



GOVERNOR'S
EMPOWER RURAL IOWA
INITIATIVE

Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative

Investing Rural Iowa Task Force Meeting Minutes

Buena Vista University

President's Board Room, Ballou Building

610 W 4th St

Storm Lake, IA 50588

Wednesday, November 17

12-1 PM

1. Roll Call:

Lt. Governor Gregg	Sandy Ehrig	David Barker	Danna Larson
Hunter Callanan	Chuck Morris	Nathan Katzer	Gene Gettys
Sarah Thompson	Mark Reinig	Kiana Johnson	Nick Sorensen
Brian Lenzmeier	Lisa Houser	Ben Bouwkamp for Secretary Naig	

2. Approval of Minutes from October 19, 2021 meeting:

Minutes from the previous meeting had been distributed for review. Mark Reinig made a motion to approve, with Brian Lenzmeier seconding. Motion passed.

3. Welcoming Remarks from Lt .Gov. Gregg:

Thanked members attending and Brian for hosting the meeting at Buena Vista. Looking forward to touring the Foundry after the meeting. Commented on various issues ERI is working on, as well broader efforts in state government. All three task forces are meeting this week, then we will be hosting a join ERI and IRDC meeting in December.

4. Remarks by Co-Chair Sandy Ehrig:

At the Growing task force meeting we heard from Joe Murphy with the Iowa Business Council on issues, but also how they are utilizing the "This is Iowa" campaign format to customize messages to their members. Nicole Crain with ABI gave an overview as well.

5. Iowa Rural Development Council Programming – Sandy, Mark, Bill:

Sandy: For over 10 years IFB's Renew Rural Iowa hosted a roundtable for resource partners helping entrepreneurs. Originally had around ten attendees, but as gaps were

identified, there was a broader reach. Once ERI and IRDC both became active in connecting, the roundtable went into hiatus

Mark: Many of the original members are now part of IRDC. One of the reasons for the roundtable was to get rid of duplication of efforts and learn best practices. IRDC is looking at bringing this back into place, looking at what is needed. The Okoboji Entrepreneurial Institute was an early player.

Bill: Roundtable was a big urban group, incubators, angel networks. There are other groups looking to connect with rural entrepreneurs. Demonstrating to those networks that there is opportunity. Looking at launching after first of year. Maybe use that as a platform for a session of the Summit. Will be using Zoom for meetings but could dovetail with the Summit or take something from the Summit and use it in a meeting in July – maybe as part of OEI.

LG: What role would ERI members take? Sandy: They should participate. Bill: Members can help bring people that we are not aware of.

Tom Nelson: He is the new VP of business development for the Iowa Lakes Corridor. The Institute started 15 years ago. It's a good partnership with three original education partners then added BV and Iowa Lakes and incorporated new programming for students. Also refocusing on how they can encourage entrepreneurs to locate in rural areas and ways to showcase assets like the Foundry. UNI handles applications taking eight students from UI and UNI and four from BV and Iowa Lakes. They partner with host families in the Corridor that house students. Students receive mentoring from business experts and the families. Looking at how they can grow that mentorship outside of just the OEI timeframe.

LG: He or Governor always attend and interact with students, very inspiring. Should we consider having ERI task force members participate somehow? With the funding we have maybe there is some way we can help with OEI financially.

6. Supporting Entrepreneurs Discussion – Sandy, Liesl:

Liesl: Looking for feedback from task force members on gaps in support, programs that could be models, other.

Sandy: Sits on the SBDC Advisory Board which met last week. SBDC has a new program manager, Ethan Pitt, who works in Ames but travels the state meeting with rural business innovators. Almost all have a tech element, and most are three or less employees. Supports peer learning, mentorship, access to resources such as attorneys. Very customized to what company needs but not overly structured. Eight of nine of the companies he's met with intend to stay in communities they founded in. First cohort has been a success.

Sarah: She worked in Hamilton County with four communities that were county branded so they could work better together. Looked for innovative ways to solve small business problems. In one community all buildings full, so created the vendors village,

where they brought in tiny cottages and now those are full. The ED group in Jewel takes very little rent and it helps a business test waters before going into a brick and mortar.

Gene: Had a joint Chamber/incubator affiliated with NWCC. City has ownership. Incubator didn't take off so with collaboration the city council signed ownership to the community college. They are researching creating a career academy for trades providing entrepreneurial training on how to run a small business.

LG: What can ERI do with our financial resources? We've used them on grants traditionally but as we look at next year and received same funding we may want to refocus, plus we may have funds left from this year. One idea might be supporting DBGH, or maybe economic gardening to help mid-level small businesses with market research for expansion plans.

Danna: Have been approached by people wanting to start a business, but don't know if the town will support. Can there be some type of agreement by where a city partners with business to help them know that the community is invested in entrepreneurship?

LG: Maybe we need to look at the rural innovation grant awardees to see if there have been successful and replicable. Bill: Thinks when we get roundtable together there will be some good input on success stories.

7. Grants & Programs Update, Public Comment, Wrap up & Next Steps – Liesl:

Liesl provided an overview of the grant programs and thanked members who are part of the review panel. All programs are now open and due by December 1. These include:

- Rural Innovation Grant Program – Provides up to \$200,000 in grants supporting creative, non-traditional ideas that focus on current issues and challenges faced by rural communities with the themes of community investment, growth, and connection.
- Rural Housing Assessment Grant Program – Provides up to \$100,000 to support the use of publicly available online information through the "[Profile of Iowa](#)" tool and rural community efforts to interpret this hard data with supplemental information, as well as to implement through changes to development codes, local ordinances and housing incentives specific to their community needs in partnership with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.
- Rural Child Care Market Study Grant Program – Provides up to \$100,000 to support the use of data and analysis by rural communities to determine the specific needs and solutions for their area. In partnership with First Children's Finance, funding from the program will empower communities to assess their current child care market environment and develop strategies.
- Rural Return Program – Provides up to \$100,000 to support creative programming that attracts new residents to move and/or work in rural communities. Grant funding will support the development and implementation of incentive programs.

8. Adjourn