



GOVERNOR'S
EMPOWER RURAL IOWA
INITIATIVE

Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative
Executive Committee Meeting
Conference Call
Monday, April 20, 2020
2:00 PM

I. Roll Call:

Members Present:	Lt. Governor Gregg	Sandy Ehrig	Chris Ball
	Dave Duncan	Emily Schmitt	Janae Jenison
	David Barker		
Guests Present:	Bill Menner	Rand Fisher	Drew Conrad
	Mickey Shields	Mark Reinig	

II. Approval of Minutes: Minutes from the 10/24/2019 meeting had been distributed for review. James Hoelscher motioned to approve and Emily Schmitt seconded. Passed unanimously

III. Welcome Remarks & Updates from Lt. Governor Gregg: The Lt. Governor thanked members for attending during this unprecedented time of conference and Zoom calls. This meeting provides an opportunity to stay in touch and provide updates, as well as to hear feedback from members.

The Governor is hosting daily press conferences to provide updates on COVID-19. She has taken significant action in closing businesses and schools. The Legislature is closed through April 30th with the broadband and other legislation pending. When the legislature reconvenes, he expects significant action. The need for high speed broadband has been strongly demonstrated through this pandemic. Online learning, telehealth, working, all require connectivity.

IV. Remarks from Sandy Ehrig:

March 10th was Empower Rural Iowa Day on the Hill and on March 18 the quarterly IRDC meeting was held by conference on Zoom. Next week would have been Summit, which we've now moved to Aug. 19-21 with similar plans, but some changes. We will need to

shed light on what we have learned through this experience. Never would we have experienced the need for leadership and strategic planning like we do now.

V. Grant Program Updates:

The grant application deadline has been pushed back to June 5th. Grantees will have a full fiscal year to us funds. No apps received yet, but six innovation and four housing grants have been started. Please continue to push out information. If there are questions, please send her way at rural@iowa.eda.com.

VI. Rural Analysis of Business Impact Survey – UNI Institute for Decision Making James/Drew Conrad:

James thanked Drew as IDM director and congratulated the economic developers in the field. Every day we talk to them and view the amazing work they are doing with businesses, many of which are working with small businesses which they may not normally do, but they are moving ahead. Within days of this unfolding, Debi reached to out to Drew for a statewide census to see where businesses are to get a better picture of need. Drew will discuss the survey process and what was done. A screenshot and executive summary had been distributed for reference. Since the survey, they have been curating sub-reports to further break down data, including a rural prospective.

Drew: Thanks to all who helped push out notice. They received almost 14,000 responses in under a week. Once we got the data cleaned up and provided to IEDA, we started focusing on sub-reports regionally. With all 99 counties responding there are a large number of rural businesses, 45% of respondents are rural which is a good sample size.

James: We broke down the data based on what is rural and what is not. They shared a map in which all purple are rural and greyed out counties are part of a MSA. Could break down by zip, but to do any cross comparison with census or etc. is difficult to do so do on a county basis.

Liesl – we've struggled with definition of rural. I think county makes sense, but what do others think?

James -proposing if it is a metro county it would be grey, if rural, it would be purple. Instead of having 20 some excluded, there would be just 10 or 12, which are our metro.

Chris – Looking at broadband, not sure looking at zip codes vs rural zip will show the challenges between the two. Davis county in Bloomfield has good broadband, but counties to the west, for example Centerville is ok, but other towns in Appanoose County not so much. If there is a way to break it down to outside of town vs in town that would be good, but zip codes don't do that.

Bill – IEDA through the Workforce Housing Tax Credit program identified 90 rural vs 9 urban. Can we follow that model, leaving out rural parts of those, but aligning with something that already exists.

Dave D. seems like that is the easiest way, to latch out to something that is set up.

James – is county level ok? Sandy – yes, let's do county. Wanted to think it through before we produced survey so there was input.

Drew: County level, even along lines Bill suggested makes sense, because we can pull from other data. Challenge on zip codes is benchmarking data. Can always get county level data from several sources, more standardized.

James – next step: Drew and team will pull data and will make an executive summary and slides, will be reviewed and then distributed. Hopefully ready in a few days vs weeks.

VII. Rural Impacts Discussion: What are members seeing on the ground from a policy perspective?

Dave D: Broadband deployment is now high a priority during pandemic. Many stories on how members have offered free services, free upgrades, but with all the spikes in traffic, the current infrastructure has been able to handle it. Future-proof networks. Encourage governor to move forward with broadband legislation.

Emily S.: Virtual instruction will save rural towns. For us to recruit employees in Sheffield, they want their kids to have opportunities like they have in Mason City and Clear Lake. We need people thinking of smaller area superintendents like West Fork. Hopefully legislators will take on this topic. Coupled with telehealth very important.

Adam: Wonders if rural living becomes more attractive to people vs densely populated cities where more cases are spread.

Jenae: She has told family she's never been happier to live in rural Iowa. COVID-19 has completely shifted how they work. All classes online in two weeks – amazing. All staff working remotely if possible. Economy perspective – all staff taking are taking a four-week furlough over summer. If there is any way they can be helpful in the narrative on broadband let her know, they've tracked hotspots, etc. and can pull that data.

Lt. Gov: Reflected on how quickly State Government was able to pivot to remote working. Without this situation it might have taken a couple of years, but we did it in two weeks. Thinks there are some positives that will come out of this experience – how can we capitalize on that?

Jenae: In Pella, we had to cancel Tulip Time but have seen an increase in support of local businesses. Online shopping, carry out, lots of innovation online uses. Lt Gov: Rural communities have community pride, might not see the same thing in larger areas.

David B: On housing, rural residents are paying rent, different on the commercial side – hard to collect. The federal tax code is more fluid in this situation – might be a good time to lobby for some rural changes. Working on a narrative.

Liesl asked guests to give insight.

Mickey Shield, Iowa League of Cities: City government is facing challenges. They haven't been able to figure out a lot of remote working, splitting shifts, importance of broadband. It is tough, but lessons are being learned that will make things better in communities, opportunity for improvements. Thanks to Governor's office. Would like to be funneling funds to more rural cities, first funds were for larger cities.

Rand Fisher, Iowa Area Development Group: Highlighted the work we've been doing in childcare, might be new moments of opportunities. Also, small business challenges and Main Street businesses will be facing a lot of problems. Might be opportunities for new tools for rural Iowa – something for us to keep our eye on with the Task Force when we look at recommendations moving forward.

Bill Menner, Iowa Rural Development Council: There are a remarkable group of healthcare professionals across the state. Hospitals and clinics are losing money and furloughing staff because no work. It's crisis time, haven't lost one yet, but is concerned this will happen. Clinics, dentists, pharmacies, etc. CDC may start allowing some non-critical procedures to start again. If you are served by a rural hospital you are lucky – they have space, because all non-essential services are not being performed. They are all at risk.

VIII. Questions and Comments from Executive Committee

None

IX. Adjourn: