



*Working Together for a Stronger Rural Idaho*

# Organizational and Operational Review Report

This project is funded through a grant with  
USDA-RD, RIVDA, & Idaho Commerce.



**Report  
Provided by:**



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*Working Together for a Stronger Rural Idaho*

## **BUSINESS SOLUTIONS + DO GOOD!**

We are committed to your success and that of our community!

Our Impact Team of consultants helps organizations create a thriving business. Why? When your business thrives it creates space for you to help our communities thrive!

# Meet Our Team



### **DR. MINDI ANDERSON**

ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT  
CONSULTANT

Mindi has a long-standing reputation for strategically developing, growing, and leading small and large organizational structures within her military, civilian, and non-profit career. She is a disciplined 22+ year military veteran committed to developing strong partnerships and community-based support to Idaho through her various roles.



### **BLOSSOM JOHNSTON**

IDAHO PARTNERS FOR GOOD  
FOUNDER & CONSULTANT

Blossom has worked with 1,000+ Idaho nonprofits in all forty four counties over 35 years. She started Idaho Partners for Good as a result of finding a better solution to the same problems all for-profit and nonprofits struggle with-infrastructure. Having worked under two governors (Kempthorne, Risch), the J.A. & Kathryn Albertson Foundation, and in the start-up world, she understands Idahoans and our place-based resources like few others. Her purpose is to improve the well-being of families and children and she does this by leveraging opportunities, relationships, and resources.

# Scope of Work

## PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

On behalf of the Idaho Rural Partnership (IRP), Region IV Development Association, Inc. (RIVDA) contracted Idaho Partners for Good (IP4G) to conduct an organizational and operational review of the IRP and lead the facilitation and development of a strategic plan for 2024-2029. Using a strengths and appreciative inquiry approach, IP4G examined IRP's current organization and operations, provided recommendations for the improvement of the overall management structure of the organization, and facilitated the development of a strategic plan to guide future operations. This project is funded in part through a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development (USDA-RD) awarded to RIVDA and a sponsorship from the Idaho Department of Commerce awarded to the IRP.

## SCOPE OF SERVICES

1. Compilation and review of pertinent background information including:
  - Organizational mission and responsibilities as outlined in Idaho Code 67-9005
  - Examine the funding history of the organization.
2. Identification of strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and possibilities of the current operational structure.
3. Clarification of roles, responsibilities, and authority of the IRP Executive Director.
4. Facilitate collective and confidential individual stakeholder participation in the development of a strategic plan for 2024-2029. Stakeholders should include but not be limited to current board members, IRP project volunteers, funders, disadvantaged rural constituencies, rural advocates, and relevant elected officials.





AUGUST 2023

# SOAR ANALYSIS

The SOAR Analysis is designed to build on strengths that require less effort and resources than trying to correct weaknesses, as people find it more engaging and exciting to focus their attention on positives rather than negatives.

PROVIDED BY IDAHO PARTNERS FOR GOOD

# Idaho Rural Partnership: SOAR Analysis

## SUMMARY

This report summarizes the strategic SOAR analysis based on the information provided during the Environmental Scan. Interviews both in-person and virtually, stakeholder assessments, and community reviews conducted by the survey were used to analyze and summarize major themes and goals that provided recommendations to build the Idaho Rural Partnership 2024-2029 Strategic Plan.

A SOAR analysis looks at the categories of Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results for an organization. IP4G collected the following data from a variety of sources to carry out the strategic SOAR analysis:

- Interviews with IRP Directors and key stakeholders: in-person and virtual = 27
- Stakeholder assessments: 42 survey responses from the Idaho Rural Success Summit, and 27 survey responses from the Environmental Scan survey.
- Community review stakeholder input - 14 responses
- IRP meeting minutes, Annual Reports, and other key historical artifacts including the University of Idaho report on the impact of the Community Reviews.

**Based on the outcome of the SOAR analysis, we recommend Idaho Rural Partnership Strategic Mapping and Planning concentrate on the following areas:**



*Reference to Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool, AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation, October 2017*

The results of the SOAR analysis will be used in combination with reports from the inventory, Environmental Scan, Report Prioritizing Key Improvements, and Potential Funding Sources Report to inform the strategic mapping and final 2024-2029 strategic plan for the Idaho Rural Partnership.

**Note:** there are two distinct stakeholder groups that are part of the IRP ecosystem and would be considered end-users; those who live and work in rural communities and those supporting these communities. Most of the IRP Board represents the latter group.

**"SOAR analysis is a powerful tool to bring stakeholders together to recognize the potential of the organization and create a shared vision of the future".**

# SOAR Analysis

SOAR analysis is a powerful tool to bring stakeholders together to recognize the potential of the organization and create a shared vision of the future.



## Strengths

What the organization does well, along with its key assets, resources, capabilities, and accomplishments.



## Opportunities

Circumstances that your team could leverage for success, eg. to improve profitability, market share, or competitive edge.



## Aspiration

An expression of what you want to be and achieve in the future. A vision to build on current strengths, provide inspiration, and challenge the current situation.



## Results

Tangible outcomes and measures that demonstrate you've achieved your goals and aspirations.

Building on strengths requires less effort and resources than trying to correct weaknesses, as people find it more engaging and exciting to focus their attention on positives rather than negatives.

Reference: [Stavros, Jacqueline & Cole, Matthew. \(2013\). SOARing towards positive transformation and change.](#)



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## STRENGTHS

The IRP established an environment for high-level collaboration, coordination, sharing of resources, etc. Leaders leverage their collective wisdom and use a holistic approach to support the IRP mission. The Community Review process works and addresses most of the Idaho code responsibilities. A variety of agencies (State, federal, regional, local) resources along with their expertise provide deep expertise in all areas rural communities need support. There are historical documents with key impact data. They retain a nonpartisan nature.

## OPPORTUNITIES

Forecast the IRP as a player in the larger economic development strategy being developed for the state. Capitalize on the need for the Board of Directors to learn, share, collaborate, coordinate and problem solve together (e.g., roundtable segment) whether during Board meetings or via other methods. Once the strategic plan is finalized (re)engage key companies that benefit from the assets and resources of rural communities.

## ASPIRATIONS

With both the Idaho Rural Partnership and the rural economic development strategies being developed concurrently, it's a great time for the Governor to fully re-engage in formulating a comprehensive state rural policy that cuts across all state departments and agencies and is coordinated under an intergovernmental rural-focused body like the IRP. This would require both the authority and funding necessary to be successful.

## RESULTS

Community reviews are impactful and designed to provide information from external community development experts and help create a forum to express a diversity of viewpoints and garner citizen feedback. We recommend designing a 2.0 Community Review process that positions rural communities for a thriving future (e.g., readiness, resources, and capacity building).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The IRP should work with communities to forecast the needs of rural Idaho in the next 10 years then help meet these needs through capacity building, resourcing, support to remove challenges, coaching/mentoring, and most importantly being a place where collaboration and productive dialogues can occur. There's a great opportunity to nurture on an on-going basis both ends of the spectrum - those who provide resources and those on the front-line (rural).
- Align the IRP strategic plan with the larger rural development plan being developed by the Department of Commerce. Then, identify where IRP fits as a long-term partner.
- Re-engage, leverage positive historical relationships with rural community leaders to better support the needs of rural communities.
- Reimagine the next evolution of the Community Review process. *Note: Design a quicker method and a 'readiness assessment'.*





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## Strengths

What the organization does well, along with its key assets, resources, capabilities, and accomplishments.

## STRENGTHS ANALYSIS

### IDAHO RURAL PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE

- The roundtable segment of Board meetings is very valuable to individual members/agencies. It helps inform their work and allows them to learn, share and collaborate or coordinate across agencies.
- There is a sharing of resources, opportunities to engage and problem solve, and time to ask questions. The value of sharing and collaborating is high enough to warrant participation.
- Smaller agencies benefit from being at the table with large ones. There is no organization positioned to be a hub for rural partnerships other than the IRP.
- Strong, consistent participation from federal agencies.
- Being known for bringing all providers to the table.

### COMMUNITY REVIEWS

Purpose: Community reviews (CR) are designed to provide host communities with systematic information from external community development professionals, create a forum to express internal leadership viewpoints and citizen feedback, recommend resources, and provide follow-up as needed.

- All community review survey participants identified the strengths of the process included: Helped them identify and understand issues and it helped them assess their community and economic conditions.
- Grew community participation and involvement temporarily and in some communities, long-term.
- Ability to get to know a community over time.
- Active listening allows a community to drive the process and reinforces that they are the masters of their destiny.
- Diversity and expertise of the visiting team members.
- Each Visiting Team member volunteered and paid for their own expenses (or paid for by their agency) so it doesn't impact IRP's budget.
- Expert voices help local communities look at their challenges differently.
- The reports included both macro and micro issues in the community which helped small organizations/businesses have a way to participate in the solution.
- Policy changes were a direct result of the report.

### PARTICIPATION

- Highly invested leaders who are deeply committed to the mission.



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- Diverse table of leaders resulting in a holistic approach to their work
- There is a focus on remaining nonpartisan, no matter the community being supported.
- Breadth and depth of collective wisdom from a wide variety of leaders with different backgrounds
- There are designated IRP Board seats (Note: this was expressed several times with the caveat: if the director is committed). Idaho Rural Partnerships Diverse Board of Directors is unlike any other group/agency/commission and can do what no one else can because of the diversity of leaders, resources, mandates, etc.

## RURAL COMMUNITY IMPACT

- A trusted source of information both internally to the IRP Board and externally facing with many communities that have completed the community review.
- Help communities comply with or help negotiate resolutions re: federal mandates.
- Relationships have built credibility both between IRP leaders and the rural communities they serve.
- Brought valuable resources into rural communities.
- No other single agency has their cache because they come together as experts supporting rural communities.
- Support for agencies moving from single-disciplinary thinking to coordinating, collaborating, and problem-solving together to solve rural Idaho problems.
- Provided a unique gateway for rural communities to connect with state/federal programs.
- Force for coordination, bringing together varied resources, regardless of whether they are Federal, State, or Local. Also, communicating with community leaders. We've developed a history of working with communities and could capitalize on that success. e.g., the Rural Success Summit. The Rural Success Summit is the most recent example that highlights all those orgs that bring people together, along with local agencies.
- Strong foundations built from support from legislature and governor, and well-respected state and federal position.
- Partnerships formed to better support the work of the IRP. e.g., University of Idaho Cooperative Extension grant management support.
- The broadband work completed previously was very successful.
- Provided communication tools: Resource Directory (outdated), newsletter and Distribution list, Facebook page, LinkedIn page and Twitter feed (not used).
- Strong relationships with other state Rural Partnerships' and nationally resulting in best practices, funding, and other resources.

***IRP Director Quote: "Everyone is focused on how do we help this community be its best self. Total rural economic development experts come together to take time away from their jobs to do this"!***



## Opportunities

Circumstances that your team could leverage for success, eg. to improve profitability, market share, or competitive edge.

