Welcome to the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable's Rural Economic Development Toolkit.

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Conclusion

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About the Research & Author
Outdoor recreation offers opportunities for sustainable economic and community development across the United States. Through interviews with over 60 practitioners - including elected officials, land managers, economic development specialists and business leaders - the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable has developed this toolkit to help your community build an outdoor recreation economy of its own. Remember, this work takes strong relationships, dedication and patience to take off. As you read, use the navigation at left to click between sections, and be sure to follow linked content to learn more from external resources.
We understand that people using this toolkit will be approaching it from varying levels of experience and readiness. Therefore, while we encourage the toolkit to be read in its entirety, you may want to gauge your need by your own experience level, and jump ahead accordingly.

Which of the following best describes your experience?

- Starting from scratch, or close to the beginning
  - You're on the right track. Continue reading this document in order.

- Some experience, things are starting to move
  - Keep it up! Consider starting with the "Best Practices: Building Momentum" section.

- Experienced, now needing revision or support
  - How can we help? Consider starting with the "Best Practices: Refining Vision & Attracting Support" section.

I'm just here to learn about federal grants or other technical assistance.
This button links to more information.
A multitude of intersecting cultural and economic forces threaten the long-term sustainability of rural communities in the United States. The 2008 recession contributed to the loss of 17,500 businesses in counties with fewer than 100,000 people. Industries like coal, oil shale, uranium, vanadium, and ranching and agriculture experienced boom/bust cycles, leaving highly dependent communities in limbo. In particular, the coal industry, a traditional buoy to states like Wyoming, West Virginia, Kentucky, Illinois, and Pennsylvania, is in steep decline. Manufacturing jobs disappeared as American firms pursue offshore or robotic options, and innovative companies agglomerate in urbanized areas to attract highly skilled workers.
All these impacts existed before Spring 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic and associated mitigation measures of social distancing and economic shutdown added increased economic and social pressures on disadvantaged rural communities. As a December 2020 report from the Brookings Institute describes it: “Will rural America—with its limited health care infrastructure and and high-risk industries—be able to survive the regional COVID-19 storm?”

Nathan Fey, Director of the Colorado Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry described these challenges in the context of his own work:

“*The new reality is that we’re still focusing on growing rural economies, but stabilizing them in the face of COVID-19 is immediately urgent.*”

Nathan Fey, Director of the Colorado Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry

These challenges demand comprehensive, place-based strategies that diversify local and regional economies and increase resilience to current and future threats.
“People in these vulnerable communities, especially in the face of COVID, are losing rural healthcare, sources of income, teachers, and basic life amenities.”

Rachel Schmidt, Former Director of the Montana Governor’s Office of Outdoor Recreation

Despite this urgency, the necessity for economic diversification in rural communities can sometimes exist in opposition to cultural heritage, traditions, and resistance to major change. As one interviewee put it, there’s a lot of pride in communities and they want to see them change as little as possible—yet they want resiliency in the face of economic crises.

Additionally, one community’s challenges are quite distinct from another, as a result of their socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic background, political affiliation, tribal status, access to natural resources, human resources and financial capital, environmental threats, geography, and other demographics.

For these reasons, there is no single approach to building economic resilience that will work for every community—the decisions a community makes must be informed by their specific context.
In the face of such challenges, the development of ‘outdoor recreation economies’ is now considered as a strategy for rural America to achieve economic diversification and resilience while maintaining cultural heritage and landscape character. In short, these economies prioritize natural and built assets within or adjacent to a community that enable outdoor recreation and its associated economic, social, health, and environmental benefits.
Historically, the term "outdoor recreation" conjures images of broad, sprawling land and waterscapes, but for the purposes of this toolkit, outdoor recreation assets should be thought of as including anything from local, state, or federal public lands and waters to private lands with granted access, and/or local amenities in the community including ballfields, pathways, archery/shooting ranges, and pools, among others.
At a broader scale, outdoor recreation is a major force in the American economy. The Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) estimates that outdoor recreation (defined as 'all recreational activities undertaken for pleasure that occur outdoors') generates $788 billion in economic output and supports 5.2 million jobs—many of which are in rural communities. In 2019, outdoor recreation comprised 2.1 percent of the United States GDP. In 2018, over 318 million national park visits led to $20.2 billion in direct spending at hotels, restaurants, outfitters, and other amenities in nearby gateway communities, supporting over 329,000 jobs and generating over $40.1 billion in total economic output.
The benefits of outdoor recreation extend to the state, regional and local levels, and justify the development of outdoor recreation economies. Research from Headwaters Economics demonstrates that outdoor recreation amenities:

