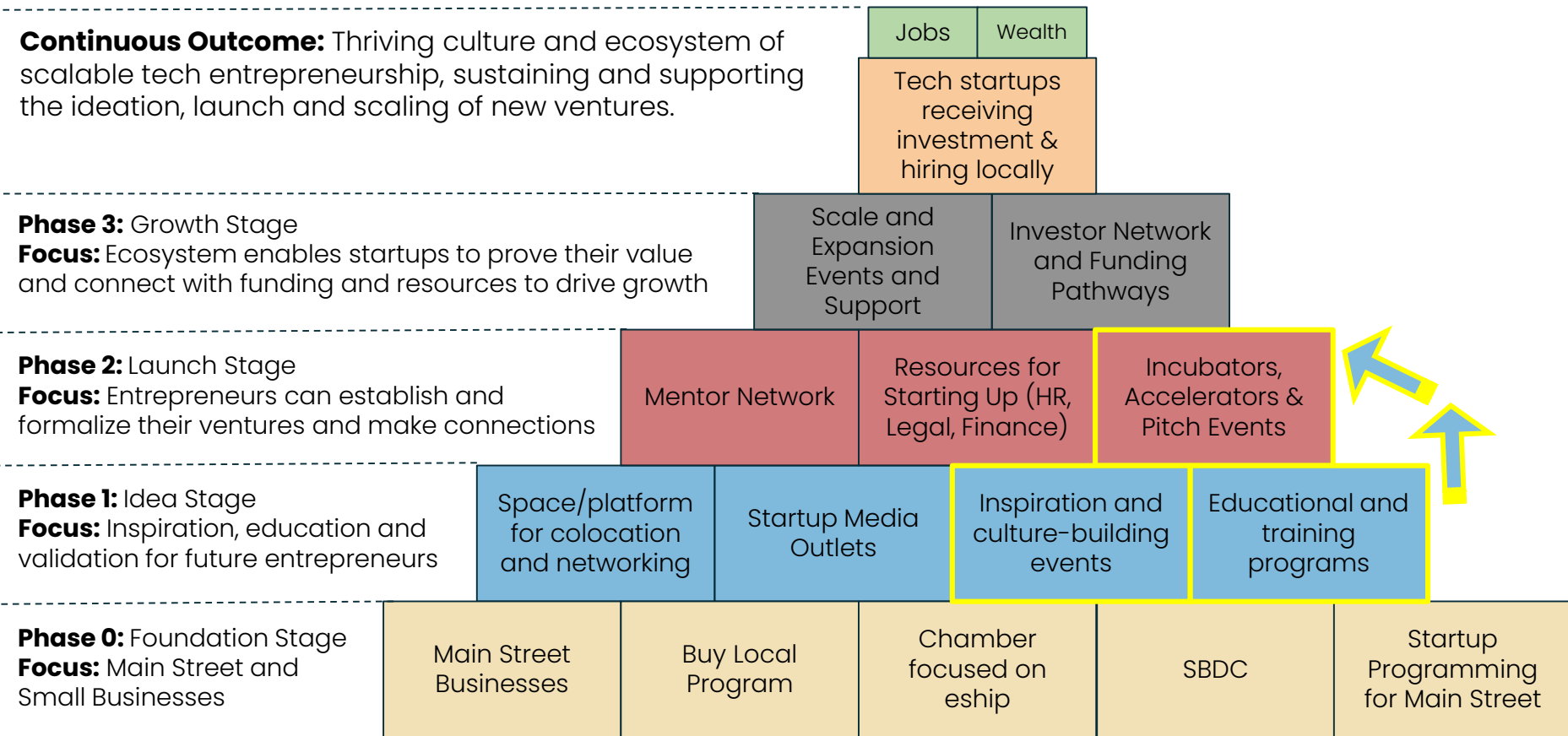
A man in a dark suit is standing at the front of a room, clapping his hands. Behind him is a mannequin wearing a long, flowing purple dress with a yellow bodice. To the left, a large screen displays a poster that says 'Pitch ADA' with a lightbulb icon and the text 'GET US WITH YOUR BEST PITCH'. The room is filled with people seated in rows of chairs, facing the front. A woman is standing near a doorway on the right side of the frame. The overall atmosphere is professional and focused.

Key Takeaways

- Curate a program brand that resonates in a rural context/integrates the local ecosystem.
- Keep the program framework flexible while retaining core focus.
- Sometimes we must take a step back in order to move forward.

Patience is key!

Building Blocks of a Scalable Tech Entrepreneurial Ecosystem



Next steps...

- EDA Build to Scale Venture Challenge
 - Grant application
 - Coworking Space
 - Tech Accelerator Program
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Thank you!

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