### OPPORTUNITIES

#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS and KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- IRP did not come up with a name across most of the data collection methods used. It is not *currently* a place people associate with rural resources, coordination, etc. The opportunity is to create visibility, access and understanding for citizens to solve their pain points and know how to access resources. Despite this, there are IRP directors that believe, “Without Idaho Rural Partnership there’s no easy starting point.”
- Decide if Idaho wants to keep the State Rural Development Council structure or move to something different.
- Decide if the appointment of directors’ method is working.
- If collaboration is central to the mission, then evaluating the frequency of meetings as well as the systems and structure that support this is critical.
- We were unsuccessful at recruiting members from the different tribes to participate so future efforts should be made to include them in meaningful ways.
- There are many large agricultural, forestry, mining, and production companies in Idaho and beyond that depend on rural communities for their resources and should be tapped to fund the work of the IRP.
- Increased in-migration changes near metro areas and increased out-migration in more remote areas leaves elderly with additional needs that we could support.
- Currently there is more federal focus and therefore resources available for rural areas that we could access and help rural areas leverage.
- Align the direction and strategic plan with the larger rural development plan being developed by the Department of Commerce.
- Help locals navigate power dynamics regarding community gatekeepers (e.g., founding families).
- Reimagine how to support rural communities who often lack staffing support.
- Help agencies truly collaborate and navigate the power dynamics and territorialism (funding restrictions).
- Use our expertise, support, resources to move local plans toward completion.
- Use our super-collaborator strength to bring multiple organizations and agencies together to solve problems.
- Continue to collect impact data from Community Review reports to know whether what we do is working.
- Consider the lodging challenge for Visiting Teams as not all communities can provide it.
- Reconsider the current Community Review process as it takes too long from initiating the process to handing off the final report.



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- Design and stabilize renewable funding (e.g., Monsanto, ICF/DAF, INL, etc.) - half of respondents identified the lack of funding as a limiting factor for IRP and its work.
- Boots on the ground are critical to developing and maintaining deep empathy.
- Obtaining a quorum at IRP meetings can be a problem.
- When the IRP Executive Director is working so hard to keep the job then they can't do their job. (Note: this had a lot of energy behind it in the interviews.)
- Communicating the different resources and opportunities coming from the federal, state and regional level that are available and helping rural communities tap the resources they need to access them.
- Rural voices from different parts of the state are central to all strategy and design of services and programs.
- Consider amending the statute establishing the IRP or support on-going funding requirements as the current funding situation is untenable.
- Be the go-to place for information, best practices, and resources so we don't leave rural communities out on their own; bring the expertise to help them move forward.
- Come alongside communities during a disaster to help them leverage the support they need.
- Consider finding a way for agencies and partners to collaborate and share resources and intel not just during Board meetings which are currently infrequent.
- Develop relationships of trust with partners so they look for the most sensible solution rather than focusing first on what is required by their own agency mandate.
- Each agency resides in their silo, but IRP gets us out and working together, albeit some members have to because they are mandated.
- Intentionally build on existing relationships to strengthen the outcomes for rural Idaho and each agency.
- Continue to support the Broadband efforts because it is key for rural communities.
- Document the impact of our work (quantitative/qualitative analysis) and create stories about the successes that have followed.
- Obtain annual funding from the legislature for IRP Executive Director position. Ensure legislators are aware that this is a code without funding.
- Develop a 'qualities of readiness' assessment for communities to ensure they are ready to engage in the Community Review process.
- Adapt the size of IRP's Board to meet the needs of the future strategy.
- IRP's strength is the broad and diverse base of partners. Be careful to develop the right kind of organizational structure that builds on our strengths and furthers the engagement of current and future partners. Note: Federal partners are concerned that moving this under one agency will weaken participation.
- Map the work being done by other agencies to identify duplication versus redundancy.
- Work with ITD district engineers to identify the most effective methods of feedback they use and replicate it for IRP.
- Reengage congressional office staff at the IRP Board level.



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## Aspirations

An expression of what you want to be and achieve in the future. A vision to build on current strengths, provide inspiration, and challenge the current situation.

### ASPIRATIONS

- Become a one-stop shop for resources and support.
- Design communication and feedback loops to allow for input directly from rural communities.
- Consistent leader and staff
- Strengthen governance structure.
- Building networks/partnerships to serve rural communities.
- Curator
- Braintrust in service to rural communities.
- Balance heart with strategy
- Fill the gap where collaboration is the solution in rural communities.
- Innovation hub: place to go to get help with trying new ideas to solve problems.
- Dot connector
- Address the burn-out issue (VT members) from the rural communities but also those with resources.
- Be a living entity that is capable of pivoting to better meet the emerging needs of rural communities.
- Catalyst: Start things and spin them into other organizations/agencies.
- Relationship-broker: both ends of the spectrum need a place and people who will help them connect to deploy and receive resources, technical assistance, etc.
- Collaboration comes from familiarity/relationships between state, federal, city, county, and community interests.
- Create a compelling narrative of the importance of neutrality + shared commitment to the health of rural areas + an objective process + vision + diversity of perspectives without being predisposed to set outcomes but allow rural communities to drive.
- Design delivery system(s) to be a go-to place for resources, capacity building, directory, etc. to meet the needs from both ends of the spectrum.
- If agency appointed directors buy into the concept/plan they bring significant influence and resources to bear.
- Increase collaboration to solve and support together (equity among small/med/large agencies) and reduce duplication of efforts. This requires knowing what each has and does and a way to keep updating this information.
- Be able to move from ideas to concrete actions.
- Find ways to be indispensable to the legislature, Governor, and other agencies.
- What does rural Idaho look like 20-50 years down the road? (Cast vision)
- A clear, compelling view of purpose.



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- Community Reviews: Increase the number of community reviews Idaho Rural Partnership is able to do and turn them around quickly. This requires reimagining how Idaho Rural Partnership might double/triple the number of Community Reviews annually.
- Help mayors (communities) develop the map for their preferred future.
- Help rural communities identify and tap their true potential.
- Historical programs: Rural Success Summit, Capital for a Day, Harmonia and Harmony program (focused on learning about tribes and Latino populations), Research, Leadership training.
- LHTC model might be a good one to replicate.
- Be a catalyst, train up and mentor next gen leaders in/for rural communities: The ability to bring in new (young) leaders on a rotating basis to build capacity to do good in their communities after graduation. Replacement of those who have been in the field a long time. Be a catalyst for people to get engaged in rural opportunities. Figure out pipeline of knowledge, experience and capacity to mentor next gen to take up rural issues.
- Restructure and develop a strong strategy to be able to recruit large companies back to the meeting table.
- Be a catalyst for people to get engaged in rural opportunities. Figure out pipeline of knowledge, experience and capacity to mentor next gen to take up rural issues.
- Find a stable, long-term structure that is independent so no one agency directs the agenda.
- Figure out how to make the magic happen all the time. Legal support seems to be a good place for them to work.
- Key is to be a collaborator. Figure out the needs and bring partners together to resource them.
- Create a clear strategy and tangible substance to support rural communities.
- Create a consulting practice as a revenue generating option.
- Is there something like a Community Review but faster and helps aggregate resources for the community?
- Document success stories together (Community Review: VT) and as a result of their collaboration/coordination, etc.
- Coordinate with Economic Development professionals to submit a few bullet points on IDAHO RURAL PARTNERSHIP with their monthly reports to the legislature/Gov/State. Report should clearly define the needs and potential solutions + tell the story after the project is completed.
- Utilize/capitalize knowledge networks and channels to communicate effectively.
- Go-to place to help resolve federal mandate challenges.
- Formal on-boarding process for new directors.

**“IRP is uniquely positioned to be the place where the broad conversations on how to best support rural Idaho can happen.”**



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## Results

Tangible outcomes and measures that demonstrate you've achieved your goals and aspirations.

### RESULTS

- Diverse perspectives from across the rural spectrum.
- Work has been done in the past to create policies and procedures around the structure and functionality of the IRP.
- Resources are shared/maximized to meet the need.
- Completed 8-10 community reviews per year.
- Foundation for a strong collaboration is established through the IRP model.
- Community reviews are impactful and designed to provide information from external community development professionals, create a forum to express viewpoints and garner citizen feedback, recommend 2.0 CR process (readiness, resources, and capacity building)

**Collaboration comes from familiarity, relationships between Federal, State, County, City, and community interests!**



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## INVENTORY REPORT OUT

### SUMMARY

Idaho Partners for Good (IP4G) conducted an inventory of all services currently provided by the Idaho Rural Partnership (IRP) in relation to their organizational responsibilities as outlined in Idaho Code 67-9005. In this inventory IP4G will outline current practices with recommendations on best and future practices.

Services Currently Provided by The Idaho Rural Partnership:

1. Community Review Assessment Report of Findings
2. Idaho Rural Success Summit

Idaho Partner for Good evaluated Community Reviews that occurred between 2017-2022 and the original evaluation research conducted by the University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System\*.

### COMMUNITY REVIEW OVERVIEW

Community Reviews (CR) are comprehensive assessment programs that provide information and tools to help communities address priority issues and enhance quality of life for their residents. In Idaho, each CR is initiated by a mayor, city council, chamber of commerce representative, or some other concerned community member, by submission of an application to the IRP. Historically, there have been two to three CRs, (each lasting two to three days) conducted each year.

There has been 40+ CRs conducted by the Idaho Rural Partnership since 2000. The CR process is open to communities with populations under 10,000 people.

### OBSERVATIONS

- The Community Review Service meets an area of the IRP's responsibilities as outlined in Idaho Code 67-9005 and is a highly valued service.
- Overall, the communities that responded felt like the process was very beneficial.
- Key takeaways on how the CR was used included: engaging community members, designing and implementing economic development work, addressing housing needs, getting funding, helped focus their community improvement efforts, and as a 'driving force' to focus their change efforts.
- The IRP has value in the eyes of these communities: listening to outsiders who can say things they need to hear, a catalyst for change and a road-map for the city/county, increased collaboration, a range of expertise provided by the Visiting Team, and the reports from other CR communities helped them see what's possible.
- In most cases, new leaders emerged which is identified need in rural communities.





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- This process is highly relational and allows communities to design the best process for their improvement.
- It engages people from a variety of community sectors and allows for their voice to be heard alongside those who typically have power and influence.
- It uncovers both the strengths and weaknesses within the community and allows people to choose where they play.
- It takes too long for the communities to get their reports.
- Facilitation by experts is key to resolving issues and removing barriers.
- The diversity of expertise in Visiting Team members, their commitment to these communities, and the weight they feel for the responsibility of supporting these communities is highly commendable.
- The unexpected happened in these ways: instead of uniting two towns as hoped the process split the efforts of both; the power of the new relationships forged during the CR has carried on. Out-of-the-box thinking began to happen.
- The data from Visiting Team participants aligned well with the data from the communities themselves. The Visiting Team also highlighted these elements which are important to the process: listening session, visioning process, facilitation to engage all voices, opening doors to funding other resources.
- The Community Review process has been revised to standardize the survey for ease of comparison between communities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- This is a highly valued service because it helps the IRP meet their responsibilities and is something that is associated with this organization in Idaho.
- Dr. Lorie Higgins should help design the future CR so that the process is streamlined and based on the ‘readiness to benefit’ by the community.
- The need for aggregating resources and expertise will not diminish over the next decade, so keeping a focus on collaborative resourcing, providing technical assistance, and opening doors for funding to implement robust community plans should be a high priority.
- Documenting the stories of impact in these communities should also be a high priority so the IRP can effectively tell the story of their value and why they need to exist. There is a template that was used in the twenty-year report that could be repurposed.
- There may be a need to do a readiness assessment to ensure the community is ready to do the deep work and heavy lift of economic and community development.

“I think this also comes back to funding, communities not having to spend large amounts of money on consultants or contractors when they have IRP/U of I/state/federal resources people come to their community at little to no charge to them. This is a crucial piece of this puzzle that truly helps rural communities. This lets them focus on actionable grant writing rather than grant writing for consulting.” - Visiting Team Member



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### Stakeholder/End-user: Community Review Data

Five communities were represented in the survey, including Blackfoot, Arco/Mackay, McCammon, Ashton.