- **draw visitors who spend money at local businesses**
- **attract new talent and investment**
- **increase property values**
- **improve quality of life and public health**, particularly in **low-income neighborhoods**
The process of building outdoor recreation economies in rural communities is neither turnkey nor predictable. But interviews with practitioners revealed best practices that enable community-centric, place-based sustainable economic development around outdoor recreation assets.

The following list of 15 principles is presented in a particular order, but depending on the community, certain practices may take precedence over others. The remainder of this toolkit is focused around these best practices.
To navigate between best practices, use the table of contents at left (or select the menu on your mobile device).

1. Identify & Empower Local Champions
2. Unify Behind Consistent Messaging
3. Make Outdoor Recreation a “Must Have”
4. Build Collaboratives
5. Guarantee Buy-In and Dependability
6. Identify One Point of Contact
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11. Achieve buy-in from the state

12. Plan for destination management

13. Ensure value capture

14. Take on basic infrastructure needs

15. Attract and support outdoor businesses

END OF SECTION
For outdoor recreation to take hold as a viable economic driver within a rural community, the community must already have access to outdoor recreation assets and exhibit a passion for outdoor recreation.

When Marc Berejka, Director of Community and Government Affairs at REI, reflected on the company’s ability to support communities in outdoor recreation development, he suggested:

"We can highlight the multiple benefits of outdoor spaces and throw in some capital as fertilizer, but it only takes off with residential local leadership. If there’s not local leadership that is committed, it’s not going to happen."
Jon Snyder, Outdoor Recreation and Economic Development Senior Policy Advisor to Washington Governor Jay Inslee, identified the pitfalls of a top-down approach:

“When these efforts are pushed by the local or state government—they’re viewed with suspicion… It’s generally really important that this comes from the grassroots.”

Jon Snyder, Outdoor Recreation and Economic Development Senior Policy Advisor to Washington Governor Jay Inslee

Pitt Grewe, Director of the Utah Office of Outdoor Recreation, put it plainly:

“Say a community wants to be a mountain bike destination, there have to be residents in the town who are willing to get behind it and push it, and support the economic and recreation side of it. They are going to be the ones writing grants, talking to the town council. It makes all the difference when it comes from the community.”

Pitt Grewe, Director of the Utah Office of Outdoor Recreation
In many situations, **this leadership can be as time-consuming as a full-time job.** As leaders emerge within a community, state and local agencies or nonprofits may consider compensating them for time spent on administrative work and coalition-building.

> "When developing particular leaders who can champion--they have to be in a position where they're not going to leave--they're actually paid to be the champion, connect dots and be a resource."

Laurel Harkness, Executive Director, Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals

END OF SECTION
To bolster such local champions, the outdoor recreation community should unite behind and disseminate consistent messaging on the benefits of outdoor recreation. In doing so, they can dispel notions that outdoor recreation strictly benefits tourists, which can be a red flag for rural communities.

As Rachel Schmidt framed it,

"The challenge has been that although outdoor recreation is a way of life, we are still figuring out how to articulate the notion that outdoor recreation can be a part of what sustains us, not just from tourism, but what it adds to our everyday lives that infiltrates every sector of our communities."

Rachel Schmidt, Former Director of the Montana Governor’s Office of Outdoor Recreation
Messaging around the economic benefits of outdoor recreation should close the divide between outdoor recreation and economic development by focusing on the job-creating and job-supporting aspects of outdoor recreation assets. Outdoor recreation creates new jobs in manufacturing, transportation and warehousing, finance, insurance, advertising, professional and technical services, and supports existing businesses with new clientele and increased economic activity.

