

*Umsung*

HEROES

OF ECOSYSTEM BUILDING

**Impact Brief**

September 2020

# INTRODUCTION

It started as an idea on an ESHIP Storytelling call in September 2019—a campaign to highlight entrepreneurial ecosystem builders who selflessly serve in their communities but don't always get thanked. The idea quickly gained momentum among a small, core group who, despite lack of funding, would spend the next year volunteering hundreds of hours of their time to shine a spotlight on our peers in the field of entrepreneurial ecosystem building. This is the story of the *Unsung Heroes of Ecosystem Building* campaign.

## **Project Description**

In 2020, the *Unsung Heroes of Ecosystem Building* campaign raised awareness of what is happening across the nation in terms of bringing the [ESHIP Goals](#) to life. We focused on unsung heroes of the movement by highlighting several exemplary ecosystem builders each month alongside an introduction to the specific Goals and initiatives (e.g. February Goal 1, March Goal 2, etc.)

## **Value Proposition**

The team identified three distinct value propositions for the project:

- Highlight ecosystem builders that aren't typically in the spotlight, thereby raising their profile locally and nationally
- Educate the ESHIP community about Goals 1-7 and ways to support their peers' efforts
- Aim to inform other national conversations around ecosystem building in conjunction with initiative 6.2 - Global Awareness Campaign

This report provides a peek inside at both the process and the results of this inspiring project.

## **Team Members**

Core team members for the project included [Anika Horn](#), [Jess Edwards](#), and [Jeff Bennett](#).

# BY THE NUMBERS

As ESHIP Goal 5 folks can attest, advancing the field of ecosystem building requires metrics and data. We start here, with the raw data and numbers of the *Unsung Heroes* campaign.

**42:** Number of Ecosystem Builder Spotlights

**12:** Number of Goal Articles & Case Studies

**54:** Total Number of Articles Published

## Quantitative Impact - Engagement

### Website Analytics

All articles were published on the [Ecosystem Builder Hub](#) website, and all can be found under the category [#unsungheroes](#). Google Analytics for the articles reveals a strong interest in the series of articles.

**5,700+**: Page views (# of views of campaign articles)

### Social Media

All articles were shared on social media channels throughout the campaign. Shares on social media were key to driving viewers to the website to read the articles. Channels included; Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook. A unique Twitter handle was created for the campaign; [@UnsungHeroesEB](#).

Social media by the numbers:

- **120**: Twitter Followers (February 14th - September 2nd)
- **1,000**: Twitter Engagement (The sum of interactions received for the tweets published in the selected timeframe: retweets, replies and likes)
- **10,000+**: LinkedIn Views (summary views of original LinkedIn posts by Jess, Anika, and Jeff. Does not include original LinkedIn posts by other people and reposts):

Most engagement per tweet:

[Eric Renz-Whitmore, March 3](#): 15 retweets, 4 replies, 44 likes


[Universal Support, July 13](#): 8 retweets, 7 likes

[Taj Eldridge, March 16](#): 7 retweets, 1 reply, 16 likes


## Notable Shares

[Keystone Podcast episode](#)

Startup Communities - No direct link (Category: Ecosystem Building)



**Sharon Zivkovic**  
Founder



**Unsung Hero Spotlight: Christina Theodoraki**

An Ecosystem builder is someone that observes or is capable to identify a problem as a system and contributes or provides a solution in a holistic manner. These are persons who discreetly or loudly contribute to build a vibrant ecosystem.

Just came across this article - What Is An Ecosystem Builder  
<https://ecosystembuilderhub.com/christina-theodoraki/>

Ecosystem Builders | Adelaide, Australia · Posted Jul 10, 2020

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## Forward Cities newsletter

### Unsung Hero Spotlight: Kim Louis

Forward Cities' New Kensington Project Manager Kim Louis defines what ecosystem building means to her, where she finds motivation, and reflects on the state of the field in this recent EB Hub spotlight.



[READ KIM'S INTERVIEW](#)

## COST

In launching the project, the team had zero budget. Despite the lack of committed funding, the team developed a plan to crowdsource as much of the labor as possible.

In June of 2020, recognizing the impact of the campaign on the field, CO.STARTERS, committed to sponsor the series of Goal 6 articles with a \$500 contribution.

**176:** Labor hours spent on project

## QUALITATIVE IMPACT

Throughout the campaign, it was inspiring and gratifying to watch communities respond to the publication of profiles of ecosystem builders in their community.

- “Your recognition has really made a buzz! While I’ve been at the Juneau Innovation Summit, quite a few of my friends and colleagues have said they saw it. Thank you for doing this project. It really helps recognize people who give their expertise and energy to communities. It is a good reminder to do more to recognize these important people.” - Jacqueline Summers
- “I shared the spotlight on Facebook and received 34 comments, 7 shares, and 138 likes. Thanks for what you're doing. There is absolutely a collective impact in what you've done so far!” - Beth Zimmer
- “It has been shared with all high level contacts on a state and national level through the various partners.” - Diana Schwartz
- “Yes, others saw it. It was a nice honor. It’s hard to launch new efforts, so we really appreciated the boost for our nascent campaign. Keep it up, you guys are awesome! Seriously grateful to you.” - Victor Hwang
- “I did a media interview and they mentioned seeing the spotlight!” Heather Metcalf

## KEY TAKEAWAYS & LESSONS LEARNED

### Lessons Learned - Anika

When we announced our call for nominations, I hoped for 20 - 25 nominations in the two weeks we had planned. After all, we solely relied on our personal LinkedIn networks and had zero budget for marketing or partnering with other organizations. So when we ended up with over 70 nominations, I was thrilled! Clearly, I expected all 70+ nominees to jump on the opportunity to be

interviewed immediately! That's when I was reminded just how busy entrepreneurial ecosystem builders are. In the end, through many conversations and follow-ups, we interviewed more than half of the nominees. Throughout this campaign, despite long hours of coordination, writing and editing, I was in awe of the dedication and tenacity I glimpsed through these conversations.

