



GOVERNOR'S  
**EMPOWER RURAL IOWA**  
INITIATIVE

Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative  
Growing Rural Iowa Task Force Meeting Agenda  
Wednesday, October 7  
1:00 – 4:00 PM

**1. Roll Call:**

<b>Members:</b>	Lt. Gov. Gregg	Sandy Ehrig	Lexi Marek (for Sec. Naig)
	Jennifer Crall	Stacy Besch	Whitney Bathke
	Mickey Shields	Ron Reischl	Emily Schmitt
	Jenae Jenison	Linc Kroeger	Rick Young
	Jenna Ramsey	Jason Neises	Ashley Moyer
	Tina Bakehouse	Caleb Knutson	Sharon Stroh
	James Hoelscher	Bethany Wilcoxon	Gary Taylor

**2. Approval of Minutes from September 8, 2020 Meeting:**

Minutes from the September 8<sup>th</sup> meeting had been provided for previous review. James Hoelscher motioned to approve, seconded by Sharon Stroh. Passed unanimously.

**3. Welcoming Remarks from Lt. Gov. Gregg:**

The Lt. Governor welcomed new members Jenna Ramsey, Chad Huyser, Barb Baker and Gary Taylor to the task force. A recap of the previous meeting was given and an overview of the topics to be discussed at today's meeting.

**4. Remarks by Co-Chair Sandy Ehrig:**

The Iowa Rural Development Council (IRDC) partners with Empower Rural Iowa efforts, and that has helped grow membership of resource providers including private, public, non-profit and profit organizations that work in rural Iowa. The most recent Rural Summit was held virtually this year and all info from that is on the IRDC website at [IowaRDC.org](http://IowaRDC.org). Hopeful that we can host the 2021 Summit in-person at the Hotel Kirkwood April 14-16

**5. Leadership Exchange Update – James Hoelscher:**

The leadership team is a subgroup of this initiative and has been busy planning this free event to bring together representatives from existing leadership programs to share best practices. It will be

held on October 21-22 in a half-day format to include keynotes, topical breakout sessions, and other. Was hoping for 60 attendees and are now at 120. October 9 is deadline to register.

## **6. Future Ready Iowa Presentation - Kathy Leggett:**

The goal of the Future Ready Iowa Initiative is to have 70% of the workforce have education beyond the high school level by 2025. Reference PPT for education, workforce and skills gap stats.

Funding: The Last Dollar Scholarship provided over 6,000 Iowans tuition at community colleges and some private institutions for high demand jobs. The Employer Innovation Fund provides up to \$100,000 for creative local projects to increase high-demand jobs. Registered Apprenticeship funds “earn to learn” training models and the creation of new programs. Childcare Challenge Fund is new and part of the Employer Innovation Fund.

Last year they did 34 employer summits to identify priorities. Technical assistance is available as well. Would welcome a partnership with ERI, and please help spread the word on available programs. Can find more on programs at [FutureReadyIowa.gov](http://FutureReadyIowa.gov).

Questions?

Lt. Governor: Agrees we should think of ways to collaborate. Might be part of recommendations going forward. Wants task force members to be aware of FRI efforts to help keep people in Iowa and connect students to employers. Example: Henderson Products in Manchester which manufactures snowplows. They have a training partnership for welders with the high school, and community college, and have hired 30 students right out of school who are staying in Iowa and making good money.

James: Where can you get more info on the Childcare Challenge? Kathy: Best information is on the website. Doesn't have info on timeline yet, hopefully by year's end she will have more info. Look at website and sign up for notices

## **7. Community Colleges Presentation - Dan Lutat, Iowa Lakes Community College; Ashley Moyer, Indian Hills Community College:**

Ashley: Discussed the Iowa South initiative, a collaboration between the community college, regional chambers, and economic development organizations. Idea started about two years ago when they held quarterly meetings with economic developers and always discussed workforce issues with finding employees. Did an evaluation on what was needed and identified need for doctors, engineers, and employees for the manufacturing base. Employers are willing to train, either by themselves or partnering with the college. Led to needing to market what they have to offer, both high and low skill. Received grant funding and did an RFP for a marketing partner to develop a plan. Working on website rollout end of November that will feature stories on regional companies, but also on people that came back, or were recruited. Hope to have data to share in a year.

