GATEWAY AND NATURAL AMENITY REGION NETWORK
April 30, 2020 Listening Session
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OVERVIEW

On April 30th, 2020, the Gateway and Natural Amenity Region (GNAR) Initiative hosted a by-invitation-only virtual listening session for a select group of GNAR communities from around the western U.S. The session provided a space for elected officials, city and county planners, economic development specialists, and others from these communities to share their COVID-19 related experiences and challenges, engage in dialogue with each other about how to respond, start to collectively generate strategies and lessons learned, and help the GNAR Initiative team identify ways it can best assist GNAR communities going forward.

The interactive session was conducted via Zoom. It was facilitated by faculty from Utah State University and University of Utah (see facilitation team contact information in Appendix A). The facilitation team used a number of exercises from the free and publicly available Liberating Structures toolkit to facilitate interactive dialogue among participants. Participants were encouraged to use these tools and exercises in their own online and in-person meetings.

This document summarizes the ideas that were shared during the session. Names and contacts for participants and the facilitation team are included in Appendix A. Resources shared by participants during and following the session are included in Appendix B.

ABOUT THE GNAR INITIATIVE

The GNAR Initiative uses research, education, and capacity building efforts to assist community leaders, land managers, and others from gateway communities and natural amenity-focused regions throughout the West to prepare for and respond to challenges in planning, development, natural resource management, and public policy—such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. The Initiative is an affiliation of university faculty, government and state agencies, non-profit organizations, and community leaders. It’s organization is based in the Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism at Utah State University.

GNAR COMMUNITY CHALLENGES

To kick off the listening session, participants engaged in an exercise called Impromptu Networking to share their thoughts in response to the prompts:

• What is one key challenge your community is dealing with?

• What are you doing to address this challenge and how is that going?

After discussing these prompts with a partner, they shared their responses to these questions with each other using the Zoom chat feature. Responses are below:

WHAT IS ONE KEY CHALLENGE YOUR COMMUNITY IS DEALING WITH?

• Matt Brown (Kanab, UT): Lack of tourist visiting.

• Shawn Hill, Teton Valley, ID/WY: Falling revenue.

• Gregg Martinez, Page, AZ: COVID-19 and AZ being closed.

• Kaitlin Myers, Moab, UT: Lack of affordable housing across all price points, lack of density.

• Zacharia Levine, Grand County and Moab, UT: Economic diversification (to increase resilience).
GNAR Community Challenges - Continued

- Mark Newcomb, Teton County, WY: Lack of response funding and testing.
- Jake Powell, Utah State University: Loss of revenue/opportunity losses from cancelling events that will not happen otherwise.
- Laurel Harkness, Mt. Shasta, CA: Low capacity in local government leadership - ill equipped to govern remotely and meet the moment.
- Kevin Walker, Moab, UT: Diversifying our economy while preserving quality of life for residents.
- Margaret Bowes, CO Assoc of Ski Towns: Communications with second homeowners around COVID.
- Tom Dansie, Springdale, UT: Responding to differing opinions from community members on how to respond to social distancing, business shutdowns, national park closures.
- Leanne Bernstein, Driggs, ID: Uncertainties regarding tourism/revenue.
- Tim Henney, Park City, UT: How to best support vulnerable members of the community.
- Mary McClelland, West Glacier, MT: Not being incorporated, with all the same challenges as an incorporated community.

What Are You Doing To Address That Challenge And How Is That Going?