#### 1. How were the communities able to use the results of the Community Review report?

- It was meant to draw the communities together for common purposes, instead it highlighted the differences and the different approaches between the two towns. In Arco, they tried to use the recommendations of the CR to design and implement community and economic development work, but it appears that the local paid staff were more interested in cultivating the INL than the hard(er) work of building a local economy. There was an impression that both could and should have been done.
- To improve community involvement.
- To obtain congressionally directed funding for their new fire station.
- It helped the community look at micro-issues/opportunities collectively as a group. The variety of people and agencies allowed the communities to focus on a few small issues that were achievable.
- As a driving force to bring about numerous areas of change, including creating a farmer's market, community events like Movies in the Park and Safety Fair, designing and funding a fire station to be built in the near future, update about 75% of building codes and zoning and make improvements to the downtown area.
- Major findings were the need for longer-term employee housing and new construction.

#### 2. How many new community members emerged as a result of the Community Review?

- Anywhere from 8 - 250
- Sometimes people have been community members e but participated more after the CR including on NPO boards. Local Education Foundation and at - school district level.

#### 3. What unexpected events occurred as a result of CRs?

- Butte County withdrew support from Lost River Economic Development and started their own economic development unit.
- Great connections were made which resulted in more impact and better relationships.
- pressure by the community on the city - including out of the box thinking.
- Different voices could be heard.

#### 4. Which issues did the Community Review address? (Listed from most addressed to least)

- Helped identify and understand issues in our community.
- Helped assess our community and economic conditions.
- Helped identify organizations, authorities, and resources to address various aspects of our development.



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- Improved intergovernmental collaboration with existing government and community organizations.
- Helped conduct outreach and facilitate communication between residents and organizations that provide services to our community.
- Helped solve unnecessary impediments to our community development.

**5. Why should the Idaho Rural Partnership exist?**

- They help facilitate conversation by bringing in people external to the community with diverse views and experience.
- The process of doing a community review and the subsequent report served as a driving force to bring about positive change because of the momentum it created. The CR report can be a useful data point when advocating and implementing improvements in the community. Larger cities likely have the resources and manpower to bring about change and improvements, but for small communities these resources are often not available within the community.
- Collaborations between government agencies help communities prioritize.
- There is great power in voluntarily bringing different agencies together to serve rural communities to benefit and assist communities.
- For communities with a large corporation supporting their economy, IRP support can help them develop their economy independent of that corporation for when their support is low or when they withdraw from the area. Helping communities adapt to their individual changing economic and social situation.

“Larger cities likely have the resources and manpower to bring about change and improvements, but for small communities like us, without the help of IRP I would guess none of the improvements and changes we've been able to accomplish in the years since would have come about.” - Community Review City Council Participant

**Visiting Team Members Data**

The group of 7 experts who responded to the survey have supported most of the community reviews, so they have first-hand insight and expertise in both the pros and cons of this core service.

**1. Name(s) of the communities you supported through the community review process.**

- Rexburg, Rigby, Soda Springs, Athol, Gooding, American Falls, McCammon, Grandview, Glens Ferry, Blackfoot, Ashton, Harrison, About 20 all the way back to the first one in Heyburn, McCammon, Kuna, St. Maries, Kamiah, Bonners Ferry, New Meadows, Silver Valley, Nez Perce/Lapwai, Driggs, Dubois, Sandpoint, Aberdeen, Preston, Cascade, Kimberly, Plummer,

**2. In what ways does the community review process assess the community and economic conditions of rural Idaho?**

- Community reviews are locally focused and may also focus on the state.



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- Identify individual community challenges and strengths. Awareness leads to planning, implementation, etc.
- Listening sessions, community tours, determining priorities, bring teams together to strategize how to implement priorities.
- Gives local citizens and leaders insight into the community from an outside perspective.
- Uses a community-centered approach which leads to the focus areas being mostly selected by the community members engaged in the process to define the topics they'd like to focus on. There are instances where the leading home team members are city staff and will mostly lead the discussion and forward engagement and it is not fully participatory for all community members, but the Visiting Teams often help guide that discussion towards a more community-centered approach. The visioning process is robust in many ways and helped communities see they were interested in many of the same issues as they moved through the process.
- Gather input from a wide variety of citizens in participating communities through a community satisfaction survey and listening session focus groups with 6 - 10 stakeholder groups in each community. Qualitative documentation and standardizing the survey allows IRP to document changes and conditions across communities in Idaho.
- Assess the built environment, natural resources, assets, and opportunities from both an inside perspective and from the Visiting Team.

**3. List specific (qualitative/quantitative) results that occurred as a result of the CR process in communities you supported.**

- Based on the advice and resources identified during the review the American Falls community leveraged millions in state and federal funds to renovate their downtown.
- Connection to state and federal resources helped fund identified needs/challenges. Community skate park in Glenns Ferry for youth activities, CRITICALLY needed spotlight in Ashton on highway 20 for Yellowstone Park traffic. Downtown beautifications include building new parks. Establishing new city committees to work on requested projects.
- Providing a final report to keep communities focused on designated priorities.
- Rexburg used it in several substantive ways (Main Street work). Other towns took different approaches.
- Using deep analysis of surveys and ripple effects mapping (REM) to identify indirect outcomes.
- Empowering communities by having resource people in the room but not directing the community members and merely being guides.
- in-kind matching allows communities to leverage larger funding sources.
- Gives communities solid documentation of need that provides them with a way to obtain grants.



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- Increase in project development and completion because the CR verifies what residents want to see in their community. Listening sessions reveal desired quality of life improvements and ideas for achieving them. City leaders that apply for CRs are typically more focused on economic development and infrastructure needs so the listening sessions provide a more comprehensive and balanced assessment of residents' desired future.
- Assisting new and existing leaders with developing project plans and resources for completing them.
- Increased hope and community pride following a community review. Residents think that if the IRP and all participating agencies/experts in CRs believe they can succeed, then they start to believe they can.
- Allowing a number of new leaders to emerge through the CR process.
- Strengthening the community's relationship with the region's economic development agency, resulting in obtaining numerous grants for projects identified through the CR. Using the Community Review as a catalyst to secure funding for a Fire Station, broadband expansion and congressionally directed funding for the Fire Station, it has also opened doors for partnerships with other community organizations.

**4. List ways the CR process helped solve unnecessary impediments experienced by rural communities.**

- Helped expedite projects that might have taken additional years were it not for the review.
- Connecting communities to specialists and resources. People/communities don't know what they don't know. Connection and collaboration are huge in overcoming hurdles.
- Helps prioritize projects and gets people on the same page, but not necessarily eliminate impediments. Many priority projects need money and need a 'champion' to manage priorities. These are 2 things rural communities don't usually have. So a great plan comes out of the process, but no guarantee that follow-through will occur or funding will be available.
- Helped communities understand the need to cooperate if they wanted to collaborate with other agencies.
- Supporting communities so they don't have to spend large amounts of money on consultants or contractors allowing them to focus on actionable grant writing rather than grant writing for consulting.
- Supporting increases in different kinds of capital, including social capital - residents get to know each other better and trust is built between residents and city leaders and organizations.
- Supporting increases in social capital - relationships between community leaders/orgs/residents with state and regional experts and service providers who offer guidance, information, and funding resources, which in turn results in project development and implementation.



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- Providing a blueprint for completing 3 - 6 projects identified in the first phase of the CR, as well as coaching and other resources that support teams implementing the projects.
- Knowing experts on a first name basis to help work in depth on future projects.

#### 5. How might the CR process be improved?

- Greater community participation. The Visiting Team was able to attend during the day, but for a bedroom community, there should be multiple times to participate at times that work for the community.
- Leadership development training for home teams and residents recruited for phase 2 action planning. Identifying how to continue new processes after funding has ended.
- Dedicated funds for a coach stipend and mini grants to support small projects identified through the CR. Also dedicated funds for a survey center to administer rigorous community satisfaction surveys (e.g., HELPS Lab at Montana State University).
- A faster, clearer, streamlined process Many community members lose interest when there is 6 - 12 months of waiting in between sessions/visits.
- More time for the Visiting Team to offer ideas than the current process allows for.
- Provide continuous assistance and support via IRP coordinators, to guide communities toward funding opportunities and to help communities navigate pitfalls. IRP coordinators to help communities implement plans that come out of the CR process. Right now, once the CR report is finalized, it appears communities are then on their own to implement.
- Community and city leaders take the lead. IRP leaders shouldn't be able to insert opinions or persuade listening groups or CR members; they should be strictly facilitators. Make it possible for communities to ask for assistance with a specific project or issue. Under the current scheme communities must pick 2 areas of focus (a third area economic development is required whether or not the community wants it) and are required to go through surveys and listening sessions that might not be relevant to the immediate needs of a community.
- Require communities to bring to the table a nominal sum of cash to match their review. This is a good test of a community's capacity to carry out and implement review findings. The most successful reviews in terms of follow-through were in those communities that made a cash contribution to their review. It also creates a sense of investment and buy in. A good rule might be a minimum of \$1K up to \$1.00 per capita.

#### 6. Why does the Idaho Rural Partnership need to exist?

- IRP has the advantages of name recognition, connections with other rural development councils through Partners for Rural America (PRA), institutionalized board participation through agencies like Idaho Commerce,



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USDA-Rural Development, Housing and Urban Development, Idaho Housing and Finance and the University of Idaho to name a few.

- To help rural communities self-diagnose problems.
- Support rural communities survive and thrive. They need to attract and retain youth and businesses. They need housing, childcare, broadband, etc. They typically lack funding and experienced professionals to help implement priorities and navigate challenges.
- Bring together diverse partners from state, federal, county, city, local, non-profit and industry partners to discuss important rural concerns.
- Provide resources otherwise unavailable to rural places without someone knowing someone. It's vital to connect rural places with real people working in the agencies.
- Conduct Community Reviews and advocate for rural needs. It is a non-partisan entity that provides invaluable services to rural communities.
- Powerful partnership-provider and a venue to really discuss the needs of rural communities in Idaho.

**7. Any additional thoughts or comments you'd like to share about ways to strengthen and support Idaho's rural communities?**

- Agencies, universities, nonprofits, and other entities providing services and support to rural communities need to increase cooperative and collaborative relationships and initiatives.
- The updated process works! Keeping the partnerships strong and vital are keys to success. Keeping members engaged and informed needs to increase. Looking for ways to speed up the process is crucial to keep communities engaged. And continuing to offer Ripple Effects Mapping to celebrate how far the community has come!
- Continue with the IRP.
- Communities should be assigned an IRP coordinator specifically to assist with the implementation of CR priorities. Or there should be funding to help communities hire a consultant to help implement priorities. Very focused and very strategic.
- The board is too large and needs to be restructured. Maybe use a regional or district system like other boards and commissions in state government. This would ensure balanced geographic representation. As things stand right now Northern Idaho is underrepresented on the board. Most of the state and federal board members are based in Treasure Valley. The average age of the board is north of 50 years of age. Term limits might help broaden generational participation on the board. Participation from other stakeholders could be achieved through a committee system. 35 is simply too cumbersome to carry out regular business.
- IRP needs a dedicated, consistent source of funding. Sponsorships are not a reliable sustainable model. When times get tough, and agencies are cutting



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budgets one of the first things to go is support for organizations and activities outside of the participating agencies.

- Full-time staffing. IRP needs at least a full-time executive director and a project specialist. This will allow the organization to provide more assistance to communities and stakeholders.
- The website needs to be rebuilt and moved to a cheaper hosting option. IRP pays roughly \$115 a month for web hosting where most business and nonprofits pay anywhere between \$100 - \$200 annually.
- IRP needs a stronger social media presence. This will likely happen if the staffing and funding issues can be fixed.
- IRP needs to formalize board policies and procedures. It is unclear if any exist.

