



2020 Annual Report Idaho Rural Partnership

Executive Summary

This document is Idaho Rural Partnership’s annual report to the Governor outlining the work and accomplishments of the Partnership.

The Idaho Rural Partnership (IRP) is designated as Idaho’s State Rural Development Council (SRDC) by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The purpose, responsibilities, and governance of IRP are found in Idaho Code Title 67, Chapter 90. We are housed in the Idaho Department of Commerce at 700 W. State Street in Boise. Twin Falls-based Region IV Development Association has served as our fiscal sponsor since 2010.

Board of Directors and Staff

IRP is governed by a 35-member Board of Directors consisting of leaders and representatives of the Idaho Legislature, government agencies, tribes, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and universities. Board members as of December 31, 2020 are listed below; per Idaho Code, board members with an asterisk (*) were appointed by the Governor.

State Agencies and Organizations

- Jess Byrne, Department of Environmental Quality*
- Celia Gould, Department of Agriculture*
- Tom Kealey, Department of Commerce (board co-chair)*
- Bobbi-Jo Mueleman, Office of the Governor*
- Brian Ness, Idaho Transportation Department*
- Barbara Petty, University of Idaho Extension*
- Jani Revier, Department of Labor*
- Erik Kingston, Idaho Housing and Finance Association*



Idaho Legislature

- Senator Jim Rice
- Senator Mark Nye
- Representative Caroline Nilsson Troy
- Representative Sally Toone

Federal Agencies and Organizations

Layne Bangerter, USDA Rural Development¹
Brian Dale, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Tom Dayley, U.S. Farm Service Agency¹
Cyndi Grafe, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Carleen Herring, U.S. Economic Development Administration
Will Jenson, Idaho National Laboratory
John Ruhs, Bureau of Land Management
OPEN, U.S. Forest Service

Tribes

Kermit Mankiller, Nez Perce Tribe
James Alexie, Coeur d'Alene Tribe
OPEN, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes
OPEN, Shoshone-Paiute Tribes
OPEN, Kootenai Tribe

Private Sector

Tim Solomon, Rocky Mountain Power*
John Stuart, MTE Communications*²



Nonprofit Sector and Rural Leaders

Art Beal, Idaho Resource Conservation and Development Association (board co-chair)*
Trent Clark, Customalting*
Barry Daniels, Elwood Staffing*
Seth Grigg, Idaho Association of Counties*
Jeff McCurdy, Region IV Development Association*²
Kelley Packer, Association of Idaho Cities*
Colleen Rossen, Silver Valley Economic Development Corporation *²
Marjorie Schmaehl, Idaho Development, LLC*

¹To be replaced in early 2021 due to results of federal election.

²Board members appointed in January 2021.

Contract staff leadership is provided by Executive Director Jon Barrett.

What we do

In February of 2013 the IRP Board of Directors re-affirmed our mission statement found in the IRP Operating Guidelines. We are best known for leading community

engagement and strategic planning processes in rural communities across the state. In 2020 we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Idaho Community Review Program. We also inform community leaders and organizations aware of resources to help them achieve their goals and to provide analysis of existing conditions and emerging opportunities in rural Idaho.

Mission of Idaho Rural Partnership

IRP joins diverse public and private resources in innovative collaborations to strengthen communities and improve life in rural Idaho.

Thank you!

The success of the Idaho Rural Partnership depends on financial and in-kind support from many private, public, and nonprofit sector partners. Financial support from the following businesses and agencies helped us achieve the accomplishments described in this report.



In-kind and other critical support was provided by the following agencies and organizations in 2020.



Detailed description of 2020 accomplishments

Click each of headings below to go to the corresponding section of this report.

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- [Adapting the Community Review program to the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
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- [Idaho Rural Peer Learning Network](#)
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- [Looking ahead to 2021](#)
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About the Idaho Rural Partnership

IRP was initially formed in 1991 as part of a national effort to improve coordination and collaboration in support of rural communities. In 2007 the Idaho legislature established IRP as an *independent public body corporate and politic*. The purpose, responsibilities, and governance of IRP are found in Title 67, Chapter 90 Idaho Code (the Idaho Rural Partnership Development Act). IRP has been housed within different state agencies over the years. We appreciate our current home at the Idaho Department of Commerce. Twin Falls-based Region IV Development Association has served as our fiscal sponsor since 2010.

IRP is governed by a Board of Directors consisting of 35 leaders and representatives of the Idaho Legislature, businesses, public agencies, tribes, nonprofit organizations, and universities who share a passion for the success of rural Idaho. Per Idaho Code, just over one-half of the board members are appointed by the Governor. The board is co-chaired by Art Beal, Idaho Resource Conservation and Development Association, and Tom Kealey, Director of the Idaho Department of Commerce. Contract staff support is provided by Executive Director Jon Barrett.