- Matt Brown (Kanab, UT): There's isn't anything we have the power to do.
- Mark Newcomb, Teton County, WY: Trying to work up the ladder: state legislature, governor, congress.
- Kevin Walker, Moab, UT: It feels like we are still in the very beginning stages of addressing that challenge.
- Gregg Martinez, Page, AZ: Creating and training on safe work guidelines. Daily industry meetings via zoom to help educate restaurants, tour operators, and hotels on safe practices.
- Kaitlin Myers, Moab, UT: Strategically increasing density, deed restricting more housing, City starting to develop housing itself.
- Aaron Qualls Sandpoint, ID: Keeping small business alive - providing access to resources and information.
- Laurel Harkness, Mt. Shasta, CA: Pulling from other sectors to assist local government with basic training on remote tools (i.e., Zoom, Slack).
- Margaret Bowes, CO Assoc of Ski Towns: Community newsletters, press releases, public health orders, vms signs.
- Shawn Hill, Teton Valley, ID/WY: Reconsidering tourism as a worthwhile economic development pursuit.
- Jake Powell, Utah State University: Rescheduling events or doing them “virtually” but the traditional opportunity is lost.
- Tom Dansie, Springdale, UT: Trying to provide as much information to the community from official sources (health department, governor’s office, etc.) as possible. Being clear and deliberate in communication with community.
- Tim Henney, Park City, UT: Amplifying mechanisms to direct relief funds.
- Zacharia Levine, Grand County and Moab, UT: Supporting workforce development (USU Moab), entrepreneurship (trainings, networking opportunities), new business development (via advising and funding), supporting existing businesses. And kudos to Shawn Hill’s comment. COVID-19 has really helped to expose the vulnerabilities associated with overdependence on tourism (and the dark underbelly of its negative externalities).
- Mary McClelland, West Glacier, MT: Revitalizing our land use committee with the county, working closely with county, working with NPS-RTCA on a West Glacier Vision Plan with excellent participation with all stakeholders - all issues exacerbated with COVID.
• **Leanne Bernstein, Driggs, ID:** Adjusting to new 'normal' and accommodating different and new ways to participate in city government; Also adjusting our schedule for adopting a new Comp Plan

Participants were asked to reflect on one key insight from their Impromptu Networking conversations with each other and to share their insight via the chat feature. Responses are below:

**WHAT IS ONE KEY INSIGHT FROM THE IMPROMPTU NETWORKING SESSION?**

- **Margaret Bowes, CO Assoc of Ski Towns:** I talk too much. Chase didn't get a chance to share.
- **Jordan Smith, Utah State University:** That several resorts have chosen not to re-open for the summer in/around Jackson
- **Mary McClelland, West Glacier, MT:** Two minutes too short
- **Mark Newcomb, Teton County, WY:** Diverse needs among the GNAR
- **Kaitlin Myers, Moab, UT:** Similarities between communities.... and, not enough time!
- **Laurel Harkness, Mt. Shasta, CA:** Universalness of the issues among similar communities.
- **Jake Powell, Utah State University:** I had never thought about the challenge of getting local leadership up to speed on governing “remotely”
- **Aaron Qualls Sandpoint, ID:** Similarities of struggles
- **Shawn Hill, Teton Valley, ID/WY:** We’re secretly enjoying the lack of crowds in our over-touristed communities
- **Kevin Walker, Moab, UT:** Interested to hear more about Springdale, which is facing issues similar to those faced by Moab.
- **Matt Brown, Kanab, UT:** I guess I’m learning how to do a Zoom breakout
- **Tim Henney, Park City, UT:** Better device would help with typing in Zoom chat
- **Tom Dansie, Springdale, UT:** Similar ideas about the importance of a diverse economy (more than just tourism) to help be more resilient to these types of emergencies.
- **Zacharia Levine, Grand County and Moab, UT:** It’s so comforting (and inspiring) and insightful just to CONNECT with other GNAR communities
Participants engaged in an exercise called 1-2-4-All to share their thoughts with each other in response to the prompts:

- What do you feel you and your community need right now to help you cope with and recover from COVID-19 and its impacts?
- What can the GNAR Initiative do to be most helpful to you and your communities now and going forward?
- Would future conversations like this (with a larger group) be helpful? If so, how often and who needs to be part of the conversation?

