



GOVERNOR'S
EMPOWER RURAL IOWA
INITIATIVE

Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative
Executive Committee Meeting
Conference Call
Thursday, July 9, 2020
10:00 AM

I. Roll Call:

Members Present:	Lt. Governor Gregg	Sandy Ehrig	Hollee McCormick
	Emily Schmitt	Janae Jenison	James Hoelscher
	David Barker	Jim Thompson	
Guests Present:	Bill Menner	Rand Fisher	Liesl Seabert

II. Approval of Minutes: Minutes from the 4/20/20 meeting had been distributed for review. James Hoelscher motioned to approve and David Barker seconded. Passed unanimously

III. Welcome Remarks & Updates from Lt. Governor Gregg: The Lt. Governor thanked members for attending. He discussed the agenda, the legislative session and the next steps and future of the Task Forces.

The ERI bill passed unanimously by the legislature. The policy increased the match to 35 which was a direct recommendation from the task force. Funding was split in half to incentivize higher speeds with 50% for projects with speeds up to 100/20 the other half less than 100 but higher than the current standard.

Due to the pause in the session the legislature they did a continuing resolution that kept appropriations at levels passed in 2020 unless they made changes. Therefore, the broadband grant program stayed at \$5 million. The Governor intends to use CARES Act funding to support broadband, but he doesn't have an amount yet.

Additionally, funding for the rural innovation grants continues at \$300,000 as did the housing, at \$100,000. They are almost ready to announce the first winners. There were some items that never got addressed, such as the derelict building program, but overall rural was a focus.

V. Remarks from Sandy Ehrig:

Two years ago we were making our initial Empower Rural Iowa announcement in Winterset, and it's good to look back at all we've accomplished. Also, IRDC adapted Rural Summit to a virtual conference on August 20-21. It will be as interactive as possible with good bookend speakers. Asking for community teams of five this year. Task force members can review agenda at the IRDC website.

V. Task Force Updates:

The Governor is going to wind down one task force, with the other two remaining and will launch a new task force to look at rural EMS issues.

Connecting Task Force: The Connect Task Force will wind down with a wrap up meeting next week. We haven't solved connectivity, but think we've reached limit of what ERI can do. Now it's ready for implementation versus policy. Also, as part of Gov. Reynold's Economic Recovery Advisory Board one aspect is connectivity and it would have been hard for the broader conversation when we are discussing rural broadband. Plus, we've had two sessions with policy tweaks. Now budget and implementation is next. The Governor is also dedicating CARES Act funds to broadband which also impacts whether we need to continue with the Connect Task Force. Members provided outstanding work and winding down doesn't mean those members can't still be part of this conversation. There will be opportunities to stay engaged.

Growing Task Force: The Governor would like us to continue to plan for a leadership conference, even if it might need to be virtual. Rural innovation grants can serve as a funnel. We challenged Iowan's to give us ideas and one consistent item was looking at how to encourage young professionals to locate in rural Iowa. We have a lot of programs in place such as IADG supporting rural dentists and there were incentives for large animal veterinarians this year. We need an inventory of what exists and where there are gaps. Dave Barker: many things you mentioned touch on Board of Regents so let him know if he can help. LG – good connection – lot of the programs stem from the universities. Emily: The Governor's Economic Recovery rural healthcare group can maybe provide recommendations to the Growing task force to carry out. James: Leadership Exchange can get ramped up quickly. He likes the additional focus to engage committee members who have been in a holding pattern. Jenae: Likes the vision for cross collaboration. LG: We will need to consider the timing of leadership event and use the Rural Summit to promote. James: First meeting of the group will be in October, and then will have a follow-up or a work session or something similar.

Investing Task Force: The Governor's economic Recovery Advisory Board has affected this task force direction, as housing is a part. We will shift our focus of this task force to look at policies on how to encourage rural entrepreneurship. A couple of other aspects will include helping rural businesses get an online presence and helping with rural business succession planning. Emily: Both are good ideas. Having an online presence and family business succession is very important. The UNI Family Business Forum does a great job. ISU has something going, as well as a private group she is involved with. Want to compete with Kellogg so it could be a revenue generator. Dave B: He judged a contest in Fort Madison

and was impressed by ideas brought forth and the very small amt of funding they are asking for. Maybe look at a microloan program. Sandy: She has a rel interest in this, the key is to inventory to see what is working and where are the gaps. LG: This is a parallel to what we did with looking at the topic of derelict building programs in rural Iowa to inventory and then streamline. Rand: A lot of small industries are dealing with mature product lines, how can we get them to look at next generation of services. Jenae: This is what they are doing in Pella.

New - Rural EMS Task Force: This task force will look at policy recommendations to make sure rural has access to service. We will get new task force members for expertise. So many are involved in EMS are volunteers, so how can we get more people to be engaged. This has been a conversation in rural communities for a long time, so hopefully this will give us some inertia. Hollee: Great idea – it is a struggle in NE Iowa and it's hard to replace people. Bill: This was discussed this at the IRDC meeting. Good information and a heat map highlighting where service is. David B: Are there synergies between EMS and entrepreneur focus? LG: We have found throughout this process, that there is so much overlap of task force missions.

VI. Task Force Next Steps:

The rural grants are ready to be announced and next week's press conference will center on announcing recipients, and what the new charge for the ERI task forces will be. The key is announcing the Rural EMS group so we can get applications for members, like what we did when we first started. We will look to announce in August and will have September – December meetings. Growing will probably start in late July or August so we can look to a late fall leadership event.

We still have a goal to meet in person in rural communities, but we need to be flexible. Maybe it will be virtual or a hybrid. It might make it easier to give more people an opportunity to attend. Liesl: Terms for task force members are two years. We'll have some turnover in late August, and some new members with the shifts in focus so good timing

VII. Grant Program Updates:

We have received the list of recipients and the list is on our website. There is a press release ready to go out after the press conference. Used all the rural innovation funds and have good projects in all three task force areas all across the state. We had six applications for the rural housing grants, and all were recommended. There is \$40,000 left so there will be a short round in the fall. Not disappointed in this as it's easier working with the ISU timeline and virtual scheduling. Budgets have been impacted by COVID. The interest is there but communities are looking at costs. LG: We have been appropriated \$100,000 – maybe we do that in a couple of rounds to help with the ISU workload and it might be a smart way to go moving forward. Timing in the middle of COVID was bad, but he was encouraged we had so many applications. Liesl: All projects are non-COVID related. They were some things already in works and some were new projects. Additional funding will do rounds next spring again. Have been making tweaks to the program based on feedback. LG: We had a number of task force members involved in review, so thanks.

VIII. Questions and Comments from Executive Committee:

Sandy: Looks like we are on for a great year. Jim: Liesl did a great job administrating the grants. The communities really responded, and he's excited about projects. LG: Reminds me a bit of catalyst grants. Smaller scale but encouraged when we visit communities that they really are a project that drives investment. These grants have the same potential. Goal is that they are innovative and can scale and we can track data.

IX. Adjourn:

LG: Thanks to everyone. He appreciates your energy and expertise and he'll make sure the governor knows we are on point and ready to move forward. Appreciates Liesl's work to coordinate the meetings, and administration of the grant. Also all the work by Executive Committee and IRDC.