Questions:

James: What have you learned from working on Iowa South that could be scalable? Have you thought about doing this in other languages? Ashley: You need many partners/more time, and stories are what resonate. Sharon: Great deal of discussion focused on the “why”? Looking at industry currently here such as Musco Lighting that has product world-wide, short commute time,

more time with family, etc. What are our amenities? Why would people want to leave larger areas to move to a smaller community? Multilingual – we haven't brought that up, but a good idea.

Jennifer: For immigrant workforce, who are you targeting, the second generation? Sharon: Livability is helping define strategy. There are two phases – attracting new people and upscaling others to high level jobs. Ashley: That first phase was getting people to move into south Iowa. Trying to get people from Iowa urban to here. Also looking at upscaling those here. Always need more promotion.

Lt Governor: Might consider for next meeting having someone from IDEA talk about livability initiative and see how we can support.

Dan Lutat: Iowa has many programs to encourage Iowans to come home, such as state programs 260 E and 260 F which provide training through colleges to scale jobs. Also, the Last Dollar Scholarship program which affects both traditional and non-traditional students. We still need to do more outside that starting with building relationships with high school students to communicate the right message as to what's available for career choices and the community colleges do a good job at that. Students stay because they have good mentors. Direct engagement is key. Needs to be a cohesive path that engages students and brings them into the colleges and on to next level. They have online degrees for adult workers to obtain in 18 months, as they would rather go quickly. Need more work in that regard. Again, direct engagement to have all entities working together is key, and there are not enough people to do that secondary engagement.

James: Good point on engagement. Community and economic developers lose people when they get into the education system. Not sure we are doing a great job of reaching out.

#### **8. Iowa Association of Business and Industry Presentation – Nicole Crain:**

ABI represents all industries, not just manufacturing. Many are in rural Iowa and include larger employers in rural communities. Workforce is an issue. Livability and how to get people in rural Iowa has been a priority for them for a long time.

Highlighted ABI programs: Leadership Iowa has been taking emerging leaders and educating on what is available in Iowa for the past 35 years. Leadership Iowa University is a program for college students to connect them to people and places for great careers. Business Horizons is an education initiative for high school students. Elevate Advance Manufacturing is a partnership with the community college and private business working on skilled workforce with the goal to get middle and high school students interested in careers in manufacturing and getting their parents involved. Are seeing good results on social media stats, including many women.

Policy: Looking at three main points for 2021: Childcare challenge grant; high-speed broadband infrastructure issue; and regulatory reform.

Questions:

James: Is there a meeting of the state associations of other states' groups like ABI? Nicole: We work with the national association. Iowa is doing well on how we've been able to maintain through the pandemic. For workforce, people are looking at Iowa for examples. Iowa is taking some great steps to be leaders on childcare issues. James: Risk falls to leaders, so we are creating our own best practices.

## 9. Best Practices Presentations:

Andy Maw, Ottumwa - Welcome & Connect Service: Program of Legacy Foundation focusing on recruitment and retention and addressing employer issues. This morning met with a pediatrician interviewing for a position. Paired with community leaders to tour Ottumwa and looked at things his wife might be interested in get a feel for what living in the community is like. Might include school tours, dinners with people with similar interests, etc. Housing is a big component. He also sets up appointments with rental options for incoming people, acting as a concierge so newcomers have someone to connect to. For retention, goal is to engage twenty people new to town, meet weekly and talk about Ottumwa's history and progress, get meals from local food vendors, etc. If we can get people to put down roots, they are more likely to stay and get involved in community life.

James: How much time is spent on discovery with people coming? Depends on employer and what info they have. Some are based on conversations with the person.