"...The development of hiking and biking trails in Whitefish, Montana, resulted in 68 new local jobs and $1.9 million in labor income. That is in part from tourists who spend money in local shops, hotels, and restaurants. However, the trail system also leverages investment of local residents. Our research shows that locals who use the trails around Whitefish spend twice as much in local gear shops as those who do not use the trails. For every $1 spent on developing trail infrastructure, there was a $2.50 return to the local economy."
— Ray Rasker, Executive Director, Headwaters Economics, Congressional Testimony

In addition, many people choose to live and work in communities with a high quality of life and outdoor recreation opportunities. Therefore, outdoor recreation supports rural economies through both attracting new business development and retaining talent. According to Headwaters Economics, "recreation counties" experience various economic benefits, including short-term support for tourism-related businesses and longer-term support by recruiting new residents who may be business owners, entrepreneurs, or workers, and growth in earnings per job across a community.

Outdoor recreation creates jobs in the field of outdoor recreation, supports other sectors through employee recruitment and retention, generates tax revenues, raises property values, and improves public health.

Watch this video on The Power of Small Business in America's Recreational Infrastructure
When considering public health, outdoor recreation is linked to increased fitness and better cardiovascular function, improved memory and reduced blood pressure, obesity, stress, and resting heart rate. These outcomes are particularly important within the context of a 2020 report from the Outdoor Foundation which estimates that just under half of the United States population did not participate in outdoor recreation at all in 2018 and that Americans went on one billion fewer outdoor outings in 2018 than they did in 2008. There are equity issues embedded in these statistics as well: when focusing on ethnic groups, African American/Black in-group participation rates have declined from a high of 55% to around 38%.

Outdoor recreation infrastructure can improve public health and decrease healthcare spending. Considering the costs of major diseases and illnesses on the U.S. healthcare system ($200 billion from heart disease/stroke, $327 billion from diabetes, and $147 billion from obesity) and the direct correlation between outdoor recreation and a reduction in such conditions, further investment in outdoor recreation has both health and economic benefit to communities.
As Marc Berejka, Director of Community and Government Affairs at REI asserted, the outdoor recreation community needs to differentiate outdoor recreation from conservation and hold it in its own light:

"As we watch the pressures of Social Security, Medicare/related public health expenditures, education, and public safety/military expenses grow for the government, we risk further disinvestment down the line in outdoor recreation and green spaces. We need to seize the moment. Healthcare is swamping the American economy. At a minimum, we should be spending some of our reactive, after-the-fact healthcare dollars on proactive health benefits from greenspaces."
In short, the outdoor recreation community should lean on the benefits above to build the case that outdoor recreation is not a "nice to have", but rather, a "must-have." State Directors of Outdoor Recreation have pursued framing that integrates outdoor recreation with existing values.

"One thing we're trying to get across from our office to these communities is 'you're not building it so they will come, you're building it for yourselves.' There's much more satisfaction out of the end result."

Pitt Grewe, Director of the Utah Office of Outdoor Recreation

"I hope to use this office to challenge the idea that these rural communities are just gateways or urban playgrounds. We have to focus on revitalization with sustainable economic and community development initiatives via outdoor recreation."

Colin Robertson, Administrator of the Nevada Division of Outdoor Recreation
Live, Work, Play, and Stay—These are the four aspects of outdoor recreation a community must focus onto enhance its place branding.

— James Glover, Once a Day Marketing LLC, New Mexico

The thing about growing unique local businesses and recreation amenities is not only are they an economic engine in themselves, but they also make a community - and the major employers located there - more competitive.

— TaEnos, CEO, PA Wilds Center
I don’t say, "Hey, there’s a new future for you in Deer Lodge"– instead I encourage communities to build on assets they already have and recognize that.

