

Peer Learning Network News

May 2022

In this newsletter you'll find a recap of the May three-state PLN meeting, focused on the Idea Friendly Method, a way to get things done in communities with more fun and with fewer headaches and pitfalls of committees, over-planning and burnout. Also, see what the current top topic picks are for the fall Solutions Roundtable. Weigh in on June 8, when the PLN meets again—meeting details below! Plus, we share resources for your communities and for you as community leaders.



Tactical Urbanism for Rural Communities

Tactical Urbanism uses short-term, low-cost, and scalable interventions to catalyze long-term change and build community. Municipal authorities, non-profits, developers, and everyday citizens use short-term projects as a tool to inspire action, draw attention to perceived shortcomings, allow people to physically experience alternative options, expand public engagement and understanding, gather data, encourage people to work together, and/or test aspects of a program or project before making a big investment.

Tactical Urbanism has roots in projects to make streets safer and more bicycle and pedestrian friendly, but it's a great approach to breaking down all kinds of projects into discrete chunks so that you can start seeing results and making progress fast! Tactical urbanism is also a state of mind. Tixie Fowler, a community activist from the fast-growing small town of Norcross, Georgia, has used this approach with skeptical city officials to create everything from trails to pollinator gardens. "I just tell them, hey, let's give it a try. We can always let the trails grow over or replant the grass if we don't like it."

The [North Dakota Department of Transportation used Tactical Urbanism](#) (see details in the master's thesis this link connects with) when it was developing its statewide Active & Public Transportation Plan. NDDOT partnered with the state public health department and nine communities (pop. 2,000-70,000) to implement demonstration projects. Communities selected the locations, provided materials and volunteers, and conducted outreach and evaluation.

In Price, Utah (pop. 8,300), a volunteer crew from the Utah Chapter of the American Planning Association [painted a mural](#) across a downtown intersection to help residents imagine what a parklet at the corner could look like. The Price Business Improvement District then hosted a [Music Meals Mingle gathering](#) on Main Street, which generated attention for the project.

Find a list of resources on p. 4.

Next PLN Meeting

The WeCAN Peer Learning Network meets on the second Wednesday of each month, 10-11 a.m. PT/11 a.m.-12 p.m. MT.

Next meeting: June 8

Topic: Who's Moving Here & Why?

- Tara Mastel, Montana State University Extension, will share highlights from a recent study exploring who is moving to Montana and why. We'll discuss insights that might apply across our three-state region, and how we can put this research to work in our communities.
- Decide on a topic for the fall Solutions Roundtable

Need the Zoom link for the meetings? Contact Marci Miller marcimiller@uidaho.edu.



Visit the [WeCAN PLN webpage](#) for news, detailed meeting notes, and updated learning opportunities.



Peer Learning Network May 2022 Meeting

Topic: The Idea Friendly Method for Getting Things Done in Rural Communities

Becky McCray and Deb Brown from [Save Your Town](#) ask, “Can you make a small town more open to new ideas?” The answer, they say, is yes, “and it may be the most important thing you do. Small towns that are open to new ideas will be the best positioned to thrive no matter what change comes their way.”

We kicked off the PLN meeting by viewing the [Idea Friendly Method video](#), which Brown and McCray put together to introduce an approach to community mobilization and action that they have found help open small towns to the power of new ideas.

There are three steps:

1. **Gather Your Crowd** with a big vision, starting a public discussion about the kind of town you want to live in.
2. **Build Connections** to turn your crowd into a capable network.
3. **Take Small Steps** together with your crowd to accomplish the vision bit by bit, building momentum as you go.

The video and the Idea Friendly Method approach resonated with PLN participants, who pointed out

several examples of this approach in action in their communities, including these:

- A group of moms took charge of repairing and replacing old playground equipment. They reached out to the whole community, built online groups, raised money. They communicate via text, email, in person with everyday “tools.” They were using the Idea Friendly Method without realizing it.
- In Pullman, an effort at downtown beautification started with one shop owner cleaning her storefront sidewalk. With a social media hashtag and through the power of example, soon the city and all of the downtown businesses joined in.
- An Idaho microbrewery started with a home brew group that spurred online networking and gathering and sharing ideas. It started with an informal, chaotic crowd just testing openly and taking small steps.
- In American Falls, ID, a shared interest in birding naturally evolved into a birding festival organized by a group of friends who gather, hosted by a retired gentleman. Everyone is welcome to join in, no exclusions. No money, everything is donated.

We discussed options for managing these kinds of small, informal efforts if there is money involved. Ideas: in Cascade, there is a non-profit community organization with a broad mission that can act as fiscal agent and be an umbrella for all kinds of projects. In Aberdeen, downtown beautification funds run through the city, making it possible for the community downtown group to continue in a low-stress way.

Top Topics for the Fall Solutions Roundtable

After an initial discussion, we have identified three potential topics, which we will discuss further during our June meeting:

- Workforce,
- Community branding & place-making, and
- How to engage people (Idea Friendly and beyond).

