

This newsletter provides updates from the June and July state PLNs, a view forward to the next sessions, and featured ideas and stories inspired by conversations and topics explored during our monthly meetings. Plus, we share news from WeCAN, as well as resources for your communities and for you as community leaders. Enjoy this bonus-length summer edition! If you have resources you would like to share in future newsletters or ideas for featured stories, please email them to Michele Archie (michele@harbingerconsult.com).



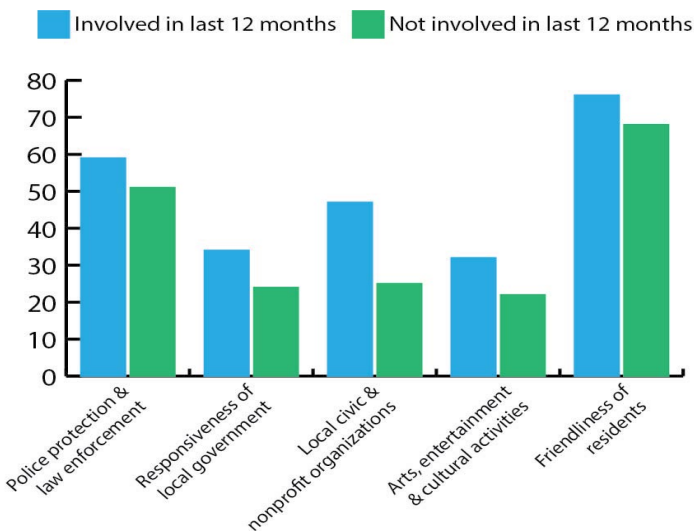
How Do Community Satisfaction and Involvement Relate?

Dr. Samuel Mindes has been analyzing the results from the community surveys conducted as part of recent Community Reviews in Wyoming, Idaho and Montana. His early findings suggest that we'll all learn a lot from his analysis.

Here's a teaser: Dr. Mindes compared the percentage of respondents who indicated that they were satisfied with a particular aspect of their community with those who stated that they were involved in their community in the last 12 months and those who stated they had not been involved in that period.

He found statistically significant differences between the involved and not-involved respondents in satisfaction with six aspects of community life. In your experience, does community involvement beget greater satisfaction, does greater satisfaction promote community involvement, or both?

Satisfaction with community characteristics by community involvement in last 12 months



Next State PLN Meetings

Idaho

Aug. 11, 10-11 a.m. PT

Topic: Collecting data + workforce development models

Montana

Aug. 27, 9:30-10:30 a.m. MT

Topic: Communities dealing with less than desirable businesses, e.g., pot shops, tattoo parlors, dollar stores, strip clubs, big box stores, etc.

Wyoming

Sept. 1, 4-5 p.m. MT

Topic: Housing, continued



Visit the [WeCAN PLN webpage](http://communityreview.org) for news, detailed meeting notes, and updated learning opportunities.



PLN State Meeting Summaries

Idaho

June

Topic: Workforce Success and Community Businesses Support

The discussion continued to focus on supporting both a viable workforce and community businesses. What are the primary needs and gaps between employers and employees? What efforts are addressing these needs? How can we provide timely resources for funding and assistance?

An exciting project by two members, Andrew and Melissa, connects food and resources as a workforce development tool. Titled [Let's Get Cooking—Workforce Development Partnership](#), this has proved highly successful. The project included pre-apprenticeship, created a workforce pipeline, and graduated 16 participants, seven of whom already went on to find work in the culinary/food industry.

A spin-off from this is in production. Called **Let's Get Building**, this will address the ongoing need for available and affordable housing to support a successful workforce and business system. This project format can be applied to any sector.

Key conversation take-aways:

- o The need for quality and affordable childcare, particularly

for parents who work in the food industry and have night shift hours when childcare is unavailable.