—Randy Carpenter, Project Director, Future West

Outdoor recreation presents new economic and workforce opportunities for rural communities. However, there are warranted community reservations about shifting from a reliance on one cyclical economy to another, such as tourism. It’s important to think about the outdoor economy beyond tourism and as an opportunity for outdoor assets to retain and attract a talented workforce and spark business growth in other sectors.

—Jack Morgan, Program Manager for Resilient Economies and Communities at the National Association of Counties
After a community identifies its local champions, they should build representative stakeholder groups that unite diverse public and private interests from the community around the same table.

Steph Bertaina, who facilitates the 'Recreation Economy for Rural Communities' program at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) dissected what these groups look like in practice:

"It's important to mobilize a steering committee that is cross-sector, committed, and dedicated, involving representatives from the city or town, private business owners, community foundations, nonprofits, state agency (if applicable), federal agency (if applicable), and other stakeholders as part of the group. That, and just having people in the community – what I call the community sparkplugs – who have the dedication and "oomph" to keep things moving. That's what holds it together."
Best practices suggest that these groups initially should be small, focused, and reliable, and only expand as momentum and interest grows behind the vision. According to interviewees, these stakeholder groups may include some combination of:

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- U.S. Forest Service
- National Park Service
- Bureau of Land Management
- Bureau of Reclamation
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Environmental Protection Agency

Federal Funding and Assistance Agencies
- USDA Rural Development
- Appalachian Regional Commission
- Small Business Administration
- National Institute of Food and Agriculture

Reggie Chapple, Acting Assistant Director of Partnerships & Civic Engagement at the National Park Service, mentioned the importance of keeping banks informed of development plans:

"Sometimes low-to-moderate income communities fit squarely into banks' investment priorities. Let's not miss the strategy to talk about a strategy for economic development in rural and urban contexts. There is a role there for banks or financial institutions to do gap financing."
These stakeholder groups may take a number of different forms, from outdoor recreation coalition/collaborative (where outdoor recreation may present a new opportunity for economic development) to outdoor business alliance (in places where outdoor recreation businesses are already established). Additionally, some focus on the town or city level, while others combine regional interests by uniting across jurisdictions. There may be multiple stakeholder groups formed in the same region to support different desired outcomes.

By striving for broad representation, stakeholder groups can ensure that the right players are informed and ready to mobilize politically at the local and state levels, provide funding and education, and/or aggregate resources to support new projects and initiatives. Examples of such collaboratives are listed in the appendix. While each of these example collaborations exists in a unique local context, interviewees identified several key strategies to support their efficacy.

See Examples of Collaboratives in the Conclusion Section
Deeper Learnings: Bringing Public-Sector Partners to the Table

Several interviewees noted the strength of partnerships between public agencies (whether state with state, state with federal, or federal with federal) to unlock the most out of limited resources at each agency and work across management boundaries.

"The ability for the Forest Service to work on a project often ends at the borders of the Forest, but the impact goes beyond that. For a gateway community, recreation on the forest has a huge impact—in town—at hotels, businesses, restaurants, guides/outfitters, etc. At the end of the day, people who recreate on the forest might want to go back to the community for a beer, see a show, stay in a hotel, etc. Our eyes are open to more public public and public-private partnerships."

Toby Bloom, National Program Manager of Travel, Tourism and Interpretation, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)

For these reasons, Bloom and the Forest Service have been engaged with USDA Rural Development (RD). RD acts as a big loan bank, providing loans, grants and loan guarantees for rural community, which allows them to extend their ability to work beyond the boundaries of the forest and into the communities. For instance, if a community needed to repair a ski lift on USFS land, USFS would be unable to fund the project, but RD has grants and other business opportunities to support partners. At the same time, USFS knows the interests of their community well—especially the small- and medium-sized entities that sometimes fall under the radar. This is part of what makes the USFS/RD relationship so effective.

"Currently, towns and counties aren't often in partnership. Great things have happened in California when the relationship between federal land agencies, counties, towns, and in certain cases, state land agencies, is stewarded. These public-public partnerships are often forgotten."