**8. What other information would you like to share with the Idaho Rural Partnership to help them with their strategic future plan?**

- I see the importance; I think we could gain more support if we could improve our timeliness and efficiency and deliver a solid product with tangible results.
- CRs are great, but not when there is no follow up or no continued support to communities.
- IRP's highest priority should be dedicated sources of funding. If legislators and the governor are not willing to fund IRP directly, IRP should consider exploring alternative organizational strategies. In the past, some board members were not actively supporting the organization. Board member engagement, support and advocacy is critical. No box-checkers.

*Note: A team from the University of Idaho conducted a retrospective evaluation of fifteen years of Community Reviews titled: Themes in community resilience: [A meta-synthesis of 16 years of Idaho Community Reviews](#) by Joshua Hightree, Andrew Kliskey, Lorie Higgins, Lilian Alessa, Tammi Laninga & Jon Barrett. We kept our survey to communities that have conducted this assessment since this report was published.*

“The biggest success I participated in was American Falls. Based on the advice and resources identified during the review the community leveraged millions in state and federal funds to renovate their downtown.” Visiting Team Member





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## ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

### SUMMARY

Idaho Partners for Good conducted an evaluation identifying the various stakeholders supporting, resourcing, and working with rural communities. Stakeholders were first identified through a request for input into the future IRP Strategic Plan by self-identifying their interest in being a part of the strategic mapping and planning. Stakeholders also identified other community and economic development influencers who are doing the work in the smallest to the largest of communities across Idaho. All participants were also provided with a copy of the Idaho Rural Partnership (IRP) Code 67-9005.

### OBSERVATIONS

- There are cities, counties, and regions that have economic development plans.
- Holistically advocacy for all facets of the rural community is not represented on the Idaho Rural Partnership, example healthcare, workforce, broadband, and water.
- Economic Development District representation from across the state is not present.
- Stakeholders are eager to learn more about the Idaho Rural Partnerships services and resources that can support their communities.
- Unsure about what IRP does or how to find resources.
- Over 50 organizations, entities, state, and federal agencies identified as supporting the Rural Space.
- Not all regions of Idaho have Economic Development District support. There are alliances formed, and gaps still within region 3.
- Community Reviews are what the IRP is mostly known for.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consider building a stronger collaboration amongst all the community and economic development work being done at the ground level with stakeholders investing in their communities.
- Evaluate the different efforts such as the Economic Development Districts, Alliances, Councils, and ED Pro Grant Funded Organizations that are doing the work in Rural Idaho to bring resources and determine ways to collaborate to build capacity.
- Continue to provide Community Reviews.



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Question 6	
What is the name of your organization?	
Southwest District Health	Idaho Community Foundation
Saint Alphonsus Health System	Teton Regional Economic Coalition
Whiskey Rock Planning + Consulting	Western Alliance for Economic Development
University of Idaho Ext - Digital Economy Program	City of Cascade
Idaho Black Community Alliance	FARE Idaho
City of Greenleaf / Western Alliance for Economic Development	Southeast Idaho Council of Governments, Inc
Cascade Chamber of Commerce	West Central Mountains Economic Development Council
Boundary Economic Development Council	Valley County
Idaho Dairymen's Association, Inc.	Merrick & Company
Avista Corporation	College of Southern Idaho
Idaho County	Idaho Rural Water Association
Sidney Resources Corporation	University of Idaho
NNU	

Question 7	
What is your title?	
Executive Director - 6	Senior Health Education Specialist
Assistant Director	Community Health and Well-Being Coordinator
Chief Operations Officer	Commissioner - 2
Business/Public Affairs Manager	Program Manager
City Clerk (Greenleaf), Secretary for Western Alliance for Economic Development	CEO/Founder/President - 4
Mayor	Chamber Office Manager
Community-based Economic Development Manager	Government Affairs and Funding Specialist
Provost	

Question 8 – What is your age group?			
18-28	29-43	44-58	59+
2	3	14	6



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Question 9	
Who has some of the best programs & services to meet the needs of rural communities? (Please provide name, organization, and email)	Top 3 Most Popular Mentions
Panhandle Area Council	Economic Development Representatives/Organizations/Regional Groups
EDAs	Idaho Department of Commerce
EDDs	USDA
EDCs	<b>Observation: Not all regions are represented</b>
Teton Regional Economic Coalition	
Western Central Mountains Economic Development Council	
Western Economic Alliance	
Clearwater Economic Development Association	
Region IV	
Western Rural Development Center	
WECMDC	

Question 10
Who has some of the best programs & services to meet the needs of rural communities? (Please provide name, organization, and email)
Community and environmental health programs: see clinic services tab: Community Health Programs, Environmental Health Programs, WIC Services.
WICAP
Foundations (LOR Foundation and others working in the state), IDEQ, Idaho Labor
University of Idaho Extension in varying areas delivered both at county and state-wide level.
The Idaho Connect Navigator with community partners such as Black Community Alliance & Idaho Veterans Chamber.
Local economic development organizations such as the Western Alliance for Economic Development are often funded by the IDOC Economic Development Professional grant program. The local interface for traditional economic development focused on small business is critical, providing essential expertise to local chambers of commerce and local business communities in rural Idaho, and provide that essential local conduit to non-local resources.
Mari Ramos – Idaho Hispanic Chamber of Commerce & Orelia Loranzana
USDA Tobin Dixon Rudy Soto. Noel LaRoque, USDA Rural Development Rural Utility Services.
Idaho Commerce (ED Pro Program) - The Idaho Department of Commerce (IDOC) supports community development to rural areas in the state with funding through Gem Grants and competitive Idaho Community Development Block Grant programs, and through support for the



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Northwest Community Development Institute (NWCID). Dennis Porter, Id. Dept of Commerce CDBG Program
Blue Cross, AARP
Economic Development District (EDD) agencies, such as RIVDA for Idaho Region 4 or Clearwater for Idaho Region 2, are perhaps best positioned to provide comprehensive economic development services, as EDDs interface with the IDOC, Federal Economic Development Agency (EDA), commonly have an in-house revolving fund for local business loans, and either have an arm for business development or interface with local economic development organizations. I wish we had one functioning in Idaho Region 3... Information on EDDs in Idaho is available from the IDOC: <a href="https://commerce.idaho.gov/communities/economic-development-districts-idaho/">https://commerce.idaho.gov/communities/economic-development-districts-idaho/</a> . economic development districts are boots on the ground and heavily engaged with our rural communities. Southeast Idaho Council of Governments, Inc, Layne Bourgeois, Panhandle Area Council; Clearwater Economic Development Association; Region IV Development, Michelle McFarlane, Altura Community and Business Consulting, Rick Miller, WCMEDC.
This is a multifaceted response. It requires all agencies and organizations working together to keep all our communities in the loop on resources available. Continued partnership building between federal agencies with programs and funding, State agencies, counties, cities, the economic development council, and other nonprofits will be critical.
Idaho Workforce Development Council
Shelley Roberts, IRWA
REDS, CSI
IWBC
Idaho Department of Environmental Quality also has funding for potable water and sanitary sewer utilities, which are foundational to economic development. IDEQ Grants and Loans Division.

Question 11	
Who do you know of that advises the governor and legislature on public policy and strategies targeted at community and economic development opportunities in rural Idaho. (Please provide name, organization, and email)	# of Mentions
Idaho rural Health Association	1
Economic Advisory Council	2
USDA	1
Department of Commerce	4
Unknown	8
District 7 representative	1
Xexus Green Energy	1
Community Council of Idaho	1
SBA	1



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Secretary of State	1
FARE Idaho	1
Economic Development Districts of Idaho	1
Idaho Association of Counties	1
Idaho Rural Water Association	2
Idaho Association of Cities	2
College of Sothern Idaho	1
Chambers of Commerce	2

Question 13	
Who does a good job of outreach and communication between rural residents and public and private organizations? (Please provide name, organization, and email)	# of Mentions
Health Districts	3
Community Health Coalitions	1
Rural Development Initiatives	1
Health Systems & Foundations	2
Idaho APA	1
League of Conservation of Voters	1
Idaho Business for Education	1
Unsure	4
Idaho Connect Navigators	1
Economic Development Districts	2
Western Alliance	1
Horizon's Lifestyle	1
USDA	3
IWBC	1
IHCC	1
Teton Regional Economic Coalition	1
Western Central Mountains Economic Development Districts	2
Department of Commerce	3
Idaho Rural Association	2
Merrick Company	1
University of Idaho Extension Office	2



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Question 14	
Who is the best at collaborating on a statewide and/or the local level to support rural development? (Please provide name, organization, and email)	# of Mentions
WICAP	1
Local Health Departments	2
Bureau of Rural Health	1
Primary Care	1
Region Development Initiatives	1
University of Idaho Extension	3
Idaho Dept of Commerce	6
REDS	1
Northwest Economic Alliance	1
Unknown	3
USDA	1
SBA	1
Idaho Community Foundation	1
FARE Idaho	1
Southeast Idaho Council of Governments	1
Clearwater Economic Development Association	1
RIVDA	1
Altura Community and Business Consulting	1
Western Central Mountains Economic Development Council	1
Idaho Association of Counties	2
Idaho Rural Water Association	1
University of Idaho Extension Office	3

Question 15			
Are there overlapping services supporting rural economies? If so, explain?			
Yes	Possibly	No	Unknown
7	5	6	5
Comments			
No more lacking services for support			
Social Services Needs			
Representation to services can be			
There needs to be. No single entity has total experience, total bandwidth / reach across Federal, State, & local level, and total resources.			



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The need for overlapping support is especially true for funding community development projects. For example, a rural community in need of potable water or sanitary sewer upgrade faces a multi-million-dollar project. In rough numbers, bond / promissory note funding could be expected to range \$18-24 in monthly user fee increase per million borrowed. Technical assistance and funding partnerships with the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, USDA-RD, Idaho Department of Commerce ICDBG, Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Economic Development Agency (EDA) funding, US Congressional Appropriation, and anyone else the community resource may be needed to cobble together funding to make the project affordable. If a community has a modest \$3million project and receives 70% grant / loan forgiveness from funding partners, then the rural residents are looking at an estimated \$20/mo increase for debt service over the next 20-30 years above current user fees (which should be over \$50/mo to provide funding for annual operation and maintenance expenses plus saving for anticipated component replacements at end of life). Now double this, as both potable water and sanitary sewer systems probably need upgrade. Plus, regulatory burdens are increasing (i.e., water lead/copper, PFAS, etc. and wastewater phosphorus, pharmaceuticals, etc.), such that rural communities face significant utility financial challenges. What is needed is collaboration to effectively leverage expertise and availability of resources. In my opinion, the economic development district (EDD) agency is best positioned to function as a general clearing house for such collaboration because of the requirement for a current local community economic development strategy (CEDS) for eligibility for federal economic development agency (EDA) funding. The EDD has to keep local CEDS current for the rural communities they serve because EDA funding is applied for through, and administered by, the EDD. As a regional entity, they work with the State and Federal levels above them and have to maintain strong local level relationships to be effective.

There are sometimes overlapping services between the economic development districts and rural economic development professionals (partially funded by Idaho Department of Commerce), but as long as everyone communicates and works well together, the more services the better!

Question 16	
Who helps you solve unnecessary impediments to rural development? (Please provide name, organization, and email)	# of Mentions
Rural Development Initiatives	1
Local Members, city or county commissioners, elected officials	2
Association of Idaho Cities	1
Western Alliance	1
Noone - Unsure - Unknown - N/A	13
ID Dept of Commerce	4
USDA	3
Community Partners	1
University of Idaho	1
Southeast Idaho Council of Government	1
Panhandle Area Council	1
Clearwater Economic Development Council	1



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RIVDA	1
County planning and zoning	1
IDEQ	1
WCMEDC	1

Question 17		
Do you know that the IRP provides resources, services, and support to rural communities?		
Yes	No	Unsure
11	6	8

Question 18		
Do you have any examples of how the IRP has supported rural initiatives? (Please provide name, organization, and email)		
No	N/A	Comments
13	2	Community Review's. Really helps people focus on solutions.
		Have always appreciated the work IRP does but they are spread thin and the needs are great.
		IRP is a resource center, connector for business and municipalities to connect with Rural Communities for business opportunities, funding, legislative support, and more.
		Information and resources, community surveys and reviews.
		Community Review/Assessment reports - most recent one I am aware of was the City of Rockland; our organization assisted with the public works assessment.
		They do the review, but they don't follow up.