What we do

IRP is best known for leading community engagement and strategic planning processes in rural communities across the state – from Bonners Ferry to Preston. In 2020 we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Idaho Community Review Program. This program helps rural communities identify their highest priority community and economic development projects and then provides recommendations about approaches for

completing them. Community reviews also provide a forum for understanding rural challenges and opportunities from many perspectives. Think of a community review as a virtual ‘barn-raising,’ where urban and rural neighbors break bread, roll up their sleeves, and pursue local solutions. In 2021 and beyond, IRP strives to increase its efforts to advise the Governor, Legislature, and other stakeholders about opportunities to improve coordination, reduce duplication, and think outside the silos that can isolate would-be partners and agencies from one another.

IRP is a member of Partners for Rural America

(www.partnersforruralamerica.org), a national association of state rural development councils, the Idaho Economic Development Association, and the Idaho Community Foundation.



Please refer to Title 67, Chapter 90 Idaho Code for more detailed information about IRP’s structure and responsibilities.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

IRP’s program work has always involved engaging and supporting Idaho’s rural residents, businesses, and leaders where they are – on the ground, in their communities. Clearly, this work was impacted by the pandemic and related limitations on travel and group gatherings. Examples of projects and activities directly impacted by the pandemic are summarized below.

- The Blackfoot and Harrison Community Reviews in process in early 2020 were temporarily paused.
- Preparations for hosting the Partners for Rural America annual conference in the Twin Falls area in August 2020 were paused. The IRP and Partners for Rural America boards made a joint decision to reschedule the conference for 2021.
- The IRP board meeting originally scheduled for April 8, 2020 was cancelled. A special meeting of the board was subsequently held on June 24, 2020.



COVID-19 survey of rural residents and leaders

In late July, IRP and several partner organizations and agencies conducted a survey of rural Idaho leaders and residents. We intended to capture their thoughts and concerns about the impact of and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in their

communities. This survey provided an important contrast to other statewide surveys that focused on business owners. Special thanks go to the Idaho Department of Commerce for supporting survey administration and report production. The on-line survey generated 333 completed responses.

Survey questions addressed pandemic-related challenges, priority funding areas, successful responses to the pandemic, and the need for training or other types of support. A summary of survey results is attached as an Appendix to this report. The full report detailing the survey results can be downloaded at the IRP website:

<http://www.irp.idaho.gov/>.

*"Thank you for providing this survey!
Your questions were very well presented
and unique."*

--Survey respondent

IRP board meetings

In May, we converted board meetings to a video conference format. This has turned out to be one silver lining of the pandemic. Conducting board meetings by video conference has increased attendance from about 20-25 people to 35+ people per meeting. The increase in participation from people in other areas of the state (outside the Boise Valley) has been particularly noticeable. Compared to previous board meetings held in person, the length of board meetings has decreased about 50% from six hours to almost three hours. Agenda highlights from our June 24, August 12, and December 9 board meetings are summarized below.

June 24 Board Meeting

- Briefing on Federal COVID-19 Resources, featuring Layne Bangerter, USDA Rural Development; Carleen Herring, U.S. Economic Development Administration; Shannon Madsen, U.S. Small Business Administration

- Discussion about IRP hosting Partners for Rural America annual conference in fall 2020. Guests: Jessica AcMoody, Michigan Rural Partners; Paul Costello, Vermont Council on Rural Development.
- Panel discussion: How is the COVID-19 pandemic impacting rural communities and how are they responding? Guests: Melissa Hamilton, U of I Extension Educator for Valley County; Marjorie and Harty Schmaehl, Kamiah business owners; Shawn Oliverson, Economic Development Specialist, City of Preston

August 12 Board Meeting

- Discussion and approval of IRP work plan and budget for the remainder of the 2020 calendar year
- Review scope of work for Phase II of the Voice of the Community rural health project and consider approval of a contract with Laurel York Odell for project coordination services. Guest: Laurel York Odell
- Results of Covid-19 survey of rural residents and leaders. Presenter: Jerry Miller, Economic Development Specialist, Idaho Department of Commerce.



December 9 Board Meeting

- Community Review Program/Western Community Assessment Network update. Guest presenter: Professor Lorie Higgins, U of I Extension
- Pierce-Weippe Rural Health Project update
- *Increasing Broadband Access in Rural Idaho: Recent Experience, Challenges, and Future Possibilities*. Guest presenters: Eric Forsch, Idaho Broadband program manager, Idaho Department of Commerce; John Holman, USDA Rural Development.
- Review and approval of proposed IRP work plan and budget for 2021, contract with Executive Director Jon Barrett, and renewal of co-location agreement with the Department of Commerce.