Randy Maiers - Come Home Award: A talent retention program that pays students up to \$15,000 to come back home after they have received their degree. Launched in 2016 and provides payments to students over two years on a quarterly basis. Payment goes to student debtor, not direct to student. If a recipient moves, they forfeit the funds. Next year will start requiring interviews with finalists to see what is motivating them to come home. There have been some challenges such as pushback from grads who already moved home and those not eligible. Social media audience important – mom's, dad's, others will share. What they would change: Would not focus on student debt. Don't use the word scholarship, it confuses employers.

Sharon – is this an endowed fund or a pass through? Randy: All pass through. We do have repeat donors. We no longer allow new contracts to go to a college freshman. Better for someone moving back home.

Lacey Johnson, Dakota Roots Program: Program started in 2006 and focuses on out-of-state recruitment and connecting with expats. They currently have 350 job seekers looking to move to SD. Have helped over 5,000 with job opportunities, with 65% moving from surrounding states. Most have some connection with region. They have twelve job advisors across the state that help people gain a personal connection. Work with alumni associations across the state. They receive no state funding, and work with current family and friends to recruit. Can join on website and can refer a family or friend. Promote local business to promote jobs. Also have personal stories on website.

Evelyn George, Newton City Council: Moved to Newton 1983 for Maytag. City had a concentrated employer domination and youth had a career plan to work that. In 2006 Whirlpool closed the Newton plant. Bad news locally and nationally and town lost identity. Local and state leaders took action. Community was invited to help define future. Focus on energy, Main Street program, education, entertainment and beyond. Must have strong leaders and strong partners.

Successes: Local investor's built the speedway; In 2008, Iowa Telecom purchased Maytag downtown campus and committed to making improvements; Effort with state leaders, helped get TPI, now largest employer; have a diverse employment base of over 50 countries; Gained 1,200 new jobs and maintained their population. In 2010 Iowa Telecom was purchased. Not a lot of new investment, no housing starts in 2011.

In 2012 new city leadership updated planning to improve curb appeal. Maytag campus sold to a local, however no development. In 2013 newly engaged city council looked at improving nuisance codes. In 2014 highlighted first Newton branding to change conversation within community. Started a housing initiative offering \$10,000 when you close. Also, reintroduced a 1980 program for dangerous and dilapidated properties where the city would buy and rehab, working with local builders. Also waived building and inspection fees. New school bond issue passed. New condos built. Started a quarterly newsletter for citizens. Found a buyer for Hotel Maytag who agreed to restore the Maytag Ballroom, renovate the theatre, and other. Another building on First Avenue was purchased by local investors and is now about 80% full. Have developed areas for housing developments. Peanut Pub and a brewery opened. Hotel Maytag with 46 units of low-moderate income housing is open and Lions Gate opened. 2020. Have had layers of activity that have added to success.

James: Many of our rural communities are where Newton was at in 2007 – much easier to bring someone to Newton today. Lessons in what you have to build to get to that point.

Discussion:

Lt. Governor: The reverse scholarship program is interesting, to incentivize people to come back. We need to test. Dakota Roots is connected to the Iowan's Project, although broader than technology, but maybe there is something we can borrow. Iowan project/Dakota Roots/ IWD put together a project in Iowa.

James: In the Dakota Project, families are being used. Can we get buy-in from families? Maybe incentivize graduates?

Lt. Governor: Looking at reverse scholarships, what is the potential? Jason: There is a lot of potential. Legal can be tricky. If you give someone \$15,000 it would be taxable income so there are things we need to look at. Donors don't want their contributions going to taxes. Need to screen, interview, etc. Hyper local. IEDA could not get that granular in small towns.

Ron: There is money in communities. If we had communication from the Governor saying we encourage reverse scholarships or look at the money going towards things like utilities, and then we could get the utility companies involved.

**10. Public Comment:** None

**11. Wrap up & Next Steps: Monday Oct 26 1-4 heavy on discussion – half meeting on discussion to**

Next meeting will be Monday, October 26 from 1:00 – 4:00 and we will focus on recommendations.

**12. Adjourn:**