Question 19		
Did you know the IRP offers Community Reviews to support evaluation of economic conditions in rural communities?		
Yes	No	Somewhat
5	8	3





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Question 20
<b>What other information would you like to share with the Idaho Rural Partnership to help them with their strategic future plan? (Please provide name, organization, and email)</b>
Partnering with local health departments can provide opportunities that are low or no cost that benefit the health of Idaho residents. If you haven't already, I would suggest getting in contact with them to explore potential partnerships that could benefit everyone! Thank you :)
I think IRP needs to be a part of the local health coalitions in rural areas, and the other collaborative efforts taking place, there doesn't seem to be much interest in grassroots planning from IRP, in the past they were some of the biggest supports for grassroots efforts but now they aren't apart of some of the most important work happening in rural Idaho.
Happy to support anyway possible.
In my 18+ years as city clerk in a rural Idaho community, the only service from the Idaho Rural Partnership (IRP) that I did not feel I had more readily available elsewhere is the community review, which I did not have budget to pursue. The IRP may find it challenging to effectively meet the responsibilities mandated in IC 67-9005. In my opinion, the Idaho Department of Commerce's ED Pro grant funded organizations on the local level, the Economic Development District (EDD) agencies at the regional level, and the Idaho Woman's Business Center and the Idaho Department of Commerce at the State level have collaborated to fill the gaps in recent years to largely cover the economic development needs identified in this code section. The IRP may wish to have a serious discussion with the Idaho Department of Commerce (IDOC) and EDD agencies to determine what role exists for mutual support, and for support of IDOC ED Pro grant funded organizations in the State. I would recommend asking the Association of Idaho Cities and the Idaho Association of Counties to contribute to this conversation, as these agencies have broad understanding of rural Idaho from city and County local government perspectives.
Getting broadband connectivity to all our rural communities is fundamental. We can then bring in digital literacy, remote workforce and e-commerce opportunities....
IRP is also a trucking affiliated company and when you search Idaho IRP, that's the first thing that comes up. The SEO needs to be improved, which may be what limits access to IRP resources.
See the Teton County Economic Development plan on the county website.
It would be beneficial to include more organizations and stakeholders doing boots on the groundwork in the rural space.
Working with the Economic Development Districts is a great way to work with individuals embedded into rural communities.
Get integrated by region with currently successful organizations like RIVDA and others. Join the team in a meaningful way.



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I would like Idaho Rural Water Association to participate in each Community Review conducted as a valued resource regarding water/sewer infrastructure as well as familiarity with overall rural community challenges. Sustainability utilities are one of the primary factors in rural economic success. I am also interested in serving in a role with the Idaho Rural Partnership Board of Directors from a non-profit entity focused on the needs of rural communities.

Idaho Rural Partnerships can enhance their strategic plan for the future by incorporating the following key elements:

**Comprehensive Needs Assessment:** Conduct a thorough and updated needs assessment of rural communities in Idaho to identify their specific challenges, opportunities, and priorities. This assessment should include input from diverse stakeholders, such as community members, businesses, local government officials, and organizations working in rural areas.

**Clear Vision and Mission:** Develop a clear and compelling vision statement and mission statement that reflect the long-term goals and purpose of Idaho Rural Partnerships. This will provide a guiding framework for all initiatives and actions undertaken by the organization.

**Collaboration and Partnership Building:** Strengthen collaboration and partnership-building efforts with local communities, businesses, government agencies, educational institutions, and other relevant stakeholders. Foster strong relationships and strategic alliances to leverage resources, expertise, and support for rural initiatives.

**Outcome-Oriented Approach:** Adopt an outcome-oriented approach that focuses on measurable goals and targets. Define specific indicators and benchmarks to track progress and evaluate the impact of initiatives. This will help ensure that efforts are results-driven and provide a basis for data-driven decision-making.

**Flexibility and Adaptability:** Recognize the dynamic nature of rural economies and the evolving needs of rural communities. Build flexibility and adaptability into the strategic plan to respond effectively to changing circumstances and emerging opportunities. Regularly review and update the plan to ensure its relevance and alignment with the evolving landscape.

**Capacity Building and Technical Assistance:** Prioritize capacity building and technical assistance programs that empower rural communities to develop their own solutions and foster self-sufficiency. Offer resources, training, and mentorship programs to support entrepreneurship, leadership development, and sustainable economic growth in rural areas.

**Communication and Outreach:** Enhance communication and outreach efforts to raise awareness about Idaho Rural Partnerships, their initiatives, and the impact they have on rural communities. Utilize various channels, such as social media, newsletters, workshops, and conferences, to disseminate information, share success stories, and engage stakeholders.

**Long-Term Sustainability:** Incorporate strategies for long-term sustainability, including diversifying funding sources, cultivating strategic partnerships, and exploring innovative funding models. Develop strategies to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of Idaho Rural Partnerships' work beyond short-term projects or grant cycles.

By integrating these elements into their strategic plan, Idaho Rural Partnerships can enhance their ability to effectively address the needs of rural communities, foster economic development, and promote long-term resilience in Idaho's rural economies.



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## Input on Idaho Rural Partnerships Strategic Future Assessment

Data Collected 4/17-4/28 2023

### Introduction

Thank you for taking a few minutes to provide us with valuable insight on the people who are part of strengthening rural Idaho. Your input is designed to help us identify leaders and organizations that can help inform Idaho Rural Partnership's strategic future which is intrinsically tied to the health and well-being of rural communities. If you sign up, a follow up survey will be emailed to you to gather data that will influence how we shape the future of Idaho Rural Communities through the Idaho Rural Partnership defined in Idaho Code 67-9005.

*This work is funded in part by a grant with a USDA-Rural Development, Idaho Commerce and RIVDA. Idaho Partners for Good is the consultancy overseeing this work. Questions can be directed to [info@IdahoPartners4Good.org](mailto:info@IdahoPartners4Good.org).*

### Questions & Responses

Organization You Represent?	
Association of Idaho Cities	N/A
Avista Corporation	NeighborWorks Boise
Boise State University	Northwest Nazarene University
Boundary Economic Development Council	Office of the Idaho State Board of Education
City of Greenleaf	One Palouse
City of Rupert	Rogue Credit Union
Custer Economic Development	Selkirk Outdoor Leadership and Education (SOLE)
Elmore County Rural Development	SICOG
Ethos Developments and Ethos Design+Build	Sidney Resources Corporation
Four County Alliance of Southeast Idaho, Inc	Sidney Resources Corporation / Xexus Greene energy
HCL	Silver Star Communications
Idaho Department of Commerce - Business Retention and Expansion Program	Snake River EDA
Idaho Dept. of Commerce	Southeast Idaho Council of Governments, Inc
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation	Southwest District Health
Idaho Rural Water Association	St. Alphonsus Medical System
ISU Community Health Worker Training Program	SVED
Live Big In Idaho	Teton Regional Economic Coalition
LOR Foundation	University of Idaho
Lost Rivers Economic Development	University of Idaho Extension - Digital Economy Program
Mountain Waterworks, a part of Merrick & Company	US Economic Development Administration
Whiskey Rock Planning + Consulting	Valley County



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**Name at least one person who understands Idaho's rural issues from many if not all perspectives? (list yourself, if applicable)**

Kelley Packer	Mitch Lee
Paul Kimmell	Mari Ramos
Peter Risse, Andrew Mentzer, Jeremy Graves, Vanessa Fry, Heather Williams, Jared Talley, Sean Hunter, Alicia Griffith, Marlene Tromp,	David Lincoln, Western Alliance for Economic Development; Roger Batt, Association Management Group; Kerry Huss, Idaho Rural Water; Doug Amick, City of Greenleaf (former Mayor of Wilder, ID, former Chief of Wilder Fire, ran a successful business for 20+ years in Wilder, ID)
No Response	Tom Lamar (latah county commissioner)
Kelly Anthon	Dennison Webb
Jolie Turek, Tammy Stringham, Brian McDermot , Rural economic development pros, some rural elected officials, folks running successful businesses in rural Idaho	SICOG
Christy Acord, Mayor Billy Galloska	Dan Hally
Erik Kingston from IHFA from housing needs perspective	Chantel Greene
Molly Beseris	Liz Mccune
Cliff Long	Kristen Nieskens
Mike Provist	Emma Morton; Krystal Denney; Amanda Collins; Kristen Jensen; Gary Salazar
Jerry Miller, ID Commerce Dept.	Ariel Foster
Brody Miller	Self
Shelley Roberts	Brian McDermott
Diana Scholes, Farhana Hibbert, Rose Cheff	Emma Morton; Krystal Denney; Amanda Collins; Kristen Jensen; Gary Salazar
I feel like I have a good idea along with my rural community partners	County Extension office chairs
Sterling Blackwell	Paul Lewin, Marci Miller, Lorie Higgins, Julia Oxorango, Melissa Hamilton, Loren Whiten-Kaboth, Jap Voss, Dave Doran, Shannon Madsen
Robert Bagley, Cindy Blackwell - Wagon Wheel Motel, Lisa Petersen - White Knob Motel, Mike Evans - ED Lost Rivers Economic Develoment Kn	Sherry Maupin, Lindsay Harris, Cynda Herrick, Dylan
Kristina Gillespie-Jaques	Jeremy Grimm
Kelly Anthon	



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**Where do YOU go to get information or resources for rural communities?**

Mayors & Councilmembers in our cities	USDA listserv
Multiple sources	Dept of Commerce
Idaho Rural Partnerships, Idaho Workforce Development Council, Directly from local communities, Economic Development directors, DOL	Community Impact Program at Boise State
Variety of sources, including Department of Commerce, DEQ, USDA, Panhandle Area Council, and Department of Labor.	Local and state resources
Western Alliance for Economic Development, USDA-RD, Idaho Dept. of Commerce, rural city governments, Association of Idaho Cities, COMPASS for grant availability and regional planning (especially transportation oriented)	
City and County Administration, IDEC	Local newspapers, online resources
Rural Economic development professionals, Altura, Idaho Economic Development conferences, RBDC, Universities, SBDC, SBA., USDA- RD, Labor, Workforce Development, Commerce, SCORE, INL, local Co-ops, LEAP, Idaho Housing, local chambers	Primary data gathering, grant resources, colleagues, usda RD
I received information from the Idaho Department of Commerce, from conferences with organizations presenting, research on the Internet, and networking and connecting with various agencies throughout the state.	Direct engagement, Rural Economic Development Agency and decades of personal experience in working with over 40 tribal communities
By meeting with locals and by attending events and trainings that are specific interest topics.	Office of rural development / Rudy Soto - Twitter
Idaho Department of Commerce, IEDA, IEDC, Idaho Housing and Finance, DOL, ITD, EDA, EPA, USDA, ICF, United Way, LinkedIn- Jerry Miller's posts	LinkedIn, city, county and state websites
federal, state, and nonprofit newsletters/events/organizations, my Commerce team members and our Rural ED Pros	Webinars, Idaho Commerce ED trainings...
ED Pros, EDA Region reps, local rural government officials	The communities themselves; funding agencies; Idaho Department of Labor; Rural Pros (Great Rift, 4CASI); self-lead research through grants.gov and other funding mechanisms; Building Rural Economies program; CEDS; Wealth works
County Farm Bureaus	I am not sure
USDA Rural Development and our field staff	From the community through Community Health Needs Assessments, working with and for the community.
Online	SBA
United Way!	Ranchers, farmers, business people, county commissioners, city officials, non profits
Daily Yonder ; Wyoming Public Radio's Modern West podcast; LOR Foundation's Resources page	Western Community Assessment Network (communityreview.org), Western Rural Development Center, Art of the Rural, The Rural Assembly, RUPRI, USDA ERS, Strong Towns, www. SaveYour.Town
Internet	Government agencies, UI Extension
Several places: Idaho Rural Water Assn. and AIC are wonderful avenues for information/resources	We have an internal (EDA) team of resource integrators that continually compile a list of resources from across the spectrum of public and private agencies and entities.
Social Media	State agencies, Local agencies, WCM Economic Development Council, committees that address rural issues
	Headwaters Economics Online Tools