Idaho Ruralist e-bulletin

The *Idaho Ruralist* is IRP's regularly published e-bulletin. We currently have 1,400 subscribers consisting of rural community residents and leaders, business owners, local and state elected officials, and representatives of our partner agencies and organizations. Topics addressed by the three Idaho Ruralist e-bulletins published in 2020 included:

- Video conferencing best practices and resources

- COVID-19 resources available to rural communities
- Housing stability during the pandemic
- Invitation to complete Covid-19 survey of rural Idaho residents and leaders
- Results of Covid-19 survey

Adapting the community review program to the COVID-19 pandemic

IRP convened our long-time partner agencies and organizations in mid-2020 for a series of conversations about how to adapt our program activities – particularly the community review program – to the realities of the pandemic. These discussions resulted in a decision to conduct the survey of rural residents and leaders described in this report. Our discussions also lead to modifying the community review process to complete a greater number of community reviews at a lower cost per community within a given period.

Blackfoot and Harrison Community Reviews

Phase I of the Blackfoot Community Review was conducted in May 2019 and the associated report was completed in August 2019. Phase I of the Harrison Community Review was completed in September 2019 and the report was finished in January 2020. Planning for Phase II of both community reviews was interrupted by the pandemic.

Planning for Phase II of the Blackfoot Community resumed in October 2020. Focus areas for this community review include: (1) housing and homelessness, (2) community recreation, and (3) Blackfoot’s image and identity. An initial virtual meeting between the Blackfoot home and visiting teams took place on December 9, 2020. Phase II was completed in February 2021.



The focus areas for Phase II of the Harrison Community Review include: (1) community recreation, (2) communication and outreach, and (3) infrastructure. We anticipate completing Phase II of this review in spring 2021.

Idaho Rural Peer Learning Network

In October 2020 IRP, in partnership with University of Idaho Extension, created the 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 built through 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 Extension. Leaders in the following communities are participating in the peer learning network: Bonners Ferry, Athol, Wallace, Kellogg, Plummer, Harrison, Cascade, Arco, Blackfoot, Weiser, Payette, and American Falls. Similar peer learning networks have been established in Montana and Wyoming through the Western Community Assessment Network (www.communityreview.org).

Invitations to participate in the Peer Learning Network were sent to all past participants in IRP community reviews in October. The first monthly video meeting of the network took place on December 3, 2020. Topics for discussion and training at monthly meetings in 2021 are being determined by the 12 people currently participating.

Go to <https://sites.google.com/view/wecan-peer-learning-network/home> for more information or to join the Idaho Rural Peer Learning Network.

Community coaching in Plummer, Cascade, and Emmett

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 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. USDA Rural Development grant funding allowed IRP to complete community coaching with the communities of Plummer, Cascade, and Emmett in 2020. This work is summarized below.

Plummer

The Plummer Community Review was conducted in September 2017. Communication with Plummer home team leaders in late 2018 resulted in an agreement that post-community review follow-up should focus on the redevelopment of the City-owned 50+-acre Pole Yard

Property. The potential to clean-up and redevelop this property was identified as a recommendation by the visiting team during the Plummer Review.

Support activities facilitated or provided by IRP directly related to the brownfields assessment and eventual clean-up and redevelopment of the Pole Yard Property are as follows:

- Convened stakeholders meeting at Plummer City Hall and site visit to discuss property history, project goals, potential future uses, possible funding sources, and next steps. This meeting led to the completion of a Phase I brownfields assessment for the property in March 2020. Phase II of the brownfields assessment focusing on water and soil sampling to identify any existing contaminants was completed in fall 2020.¹



- Completed analysis of relevant community and Tribal planning documents to develop a list of possible future uses of the Pole Yard Property.²
- Outlined a suggested community engagement process to develop a community vision for the future of the Pole Yard Property.²
- Researched resources available to the City of Plummer that could support the redevelopment of the property.²