Laurel Harkness, Executive Director, Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals
"The importance of bringing federal partners to the table should not be understated. It's important to have the federal agency players together in the room. It allows them to share the resources they have on the spot as well as participate in the visioning process."

Steph Bertaina, EPA Office of Community Revitalization

Although federal partners are generally limited in their ability to provide new funding to projects, they are well-versed in statutes, policies, authorities, and existing resources that may inhibit or support communities’ economic development objectives.

In the case of the USFS, one participant suggested engaging directly with District Rangers and Forest Supervisors, who have more decision-making authority than Regional Offices. In doing so, connecting a community’s plans to the USFS Framework for Sustainable Recreation and providing a trails coordinator and reliable crew that works to USFS standards can move the process forward more expeditiously.
Collaboratives must ensure continued buy-in and dependability from the stakeholders they bring together in the visioning, planning and implementation process.

The Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership (ESSRP), a public/public partnership between the U.S. Forest Service and local governments, provides an exemplary model to learn from. John Wentworth, who spearheads the Partnership, attributed its success to a few key elements. First, a local non-profit has provided consistent facilitation and convening for the initial iteration of the partnership. By convening around the same table - whether in person or virtually - in a regular monthly manner, the partnership has been able to bring local and federal agencies together to engage with grant opportunities awarded through
The ESSRP grew out of a collaborative - the Eastern Sierra Recreation Collaborative (ESRC) – that was formed to help inform the Inyo National Forest’s new Management plan, one of the first in the nation to be crafted using the 2012 Planning Rule. The recreation collaborative was initially funded through a local non-profit, and was later supported by a grant from the National Forest Foundation. Through region-wide public meetings, the ESRC identified shared values, principles, and guidelines to share with Inyo National Forest leadership, many of which were later incorporated into the adopted management plan.

As Chris Floyd, Manager of the Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation put it,

"We’ve found that when people are face to face, it causes people to really wrap their heads around the complexity of issues on both sides. A land manager just sitting in their office might find it easy to say no without much explanation, but being with people at the table makes it different."

Although the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic makes in-person meetings difficult, virtual convenings can serve the same purpose.
The ESSRP operates under an intergovernmental cooperative agreement between public agency stakeholders to guide future efforts. Similar strategies have been used to develop the PA Wilds Planning Team (binding 13 county governments, tourism and heritage nonprofits, economic development organizations, public land managers, and conservation groups around the regional PA Wilds strategy), and in Valley Forge, PA (where the national park has a cooperative agreement with the local tourism office to share space and collaborate on special events) among other examples.

While an intergovernmental cooperative agreement may not be appropriate in all circumstances, less formal arrangements like a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between stakeholders are also effective in ensuring future buy-in and dependability.

Formal regional collaborations can also increase bandwidth and shared expertise between low-resource communities. For example, in southwest Virginia, a regional collaborative between several rural towns allows these communities to share nonprofit leadership, grant writing support, and marketing and branding under one roof.
6. Identify One Point of Contact

As Rick Jenkinson, Board President for the Granite Backcountry Alliance noted,

"In our experience cutting glades for backcountry skiing, it was favorable for the Forest Service to have a point of contact, not scattered contacts. They trusted the Granite Backcountry Alliance to cut within bounds and to have social influence within the community."

Having one point of contact also enables State Offices of Outdoor Recreation to support these collaboratives with facilitated trainings, rural roadshows, state/federal resource opportunities, and meetings with business, as in the State of Colorado.
The United States has more than 100 land-grant colleges and universities that engage in extension services. These extension services "provide non-formal education and learning activities to people throughout the country — to farmers and other residents of rural communities as well as to people living in urban areas," according to the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

Extension services can help grow outdoor recreation economies by delivering research, education, and technical assistance to local stakeholders at a fraction of the cost of independent consultants, making small amounts of funding go further. For these reasons, extension was described in an interview as a "best-kept secret" for economic development. Examples of such partnerships are listed on Page 8 of this USDA resource.
In West Virginia, under the leadership of Extension Specialist Doug Arbogast, the Mon Forest Towns Partnership has utilized the West Virginia University Extension Service in a partnership with USDA Rural Development and U.S. Forest Service around the Monongahela National Forest for branding and design, improved signage, GIS asset mapping, playgrounds and park design, and other partnership facilitation.

