

Rural Planning Group Overview

Mission

Provide planning leadership for rural Utah communities by facilitating communication and coordination between stakeholders, offering planning and technical assistance, and developing and delivering training, tools, and resources.

Vision

Be the premier resource for planning coordination, information, and technical assistance in rural Utah.

Objectives

- I. Support the decision-making process of funding boards with objective information and analysis.
 - II. Improve communication between rural communities, state agencies, funding boards, professional service providers, and other organizations to (1) promote the coordination of planning efforts and (2) increase awareness about planning-specific issues, initiatives, events, and resources.
 - III. Facilitate rural planning, primarily for capital improvements, by providing technical assistance, training, tools, and resources.
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Strategies

Structure

The Rural Planning Group (RPG) will initially adopt a centralized structure consisting of three to five individuals located at the DWS Admin South building. This arrangement will facilitate (1) communication and coordination between the RPG, state agencies, and funding boards, (2) the management and mobilization of RPG staff, and (3) collaboration with RPP planners. Over time the Rural Planning Group may adopt different structures to enhance service, communication, and coordination between RPG planners and rural communities.

Responsibilities

Communities in rural Utah face a diverse and complex set of challenges. Consequently, the needs of rural communities span many facets of planning.

The impact of the Rural Planning Group will be most significant if the approach to addressing planning needs is deliberate and focused, yet flexible enough to meet a variety of needs. Upon establishment, the RPG will focus on planning for infrastructure and capital improvements in rural Utah, thus laying the groundwork for other planning efforts and initiatives.

In time, the group may find it necessary and worthwhile to broaden its scope and address other facets of rural planning. With initial emphasis on addressing rural capital improvements needs, the Rural Planning Group will perform three primary functions:

- I. Needs assessment and planning
- II. Communication and coordination
- III. Technical assistance, training, tools, and resources

The nature of these responsibilities is described in the following sections.

Needs Assessment and Planning

One of the primary purposes of the Rural Planning Group is to provide the Community Impact Board with information and analysis that supports the board's decision-making process.

The information provided to the Community Impact Board by the Rural Planning Group will include capital improvement plans and assessments. The RPG will plan and evaluate needs based on a community, regional, and statewide scale. Existing planning documents, including the Capital Improvements List and Consolidated Plan, will serve as a starting point as the RPG collaborates with rural communities in planning.

The RPG will also develop a standardized tool that identifies the condition of existing capital facilities and the present and future need for additional capital projects. Projects will be prioritized based on criteria developed jointly by the Community Impact Board, staff, and the Rural Planning Group.

Communication and Coordination

One of the major barriers to successful rural planning is the lack of meaningful communication between local governments and outside organizations. The Rural Planning Group intends to facilitate and thus improve communication between rural Utah and organizations that provide planning services and resources. This effort will include state agencies, funding boards, professional service providers, and other organizations.

The Rural Planning Group will assist with communicating local needs to state agencies and non-government entities. Better communication will facilitate coordination between these organizations and will significantly improve the quality of services provided to rural Utah.

A key deliverable in this effort to improve communication between rural local governments and outside organizations will be an annotated directory of organizations that provide rural planning services and

resources. The RPG will identify these organizations, meet with them to understand how they fit into the overall planning context, and make this information available to municipalities and stakeholders.

Technical Assistance, Training, Tools, and Resources

Technical Assistance

The RPG will provide technical assistance aimed to help communities identify their capital improvements needs, prioritize those needs, and develop plans and implementation strategies that will enable communities to make necessary capital improvements.

Training

The Rural Planning Group will play an active role in identifying, understanding, promoting, and delivering existing training opportunities. Ultimately, the RPG may develop and deliver its own training tools and resources as specific issues and needs are identified.

Tools and Resources

The Rural Planning Group will create a listing of existing planning tools and resources. The listing will be available to rural communities and stakeholders. The RPG will promote planning tools and resources when working with local officials. The RPG will also look to develop and distribute new tools and resources that will be of value to rural communities.

Performance Measurement

Performance tracking and measurement will be an important function of the Rural Planning Group. The RPG will develop specific performance measures and a comprehensive system for tracking its performance in order to allow stakeholders to easily evaluate success. The RPG will prepare and present performance reports to the Community Impact Board on a regular basis or as requested by the board.

Initial performance reports will deal with the organization and mobilization of the Rural Planning Group. As the group matures and solidifies its role in the rural planning landscape, performance will focus on measurable outcomes.

Summary

In summary the Rural Planning Group will perform the following functions:

- I. Assess rural planning needs and prioritize capital projects

- A. Provide information and analysis
 - B. Perform capital needs assessments
 - C. Develop project prioritization criteria
- II. Communicate and coordinate
 - A. Directly communicate with rural entities and stakeholders
 - B. Identify and share planning resources
 - C. Prepare and maintain a schedule of planning-related events and services
- III. Provide planning, training, tools, resources, and planning assistance