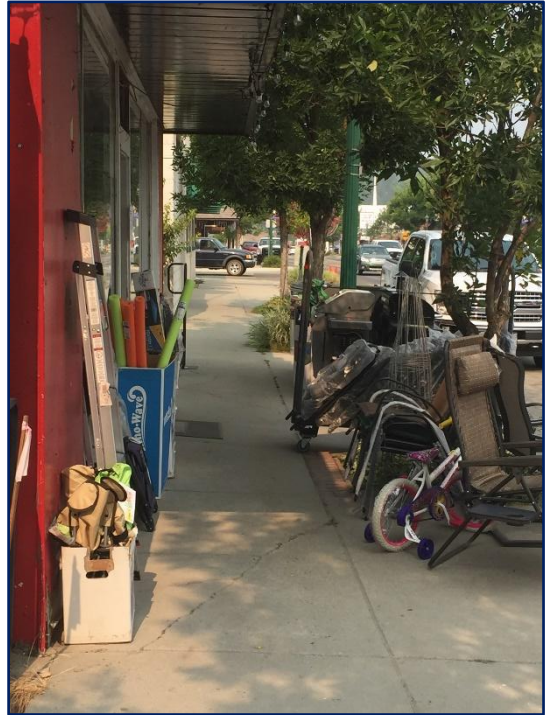
The representative from the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality involved in the project expressed his view that the progress on brownfields assessment of the property might not have been made without IRP’s leadership role in bringing the stakeholders together.

Cascade

The Cascade Community Review was conducted in April 2016. Initiated in 2019, IRP completed the following post-Review community coaching support in September 2020.

- Prepared summary of recommendations related to downtown and community revitalization identified during the Cascade Community Review.¹

- Provided detailed comments and recommendations regarding the draft Cascade Community Revitalization Plan.¹
- Completed analysis of existing planning documents and recommendations regarding the geographic boundaries of downtown Cascade.²
- Produced analysis and summary of various past planning efforts to develop a community vision for Cascade and/or the downtown.²
- Provided feedback on a previously completed downtown slum and blight assessment.²
- Developed relatively low-cost policy, community engagement, and capital improvement recommendations to support community revitalization.²
- Research funding and other resources available to support downtown and community revitalization efforts.²



Emmett

Emmett community and economic leaders first contacted IRP about the possibility of supporting community and economic development efforts in 2019. Subsequent communication resulted in conducting a Ripple Effects Mapping exercise with Emmett home team leaders in June 2019 to document outcomes from the Emmett Community Review. The Ripple Effects Mapping exercise resulted in the identification of goals and projects that could be an appropriate focus of follow-up support.



Community coaching activities provided to Emmett in the summer and fall of 2020 included:

- Created a two-page summary of issues and recommendations identified during the 2003 Emmett Community Review.¹
- Completed Ripple Effects Mapping exercise with Emmett home team leaders.¹
- Facilitated home team brainstorming and prioritizing of community and economic development activity going forward.¹
- Visited Emmett’s commercial areas (i.e., Highway 16, Washington Boulevard, and downtown) and communicated with community and business leaders to develop updated observations and recommendations related to the design and revitalization of commercial areas.²
- Researched best practices regarding short and long-term uses for vacant commercial buildings.²
- Researched related funding and other resources available to Emmett.²

¹Completed in 2019.

²Completed in 2020.

Voice of the Community rural health project

Grant funding received from the Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health in 2019 and a related partnership with the Idaho Community Foundation resulted in IRP’s completion of health-related focus groups in six rural communities in the fall of 2019. The intent of the “Voice of the Community” project focus groups was to increase understanding of gaps in health care services and facilities in rural Idaho and to compare the experience and perceptions of rural residents and health stakeholders with available health data.

The Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation grant funding allowed IRP to continue working with the Pierce-Weippe communities in 2020 to address some of the healthcare-related needs identified during their focus group. Area stakeholders participating in this ongoing effort include the Clearwater Valley Hospital, faith leaders, Weippe Senior Center, food bank, Idaho Youth Challenge Academy, Joint School District #171, A to Z Counseling, Pierce Recreation District, Clearwater County Ambulance, and Clearwater County Economic Development.



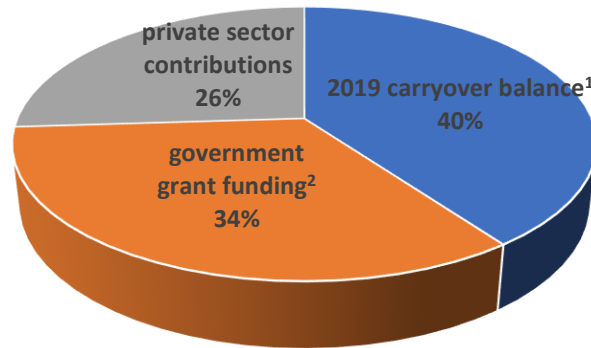
Facilitated by Laurel York Odell (under contract with IRP), the participating stakeholders identified above continue to engage in brainstorming and project development to address needs in the following high-priority areas:

- Medical care and access
- Transportation
- Substance abuse treatment and prevention
- EMS services
- Health promotion and prevention
- Dental care

Summary of 2020 funding

IRP's 2020 funding included a 2019 carryover balance of \$22,600 and \$35,125 in new funding raised during the calendar year, for a total of \$57,725. Total funding, including the 2019 carryover balance, is broken down by source in the chart below.