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Who comes to mind when you think about “champions of rural Idaho”? (list yourself, if applicable)	
Shelley Roberts, IRWA	Kelly Anthon
Paul Kimmell	Mitch Lee
Peter Risse, Andrew Mentzer, Jeremy Graves, Vanessa Fry, Heather Williams, Jared Talley, Sean Hunter, Alicia Griffith, Marlene Tromp	Billy Salts at Magic Electric, Karli Sudweeks who is a teacher in Blackfoot
Please see names given for other questions in this survey	Tom Lamar
Rupert City Administration, Kelly Anthon	Selkirk Outdoor Leadership and Education (SOLE)
same list as above, some rural elected officials	The cogs, SICOG, RIVDA, PAC, CEDA
Elmore County Rural Development, Elmore County Health Coalition and a few other local organizations are beginning to take a look at what our rural communities are lacking. I would like to see more agencies actively involved in rural activities and communities who are experts in their fields. For example, many of our rural residents do not know the resources available to them as homeowners. Being active through television ads (not everyone has a computer), mailers, and other forms of communication are key to rural success.	Chantel Greene and Rudy Soto
IHFA and USDA and University of Idaho Extension offices	Chantel Greene
Many of the ED Pros that have been serving in many different capacities are amazing and true "champions of rural Idaho".	Liz McCune, Ruby Soto, Diane Bevan, and the Department of Commerce
The community members	Jerry Miller
Rose Cheff	Krystal Denney, Amanda Collins, Emma Morton, Gary Salazar, Todd Thomas, Steve Allred
Leaders from IRP, IWBC, USDA Rural Development, Commerce, Rural ED Pros, U of I Extension offices, ag industry organizations, Economic Development Districts	Jeff McCurdy, Chanel Tewalt, Gyni Gilliam, Harry Griffith, Diane Bevan, Ray Soto, Karen Appelgren, Kim Glineski, Chantel Green, David Simms, Mayor Brown Potlatch, Chris St. Germaine, Laurie Higgins, Dr. Jaap Vos, Mayor Steven Rule Middleton, Kendra Witt-Doyle BCI Fndn, Gov. Little, Larry Hall - Jerome, Kristen Jensen - American Falls, Tammy Stringham - Salmon, Kelley Packer, Monica Hamilton - Arco, Jerry Miller - Coomerce, Dennis Porter - Commerce,
County Farm Bureaus	Saint Alphonsus
Noel LaRoque, Shelley Roberts	Usda
Community Members	All officials and non-profits working on behalf of citizens and the landscape.
United Way!	Carolyn Troy, Shauna Arnold, Ann McCormack, Karen Rohn
WCM Economic Development Council, Dept of Commerce, Chambers of Commerce, many non-profits	University of Idaho Extension, UI Extension's Digital Economy Program
Same as above who understand rural issues plus Mike Foster - Mackay City Councilman, Trent Van Lueven - Ag Teacher - Mackay High School, Margie Van Orden - Retired teacher	Dennis Porter
Shelley Roberts, IRWA, Kelly Packer, AIC, Mary Alice Taylor (AIC), Kristina Gillespie-Jaques (MWW-Merrick), Tim Farrell, Noel LaRoque (USDA), MaryAnna Peavey (IDEQ), and so many others!	Yes, I do consider myself as a champion for rural Idaho.

Consulting Services Provided by:



*“This project is funded through a grant with USDA-RD, RIVDA, & Idaho Commerce”*



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**Provide the names of people who are doing a good job of coordinating, collaborating or partnering on behalf of rural communities. (List yourself, if applicable)**

Association of Idaho Cities, Idaho Rural Water Users Association	Cortney Abenroth, Amber Smyer, Kelly Anthon
Paul Kimmell / Inland Northwest Partners	Rudy Soto
Peter Risse, Andrew Mentzer, Jeremy Graves, Vanessa Fry, Heather Williams, Jared Talley, Sean Hunter, Alicia Griffith, Marlene Tromp	Thea Jordan, Jose De Leon, Jenny Hemly
Nancy Mabile of Panhandle Area Council (PAC)	Peggy Jenkins, Palouse Pathways
David Lincoln, Western Alliance for Economic Development; Kelley Packer / Dawn Hall / Justin Ruen at Association of Idaho Cities	Rich French, Chris Nomura (U of I), Tom Lamar
Jerry Miller	Selkirk Outdoor Leadership & Education (SOLE)
Jolie Turek, Tammy Stringham, Brian McDermott, Rick Miller, John Ward, Susie Davidson, Toni Ruth, Dale Lish,	SICOG, Krystal Denney, RIVDA, Altura, PAC, CEDA
Communication and collaboration have always been major issues within the municipalities and counties in which I am involved. With the assistance of Central District Health, Elmore County Rural Development and others are beginning to break down the barriers and meet to collaborate and network to share resources available.	Dan Hally, Chantel Greene, Rudy Soto
Ethos Developments	Chantel Greene
Four County Alliance of SE Idaho, Regional Economic Development for Eastern Idaho Teresa McNight, Department of Commerce Jerry Miller,	Department of Commerce, Rural Economic Development, County Development and Silver Star Communications
Jerry Miller and Kim Glineski on my team at Idaho Commerce	Idaho Commerce
Tom Kealey	Krystal Denney, Amanda Collins, Emma Morton, Gary Salazar; Steve Allred
County Farm Bureaus	I am not sure
USDA-RD, Idaho Rural Water Association, RIVDA, CEDA	St. Luke's Saint Alphonsus, community health groups
Rose Cheff, Diana Scholes, Andra Hansen	Rivda
United Way of South Central Idaho	Leaders of the above organizations.
Community Officers at LOR Foundation ; Center for Rural Innovation	Paul Lewin (U of I), Lorie Higgins, Marci Miller (RDI), Shauna Arnold (Cascade), Ann McCormack (Nez Perce Tribe), Melissa Hamilton (U of I), Polly Taylor Dennler (Juliaetta), Colette DePhelps (U of I), Dave Doran (SICOG), Sarah Toevs (Boise State), Julie Fodor (U of I), Steven Hatcher (arts commission), Erik Kingston (IHFA), Karen Rohn (Potlatch), Bart Cochran (LEAP), Joey Peutz (U of I)
Headwaters Economics, The LOR Foundation	University of Idaho Extension, UI Extension's Digital Economy Program, Idaho Women's Business Center
Shelley Roberts, IRWA, Kelly Packer, AIC, Mary Alice Taylor (AIC), Kristina Gillespie-Jaques (MWW-Merrick), Tim Farrell, Noel LaRoque (USDA), MaryAnna Peavey (IDEQ), and so many others!	Rudy Soto and Dale Lish with USDA. Deb Smith, Clearwater Economic Development Association
Whiskey Rock Planning + Consulting	Valley County, Sherry Maupin, WCM Economic Development Council, Lindsey Harris



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## PRIORITIZING KEY IMPROVEMENTS

### SUMMARY

This report identifies the Idaho Rural Partnership's (IRP) current state in regard to the mission and responsibilities as described in Idaho Code 67-9005. To help understand both the historical and current environment in which it operates, we conducted interviews and surveys with the Board of Directors and other key stakeholders.

We included questions regarding whether they believed the key responsibilities of the Idaho code establishing the Idaho Rural Partnership were being met. We also asked for examples regarding how the IRP was delivering on these responsibilities.

### RESPONSIBILITIES IN CODE INCLUDE

- (1) Assess community and economic conditions of rural Idaho;
- (2) Advise the governor and the legislature on public policy and strategies to identify the community and economic development opportunities in rural Idaho;
- (3) Act as a clearinghouse of information and as a referral center on rural programs and policies;
- (4) Conduct outreach to rural communities and facilitate communication between rural residents and public and private organizations that provide services to rural communities;
- (5) Identify organizations, authorities and resources to address various aspects of rural development;
- (6) Serve as a nonpartisan forum for identifying and understanding rural issues from all perspectives;
- (7) Improve intergovernmental coordination, private and public cooperation, and to seek out opportunities for new partnerships to achieve rural development goals within existing governmental and community structures;
- (8) Foster coordinated approaches to rural development that support local initiatives, with an imperative not to usurp the individual missions of any member organizations or duplicate effort;
- (9) Seek solutions to unnecessary impediments to rural development within Idaho;
- (10) Work cooperatively and seek solutions to impediments with the national rural development partnership and other state rural development councils; and
- (11) Submit an annual report to the governor outlining the work and accomplishments of the partnership.

### OBSERVATIONS

Based on the data, some elements of the code are regularly carried out and others have had little implementation, especially in the last three years.

1. Most participants agree the IRP currently **does** achieve the following responsibilities in the code (numbered above): 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.
2. Most participants agree the IRP currently **does not** achieve the following responsibilities in the code (numbered above): 2, 3, 10, 11.





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- The IRP started off very strong for its first ten years, as documented in a variety of reports. They were supported at both the federal and state levels, had corporate buy-in, strong leadership from a diversity of partner agencies, and strong representation from rural stakeholders.
- Over the years, federal funding stopped, and a new on-going funding stream never materialized, which forced the leadership to spend more time fundraising than delivering on their responsibilities.
- Many of IRP's directors, especially those who have been members since the beginning, have tried to keep the organization afloat, specifically with the Community Review service.
- In the past three to five years, the organization has steadily lost its ability to deliver on the entirety of their mandate.
- A variety of current IRP directors and their agencies have mandates to deliver on specific elements found in the code. e.g., economic development professionals deliver programs and services to assess the community and economic conditions of rural Idaho and at least three other responsibilities identified in code for the IRP.
- The IRP has the ability to bring a range of resources through their representing agencies to coordinate, collaborate, and resource together to help solve rural Idaho problems.
- There were many mentions of needing help to remove impediments (9) especially as they pertain to federal mandates.
- The Community Review model addresses eight of eleven responsibilities in the code.
- Many identified one of the most critical responsibilities is to improve intergovernmental coordination, private and public cooperation, and to seek out opportunities for new partnerships to achieve rural development goals within existing governmental and community structures.
- Each partnering agency has a specific mandate and designated service areas (e.g., county, city, region) which cause numerous challenges to rural communities despite there being available resources, services and programs. The lack of state, regional and federal coherence causes significant challenges.
- Overall, there are challenges to the current board structure, meeting cadence and process. Many cited the inconsistency of structured board meetings, follow up to actions that happen beyond the meetings, and the purpose of meetings appears to be information sharing only and not decision making.
- The Board must have more seats for rural communities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The need for a coherent strategy focused on rural thrive-ability is fundamental given the many changes occurring in Idaho. With both the IRP and the rural economic development strategies being developed concurrently, it's a great time for the governor's office to fully re-engage in formulating a comprehensive state rural policy that cuts across all state departments and agencies and is coordinated under an intergovernmental rural-focused body.