- o Looking at a balance of housing, utilities, and transportation costs (HUT index) challenges the reality of employment and living expenses.
- o West Central Mountain School District has developed a pre-apprentice and academics planning program to help secondary students explore and realize their career goals. A quarter of students show an interest in health care careers.
- o Kellogg is working on a maker-space with an educational component involving restaurants and community.
- o Crowd-source funding was discussed as a viable financial component, with the possible need for a template or guidance on how to best go about this. Anna Mackay of [Sister City](#) is great resource for how crowd investing works.

Resources shared

- Udemy [business skills training](#)
- [Updated housing market](#) overview for Idaho

- Idaho [career and training research](#) hub

- North Idaho College [Venture Hub](#) — resources and services to launch, build and grow businesses
- RCAC & [WealthWorks West](#) — an approach to community and economic development that develops value chains that connect community assets with markets

July

Topic: Community Development Classes

This discussion grew out of previous discussions of Workforce Development as a goal to provide transitional opportunities to those who need to find new ways of work and support. The program ideas discussed focused on skill-sharing, finding gaps in available jobs or in lack of training, and developing programs that cover these needs. Topics ranged from STEAM careers to tech support to bike repair. The subject of food service that has been so hard hit since COVID shutdowns continues to be a big issue. Many restaurants aren't able to stay open for lack of available workers.

Another recognized gap is for non-traditional approaches to training for people with disabilities to help them and their families realize independence and quality of living. One source that supports this is a state-wide program called [Children's Therapy Place](#).

Another innovative program that supports farm-to-table and employs people with disabilities is this [Montana greenhouse-production partnership](#), involving a disability nonprofit organization and a local small business.

Mentorship programs are also a favored idea to sustain those who have the skills and want to pay it forward and provide experience and training for those who want to add to their skills.

After-meeting action steps include:

- Reaching out to PLN members who have slipped away during the summer and draw them back in;
- Continue browsing grant opportunities; and
- Create a survey to do a gap analysis on community and economic development programs.

Wyoming

June

Topic: Engagement and Leadership

A small gathering (summertime adventures), but with fierce commitment, continued the conversation about an ongoing need for leadership and workforce development in rural communities. Businesses, particularly the restaurant industry, can't find enough laborers to keep their doors open. Laborers can't find available or affordable housing in order to live in a community where there might be jobs.

Participants shared web-based resources, with a five-minute [Brené Brown interview with Jimmy Fallon](#) on NBC's The Tonight Show being a favorite. Brené's "Dare to Lead" podcast (Spotify Monday evenings) is also highly recommended.

Key conversation take-aways:

- o Leadership does not mean wearing "pin stripes." Leadership is for everyone, not just people "in charge." Individuals need to be accountable and take action, not sit back and blame the "leaders."
- o Leadership means being able to rumble with vulnerability and integrity, and to live our lives with moral values.

Action steps for the July meeting:

- Continue with the importance of leadership and segue into the topic of a need for housing.
- Each community person try and bring in two others for the July meeting.

- Listen to a [Dare to Lead](#) podcast for discussion and bring more resources to share.

Resources shared

- David Matthews' ([Kettering Foundation](#)) forthcoming book, *Together: Building Better Stronger Communities*, explores how to bring people together in times of great divide.
- U of Minnesota Extension [community leadership programs](#)
- [Blandin \(MN\) leadership program](#), pairing young leaders with established leadership.

July

Topic: Housing

A brainstorming session using the [XMind](#) mind mapping software (free version available) delivered many concerns and challenges. Included are topics such as:

- Upkeep (or lack of upkeep) for rural properties;
- Long-term rentals and short-term rentals on platforms like VRBO and Airbnb, which can be positive but also depletes availability of rentals for locals;
- Resistance to "high density" housing due to the historical western mindset focused on owning acreage; and
- Zoning and who is to say what, where, and how someone can build.