They were then asked to share their key takeaways for each of these questions via the chat feature. Their responses to each of these prompts are below:

**WHAT DO YOU FEEL YOU AND YOUR COMMUNITY NEED RIGHT NOW TO HELP YOU COPE WITH AND RECOVER FROM COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACTS?**

- **Jordan Smith, Utah State University:** Needs we discussed: Forum to share information on revenue losses and other impacts from communities in similar situations.
- **Mark Newcomb, Teton County, WY:** Support for needs of our public health department so they can implement reopening strategy of test, track, trace
- **Mary McClelland, West Glacier, MT:** Better develop networking and ways of communication
- **Laurel Harkness, Mt. Shasta, CA:** Secondary & tertiary economies. Not solely reliant on tourism.
- **Jake Powell, Utah State University:** I think guidance on how to work with NPS and other groups currently closed, to open communities in a coordinated effort that is clear to people.
- **Tim Henney, Park City, UT:** Repurposing restricted TRT funds from marketing to disaster relief
- **Gregg Martinez, Page, AZ:** Diversified industry
- **Leanne Bernstein, Driggs, ID:** Resources and aid with expanding economic diversity; more local resiliency planning
- **Kaitlin Myers, Moab, UT:** More resources to take care of our vulnerable people most affected by unemployment via tourism
- **Aaron Qualls Sandpoint, ID:** Besides PPE, support for local businesses
- **Shawn Hill, Teton Valley, ID/WY:** A regular bulletin (from GNAR) of what communities are doing
- **Margaret Bowes, CO Assoc of Ski Towns:** Communicating balance between public health and economic health
- **Zacharia Levine, Grand County and Moab, UT:** More staff! The resource limitations are INCREDIBLE. Also, more urgently, best practices in how to safely operate a service-based tourism business in the post-COVID era.
- **Tom Dansie, Springdale, UT:** Help promoting messaging to visitors on how to visit responsibly. We are concerned about a flood of visitors bringing more exposure to the virus to our community.
- **Mark Newcomb, Teton County, WY:** I apologize—I’m going to have to break away....I look forward to looping in again in the future. Good luck to all of you!
- **Kelly Stowell, Kanab, UT:** We’re ready for customers to come back and patronize our businesses!

**WHAT CAN THE GNAR INITIATIVE DO TO BE MOST HELPFUL TO YOU AND YOUR COMMUNITIES NOW AND GOING FORWARD?**

- **Zacharia Levine, Grand County and Moab, UT:** See my comment above re: best practices for safe operation of an industry that depends a lot on social interaction (at least at the points of sale)
- **Tom Dansie, Springdale, UT:** Facilitate more discussion between gateway communities. Provide best practices / case examples on what other communities have done successfully.
- **Kevin Walker, Moab, UT:** Facilitate information sharing in order to (1) avoid reinventing the wheel and (2) repeating mistakes that other communities have made.
• **Aaron Qualls, Sandpoint, ID:** Sharing of information and strategies. What's the “New Normal” going to look like for all of us?

• **Shawn Hill, Teton Valley, ID/WY:** Exploring the prospect of our economies not running on all cylinders over the long term - and embracing it!

• **Kaitlin Myers, Moab, UT:** Ability to connect with other similar communities we wouldn’t typically have the ability to network with and learn from

• **Mary McClelland, West Glacier, MT:** By doing this you are facilitating sharing of information - previous break out had a good suggestion of a platform for questions & answers

• **Jordan Smith, Utah State University:** Needs we discussed: Facilitate forums to share ideas, current solutions being implemented by other communities.

• **Margaret Bowes, CO Assoc of Ski Towns:** Provide opportunity for networking and information sharing. Maybe virtual events such as this around a specific topic.

• **Laurel Harkness, Mt. Shasta, CA:** Would love GNAR to create playbooks 1) for local governments on transformation and creating secondary & tertiary economies 2) regional toolkit, how small local governments can leverage the power of their region.