(Click to enlarge)
Interviewees underscored the importance of a culturally conscious approach in planning and coalition development.

Gabe Vasquez, a council member in the City of Las Cruces, NM notes that identifying the best local champions takes significant time, understanding, and trust, saying:

"Make a culturally conscious approach—don't impose cultural norms across communities."
In certain cases, key relationships with a few community members led to the invitation of other key community members to the table. To reiterate, rural communities are unique from one another—in socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic background, political affiliation, tribal status, access to natural resources, human resources and financial capital, environmental threats, geography, and other demographics—and require distinctive approaches. To illustrate this point, one state Office of Outdoor Recreation director noted the importance of "knowing when to wear their Carhartt versus Patagonia hat" in building support for outdoor recreation as an economic driver.

Kristin Kovalik of the Trust For Public Land (TPL) Oregon underscored the importance of deference to local customs:

"We insist on being invited to a space, rather than making the space by ourselves or assigning priorities. Our work in the community is motivated by the questions, "How can this land and trail system serve the broader community—not just in access and health but also economically? Who are the leaders now, what is their vision while they are in office, and do they have the resources to complete that mission?"

Kristin Kovalik, Trust For Public Land (TPL) Oregon
In particular, tribes should be targeted for inclusion in planning efforts, given the ignominious history of genocide and forcible relocation of Indigenous peoples from today’s public lands and outdoor spaces. This point was underscored by Mary Monroe Brown, Director of the Wisconsin Office of Outdoor Recreation, who counts Native American Tourism of Wisconsin (NATOW) as an important partner in the state’s work.

Lucas St. Clair, who supported the creation of the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument, outlined a re-assessment in his community’s own planning efforts around the new monument.

"We decided to focus on re-establishing Indigenous culture and de-colonizing aspects of the existing culture and the way we tell the story of the park. We want Indigenous folks to be at the center of the frame. Todo so, we have established a tribal council with four federally recognized tribes. Each chief identified four members for their tribal council. This helps us with informed design, experience, and an Indigenous lens."

Lucas St. Clair, Executive Director, Elliotsville Plantation Inc.

In summary, the formation of stakeholder groups and future outreach to the community should be motivated by basic principles of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and consistently assess whether planning efforts reflect all interests in the community.

"Lots of folks in leadership don't represent the communities they're hoping to serve—for instance, immigrant constituents often find that there are not representatives from their communities in positions of leadership to advocate for their needs."

Kendra Briechle, Manager, Community and Economic Development and Katie Allen, Conservation Leadership Network Director, The Conservation Fund

As Briechle and Allen have noted, it is important that community leadership (i.e. town councils and committees) are intentional in how open positions are advertised and filled, as well as how topics for discussion relate to the full community. When leadership can reduce barriers for entry for underrepresented community members, they increase the likelihood that decisions meet diverse community needs.
Deeper Learnings: Examples of Community-Centric Outreach: Tucumcari

A recent project in Tucumcari, New Mexico, demonstrates effective community-centric outreach and mobilization to revitalize a community pool area. Attila Bality of the National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, reflects on the success of the community engagement strategy.

"Tucumcari is a great example town in rural New Mexico. The City was interested in revitalizing a park that had been long neglected since a public pool was closed in the 1970s. The town's economic development group asked for help. My team came in to rethink the park from a regional destination package—things like long gun shooting competitions, high school cross country races, family reunions, weddings, all these things that used to happen."

Bality and his team educated and informed the economic council about outdoor economics data from Headwaters Economics, OIA data about trends, and got them to participate in the state outdoor rec conference in Silver City. They also brought the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service to the table to address land restoration and conservation strategies. For the communities that Bality works with, their questions are primarily about economic development and quality of life. In his experience, it is easier to make the economic development case than it is to make the health case, particularly in rural communities.
State and local entities can support community economic development by providing targeted trainings to local stakeholders to fill capacity gaps to develop outdoor recreation businesses.

