



Rural Utah County Embraces Area Sector Analysis Process

TARGETED, SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Historically, the residents of rural areas have been economically disadvantaged relative to their urban counterparts. In rural areas, incomes have been lower, poverty rates higher, and unemployment more extensive. These economic concerns have become even more pronounced in recent decades as the number of jobs in agriculture, the natural resource industries, and manufacturing, traditionally the primary employers of rural workers have declined (Albrecht, 2014). An added concern is that the rural economy has not rebounded from the great recession as quickly or completely as the urban economy (Hertz et al., 2014).

Seeking to address their struggling economies, many rural communities have initiated or strengthened their economic development activities. To assist communities in their economic development efforts, the Area Sector Analysis Process (ASAP) was created by an ASAP development team comprised of community development specialists from around the West (Harris et al., 2012). ASAP assists communities in identifying their community development priorities; the assets that will help them achieve their goals; and the types of businesses that are likely to match their goals and assets. ASAP incorporates three major inputs; (1) the preferences and goals of community residents obtained by a survey of local people; (2) the quality and quantity of local assets obtained by an asset assessment procedure; and (3) the needs and requirements of industries and businesses obtained by surveys of a wide range of industries and businesses from throughout the nation.

ASAP results can aid communities in both short-term and long-term planning. For the short-term the ASAP model provides a list of industries that are both desirable – consistent with local goals and objective – and compatible with industry interests and requirements. The efforts for the development of these industries can begin immediately. ASAP can also guide long-term planning by providing a type of “gap analysis,” making apparent which missing assets are responsible for the county’s incompatibility with certain otherwise desirable industries. This can help county officials in planning and infrastructure development.

The primary benefit of the Area Sector Analysis Process is that by taking into account all three sets of factors, community development efforts can be much more focused and targeted and the likelihood of success greater. Since its inception, the ASAP model has been used effectively in Nevada, Arizona, Montana, California, and Minnesota.

WAYNE COUNTY, UTAH

Recently, ASAP has been conducted in Wayne County, a small and isolated county in south central Utah. Wayne County is confronted with economic problems typical of small rural communities – loss of primary employment, an aging population, a shrinking tax base, and few economic options and opportunities for its youth. Average incomes in the county are well below the state average.

Economic development efforts in Wayne County have several major obstacles. To begin with, the Wayne County population has always been small (2,747 residents in 2013). This small population means few workers for potential industry and few consumers for businesses. A lack of education and training of the existing workforce is also a concern. Isolation represents a second major obstacle. Wayne County is hours from the nearest urban area and airport and many miles from the nearest interstate highway. Thus, additional time and cost is required for getting produce to market or obtaining supplies and provisions. A third obstacle is that the vast majority (97 percent) of the land in the county is publically owned (87 percent by the federal government and 10 percent by the State of Utah). Thus, only three percent of the land in the county is privately owned and available for economic development.

Wayne County does have significant assets including spectacular scenery that includes Capital Reef and Canyonlands National Parks as well as mountains that provide opportunities for camping, fishing, and hunting.

ASAP IN WAYNE COUNTY

In autumn 2014, the Wayne County ASAP project began as a joint effort between Wayne County, Utah State University Extension, Southern Utah University



PICTURED: ASAP Steering Committee in Wayne County, Utah/W. Curtis



PICTURED: Don Albrecht ASAP in Wayne County, Utah/W. Curtis

(SUU), and the Western Rural Development Center (WRDC).

For ASAP to be successful, an engaged and involved steering committee of local residents is essential. Under the direction of Wayne County economic development director, Michelle Coleman, a steering committee of about 30 members was assembled.

The steering committee and ASAP Facilitators met together once each month in Wayne County. During these meetings, the ASAP Facilitators presented the ASAP modules. These modules describe the Area Sector Analysis Process and provide an overview of local and national economic and demographic trends. During one of the modules, the goals survey was given to members of the steering committee and they were asked to distribute the survey widely to a cross-section of Wayne County residents. About 200 Community Goals Surveys were completed. Simultaneously, the steering committee completed a detailed Community Assets Survey.

The completed goals surveys, along with the asset survey were sent to ASAP team members at the University of Nevada-Reno (UNR) where the Wayne County survey results were compiled and processed. Output from the ASAP model provided a list of industries by NAICS codes and shows the extent to which each industry is both compatible (based on the needs of business/industry) and desirable (based on the goal surveys completed by county residents).

In Wayne County, the model revealed 15 industries that were both desirable and compatible. These industries were selected for further examination. This examination included a look at firm size, salaries paid, etc. Based on this assessment, steering committee members further pared the list of industries to three. These are:

- 1. Internet-Based Industries.** Excellent Internet capacity and high-quality amenities make these types of industries both compatible and desirable in Wayne County. Efforts will be made to target persons who are self-employed and can work from

anywhere they choose with good Internet connection, as well as persons who are employed by a company located elsewhere, but can conduct their work via the computer at the location of their choice. Additionally, efforts will be made to develop the skills of existing residents so they can be involved in such jobs

2. Tourism and Outdoor Recreation.

Resulting from high-quality amenities, highlighted by Capitol Reef National Park, numerous tourists visit Wayne County each year. The goal would be to entice more of these tourists to stop, stay longer, and spend more money in the county.

- 3. Niche Agriculture.** Opportunities are available to produce high-quality products in Wayne County that sell at much higher prices than regular farm commodities. Possible examples include grass-fed beef and high-quality apple juice, honey, or cheese. Markets for these products would include visiting tourists as well as individuals throughout the world who could order these products via the Internet.

MOVING FORWARD

The county is now in the process of moving forward to make these goals a reality. Subcommittees are being developed to share ideas and implement plans for each of the three selected industries. Additionally, the county is developing a brand that can be used to market each of these industries. •