Idea Friendly Method Resources

Log-in to access the Idea Friendly Method video:

- Go to <https://learnto.saveyour.town> then click on “login” or “member login” at the top of the page. If it doesn’t open right to the Products page where you can access the two videos, click on “Products” or “My Products”
- ID: wecanbootcamp@gmail.com, password: CommunityBootcamp22





& Other Resources

Connect Your Community With Infrastructure Funds

The White House recently released a [Technical Assistance Guide](#) to help communities access resources from the bipartisan infrastructure law. In a [press briefing](#), it also highlighted companion efforts that might help your community successfully navigate the maze to tap these funds, including a privately funded [Local Infrastructure Hub](#) (launches July 1) to help communities of all sizes access federal infrastructure funding.

Share Your Community's Good Work With a RuralRISE Quick Pitch

The [RuralRISE Summit](#) is an annual gathering of people and organizations working to increase opportunities and prosperity for small and rural communities across the United States. This year's event is Sept. 28-30 in Emporia, Kansas. In preparation, organizers are inviting (short) [proposals for Quick Pitches](#), crisp 5-minute overviews of a program or project that is scalable, repeatable, and has been successful in your rural community. They've been an audience favorite at previous Summits, and this year, can be presented in person or by video, which will be posted to the RuralRISE website and social media accounts. Proposals due July 1.

Latest GNAR Blog Post on Community Vision

Emily Meadows, recently graduated researcher with the Gateway and Natural Amenities Region initiative (University of Utah) contributed the project's [latest blog post](#) on community visioning, with insights drawn from Tom Dansie from Springdale, Utah, just outside Zion National Park. Springdale's vision, first created 30 years ago, is still anchored in two core concepts that guide community planning and development.

15% WeCAN Discount for Online Courses

Use the code WECAN for a 15% discount on all of the [Harbinger Consultancy's online courses](#) for community and economic development professionals, community leaders, land trusts, downtown organizations and other groups focused on community well-being.

We still have five slots available in our June [Creative Placemaking](#) course! Also starting in June, [Do-It-Yourself Trail User Research You Can Start Right Away](#). Other courses begin September-November, with early registration discounts through May 31.

Regards to Rural conference

Hosted by [Rural Development Initiatives, Inc.](#) was held at the Wildhorse Casino on the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation May 21-22. The event centered on Rural Vitality with keynote speaker Benjamin Winchester. Conference sessions included advancing equity through public policy, community funding solutions and using federal dollars for your community projects, climate change preparedness, reframing conflict for stronger conversations, and power tools for change, and our own Peer Learning Network. Marci Miller co-presented "Re-thinking How We Collaborate: Peer Learning Networks" alongside LaNincia Duke (Black Rural Network and [Humble Beginnings](#)) and Dr. Amanda Cheromiah, Director of [Native SOAR](#) at the University of Arizona.

Some interesting articles Marci shared from the conference:

[Arts & Economic Prosperity](#) study of the economic impact of the nonprofit arts & culture industry

[Pacific Northwest Sees Establishment of the Black Rural Network](#) (Daily Yonder, July 2021)

[How Native Tribes Are Taking the Lead on Planning for Climate Change](#) (Yale Environment 360, Feb. 2020)

[Stronger Together: Federal funding and planning strategies designed to promote sustainable economic development in rural America](#) (US Dept. of Agriculture and US Dept. of Commerce)



Tactical Urbanism Resources (from p. 1)

[Tactical Urbanism Toolkit](#), Bike Utah. A series of photographic and video examples, accompanied by brief descriptions of materials used, partners and purposes.



Members of the Utah Chapter of the American Planning Association paint a downtown street in Price, Utah, visually expanding the crosswalk and creating a “parklet” in the road next to adjacent parking spaces.

[Tactical Urbanism Demonstration Projects as Community Participation](#), Charlie Simpson, University of Washington master’s thesis, 2020. Explores examples of how government agencies have used tactical urbanism to promote community participation in planning processes.

[A Tactical Urbanist’s Guide to Materials and Design Version 1.0](#), Street Plans Collaborative, 2016. Designed for neighborhood groups, advocacy organizations, professional planners, transportation engineers and elected officials, this guide delves into nitty-gritty details about design, materials and process. See also [TacticalUrbanismGuide.com](#).

[Tactical Urbanism: Applying a Big-City Placemaking Technique to Smaller Communities](#), Josh Mahar, Municipal Research and Services Center, 2016. This blog post discusses how the underlying principles and techniques can be leveraged in small cities and towns looking to improve their community spaces. It also offers a short list of resources.

Questions about the Peer Learning Network? Contact your state facilitator:

Idaho: Melissa Hamilton mbhamilton@uidaho.edu

Montana: Rebecca Meyers rebecca@medamembers.org

Wyoming: Juliet Daniels juliet.daniels@uwyo.edu

Want to join the monthly PLN meetings?

Want to join the monthly meetings? Contact Marci Miller marcimiller@uidaho.edu

Marci can help if you’re not on the PLN meetings email list and calendar appointments—or don’t know if you are.

Newsletter contributors

Michele Archie • Julie Daniels • Melissa Hamilton • Rebecca Meyers • Marci Miller • Elizabeth Sloan • Lorie Higgins

Want to add something to the next newsletter? Contact Michele Archie michele@harbingerconsult.com

WeCAN collaborating organizations

Idaho Rural Partnership • Montana Economic Developers Association • Wyoming Business Council • Extension faculty at University of Idaho, Montana State University & University of Wyoming