• **Gregg Martinez, Page, AZ:** Help us raise awareness of our communities and their specific needs

• **Leanne Bernstein, Driggs, ID:** Keep up with what you’re doing, this situation highlights the need for GNAR communities to do the things that many other communities are already doing, i.e. remote public meetings. Continue to facilitate discussions between GNAR communities and help connect communities especially in the same state

• **Kelly Stowell, Kanab, UT:** Create a network and develop resources for gateway community best practices, adapt to economy, ensure safety of customers and employees

**WOULD FUTURE CONVERSATIONS LIKE THIS (IN A LARGER GROUP) BE HELPFUL?**

- **Kelly Stowell, Kanab, UT:** Yes, helpful once per month
- **Gregg Martinez, Page, AZ:** Maybe. As long as we have objectives
- **Kevin Walker, Moab, UT:** I would be interested in participating in future sessions like this, but ideal frequency depends on external factors.
- **Laurel Harkness, Mt. Shasta, CA:** Yes. Also would love to see GNAR representation from OR, WA, NV, CO (other blue states). CA and those states are collaborating together around COVID reopening.
- **Mary McClelland, West Glacier, MT:** Could you have groups like this focused on a topic or specific issue? This is helpful to know all the challenges out there and spur the problem-solving thoughts
- **Tom Dansie, Springdale, UT:** Yes! The diversity in this group is great (gov employees, advocates, elected officials). More gatherings like this would be great. Quarterly?
- **Leanne Bernstein, Driggs, ID:** Yes, conversations like this are helpful and encouraging. These meetings can also be a great place to start side conversations to get to know others who are in similar situations
- **Margaret Bowes, CO Assoc of Ski Towns:** Bi-monthly. Specific topics will attract the right participants and likely result in more valuable conversation. Breakout rooms were great.
- **Shawn Hill, Teton Valley, ID/WY:** Yes. Participation from elected officials and chambers of commerce/business groups is necessary. Maybe one or two topics per meeting.
- **Tim Henney, Park City, UT:** Yes, a group that can coalesce around achievable outcome
- **Zacharia Levine, Grand County and Moab, UT:** Yes! Indeed. I like the virtual meeting room as well since our communities are so isolated and meeting in person is challenging (time and money and carbon intensive) even in normal times.
GNAR COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES

Participants were encouraged to think about how in “every challenge there is an opportunity” and to use the chat feature to share their thoughts in response to the following prompt:

One opportunity COVID-19 might create for my community is...

Participants’ responses are shared below:

- **Gregg Martínez, Page, AZ**: Better connection to business and city government
- **Kevin Walker, Moab, UT**: C19 has lowered barriers for telecommuting. In the long run this could help our community diversify.
- **Tim Henney, Park City, UT**: Recognition that proactive preparation is preferable to well executed reaction.
- **Aaron Quals Sandpoint, ID**: Rolling out lighter Quicker Strategies for small businesses (popup, food trucks, parklets)
- **Laurel Harkness, Mt. Shasta, CA**: Reframing focus on outdoor recreation infrastructure, both the stewardship and expansion.
- **Zacharia Levine, Grand County and Moab, UT**: Highlighting the importance of diversification, and the reality that tourism isn’t all roses. Jonathan Schechter is a great speaker/thinker on the topic of governance, btw.
- **Shawn Hill, Teton Valley, ID/WY**: Relish the lack of crowds and focus on livability, sustainability, resiliency instead of economic development and a maniacal drive for tax revenue
- **Kaitlin Myers, Moab, UT**: Opportunity to expand remote working, diversity of business types and industries
- **Kelly Stowell, Kanab, UT**: Help local businesses fill in the supply chain with products produced locally
- **Tom Dansie, Springdale, UT**: Learning how to react quickly to unforeseen circumstances, help in becoming proactive to anticipate the next catastrophes.
- **Leanne Bernstein, Driggs, ID**: I have seen folks really rally around the idea of self-reliance. I think we can leverage this into resiliency planning and increased community involvement
- **Margaret Bowes, CO Assoc of Ski Towns**: Current reality has benefits such as reduced traffic, pollution, consumption. Sense of “we are all in this together.”
- **Mary McClelland, West Glacier, MT**: Communication helps pro-action not reaction, without COVID, we wouldn’t be focusing as much on being better communicators and listeners to find community solutions

ONGOING RESEARCH ON GNAR COMMUNITY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The GNAR Initiative team provided a brief overview of ongoing research on challenges and opportunities in GNAR communities, noting that they are currently pursuing research funds to explore 1) COVID-19 impacts and responses in GNAR communities and 2) interconnected housing and transportation issues.

