



GOVERNOR'S  
**EMPOWER RURAL IOWA**  
INITIATIVE

**Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative**  
Growing Rural Iowa Task Force Meeting Agenda  
Monday, October 11  
10 – 11 AM

1. Roll Call

Lt. Governor Gregg	Sandy Ehrig	Jenae Jenison
James Hoelscher	Caleb Knutson	Whitney Baethke
Mickey Shields	Linc Kroger	Gary Taylor
Jennifer Crall	Stephanie Fromm	Ron Reischl
Travis Tolliver	Rick Young	Ashley Moyer
Emily Schmitt		

2. Welcoming Remarks from Lt .Gov. Gregg

Lt. Governor Gregg welcomed members and thanked them for attending. Since the previous meeting, the four ERI grant applications have been opened, and he ask members to please help spread awareness.

3. Remarks by Co-Chair Sandy Ehrig

Sandy welcomed members and provided brief information on the Leadership Exchange which will be covered in greater detail later in the meeting. Wonderful news on the grant activity.

4. Welcoming Communities Panel: Himar Hernandez, ISU Extension & Outreach and Henny Ohr, EMBARC

Himar: At ISU Ext. we work with communities to enact change for the benefit of citizens and are facilitating leadership programs. The programs include components of DEI which has led to important discussions. At a recent program in south central Iowa discussion was held on data available and how much the community needs new residents and discussed how to be a welcoming community. Community members felt they were, however two HS students who were participating indicated they are not as welcoming in the community as they could be, and it is hard to break in. Different perspectives offered by different community demographic can be eye-opening for the leaders to hear the perception maybe doesn't match the reality.

Can use many methods to work on welcoming – look at data, have community do self-reflection; action planning, strategic planning, - all including DEI, then let the community

identify what they need, who their target resident group is. There is not one specific approach, it needs to be structured by the needs of the community.

They are also developing a multi-state program to market hometown America. It is a train-the-trainer approach helping communities learn how to market their community, identify image, what needs to be changed, etc.

LG: There is a challenge in rural communities in providing that feeling of welcoming. Community members know and care about each other, which is what gives you a small town feel. The challenge is for someone from the outside who moves into town. Ottumwa offers a good program with their concierge program which is intentional about getting new residents engaged.

Himar: The Legacy Foundation oversees Welcoming Connect in Ottumwa. They share best practices and check back with residents over time to see if they are still feeling engaged. Would like to challenge the organization to look at how they can engage youth to keep them in community. Used to have New Iowan Centers which he felt was successful but is no longer funded. James: Dr. Mark Grey worked with the New Iowan program. There were many resources created for that but would need to be updated.

James: Henny Ohr with EMBARC – has said if you are looking at the immigrant population, they will come for jobs but won't stay. So what can communities do to be proactive?

Himar: Would like to see some focused direction from the Governor's office like we are seeing with housing, to help communities. Examples: Iowa City starting a teen center – teens feel they belong. Ottumwa – first LGBT event held – had a person indicate they've never felt as welcome until now. Can't use a one-fits-all – different needs for different populations.

Jennifer: Have you had some best case studies we can look at? This might be a good opportunity for rural communities for new residents. Himar: Immigrants will always be here and we need to understand both new and immigrants that have been here for a generation or more. Best Practices – top down messaging from the governor's office. continued support for the Immigrant Entrepreneur Summit. LG – recent developments – we are having these conversations at the Governor's ERI task force. Also, Invest TF looks at housing and \$100M has gone to housing in general, but includes a set-aside amount for minorities for first time homes.

Henny: Provided an overview of EMBARC - First social service provider that is immigrant led. RISE program is offered through Americorp. Building integration within community, training the trainer through leadership development. Currently in 13 different sites with 99 members speaking 32 different languages, made up of 70% immigrants. Team based model – matching for needs. Looking now at workforce and education. Partnering and having pathways that includes individuals, families and community. Attracting immigrants to a community is based on communication and trust. When we work with communities, they are intention about which groups they are trying to attract and sculpting assistance to them. Look at quality of life too.

James: Referencing the Bosnian immigrants in Waterloo, Adams grocery store started to notice clients were changing. Within a year they went filling half the store with Bosnian

goods and it became the place they shopped. We can help our businesses learn how to be supportive of immigrants which can help the bottom line.

5. Grant & Program Updates

Liesl gave an overview on the grant status. Press release just went out launching the four programs, two existing (Rural Innovation Grant, Rural Housing Assessment Grant), and two new (Rural Return Pilot Grant, Rural Child Care Market Study Grant). For the Child Care Market Study program, we are partnering with First Children's Finance which will be conducting the studies. The Rural Return Program is an incentive program for communities to develop innovative models to attract people to their community. Applications and more information for all programs can be found via [iowagrants.gov](http://iowagrants.gov), with applications due by December 1, 2021.

Also, registration is open for the October 26 Leadership Exchange to be held at Legacy Plaza in Newton. This one-day event is open to all and is for communities with existing programs to share best practices with other communities looking to start a leadership program. Additionally, a Leadership Bootcamp will be held the following day for those communities starting a program and will be an in-depth workshop pairing communities with mentors. Leadership grants for the Bootcamp have been awarded to 15 communities receiving \$1,000 each to help build their program.

6. Public Comment: None

7. Wrap-up & Next Steps:

The Lt. Governor asked members to please help spread the word on the grant programs and the upcoming Leadership Exchange, and encouraged member to attend the Exchange as able.

8. Adjourn