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- If the IRP is the designated intergovernmental rural coordinating body, then they need the authority to influence the actions of other agencies (ITD, IDOL, IDHW, Department of Education, DEQ, etc.) and on-going dedicated funding to carry out the strategic plan.
- Overall, the scope and breadth of the responsibilities identified in Idaho code are too big for the current structure. We recommend mapping each responsibility in code to the agencies represented by those on the Board to see who has a mandate to deliver that element. If duplication exists then the IRP should seek a change in the code to remove that responsibility, and if redundancy exists, stay the course.
- While an annual report has been submitted to the Governor as required, the IRP doesn't have the relationships needed to help the legislature and Governor set public policy to support rural communities and their economic development. An annual report is a good start, but an on-going strategy to cultivate relationships with key legislative leaders is critical. Consider getting legislative support to ensure agencies at all levels provide more support to rural communities, not more policies.
- There are several state rural development councils worth seeking input from on a long-term business structure such as the North Carolina Rural Center and the Vermont Rural Partners.
- Community Reviews are the primary service provided by the IRP and there are many stories of economic and community impact that have emerged as a result. This model should be adapted to continue to meet the needs of our rural communities.

### *Investing in Rural Prosperity*

“Rural communities need better capacity and help with coordination to undertake the planning and actions needed to improve their economic and social conditions.”  
Currently, resources to support rural communities are diffused through many agencies”.



## POTENTIAL FUNDING RESOURCES REPORT

### SUMMARY

Idaho Partners for Good reviewed data from the environmental scan and current funding sources to evaluate how the IRP may be able to secure funds for its revitalization and sustainability. In addition to funding sources, it includes observations and recommendations related to accomplishing IRP's funding objectives.

The issue of funding was identified repeatedly in the overall analysis as a primary concern. Funding secured over the course of the Idaho Rural Partnership inception has been inconsistent and sporadic. This report provides a roadmap toward a sustainable funding plan.

### A. Observations

- a. IRP has several foundational elements and enabling resources currently in place which donors prefer to see when making their giving decisions:
  - i. Mission and Role: A **mission** statement is in place: *The Idaho Rural Partnership (IRP) joins diverse public and private resources in innovative collaborations to strengthen communities and improve life in rural Idaho.*
    1. In August 2007, the IRP Board of Directors established clear issues and activities as priorities for IRP action.
  - ii. Board: IRP has high-profile committed community, state and federal leaders that serve on its board and committees.
  - iii. Program: IRP has a focused program-design that identifies priorities and services. IRP is best known for coordinating the **Community Review program**. It has completed 40+ community reviews since 2000, helping rural leaders and residents establish priorities, access grant funding, and achieve economic development goals.
    1. IRP's 2020 Annual Report highlights the continued need for a **Idaho Rural Peer Learning Network**. This statewide peer-to-peer network responds to the large number of communities seeking ways to build on the momentum of the community review process and to support existing and emerging community leaders. The Network is a program of the Idaho Rural Partnership in coordination with the University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System. The **Idaho Ruralist** is IRP's regularly published e-bulletin.
    2. There is a need to evaluate and address the current financial management obligations regarding RIVDA as fiscal agent. They are not compensated for their efforts and are assuming the liability.
  - iv. Value Proposition: The value-proposition of IRP is expressed in its 2020 Annual Report: *"Our experience conducting 45 community reviews across the state since 2000 has taught us communities that have taken advantage of post-review coaching provided by IRP and our partner agencies and organizations*



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*tend to enjoy increased outcomes as measured by successful capacity-building efforts, grant funding received, and projects completed. In 2018 we modified the community review program by formally adding post-review community coaching as the third phase of the process.”*

- v. Strategic Plan: In current draft for 2024-2029
- vi. Technology: (for operations management: HR, Finance, CRM, etc.) TBD

## B. Recommendations

- a. For IRP to move to its next level of growth, certain improvements are necessary for raising its chances of securing sustainable funding.
  - i. Establish a paid executive leadership (executive director), to ensure smooth effective operations, management and sustainability of the organization.
  - ii. Create a detailed Fund Development Plan with metrics to ensure progress, tracking and evaluation; and an aligned Communications Plan to help donors build confidence in the IRP.
  - iii. Develop formal on-boarding and training process for executive leadership and the board. The executive director and Board of Directors need to know their roles and responsibilities.
  - iv. Build relationships with current donors; revive/cultivate relationships with lapsed donors; and identify and build a plan for engaging with targeted prospective donors.
  - v. Submit 5 to 6 grant applications per quarter to potential grantors.
  - vi. Allocate dedicated human resources to implement the fund development plan, whether volunteers, consultants, board members, or staff. Positions include researcher; proposals/grant-writer; donor-outreach and relationship manager to secure funding from government, high-wealth individuals, and private and public foundations; as well as a communications specialist to roll-out and manage communication-plan priorities for increased visibility.
    - 1. Note: Consider outsourcing services such as fundraising and communication planning, grant-writing, launching or management of programs and projects, and any other personnel-gaps in interim capacity.
  - vii. Develop a closer collaboration with stakeholders, including system leaders, mayors, county commissioners; and congressional leaders help ensure IRP is first-in-line for grants, while also influencing policy decisions.

## C. Funding Options/Prospects

There is a vast pool of funding sources available for IRP, including government, public, and private funders. See attached list which has been built from reputable sources. IRP may also consider subscribing to such resources.

These are short-term quick wins to try:



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- Identify directors on the board that have grant writing resources and work together to submit grants. This has paid off in the past!
- Work with the Idaho Community Foundation to identify donor advised funds that are focused on supporting rural communities and work with them to set up meetings to talk to the fund holders.
- Work with the [LOR Foundation](#) to identify whether the IRP is eligible for funding. They have taken part in the Idaho Rural Success Summit and have been following this work.
- Work with the Governor’s office to present the IRP strategic plan to the 2024 legislative body for funding.
- Rural Partners Network (USDA) has a [list of grants](#) worth reviewing.
- Giving circles are a big deal and a great fit for the IRP. Consider pitching the IRP at a giving circle such as the [Boise Impact Club](#).

**Longer-term Prospects List** consists of donors who have a history of making grants to Idaho organizations. The workbook includes three sheets:

- Sheet 1: List of 1515 donors who have made grants within Idaho, listed in descending order of their giving amount.
- Sheet 2: List of state/Idaho and national/government agencies that have made grants within Idaho. Information on the amount of grants made are listed based on the information available.
- Sheet 3: This includes additional information on potential donors.

In conclusion, IRP stands at a pivotal moment, poised to embark on its next transformative phase of growth. With adequate staffing, a carefully crafted fundraising plan, and a corresponding communication plan in place, tailored to engage and inspire a diverse audience of supporters, IRP will drive positive change and make a meaningful impact in rural Idaho.

#### **D. Overview of Fundraising Practices**

A strong fundraising foundation is built on strategic planning, including a Fundraising Plan and a corresponding Communication Plan, both designed with clear, measurable goals and related implementation strategies, with relevant metrics and timelines.

Fundraising methods generally include some or all the following pillars:

- **Grants:** Research and apply for grants from foundations or government agencies.
- **Corporate partnerships and rural-focused associations:** Support from businesses interested in aligning with your cause.
  - **Corporate Social Responsibility:** many large corporations want to demonstrate their commitment to CSR via charitable investments in the communities they serve.
  - **Aligned Industry Associations:** e.g., Farm Bureau
- **Direct mail:** Send personalized letters or fundraising appeals to potential donors at least once per year. The success rate averages from 1% to 3%.



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- **State funding:**
  - Budget a line item in a state agency with an aligned mission
  - Work with legislature for annual funding appropriation
  - Work with legislature for a Tax Check-off: (eg. Idaho Children’s Trust Fund)
- **Membership Dues:** this annual revenue source can contribute to financial stability and operational expenses.
- **Email solicitation:** Periodic outreach to individuals, with impact stories and funding requests.
- **Major donor campaigns:** Cultivate relationships with high-net-worth individuals who can contribute significant amounts.
- **Online fundraising platforms:** Utilize crowdfunding websites or donation portals to reach a broader audience.
- **Events:** Organize select fundraising events like galas, golf tournaments, auctions, or charity runs to engage donors in person.
- **Planned Giving:** Planned giving, also known as legacy giving or gift planning, allows individuals to make charitable contributions to nonprofit organizations or causes, typically as part of their overall financial and estate planning. These gifts help ensure the long-term sustainability of charitable organizations and enable them to continue their essential work in supporting communities and advancing social causes.
- **Endowment:** Commonly established through charitable donations from individuals, corporations, or other entities, an endowment is a financial asset or fund that is permanently invested by a nonprofit organization, educational institution, or charitable foundation. The principal amount of the endowment remains intact, and only a portion of the investment earnings, typically a percentage (often around 4-5% annually), is spent each year to fund the organization's initiatives.
- **Monetizing Products/Services:** Develop a revenue stream based on delivering products and services to state agencies who focus on rural communities/clients. (eg. Idaho Partners for Good, LHTAC).
- **Partnership with state/federal agencies:** e.g., Serve Idaho’s capacity building funds.

Associated roll-out strategies should be developed for each of the above pillars to ensure proper and timely implementation.

Fundraising Plan Considerations:

1. **Budget and Costs:** Consider the expenses associated with your fundraising efforts, such as marketing materials, event costs, or fees for online platforms. Ensure your fundraising goal accounts for these expenses.
  - Fiscal sponsorship: another nonprofit manages all the funding for you. Note: fiscal sponsors require an administrative fee to support their organization.
2. **Build a Fundraising Team:** Collaborate with volunteers, staff, or other stakeholders who can contribute their time, expertise, and networks to support your fundraising efforts.



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3. **Craft Your Message:** Develop a compelling and emotionally resonant message that explains why your cause is worthy of support. Clearly communicate how donations will make a positive impact.
4. **Utilize Online Platforms:** Leverage the power of social media, email marketing, and other online channels to reach a wider audience and encourage sharing and engagement.
5. **Engage Donors and Build Relationships:** Don't focus solely on obtaining one-time donations. Cultivate relationships with your donors by showing appreciation, keeping them updated on progress, and involving them in your cause.
6. **Track Progress and Adjust:** Regularly monitor your fundraising efforts and track your progress toward your goals. If certain strategies are not delivering results, be willing to adjust your plan accordingly.
7. **Consider Compliance and Legal Issues:** Ensure your fundraising activities adhere to all relevant legal and regulatory requirements. This includes any necessary permits, licenses, or tax implications.
8. **Evaluate and Celebrate Success:** After your fundraising campaign is complete, evaluate the results and celebrate your successes with your team and supporters. Express gratitude to donors and acknowledge their contributions.

Building a successful fundraising plan requires dedication, creativity, and persistence. Stay open to feedback and learn from your experiences to continuously improve your fundraising efforts.