Solutions were touched upon, such as "embracing the zoning" and getting involved with the pro-

cess regardless of its angles and the frustrations. Local ownership tools such as a land trust/land lease could take away much of the property expense and provide an affordable housing market. The [Welcome Home Wyoming](#) program that includes downpayment assistance. Laramie has a program that includes loan forgiveness, DIY projects, and home upkeep.

Resources, Ideas &

Next Steps

- A [webinar about workforce housing](#) out of Davis California is highly connected to this issue and useful.
- Kim Porter has a Housing Toolkit that she will present at the August PLN meeting.
- The idea of creating a multi-state housing summit will be discussed further at the next meeting, as well.

How the Stevensville (MT) Civic Club Got a New Attitude

A [recent article](#) in the Bitterroot Star details how new leadership and a new approach took the Stevensville Civic Club from close to folding to 65 active members in short order. Some keys to success:

- Meet quarterly, not monthly;
- Hold socials, not boring meetings, and focus on updates and key volunteer opportunities;
- Move meetings around;
- Focus on a single big project that has a meaningful impact—in Stevensville, this is the Splash Pad park, which the club is fundraising for with other local groups.

Montana

June

Topic: Community Branding, pt. 2

This Part 2 conversation continued the focus on community branding and marketing, looking especially at how to engage communities in seeing value in who they are. A community brand tells the story of who you are, a consistent image that the community can deliver on.

We see pride demonstrated in beautiful public spaces, parks and other community assets, like downtown. Schools and school sports are often part of community pride. In Lockwood, Bob Riehl said that building a high school (an idea in the works for decades) is a huge source of pride, and now varsity sports will be coming soon to add even more.

In Troy, Shauna Kelsey noted “we’ve made the most progress when kids are involved in projects,” like laying sod for a new soccer field. Involving youth in the community review surfaced ideas for a new skate park (done) and a mountain bike club is now in the works.

Key take-aways:

- Start small; engage multiple partners and invite participation. Build momentum step by step.
- Engage youth. Listen to them and engage them in a project.
- Patience: sometimes it takes time to cultivate change.

July

Topic: Engaging More People in Community Projects

Patti Eldridge from Victor got some peer input about her problem, which is that people aren’t stepping up to maintain the community park, Blue Star Memorial, ball fields and flowers along the highway. Ideas included repurposing the fields into the skatepark that kids want, and other strategies for supporting people to step up and help. Also: be careful of taking on projects that require maintenance!

Letting the community take ownership by opening the opportunity to help was part of the conversation. Steve Dogaikos offered that the “idea friendly” approach to community projects helped him recognize the “gatekeeping” issue where established leaders pick and choose volunteers for things and limit ideas for community projects. “Idea friendly” helps him let go of ascribing ownership of projects to different leaders and groups.

Key takeaways:

- Ask people to do something specific for a limited amount of time.
- Consider the [Idea Friendly Method](#) featured in the work of SaveYourTown.org. (Watch the next PLN newsletter for more about the “idea-friendly” approach.)
- You have to be where the volunteers are to reach out. Find them on Facebook, churches, main street restaurants, etc.
- Question “we have always done it this way” to gain more insights and ideas.

WEBINARS

Boom Town: Amenity Migration in the Rural West and the Rise of the “Zoom Town”

On-demand [webinar replays](#) for gateway and natural amenity region communities experiencing population growth—before, during and after COVID. This webinar series from 2020/2021 brought together leading scholars, organizations and practitioners to explore research, community experience and strategies for addressing related challenges.

See the whole slate of Gateway and Natural Area Region (GNAR) Initiative webinars—including **How to Shred GNAR(Iy) Problems: Tools, Techniques and Resources to Address Epic Housing Challenges** on [GNAR's YouTube channel](#). Full of new and inspiring ideas based on experiences. PLUS see the GNAR Online Community Toolkit with resources, case studies, model ordinances, and other tools to help with GNAR

communities' unique planning, transportation, economic, community development, and sustainability challenges and opportunities.