When speaking about rural leadership in California, Laurel Harkness of the Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals remarked that:

"A lot of local leaders come into roles with little prior experience and don't have access to professional development opportunities in the midst of their responsibilities."
Amy Allison, Director of the North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Industry Office concurred, noting that:

"Most of our rural communities don't have grant writers or people who have the time or resources to constantly look for grant opportunities."

These administrative challenges for a small town can be difficult when considering applying for federal grants, which require NEPA compliance, reporting, and/or additional policies and procedures (for instance, a traffic management plan requirement from a state Department of Transportation).

To mitigate these challenges, state leaders cited utilizing or planning to create resources including:

- Leadership development academies (focused on growing visitation, increasing school populations, maintaining hospitals, building affordable housing, and enhancing outdoor recreation infrastructure to support healthy lifestyles)
- Outdoor Recreation Incubator Grants and Business Accelerators to support the development of programs that assist early-stage outdoor businesses
- Grant writing training and awareness of notice of funding opportunities
- Clear and accessible lists of grants, loans, and technical assistance that support outdoor recreation
- Economic data and research on the benefits of outdoor recreation
- Marketing and branding services
- Entrepreneurship workshops and workforce trainings
- Conferences and events
- Toolkits to combine the resources above and others
States with larger Offices of Outdoor Recreation are able to provide such opportunities with more sophistication and frequency. For instance, the Utah Office of Outdoor Recreation sends staff into communities to build relationships and present funding opportunities and resources available that year. These trainings can also help communities tie their proposals to current state initiatives.

The PA Wilds Center, which operates as an external lead nonprofit to Pennsylvania’s Department of Conservation and Natural Resources for the PA Wilds Conservation Landscape, regularly provides partner organizations in the landscape with verbiage, data sets, and support letters to tie their recreation-related funding proposals to the regional strategy help them resonate with funding agencies and state lawmakers. This example showcases that even states without state offices of outdoor recreation can still have intermediaries playing a supporting role.
A well-articulated community brand can both attract new visitation and attention to a town or region while sustaining local character, values and increasing local pride.
As James Glover, a branding consultant who has helped develop outdoor recreation in rural towns like Farmington, NM puts it,

"**Communities don't always understand branding or what that is.**

Communities need to understand that they already have a brand, good or bad — it may not be what they want now, but they have the ability to shape and manage the brand moving forward.

"**At the highest level, rural communities can’t be all things to all people—they are often so hungry to attract new residents and businesses, prospects end up not being a good long-term fit or align with their own values and offerings.**"

Brand development may include designing logos, signage, marketing materials, and a mission and vision statement, identifying a consistent voice for external engagements, and creating a strategic plan. These efforts give a degree of control to the local community about how they are perceived and treated by visitors and locals alike and set a trajectory for further development.

"**A place-based brand is a powerful thing. “I love NY” makes $30M a year for the public good. “Keep Austin Weird” has helped turn a sleepy college town into one of the fastest-growing cities in America. We don’t want to be NYC or Austin. Our place-based brand is built around our region’s tremendous public lands and outdoor experiences, maker culture, and rural lifestyle. But we know if we continue to invest in this brand, and this strategy, it brings real economic power to our rural businesses and communities.**"

TaEnos, CEO, PA Wilds Center
Unified Voice: The Greater Zion Convention & Tourism Office

The Greater Zion Convention & Tourism Office exemplifies the regional branding approach by offering a logo, verbiage, imagery, statistics and facts, current events and presentations to be utilized for uniform marketing by the towns and businesses surrounding Zion National Park. To build the brand, an advertising agency collected over 500 responses from individuals who had visited the region within the past few years in order to understand the perceptions surrounding the region and potential opportunities.

