

# impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

## Western Community Assessment Network (WeCAN) community bootcamp

### AT A GLANCE

The bootcamp supports ad hoc rural committees with getting improvement projects implemented. Participants gain skills to launch ideas through networking, grant writing and grassroots leadership.

### The Situation

The WeCAN (Western Community Assessment Network) network developed the Community Bootcamp program to build civic engagement and leadership to increase community capacity post the Community Review process. While elected officials and development organizations prioritize needs like infrastructure and economic development, we found that acting on small projects keeps the community engaged. Implementing ad hoc driven projects demonstrated the community's capacity to work together to solve local concerns and issues. WeCAN network research discovered a three-phase approach to Community Reviews. The Community Bootcamp bolsters the third phase of the Community Review sparking motivation of citizens to act and implement ideas generated during the Community Review process.

- Community reviews are intensive open-ended assessments involving a community survey, listening sessions, town hall meetings and action planning conducted during two community visits by facilitators and experts recruited from regional organizations and state agencies.



Bootcamp community, Baker Montana, used their \$500 to create an arts organization and hold an Artwalk.

### Our Response

Teams come together in one location in their communities, and using video conference/Zoom technology, learn from four different instructors over six weeks through nine hours of instruction and facilitated planning activities. Topics include:

Rural community innovation stories and research, Brainstorming and prioritizing project ideas, “Idea Friendly” approaches to community development. Building compelling stories about proposed community projects. Identifying networks of support for proposed community projects, crowdfunding, building a project funding toolbox and creating robust action plans to guide projects to completion.

Teams that successfully create plans and implement them receive matching funds for their projects. Instructors have included both consultants and University of Idaho Extension educators.

### Program Outcomes

Eleven communities have participated in two bootcamps, one in 2022 and one in 2023. An evaluation survey was sent to participants following the last Bootcamp and reviews were largely positive. Concerns focused primarily on logistics (meeting length and time of day) and increasing the time spent on grant resources including more training and support around grant writing. Overall, participants liked the format and topics, and appreciated having breakout time built in to apply content in real time.

- I could not be more pleased with the bootcamp experience... The repeated early guidance to keep our initial goals small and realistic helped in setting better short-term goals. I am greatly impressed with the very practical nature of the training including forms, charts, attractive printed notebooks, the breakout sessions... and the follow-up with recordings.

One community took research to heart that finds more indicators of innovation in rural communities that have arts organizations. They used the \$500 seed funds provided by WeCAN to have an Artwalk and start a new arts organization, all of which happened

within three months from the end of the bootcamp. The arts council raised \$800 from that event and decided to use those funds to hold other events and start a community theater. The first production was a sell-out and the organization raised \$21,000. They are now planning a third production and are bolstered by the overwhelming community support for the arts.

Projects selected by other bootcamp communities include a museum/historical society, a historical walking tour, free little art galleries that also provide free art supplies, an electronic community information sign, cleanup of a local campground, playground equipment, outdoor mining museum cleanup and leadership training.

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### The Future

To offer the bootcamp at minimal cost to communities going forward, WeCAN is proposing to edit recordings from the second Bootcamp and develop an on-demand Bootcamp that can be of assistance to communities when they are ready and able to implement it. WeCAN staff will work with local facilitators as they support community teams through the sessions.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Lorie Higgins**, Community Development Extension Specialist • University of Idaho ARES • 208-669-1480 • [higgins@uidaho.edu](mailto:higgins@uidaho.edu)

**Melissa Hamilton**, Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Valley County • 208-382-7190 • [mbhamilton@uidaho.edu](mailto:mbhamilton@uidaho.edu)

**Kathee Tift**, Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Nez Perce County • 208-799-3096 • [ktift@uidaho.edu](mailto:ktift@uidaho.edu)

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