Citizens' Institute on Rural Design

On-demand webinar replays on a variety of topics ranging from predevelopment and fundraising for rural design projects to creative placemaking, cooperation among rural communities, and local food economies: rural-design.org/webinars

Rural Health Innovations

Webinars, PDFs and other resources on [collaborative leadership](#). Topics include building trust in collaborative partnerships and an introduction to the science of networks. Other resources include a link to “Collaboration: What Makes It Work,” a publication that

features the Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory, a free tool to use to assess how your collaboration is doing on 22 research-tested success factors.

25% WeCAN Discount on fall Exploratory Scenarios Planning and Creative Placemaking Courses

Learn to use Exploratory Scenarios Planning to engage your community on complex, high-uncertainty issues like over-tourism, rapid growth and development, the effects of climate change, economic change, inequity, and housing affordability. Or learn to use creative placemaking to leverage arts and culture to revitalize and reshape your community and allow for genuine public engagement. Use the code WECAN for a 25% discount. Group discounts for two or more from the same community or organization. Learn more and register: haringerconsult.com/online-courses

Other Resources

Leadership Resources Recommended by James Klessens (Cody, WY)

- Brené Brown seems to have uncanny sage advice loaded with common sense wisdom. Check out her videos, especially [The Power of Vulnerability](#).
- Simon Sinek's [Why Good Leaders Make You Feel Safe](#)
- Shine Coaching has a [list of leadership TED Talks and other videos](#) that is worth a deep dive.

The Daily Yonder

A [website](#), newsletter, podcasts and more focused 100% on rural America. News and analysis focus on a wide range of rural issues from agriculture to broadband and tech, tribal issues, housing, economy, arts and culture and many more topics.

The Aspen Institute Guide to Federal Resources for Rural America

The Aspen Institute maintains [this list of ARPA and other federal programs](#) that provide funds for rural communities and organizations. New additions are clearly identified, as are proposal deadlines. It's great to have someone handle the initial legwork, freeing you up to browse through to find potential funding sources.

Resources Related to American Rescue Plan Act Fund-

You'd have to be hiding under a rock to miss the buzz about community recovery funds from the American Rescue Plan. What's that? You've been hiding under a rock? Or maybe you're tired of hearing more of the same and you're looking for creative ways to tap ARPA funds to boost your community. Here are three, collected by the Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking.

With the American Rescue Plan (ARP) providing an unprecedented \$350 billion in flexible fiscal aid, Bass Center scholars and collaborators offer policy and practice recommendations for how state and local leaders can use the funds to invest in communities and rebuild more equitable local economies. (Note: some of these ideas may require some creativity and/or regional collaboration to adapt to smaller rural communities.)

Helping residents 'buy back the block' with American Rescue Plan funds

Elwood Hopkins and Tracy Hadden Loh discuss how local leaders can leverage ARP funds to help residents "buy back the block" through supporting community ownership of real estate and new cross-sector arrangements and coalitions for deep resident engagement. This can ensure that these resources make a real, long-term difference for communities harmed by COVID-19, racism, and poverty. [Read more](#)

The American Rescue Plan can be a lifeline for business districts

Kelly Humrichouser and Patrice Frey of Main Street America argue that municipal leaders should use ARP funding not only to support businesses individually but to invest in holistic strategies that support local business district recovery. [Read more](#)

How local leaders can use American Rescue Plan funds to support playful learning in cities

To address disparities in educational outcomes for school-age kids, local leaders need to invest in the creation of learning ecosystems both within and outside of formal educational settings, Helen Shwe Hadani and Jennifer S. Vey write. [Read more](#)

New EDA-Led American Rescue Plan Grant Program Aimed at Local Tourism Recovery

EDA's ARP Travel, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation grant will fund infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects to help local tourism industries recover from the pandemic. Deadline: January 31, 2022. [Apply here](#).

Questions about the Peer Learning Network? Contact your state facilitator

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WeCAN collaborating organizations

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