As campaign organizers we gained a unique perspective of the work of entrepreneurial ecosystem builders: On the one hand, we read the nominations which showed much gratitude and appreciation for a hard job well done.

- "I don't know another ecosystem builder who works as tirelessly on building a community like Adam. I've had the honor of knowing Adam (aka Dondo) since 2012... Not only did he work diligently to build his startup (Local Ruckus, but he contributed an abundant amount of time to co-founding and co-leading the Kansas City Startup Village."
- "I want to nominate Mara Hardy as my favorite ecosystem builder! Mara, we are so thankful that you moved over from Denver to Grand Junction and hit the ground running! You've made a huge impact in our community!"

Seeing, on the other hand, how these ecosystem builders are making an impact in communities around the country was nothing short of humbling! I was astonished by the depth of expertise and dedication they demonstrated through their work. The unique character of our campaign allowed us to hold up a mirror to these grassroots champions and demonstrate just how much they are appreciated and valued in their communities."

## Lessons Learned - Jess

**The nomination phase...** While we did get a small amount of self-nominated "unsung" ecosystem builders (quite opposite of unsung!), the amount of nominations pouring in for unsung heroes from the communities, colleagues and entrepreneurs they serve strongly validated that the shared DNA of most ecosystem builders is to truly be a humble servant leader. Reading the emotional nominations that expressed great appreciation and awareness for their ecosystem builder's work only reinforced my notion that **advocacy is absolutely critical**. Because, ecosystem builders will never shine the light on themselves. So, there are so many untold stories to tell!

**The project development process...** A small but mighty team of self-starter ecosystem builders came together to test the power of collaboration, and attempt to shine a spotlight on fellow colleagues doing exceptional work to advance our profession. The campaign highlights individuals and communities through each of the ESHIP Goals. Reflecting back on where we started and how organic it was... the outcome is pretty magical! While this project was bootstrapped and penniless for the most part, it was one of the most enjoyable and efficient project teams I have ever been on. Working with Anika Horn and Jeff Bennet can be summarized by Steve Job's theory that "A small team of A+ players can run circles around a

giant team of B and C players.” From time to time, we all took turns being discouraged or burnt out, and then, we also took turns injecting enthusiasm and a little extra work to get the team back on track and keep the project moving forward. Regardless of the obstacles, **working with a purpose-driven team is extremely rewarding and carries a high probability for success!**

**For “F’s” sake!...** Oh, for FUNDING’s sake! :) While the finished product is so polished and professional, there is still a great lack of institutional support. Not only is it disappointing, it also is to the detriment of quality projects like *Unsung*. For this work to continue on; the commitment needs to come in the form of funding. **Funding to highlight the actual work being done in the field is imperative to moving the profession forward.** Sadly, you can have all of the ideas and talent in the world on your side, but, if you do not have funding then it is hard to ever keep things sustainable.

## Lessons Learned - Jeff

### **Stories Resonate**

Since launching [Ecosystem Builder Hub](#) in February 2019, I’ve watched the website analytics to see what resonates with ecosystem builders who visit the site. Aside from an article I wrote about mapping ecosystems, the content that has been visited the most are the spotlights of ecosystem builders. The website traffic and social media engagement throughout the campaign are testament to the desire of communities to share and celebrate the ecosystem builders who are working hard to make their communities better. We as a field of ecosystem builders need to continue to share and amplify these stories.

### **Casting a Broader Net**

We relied too much on our own networks in putting out the call for nominations. While we had a goal to be intentionally inclusive with this project we fell short of that goal and a lesson learned is to put extra time and effort into finding additional channels and networks of networks to help increase nominations among communities of color.

### **Small Action-oriented Teams Get Things Done**

Having been involved with the ESHIP Champions and Goal calls since they started in the Fall of 2018, I’ve taken part in a lot of discussions around efforts to professionalize the field of ecosystem building and deliver initiatives to advance the seven ESHIP Goals. While discussion is necessary, at some point people need to commit and start doing the work. Even with no funding there are things that ecosystem builders can do to advance the field. This project is proof that a small team of ecosystem builders who are action-oriented can deliver an impactful result for the broader community. We need more small, action-oriented teams to do and deliver.

## THE PROCESS—HOW WE DID IT

The idea emerged in conversations with Anika, Jess, and Jeff after an ESHIP Storytelling call. We had no budget, so we opted to crowdsource the community through nominations and a standard interview template.

Jess put together a Google form for nominations and we sent out calls for nominations through our networks and then sent out a template of interview questions to those who were nominated. We ended up with over 70 nominations and 40 nominees responded. We reviewed all that info to develop an editorial calendar for publishing.

Publication officially launched in February with a profile on The Keystone Podcast (thanks Yuval and Charlton!). Each month we wrote a summary post for the featured goal and aggregated the interview responses then published them on Ecosystem Builder Hub. Then Jess, Anika, or Annette Wong created social media posts for each article of that series and scheduled those.

### Publication Schedule:

- Feb 13: Campaign Introduction + Official launch Valentines episode on Keystone
- Feb 27: Goal 1 Spotlights
- March 18: Goal 2 Spotlights
- April 19: Goal 3 Spotlights
- May 16: Goal 4 Spotlights
- June 20: Goal 5 Spotlights part 1
- July 1: Goal 5 Spotlights part 2
- July 8: Goal 6 Spotlights
- August 21: Goal 7 Spotlights