

Montana Rural Development Roundtable



Summary of Montana Rural Development Roundtable

Bozeman, Montana

May 13, 2009

Those in Attendance:

- Don Albrecht – Western Rural Development Center
- Sheldon Jones – Farm Foundation
- Dan Clark – Montana State Extension
- Sam Korsmoe – Madison County Economic Development Council
- Paul Lachapelle – Montana State Extension
- Tara Mastel – Jefferson Local Development Corp
- Leah Noel – Rural Dynamics
- Mark Reahder – Farm for Families
- Mike Schectman – Big Sky Institute for the Advancement of Nonprofits
- Liz Stuew – Rural Dynamics
- Christiane Von Reichert – University of Montana Geography

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

Participants were asked to list the two or three most positive features of rural Montana.

Their responses were:

1. There is a connection to the landscape. People both make a living from the land and enjoy it for recreational purposes.
2. Montana has close-knit communities that provide close relationships. People take care of one another.
3. Montana has independent and self-reliant individuals

Session Two: Priorities for strengthening the future of rural Montana

Participants were asked: As you ponder the future of rural Montana, 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** broad areas listed below would you select as being of “highest priority” for the future of rural communities in Montana?

- 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 their responses to the following four priorities:

1. Leadership development
2. Entrepreneurship, education and local economic development
3. Philanthropic and nonprofit development and other sustainable funding sources
4. Develop local assets, including agriculture and increase value-added opportunities in the development of resources.

Session Three: Digging deeper into the three priority areas:

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

1. Leadership development
 - a. Specific challenges faced by rural areas in Montana
 - i. Existing leaders tend to be older
 - ii. Education, skill levels, confidence and human capacity among the residents of many rural communities is very low.
 - iii. People need help in order to deal with situations outside their comfort zone.
 - iv. Becoming involved in a leadership position results in adversarial circumstances and it requires extensive time commitments – something many people are unwilling to deal with.
 - v. Delivery of programs is a challenge because of isolation - great distances between communities and small populations.
 - b. Strategies/initiatives that should be launched

- i. Leadership training and education programs, such as “Leadership Plenty,” should be implemented.
 - ii. It would be helpful if resources were obtained to provide train-the-trainer programs.
 - iii. The WRDC could assist by convening a regional team to explore best practices relative to leadership development programs.
- 2. Entrepreneurship, education and local economic development
 - a. Specific challenges face by rural areas in Montana
 - i. Because the state is large and population is small, program delivery is a problem
 - ii. Skills for developing business, marketing, financial plans are lacking.
 - iii. Planning for success in a larger political economy and financial markets are beyond local control – but by understanding how these entities work would increase the likelihood of success.
 - iv. There is a need to develop an entrepreneurial spirit that would provide support as people work on creating a new idea. This spirit would also reduce the fear of failure.
 - b. Strategies/initiatives that should be launched
 - i. Provide a system of networking by facilitating sessions where people get together to share ideas and initiate creativity.
 - ii. Provide a format so that communities can decide where they are and where they want to be.
 - iii. Provide E-commerce and similar training.
 - iv. Share success stories as models in a manner similar to what the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship does.
- 3. Philanthropic and nonprofit development and other sustainable funding sources
 - a. Specific challenges faced by rural areas in Montana
 - i. Montana has a lack of experience with Philanthropic and nonprofit development. They are on the wrong side of philanthropic divide.
 - ii. There is a lack of significant dollars to underwrite initial development efforts.
 - iii. Within communities there is a lack of money to help with development and there is a lack of skills to seek such funds.
 - b. Strategies/initiatives that should be launched
 - i. Programs should be developed to make both communities and individuals aware of philanthropic and nonprofit organizations. These education and awareness programs could also share success stories.

- ii. A course could be developed on philanthropy/fundraising for dummies
- 4. Develop local assets, including agriculture and increase value-added opportunities in the development of resources.
 - a. Specific challenges faced by rural areas in Montana
 - i. There is a lack of understanding regarding the influence of outside markets on local producers and the importance of value-added.
 - ii. Help is needed in creating a demand for locally produced food. A major problem is that the infrastructure is lacking for processing, storing, and marketing locally produced foods.
 - iii. There is a lack of understanding regarding the new opportunities that exist through information and communication technology in a global world.
 - iv. Philanthropic organizations don't understand how they can help.
 - b. Strategies/initiatives that should be launched
 - i. E-commerce and e-extension programs and trainings should be offered and efforts made to reach a broad audience.
 - ii. Educate foundations on where their investment is needed for value-added agriculture and other economic development efforts.
 - iii. Provide a means of improving access to capital for local development efforts. Local banks don't know how to deal with venture capital issues.

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 the state's land-grant university in relation to the FOUR priority areas identified in Session Two and discussed in Session Three. Their responses were:

1. Research Needs
 - a. Research to improve understanding of which leadership programs would best serve rural communities compared to urban communities?
 - b. What is the best means for marketing programs to rural communities and residents?
 - c. How do you measure the success of programs?
 - d. Do the programs work for different racial/gender/age groups?
 - e. What are appropriate means of implementing dialogue/deliberation in a community?
 - f. How do you get to the tipping point where a program has its own inertia?
 - g. How do you determine community readiness?
 - h. Why didn't prior interventions sustain?

2. Extension/outreach questions?
 - a. What is the capacity of various states to deliver programs?
 - b. Develop means of sharing best practices.

3. Partners
 - a. Philanthropic organizations and foundations – Montana Arts Council
 - b. Montana Nonprofit Association
 - c. Montana Council for the Humanities
 - d. Montana Economic Development Association
 - e. State organizations – governor’s office
 - f. Community banks
 - g. Credit unions – Montana Credit Union for Community Development
 - h. Private Businesses
 - i. Montana Indian Business Alliance
 - j. Indian nonprofit association
 - k. Federal agencies – USDA Rural Development, USFS, BLM, etc.