Participants were invited to share their thoughts on these topics and any other research needs, as well as to let the research team know if they want to be involved in any of these studies, by contacting Danya Rumore (danya.rumore@law.utah.edu and 208-659-1415).

Danya also encouraged participants to contact her if they want any additional training on how to use Zoom to run interactive, engaging online meetings.
To wrap up the listening session, participants were asked to use the chat feature to share their thoughts about the following prompts:

- One key takeaway or insight from this listening session is...
- One idea for how I/my community can be helpful to the GNAR Initiative is...
- Do you have any lingering questions, concerns, thoughts, ideas?

The responses they shared via chat for each prompt are below.

**ONE KEY TAKEAWAY OR INSIGHT FROM THE LISTENING SESSION IS...**

- Zacharia Levine, Grand County and Moab, UT: The timing of this was really good...I'm guessing all of us needed to connect with other GNARly people outside our own communities.
- Tom Dansie, Springdale, UT: There are some really great ideas being explored by other communities. I am excited to learn from them.
- Shawn Hill, Teton Valley, ID/WY: There's a hunger for peer-to-peer learning
- Margaret Bowes, CO Assoc of Ski Towns: Always energizing to chat with folks that understand challenges facing tourism-dependent communities.
- Tim Henney, Park City, UT: Shared community challenges
- Laurel Harkness, Mt. Shasta, CA: Common issues around seeking resilience through building out other economics besides tourism and seeking balance between public health & economics.
- Kaitlin Myers, Moab, UT: Taking more time to consider different ways in which COVID-19 can make our community more resilient; personally taking away how to structure a constructive Zoom meeting to gather feedback from a large group
- Leanne Bernstein, Driggs, ID: We'll never be able to plan for every possible scenario, but we can be flexible and we can help and learn from each other
- Mary McClelland, West Glacier, MT: This is excellent, thank you. Insight from this listening session is that I talked too much and could probably benefit from having the prompts in advance so I can be more thoughtful about input and have more time to listen to the experienced planners that you have on this call.
- Kelly Stowell, Kanab, UT: Self-reliance
- Aaron Qualls Sandpoint, ID: Opportunities at the state level to reshuffle budgets to directly support small business

**ONE IDEA FOR HOW I/MY COMMUNITY CAN BE HELPFUL TO THE GNAR INITIATIVE IS...**

- Tim Henney, Park City, UT: Actively advocate for identified shared outcome
- Kelly Stowell, Kanab, UT: We need to gather good data locally and be prepared to share
- Shawn Hill, Teton Valley, ID/WY: Pay dues
- Aaron Qualls Sandpoint, ID: Share info and strategies for getting us back on our feet.
- Margaret Bowes, CO Assoc of Ski Towns: I can more regularly communicate with GNAR and share information and resources that CAST has developed. Could be added to your broader, more regional work.
- Laurel Harkness, Mt. Shasta, CA: Sharing resources, other best practices from gateway communities throughout our network.
- Kevin Walker, Moab, UT: Information sharing
- Tom Dansie, Springdale, UT: We have been successful in working regionally (Zion Regional Collaborative) to address issues. We could share our success in regional planning with other areas.
- Zacharia Levine, Grand County and Moab, UT: Graduate students performing situation assessments on key topics and then sharing them with the GNAR network.
- Gregg Martinez, Page, AZ: Connecting you to other AZ GNAR communities
- Leanne Bernstein, Driggs, ID: Face challenges head on and share about those experiences - we can fix 'em if we don’t talk about ‘em
- Kaitlin Myers, Moab, UT: Initiate local listening sessions within our own communities to share with this group and make changes within our own local gov/infrastructure
- Mary McClelland, West Glacier, MT: We can help develop strategies for the challenges of gateways where the community is unincorporated.
- Laurel Harkness, Mt. Shasta, CA: We are hosting a Rural California Outdoor Recreation Summit - mid Nov. Possible forum for GNAR.
- Zacharia Levine, Grand County and Moab, UT: Ooh...nice idea Kaitlin. We need to identify ways to more efficiently spread knowledge with the electorates of our communities

DO YOU HAVE ANY LINGERING QUESTIONS, CONCERNS, THOUGHTS, IDEAS?

