

IMPACT

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Community partnerships: America's Best Communities

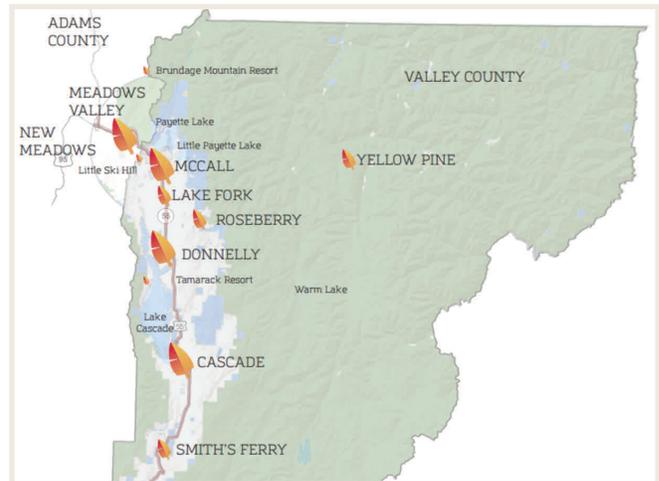
AT A GLANCE

UI Extension partners with local communities to strengthen impact on regional planning and coordination throughout the West Central Mountains.

The Situation

The communities in the West Central Mountains (WCM) of Idaho are small and remote. Regional collaboration is essential to increase the capacity of each community making the area more resilient and competitive for outside funding sources. The rural communities in the WCM of Idaho have had difficulties in the past working together. Behavior change in community planning happens with a "carrot or stick" approach. The America's Best Communities (ABC) contest had a 1, 2 or 3 million dollar "carrot." The ABC contest incentivized the need to expand existing efforts of regional collaboration. Over the past three years, trust between the communities has had a chance to grow and barriers have been addressed. Shared challenges have been identified and an economic development strategy has been written, adopted and short term initiatives have been implemented.

The main objective of the ABC contest in the WCM was to form a regional committee to address shared challenges. UI Extension has served on the ABC committee since 2014 as the planning and visioning chair, and was the team lead for the following short term initiatives: formation of the WCM Food Coalition, Community Garden Spaces, Traveling Maker Space Kit Program and the Area Sector Analysis Process (ASAP).



West Central Mountains region, Idaho's Adventure Corridor. It includes Valley and a portion of Adams County.

Our Response

UI Extension programs were leveraged to contribute to the efforts of the WCM strategy through leadership in regional planning, youth development, rural capacity building, food systems, community gardens and sector development. Examples of programming for community development include:

- The Cultivating Success, Beginning Farmer and Rancher course, was offered in January 2016, along with Master Gardener and Victory Garden classes.
- UI Extension was selected to participate in the ASAP Western Rural Development Center program. This project was implemented February 2016 and was completed in February 2017. The results of this survey have been shared with the WCM Economic Development Council to move this process forward.

- The WCM Food Coalition was assembled with local stakeholders in March 2017.
- UI Extension and Master Gardeners helped establish community gardens in the area including: Pride of the Pantry Plots Community Garden at the Cascade Food Pantry and the Meadows Valley Community Garden at the school in New Meadows.
- UI Extension will continue to serve on the Cascade Mobility Team to enhance and improve the pedestrian corridor in the City of Cascade.
- UI Extension, 4-H Youth Development will continue to provide programs throughout Valley County.

Program Outcomes

The ABC contest has spurred rural capacity building in the WCM and has demonstrated the ability for action and implementation to address challenges throughout the region. Through the first award of \$50,000 in the ABC contest, the committee developed the WCM Economic Development Strategy. Continuing to advance in the ABC contest, additional funding of \$100,000 was awarded. This funding was dedicated to the implementation of the 21 short-term initiatives that supported efforts to address the six main challenges identified throughout the region including: 1) Jobs, 2) Housing, 3) Transportation and Infrastructure, 4) Educational, Cultural and Recreational Opportunities, 5) Health and Wellbeing and 6) Regional Communication. Over the course of a year this plan has synthesized and organized the efforts of 23 organizations, four municipalities, two counties and identified short-term initiatives. A regional branding strategy has begun, a logo developed, and social media hashtags are in use.

The WCM region has received national recognition. The American Planning Association (APA) awarded this community effort the national 2016 Vernon Deines Merit Award for an Outstanding Small Town Special Project Plan. The statewide Idaho APA chapter awarded the WCM Economic Development Strategy the Outstanding Plan Award.

The Future

The WCM Economic Development Strategy will continue implementation under the direction of the WCM Economic Development Council. A WCM Community Foundation will be created to establish a local funding source for grants. Through continued collaboration and coalition building the WCM will be able to have a greater impact in reaching the long term goals identified in the WCM strategy.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

The ABC contest was submitted by McCall Chamber Community Development committee in 2014. Over time, this initiative brought together over 23 organizations and businesses in the WCM including: Valley County, city and chamber representatives from Cascade, McCall, Donnelly, and Meadows Valley, Meadows Valley Community Foundation, UI Extension and the Valley County Economic Development Council. As additional partners are identified that support the long term goals they are brought on board. We have found that we are stronger working together and create a greater impact. Together we thrive!

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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