

Idaho Rural Development Roundtable



Summary of Idaho Rural Development Roundtable

Boise, Idaho

September 8, 2009

Those in Attendance:

Don Albrecht – Western Rural Development Center

Darrell Bolz – Idaho State Legislature

Jon Barrett – Clearstory Studios

Ken Bullock – Partners for Prosperity – Rural Mayor

Charlotte Eberlein – Director, University of Idaho Extension

Matthew Ellsworth – Office of U.S. Senator Risch

Mike Field – Idaho Rural Partnership

Mike Hedrick – USDA Rural Development

Wendy Jaquet – Idaho State Legislature

Rick Johnson – Idaho Conservation League

Abelardo Rodriguez – University of Idaho

Dick Rush – USDA/FSA

Priscilla Salant – University of Idaho Outreach Coordinator

Bob Swandby – Idaho Commerce

Pat Takasugi – Idaho State Legislature

Session One: What do we value about the rural areas of Idaho?

Participants were asked to list their two-three most important positive features about Idaho's rural areas. Their responses were:

1. Natural resources including landscape and amenities.
2. A strong sense of community with a social support system that includes schools, civic organizations, churches, etc.
3. The state is socially and economically diverse with independent and hard working people.

Session Two: Priorities for Strengthening the Future of Rural Areas

Participants were asked: As you ponder the future of your state’s rural areas, which of the following general rural development topics would you (personally) identify as being of highest priority to promoting the long-term survival and strength of these areas? That is, what **THREE or FOUR** broad areas listed below would you select as being of “highest priority” for the future of rural counties and communities in your state?

- Economic Development
- Economic/Social Inequality and Poverty
- Education and Workforce Development
- Health and Nutrition
- Housing
- Information and Communication Technologies
- Leadership, Citizen Participation and Rural Public Policy
- Population Change/Migration Patterns
- Public Land Use and Management
- Public Services/Public Infrastructure
- Renewable Energy Development
- Rural and Entrepreneurial Development
- Rural-Urban Interface and Growth Management
- Water, Biodiversity and other Natural Resources
- Other areas not listed above (please list):

Then the group narrowed down the individual responses into the following four priorities:

1. Education and workforce development leading to economic development for changing economies.
2. Leadership development for working on complex public policy issues.
3. Solution-based collaborative resource management
4. Public service, infrastructure and organization challenges imposed by government regulations.

Session Three: Digging Deeper into the Four Priority Areas

Next participants were asked to take these four priority areas they identified during Session Two and identify challenges and strategies/initiatives that could be launched to address the challenges. Their responses were:

1. Education and workforce development leading to economic development for changing economies.
 - a. Specific challenges faced by rural areas of Idaho?
 - i. Idaho education system does not compete favorably with others in a global economy.
 - ii. There are inadequate technical and professional educational opportunities in the state to prepare workers for the current economy.

- iii. Adult or continuing education programs are needed to retool the workforce.
 - iv. Educational programs need to be adjusted to fit the changing economy.
 - v. There is a great need for broadband connectivity throughout the state.
 - vi. Political barriers prevent higher education collaboration.
 - vii. There are problems recruiting quality teachers to rural Idaho.
 - viii. There is a lack of affordable/accessible housing for the workforce.
 - ix. Transportation provides a barrier to educational opportunities.
 - x. There is a lack of affordable/accessible primary health care.
- b. Strategies/initiatives that should be launched
 - i. Create a more collaborative educational system that includes public education, adult education, higher education, professional/technical training. Find a model that works and implement in Idaho.
 - ii. Coordinate economic development efforts and impacts, including housing, health care, and public infrastructure.
 - iii. Improve broadband connectivity throughout the state.
 - iv. Develop a steady funding stream.
2. Leadership development for working on complex public policy issues.
- a. Specific challenges faced by rural areas in Idaho
 - i. The state does not foster good leadership. Programs are needed to provide incentives.
 - ii. There needs to be better collaboration between levels of government, including federal, state and tribal governments.
 - iii. Part-time leaders are asked for full-time effort.
 - iv. A very high knowledge base is demanded of laymen in a polarized environment.
 - v. Local isolation where people lack awareness of outside issues that are impacting their efforts.
 - vi. Inadequate staff and inability to keep quality staff.
 - vii. Embezzlement.
 - viii. Differences between competing interests.
 - ix. Difficult to build consensus, especially when faced with scarce resources.
 - x. There is a lack of mentoring for new and potential leaders.
 - b. Strategies/initiatives that should be launched
 - i. Foster good leadership through mentoring, training, recruitment and incentives.
 - ii. Redirect resources and funds to this issue.
 - iii. Find additional partners and resources such as public, private and nonprofit.
 - iv. Present more accessible, affordable and user-friendly training programs using video conferencing and holding regional meetings that are easier to attend.

3. Solution-based collaborative resource management.
 - a. Specific challenges faced by rural areas in Idaho
 - i. Often the solutions are court driven and negotiations end up in litigation.
 - ii. Extensive polarization and mistrust on critical issues.
 - iii. Lack of knowledge of policy and decision-making processes.
 - b. Strategies/initiatives that should be launched
 - i. Showcase and celebrate successes.
 - ii. Share best practices and recognize that there are alternative approaches.
 - iii. Demonstrate the cost savings of collaboration and the benefits of being part of a solution.
 - iv. Make people aware of collaborators and develop new collaborators.
 - v. Recognize that collaboration doesn't always work the first time. Develop the ability to walk away and try again.
4. Public service, infrastructure and organization challenges imposed by government regulations.
 - a. Specific challenges faced by rural areas in Idaho
 - i. One size does not fit all – what works in one community may not work in another community.
 - ii. People of rural Idaho do not want to be told what to do.
 - iii. Infrastructure is aging and replacements are expensive.
 - iv. Lack of communication, cooperation, collaboration and accountability between different levels of government.
 - v. Idaho has a culture of low taxes and fees. Idaho is a relatively low-income state. Thus funds are lacking to deal with infrastructure problems. Yet people expect better services.
 - vi. 20th century government organizations do not deal well with 21st century issues.
 - vii. There are unfunded mandates and changing governmental regulations. Local leaders often lack the essential knowledge for dealing with these changes.
 - viii. There is a proliferation of special taxing districts.
 - ix. There is a lack of trust between officials and residents.
 - b. Strategies/initiatives that should be launched
 - i. Officials should do a better job of articulating why infrastructure is needed.
 - ii. Engage residents in creating the solution.
 - iii. Do a better job of articulating the true cost of services and new infrastructure and the benefits to the taxpayers.

Session Four: Research and Extension Needs and Potential Partners

Finally, participants were asked to identify what they felt are the most critical roles that should be played by your state's land-grant universities in relation to the FOUR priority areas identified in Session Two and discussed in Session Three. Their responses were:

1. Potential Partners for WRDC and Land Grant Universities
 - a. Tribal governments
 - b. Association of Idaho Cities
 - c. Idaho Association of Counties
 - d. Rural mayors
 - e. Rural County Leaders
 - f. Governor's office
 - g. Federal land management agencies
 - h. Public education leaders
 - i. Other higher education institutions
 - j. Clearstory Studios
 - k. Partners for Prosperity
 - l. Idaho Rural Partnership
 - m. Idaho Commerce
 - n. Offices of elected government officials
 - o. Idaho Conservation League
 - p. USDA – FSA and RD