IRP funding breakdown
2020 CY



¹Primarily grant funding from Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation

²Primarily USDA Rural Development

Looking ahead to 2021

We are excited about the following activities identified in IRP's 2021 work plan:

- Update IRP strategic plan
- Complete Blackfoot and Harrison Community Reviews
- Revise community review process to increase the number of communities served
- Invite communities to apply for community reviews beginning in mid-2021
- Continue to evaluate past community reviews using Ripple Effects Mapping.
- Continue participation in the Western Community Assessment Network with peer organizations in Wyoming and Montana
- Complete the Voice of the Community project with the communities of Pierce and Weippe communities
- Host the annual conference of Partners for Rural America (rescheduled from 2020)
- Further develop the Idaho Rural Peer Learning Network
- Increase publication of the Idaho Ruralist e-bulletin from quarterly to bi-monthly.
- Stabilize and increase our funding from additional sources.
- Fill open seats on the IRP board of directors

For more information

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Appendix

Summary of Results

COVID-19 Survey of Rural Residents and Leaders

The complete survey report can be found at the Idaho Rural Partnership website at www.irp.idaho.gov.

Summary of Survey Respondents

- 333 people completed the survey from July 22-August 7, 2020.
- While responses came from across the state, just over one-half of survey respondents (57%) live in the following six counties: Benewah, Idaho, Lewis, Nez Perce, Teton, and Valley.
- Most respondents (69%) identified themselves as either a local elected official, city or county employee, a leader of a community organization, or a resident. Respondents were limited to a single choice from among nine predefined categories.

Key Findings

Priority funding areas during the pandemic. Survey respondents feel the need for funding and other assistance is greatest around the following pandemic-related concerns: (1) help impacted businesses survive and thrive, (2) help residents whose incomes have been reduced by job loss or reduced hours meet basic expenses like housing, utilities, and food, and, (3) education and other youth services.

“I would like to see the money used to help provide food and necessities of life to those who have lost their incomes as a direct result of the pandemic.”

— Survey respondent

Most significant pandemic-related challenges. Responses to a question about the most significant anticipated challenges largely mirror the question about funding priorities. The most significant challenges identified by respondents include: (1) business survival, (2) people being able to meet basic expenses, (3) education and youth (including school, childcare, recreation, library programming), and (4) community cohesion. Community cohesion includes a concern that an influx of visitors and new residents from urban areas could adversely impact the community and increase socio-political divisions heightened by differing opinions about the validity of the pandemic and related government responses.

“Less income for locals which means less spending, especially locally, in the small shops. This means that more local small shops will close their doors.”

— Survey respondent

Successful community efforts. Respondents expressed pride in their community responses to the coronavirus pandemic in the following areas: (1) putting COVID-19 protective measures in place, (2) volunteerism, (3) charity response (e.g., faith organizations and nonprofit organizations helping struggling residents), and (4) businesses adapting to minimize the health risks of employees and customers.

“We formed a group of caring individuals representing local government, hospitals, chambers, public schools, local businesses, food, parks, etc. that have one goal: to protect the people and the community and those that are visiting. The group is caring, creative, and driven. They take ideas and put them to action. I’ve never worked with a team that truly has the best interest of the people in mind. No egos involved.”

— Survey respondent

Need for training. Survey respondents believe training in the following priority areas would support their community’s recovery from the pandemic (in order of priority):

- Broadband
- Housing
- Education
- Strategic planning (includes emergency response, resiliency, disaster planning, etc.)
- Youth and family services
- Small business development/entrepreneurship

Need for trust and understanding among individuals and organizations. 43% of survey respondents strongly agreed that increasing trust and understanding would help the community make better decisions and complete community projects; 34% agreed with this statement.

Anything else? The last survey question provided an open-ended opportunity to express anything else respondents would like to share about the COVID-19 pandemic in their community. 78% of survey respondents offered a response to this question. The most often given responses to this question are listed below in order of frequency.

- Divergent views about the seriousness or legitimacy of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Building bridges across increasingly visible political divides
- Jobs and the economy
- Health impacts and measures to mitigate and prevent them.
- Impact of visitors on community services, facilities, and residents’ exposure to COVID-19
- Communication and leadership