



Main Street Montana- Rural Partners Update

Rural Partners continues to work with each Community Partner on a regular basis. We continue to connect communities with resources, both state and federal, that can help move projects forward. We have also connected communities across the state with one another to share lessons learned and successes on similar projects. Some of the successes may seem small, but these small steps move communities forward. Rural Partners has been successful at helping advance short-term accomplishments towards long term community goals.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in March, we have continued to reach out the communities to offer assistance and resources, both COVID and non-COVID related. Although we were unable to hold additional Community Partner meetings this summer, as planned, we will continue to work with existing Community Partners and rural communities throughout the remainder of the administration.

Some notable outcomes over the last year include:

- A major challenge in Troy is lack of reliable, affordable broadband. Rural Partners teamed up with Deloitte Consulting and Montana Telecommunications Association to develop a broadband pilot project in Troy and explore opportunities to expand service in the area. The intent of the project was to explore challenges the community is facing as it relates to rural broadband and identify key opportunities across industries where broadband can accelerate economic development. Deloitte provided a pro bono analysis of the broadband connectivity challenges that are specific to Troy and helped develop a connectivity roadmap outlining next steps. The 12-week project included 30 interviews with stakeholders in Troy, a planning and visioning workshop, and a final meeting to present the **strategic plan**. We continue to work with the Troy on a variety of projects including housing, infrastructure, and their farmers market. We are also on the Community Review team with MEDA and other partners.
- The in-town trail project continues to be a top priority for the community of Lincoln. We connected Lincoln with resources to develop an in-town trail system, including MSU Western Transportation Institute (WTI) and Lewis and Clark County. WTI and Lewis and Clark County are providing technical assistance and design services for the project. We also set up a meeting with Envision Lincoln and Anaconda Local Development Corporation to learn about Anaconda's in-town trail system, downtown revitalization efforts, and how Anaconda has capitalized on the CDT trail. This was a very productive meeting for Lincoln to learn about some of the challenges Anaconda faced, and how they were able to overcome roadblocks and be successful. We've met with Envision Lincoln and community partners about an interactive recreation map for the area. Additionally, we worked with Envision Lincoln of a Community Open House in winter 2020.

- Attend monthly Choteau Area Port Authority meetings and provide resources as needed. We also helped the community work with MDT on some in-town and highway signage projects, as well as identify next steps for updating infrastructure and preparing the community for improvements to their main street. We are also supporting Choteau as they work to address their childcare needs, a priority for many communities.
- In Glendive, the Rural Partners meeting brought together a variety of stakeholders that have been working separately on different projects, with the same goal of improving Glendive. The meeting helped breakdown silos among the groups and since then the community has formed the C3 group. The C3 group now has a comprehensive vision and has identified common priorities for the community and meets regularly to move Glendive forward in a unified effort. We continue to work with the C3 group and community on a variety of projects, as well as supporting the community with recent layoffs in the region.
- In Glasgow, we worked with BNSF to get a train depot station painted, a priority for the community.
- Provided state and federal resources for various priorities including broadband, food sovereignty, opportunity zones, renewable energy, and business development to tribal stakeholders based on priorities.
- Compiled a [Tribal and Economic Development Initiatives Report](#) highlighting what tribal communities across both the state and country are doing to innovate and make strides towards increasing economic opportunities in a number of sectors.
- Partnered with Deloitte Consulting and No Kid Hungry on a project looking at how connectivity can enhance food security on the Rocky Boy Reservation. The intention of the project was to enhance the understanding of the current challenges the community is facing, with specific attention on connectivity and food security challenges, and strengthen the case for investment in connectivity as a critical enabler to address the food security challenges and optimize existing food security programs and efforts. The project overview and report can be found on the [website](#). We continue to work with the Tribal Food Sovereignty group, No Kid Hungry, and Deloitte Consulting as food security has become an even greater concern in light of COVID-19.
- Working with Crow Reservation, MSU, and MT State Parks on potential solutions for infrastructure upgrades at Plenty Coup State Park. Met with stakeholders in winter 2020 to discuss the situation and potential solutions. In March, the Parks and Recreation Board approved moving forward with the design and ultimately construction efforts for a new wastewater treatment system at Chief Plenty Coups State Park. MT State Parks is also working on installing one or more groundwater monitoring wells as a part of the DEQ permitting process for the project.

- Connected the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians with Montana Board of Investments for potential funding of travertine quarry.

In addition to the direct assistance we have provided the Community Partners, the Main Street Montana Rural Partners project has also worked on some statewide initiatives, including:

- Relaunching the Main Street Montana website with new information and resources for communities, including developing a [Community Development Funding Database](#). This searchable resource database helps communities identify state and federal grant and loan opportunities to help fund community and economic development projects.
- Held the first ever Reimagining Rural Summit in partnership with MSU Extension and Montana Community Foundation, bringing over 100 diverse stakeholders together to talk about the future of rural Montana.
 - Working with MSU Extension and MCF on next phase of Reimagining Rural. This will involve inviting/selecting 20 rural communities across Montana to participate in a one-night event featuring rural expert Ben Winchester from the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality. Ben will discuss his “brain gain” concept and research and how it applies to Montana’s rural communities. Participating communities will engage in a local discussion, led by a trained facilitator and a co-facilitator to discuss concepts and determine ways to incorporate ideas into their local communities. Communities will wrap-up with a statewide dialogue by reporting their work.
- Across the state: Mapping Rural Innovation. Gathered rural community success stories to be compiled into best practice whitepapers on topics including childcare, cooperative businesses, trails and recreation, local capacity, and funding strategies. See the first two whitepapers here: <https://mainstreetmontanaproject.com/rural-partners/across-the-state/>.
- Working with inter-agency group on supporting childcare opportunities and identifying solutions.