Homes are where jobs sleep at night. Without housing it becomes incredibly difficult to attract industry and business. Over the last several years, by various needs assessments and community input workshops, housing remains one of the most needed and complicated topics in Wyoming.

Housing throughout the state of Wyoming continues to be a topic of conversation had by communities, residents, and those looking to relocate to Wyoming. As a result of hearing this common theme of housing (needs, wants, desires), the Wyoming Business Council, the University of Wyoming Extension, and sixteen other housing agencies in Wyoming collaborated to create a Housing Toolkit. The mission of the Housing Toolkit is to help communities successfully address common struggles by developing tools and a team that can provide resources, information, and a map leading to action.
Prior to the Toolkit collaboration, the Wyoming Business Council, UW Extension, and others located throughout the state held several meetings to identify statewide needs. Topics included tourism, diversifying the economy, jobs, day cares, and housing. The group acknowledged from the beginning that housing would likely be the hardest task to cover and housing was not initially selected.

After much thought and discussion, the realization that homes are where jobs sleep at night, and before improvements could be made to other sectors, the communities’ homes were a critical and essential need to fulfilling any other need or desire.

Once housing was selected as a statewide need, the original gathering of individuals began inviting housing professionals, agencies of all kinds, non-profits, and developers, all who could provide insight and education on housing in Wyoming. The process started with a series of meetings to identify solutions for the variety of needs and wants for housing in Wyoming. A number of facilitated meetings were held to develop the process and define the Toolkit and its mission. A Toolkit emerged and as the group evolved so did the Toolkit.

Although Wyoming is the least populated state in the U.S., no two towns have the same housing requirements or desires. The partnership between the agencies was vital in identifying opportunities to overcome the housing disparities, cost, and availability.

Located within the Toolkit are a variety of resources for communities and municipalities to identify their housing needs:

- List of housing agencies and their programs
- Housing success stories
- Resource list
- Financial tools
- Housing flowchart to help communities determine if they are ready for a housing study or what they need to do to be ready
- Consumer information

The biggest achievement of the group was the Housing Needs Study by Income Level and County. This is the first report of its kind in Wyoming and breaks down the needs by income level, in an easy to read four-page report. This report is easily understandable by non-housing individuals. (insert link.)

It was important to all of the collaborators, in addition to providing resources, that the Toolkit provide hope to communities looking for help as well as share the success stories other Wyoming communities have achieved.

GUERNSEY – SUCCESS IN HOUSING
One of the success stories featured in the Toolkit is the town of Guernsey located in South Central Wyoming. Guernsey is a town with a population of 1,200 people and was struggling for years to provide housing for their residents. To help overcome the housing disparity, a group of six individuals who called themselves the G2 group (Growing Guernsey) identified the need for affordable housing in their community and formed a nonprofit to overcome this challenge.

G2 purchased and renovated an empty building which currently has full occupancy. They then purchased at auction the “pink apartments,” a former town eyesore; they re-sold the building to a contractor for renovation. Their next project included purchasing an oversized lot with a rundown trailer, the lot was split into two and a home was built on each. In addition to these housing renovations, a lot was purchased and a new home was built.
All three houses were sold for under $150,000. The group also helped the Wyoming Housing Network build a new, 12-unit apartment. Economic developer, Bruce Heimbuck, was invited to a regional symposium in Denver to talk about the project after gaining regional attention as a result of the Toolkit video and Best Practice Manual.

To better understand their motivation, challenges, and success, the Wyoming Business Council and Community Development Extension Educators from the University of Wyoming went to Guernsey to meet with the G2 group, town electives, and the community through a variety of focus groups and a town public meeting. During these sessions, the team was able to understand what worked, what was learned, and what the current housing needs are in Guernsey. Ripple effect mapping was used to capture the comments and effects that the G2 housing initiative had on the community. Hearing how residents in one community took action and made a difference is just one resource found in the Toolkit.

Takeaways from the meeting with residents in Guernsey were positive regarding the G2 group and their accomplishments. It was indicated many times that community members began working on their homes and a sense of community pride in their homes was re-established. The community has since done other projects to improve the quality of life in Guernsey.

Although the G2 group was successful in their endeavors, the need for more housing was communicated throughout the visit. Guernsey’s success and response to their housing needs is attainable by other communities and demonstrates the power of residents taking action.

The Housing Toolkit is an ongoing process and will continue to evolve as efforts continue to help communities in Wyoming.
Community Toolbox

The Wyoming Business Council collaborates with other state agencies and various stakeholders – public, private and nonprofit – to tackle local, regional and statewide quality-of-life issues and opportunities that have an economic development component.

**Mission**

Help communities successfully address common struggles by developing tools and a team that can provide resources, information and a map leading to action.

**Background**

Wyoming has been gathering data from communities about their needs through community assessments, Tour 23 and other assessment venues for more than 15 years. Many themes are continuous and recurring across the state, such as affordable housing and workforce development and attraction.