- Aaron Qualls Sandpoint, ID: Get ready for an onslaught of remote workers?
- Gregg Martinez, Page, AZ: When international travel will happen again?
- Laurel Harkness, Mt. Shasta, CA: One of the best examples of responsiveness in a gateway community recently was in South Lake Tahoe - they’ve initiated what they are calling a “Transformational Committee”, designed to address the path forward from COVID 19.
- Tom Dansie, Springdale, UT: Has there been any research specifically about the COVID19 in gateway communities? Rates, outcomes, impacts, etc? If so can it be shared?
- Kevin Walker, Moab, UT: Possible online formats for information-sharing: Stackexchange style, Slack, Wiki. Which (if any) of these would be useful for GNAR?
- Shawn Hill, Teton Valley, ID/WY: I will happily accept a grant to liaise with our European counterparts and the solutions/lessons learned there:)
- Zacharia Levine, Grand County and Moab, UT: I like the idea of exploring the concept of “new normals” for GNAR communities and monitoring it. COVID-19 presents a really good “quasi-experimental” opportunity (i.e. pre-post studies).
- Mary McClelland, West Glacier, MT: Will part of your compilation include a profile of sorts for each of the participants so we could see where our concerns and issues cross-over?
- Laurel Harkness, Mt. Shasta, CA: Encouraging policies in play around rural resilience and CCC deployment at federal level. Could mean much support for influx of jobs on public lands and support for land management agencies. (i.e. Great American Outdoors Act).
- Aaron Qualls Sandpoint, ID: See this link for Economic Stabilization, Recovery and Organizational Response: An Action Framework for Place Management Organizations
The GNAR Initiative team thanked everyone for being part of this session and shared the following closing thoughts and next steps:

- The COVID-19 outbreak has exposed weaknesses that were already there: lack of economic diversity; strained leadership; testing relationships (community/ national park/ various levels of government/ and other organization)
- Lots of communities are dealing with the same issues, hopefully you can share ideas and help each other out.
- There is a lot of noise and diverse information out there about how to best move forward; etc. We want to cut through this noise and provide a forum for you to share with and learn from one another.
- How can the GNAR help out? It was great to see that all of you shared information that we never thought about. This will help us focus our future efforts to create opportunities to share information and conduct future research.
- Moving forward: This was our first step. We hope to bring more people together in the future - hopefully in May. Ultimately, we want to help people problem solve.
- We will give you a record of this meeting and contact information from all the folks that participated.
- We are also looking for other partners and funding to help provide support to GNAR communities. If you have any ideas about other people and organizations we can engage to expand our efforts and provide better support for GNAR communities, please let us know.
# APPENDIX A – LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AND FACILITATION TEAM CONTACT INFORMATION

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APPENDIX B – RESOURCES THAT PARTICIPANTS SHARED DURING AND AFTER THE SESSION

Economic Stabilization Recovery Framework for IDA (shared by Aaron Qualls)

Colorado Association of Ski Towns (CAST) reports (shared by Margaret Bowes)
- NWCOG & CAST E-Bike Survey & Policy Report, April 2018
- CAST Multi-Modal Transportation Best Practices Report and Appendices, August 2018
- Regional Workforce Housing Report, January 2019

South Lake Tahoe Transformational Committee to address the path forward from COVID-19 (shared by Laurel Harkness)

GNAR Initiative research findings (shared by Danya Rumore)
- Planning in Gateway and Natural Amenity Region Communities: Understanding the Unique Challenges Associated with Transportation, Mobility, and Livability (Research Report)
- Other resources, including a webinar on our findings