## E. Organizing for Fundraising Success

Prior to launching any fundraising or solicitation campaign, fundraising-readiness is critical for achieving fundraising success. Consider the following at the minimum:

### a) Internal Organizing

- **Fact Sheet** – this is a pitch document that tells a compelling story of IRP, its programs, impact achieved, and lays out partnership opportunities.
- **Template proposal** – this can be customized to align with donor priorities; and is valuable for filling out grant applications.
- **Budget** – this lists the amount of funds required for the optimal functioning of the organization. Sometimes IRP's grant requests may be a line-item on this budget, and other times, a separate budget is requested by the grantor.
- **Board list** with titles and affiliations. Funders like to see gender parity.
- **Financial documents**, including Audits and Annual Reports for the past two to three years.
- **Minutes of the Board** to evaluate the level of donor engagement.
- **A DE+I statement** to ensure all rural citizens belong and are heard.
- **A powerful pitch-deck** for presentation during introductory meetings and at the right forums.
- **A collated list of all organizational and programmatic needs** so that a targeted request can be made to potential donors.
- **A Community Review Program.**



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It is also advisable to have:

- **An Elevator pitch** readily available and shared with all staff and the Board with key talking points in relation to IRP.
- **Profile of the chief executive and staff.**
- **A Relationship-management/recognition plan**, especially for high-level donors
- **A CRM** to manage contacts and build relationships.
- Subscriptions are valuable resources that provide donor information. Suggestions include: [Candid](#), a nonprofit that provides the most comprehensive data and insights about the social sector; Grant Station, [About GrantStation | GrantStation](#); Chronicle of Philanthropy <https://www.philanthropy.com/> a magazine that covers the nonprofit world of philanthropy. It is aimed at charity leaders, foundation executives, fundraisers, and other people involved in philanthropy.
- **Education on fundraising strategies.** Consider these videos:
  - [Inspirational TEDX Talk](#) by Kara Logan Berlin - How to be a better fundraiser
  - 48 Fundraising Ideas [video](#)

b) External Organizing

- A communication strategy covering the following:
  - **An updated/refreshed website** with easily accessible information, and where impact is highlighted.
  - Active **LinkedIn and Facebook profiles.**
  - Active **Idaho Ruralist E-Bulletin.**
  - **Printed marketing materials** such as the Fact Sheet/organization profile; pitch deck, limited copies of printed annual report, etc.
  - **Social-media marketing plan** with messaging that highlights the impact of IRP.
  - **Electronic/email solicitation plan** along with online donation options.

c) Initial Prospecting/Outreach Strategy Recommendation:

- Re-launch IRP with an event(s), inviting all stakeholders. Consider co-hosting it or piggy-backing on a more established rural-focused event.
- With limited human resources, the following strategy may yield initial results
  - **Develop a standard pitch letter** with a specific request intended for multiple donor prospects.
  - **Use a personalized approach for each pitch** depending on the giving-capacity of the prospects.
    - Such letters can be mail-merged and sent electronically to those whose email is available; or by mail. The attached ‘funding options’ list includes mailing addresses, and some email addresses.





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- Research top 20 to 30 prospects in the attached list. Applications to be submitted based on funders giving guidelines and identifying alignment.

Attachment:

IRP Prospects – Excel Worksheet

**Submitted by:**  
Roma Bose, CFRE, CNEL  
Impact Team  
Idaho Partners for Good  
[romab@idahopartners4good.org](mailto:romab@idahopartners4good.org)  
571-594-0054



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## BUSINESS STRUCTURE OPTIONS REPORT

### SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to identify different types of business (operating) structures that IRP might want to consider for long term sustainability. These options should be discussed with the members of the board of directors. A specific subcommittee could be designated to help do further research once the list has been prioritized.

IRP's strength is in the broad and diverse base of directors and partners. It is important to develop a structure that builds on these strengths and furthers the engagement of current and future partners. Creating an organizational structure that is highly responsive to rural stakeholders is critical.

### BUSINESS STRUCTURE OPTIONS

Choosing the right business structure depends on factors such as the nature of the business/organization, liability concerns, tax implications, management preferences, financial expertise, and long-term goals. It's recommended to consult legal and financial professionals to make an informed decision once the top options are identified. This is a list of organizational structures being used by other rural partnerships as well as a variety of aligned options to help inform your decisions.

- **Rural Partners Network is an end-user defined** approach: rural leaders define the geographic service area that might include one county or many counties that address one or multiple issues and are housed under a variety of state, local, or regional councils or alliances that are organized or informal in nature. *Note: without good organizational structure these types of alliances typically do not last.*
- **Council of Governments model:** COGs are voluntary associations that were developed during the 1970s and '80s as an appropriate method of public governance to address local and regional issues (mainly cities and counties). Their purpose is to establish a consensus about the needs of an area and the actions needed to solve local and interlocal problems and provide cooperative planning, coordination, and technical assistance on issues of mutual concern that cross jurisdictional lines. They often provide policy making functions and leadership.
- **Regional Planning Commissions:** similar in form and function to COG's. They are normally quasi-governmental and provide planning assistance on regional issues, assist local interests in responding to state and federal programs, act as a coordinating agency for programs and activities, and provide planning and development assistance to local governments.



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- **Economic Development Councils:** are multi-jurisdictional entities, commonly composed of multiple counties and in certain cases even cross-state borders. They help lead the locally based, regionally driven economic development planning process that leverages the involvement of the public, private and nonprofit sectors to establish a strategic blueprint (i.e., an economic development roadmap) for regional collaboration.
- **North Carolina Rural Center:** a 501c3 that has been developed into a ‘juggernaut’ over the past thirty years, per Bill Menner of Partners for Rural America. This is one of the best examples of rural-focused long-term impact and sustainability because they have developed effective partnerships with key stakeholders including those typically involved in rural communities with a focus on faith-communities. They originally started with state funding but no longer rely on it because they have diversified their funding stream.
- **Benefit Corporation:** Set IRP up as a Benefit Corporation. This is a corporate structure designed for for-profit entities that want to consider society and the environment in addition to profit in their decision-making process. Benefit corporations are different from traditional corporations regarding their purpose, accountability, and transparency. The purpose of a benefit corporation is to create public benefit, which is defined as a material positive impact on society and the environment. Note: not to be confused with [Certified B-Corps](#).
- **Partnering with an Existing Philanthropic Foundation** as an umbrella organization for IRP. They might provide in-kind support and opportunities for financial support, if structured well.
- **State/Federal Government Partnership** like the [Appalachian Regional Commission](#)
- **Place IRP under an existing government agency** (city, county, state). Historically, this model had limited success and has led to instability and a lack of overall support.
- **Place IRP under a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) department:** CSR is a [self-regulating business model](#) that helps a company be socially accountable to itself, its stakeholders, and the public. By practicing CSR, companies can be conscious of the kind of impact they are having on all aspects of society, including economic, social, and environmental. Engaging in CSR means that, in the ordinary course of business, a company is operating in ways that [enhance society and the environment](#) instead of contributing negatively to them. There is a great deal of synergy between CSR and the stated need to preserve rural spaces.
- **Distribute** current code responsibilities among different agencies and dissolve the IRP.
- **Hybrid:** The LHTAC model is unique in the United States and was established in code by the legislature in 1994 (Title 40, Chapter 24 of Idaho Statute). The council is a public agency separate from the state transportation department and is not subject to the administration or management control of ITD. LHTAC consists of nine councilors representing cities, counties, and highway districts. They are stewards of Federal Highway Administration funding for the state’s six districts, and they have a role in project design and construction and provide training and technical assistance.



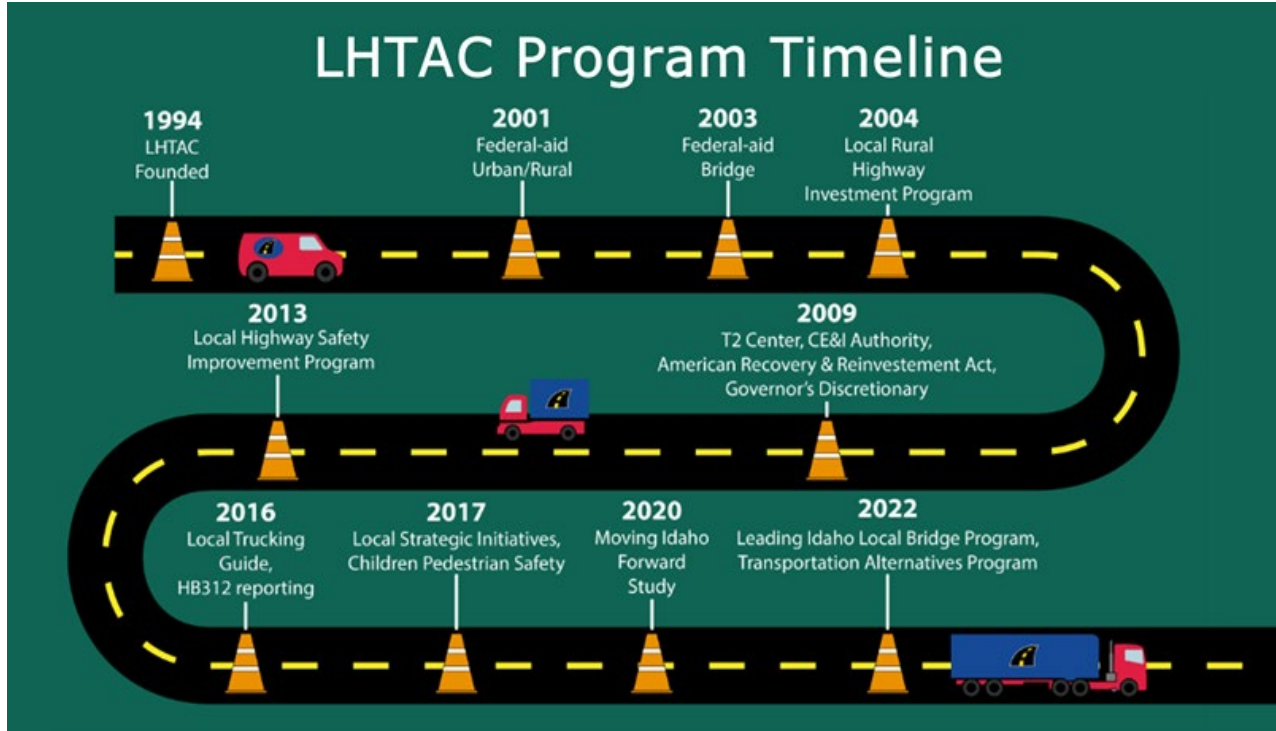
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## OBSERVATIONS

- Don't repeat history. The IRP needs its own organizational structure for long-term sustainability. Conducting more research on the LHTAC model is warranted because they have had much success at meeting the needs of rural communities and are a well-respected model in Idaho. The IRP has worked together with LHTAC in the past.
- We were unable to identify any other state organization better positioned from a roles/responsibilities perspective to be a hub for comprehensive rural partnerships than the IRP. *Note: there are many state and regional organizations that have a rural focus (economic development, healthcare, transportation, etc.).*
- Research into other effective, long-term rural partnerships and networks revealed a host of different business structures, mostly quasi-governmental or nonprofit in nature.
- There is concern among directors and other stakeholders that moving the IRP under one agency undermines collaboration and will weaken participation.
- Idaho Rural Partnerships diverse Board of Directors is unlike any other group or commission and can do what no one else can because of the diversity of leaders, resources, and mandates, etc. *Note: this was expressed several times with the caveat: if the director is committed.*
- More representation from rural communities on the board and committees is needed to ensure the right services and programs are delivered effectively. This helps meet the need for continuous feedback loops.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Based on history, placing the IRP under the umbrella of a state agency is not the right structure for the long-term. Caveat: if the IRP becomes an integrated service and a part of the state agency's long-term strategy it has a greater chance of sustainability. There is a downside especially with the federal partners around the table. There were repeated comments made about this structure undermining collaboration and weakening participation.
- Decide which business structure will support the long-term mission and vision of IRP and build it out with the support of the governor's office, legislature, federal partners (USDA-Rural Development) and large companies that benefit from rural communities.
- Ensure rural leaders help guide the build out of the governance piece.
- Select a business structure that is nimble and adaptable enough to shift when the rural landscape changes. Note: bureaucracy tends to hamper high-level collaboration.
- Activate a Fund Development committee and implement a Fund Development Plan provided by Idaho Partners for Good.





# Organizational and Operational Review Report

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