The Office provides assistance with event operations, planning and funding, marketing and public relations, planning and development of sports and recreation venues. In the early days of the COVID-19 economic shutdown, the office supported the local network of small businesses by creating a campaign called #StayGreater to reassure potential visitors and amass business support resources.
Committed funding partners are an integral component for outdoor recreation collaboratives to have a real impact in the community.

In this section, the importance of broadly representative stakeholder groups should be re-emphasized—simply having the right people at the table (including potential funders) during initial planning tends to increase enthusiasm from funders and ensure that all channels for funding and technical assistance are explored.
As Meryl Harrell, Executive Director of the Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards underscored:

"Even a small grant can be helpful in a number of ways, for example: paying for the time of a local employee to develop applications for additional funding, paying for small projects like signage or website redesigns that will help spark momentum, providing seed funding that can be matched by local community foundations and other sources of support to build up to a bigger grant match."

Interviewees identified the following funding sources for outdoor recreation economy development from organizations including, but not limited to:
Federal government and affiliated programs

- Appalachian Regional Commission
  - Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization (POWER) Program

- Bureau of Land Management
  - Land and Water Conservation Fund

- Department of Transportation
  - Recreation Trails Program

- Economic Development Administration
  - Economic Adjustment Assistance Strategy and Implementation Grants

- Environmental Protection Agency
  - Brownfields Program
  - Community Culture and the Environment Guide
  - Recreation Economies for Rural Communities
  - Smart Growth in Small Towns and Rural Communities

- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
  - Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program (BRiC)

- National Park Service
  - Land and Water Conservation Fund
  - Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance
Northern Border Regional Commission
- Economic Infrastructure Grants

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Land and Water Conservation Fund
  - Dingell-Johnson and Pittman-Robertson State Funds

U.S. Forest Service
- Land and Water Conservation Fund
  - Community Forest Program
  - Forest Legacy Program

USDA Innovation Center
- Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI)

USDA Rural Development
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Colleges and Universities
- Land Grant University Extension Services

Community Development Financial Institutions
Local government and affiliated programs

- County Commissioners
- Departments of Economic Development
- Town Council

Local nonprofits

- Local nonprofits
- Local land trusts

National nonprofits

- Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
- Conservation Alliance
- Leave No Trace
- National Governors Association
- Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, The
- Access Fund
- The Conservation Fund
• The Nature Conservancy
• The Wilderness Society
• Trust for Public Land
• Trout Unlimited
• Winter Wildlands Alliance

Private Philanthropic Foundations

• Benedum Foundation
• Blue Sky Funders
• Greening Youth Foundation
• National Forest Foundation
• Outdoor Foundation, Turner
• Foundation
• Walton Family Foundation
• Wyss Foundation

Private businesses

Private funders and fundraisers
State government and affiliated programs

- Departments of Economic Development
- Departments of Conservation and Natural Resources
- State Business Development Initiatives
- State Offices of Outdoor Recreation
- State Outdoor Recreation Grants
  - Great Outdoors Colorado
  - Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund
  - New Mexico Outdoor Equity Fund
  - New Mexico Outdoor Infrastructure Grant
  - North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, Clean Water Management Fund, Outdoor Heritage Act
  - UCORE Outdoor Recreation and Education Grants
  - Utah Outdoor Recreation Grant
  - Vermont Community Grant Program for Designation of Outdoor Recreation Communities
  - Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition
- State Parks
- State Rural Development Initiatives
- State Water Utilities

I'd like to learn about federal grants...
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Deeper Learnings: Funding Rural West Virginia

In an interview, Doug Arbogast, an Extension Specialist at the West Virginia University Extension Service, shared the following funding mix that the Mon Forest Towns Partnership utilized to support a partnership to build the economies of the ten rural towns surrounding the Monongahela National Forest.

The initial funding partners in the partnership were:

- **Appalachian Regional Commission (Federal-state partnership), matched by:**
- **Economic Development Administration (Federal agency, through state EDA office)**
- **Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, which also offered $5k mini-grants to community projects in the partnership**
- **USDA Rural Community Development Initiative (from state of WV)**
- Small funds from the Forest Service regional office worked through a local foundation to distribute funds.

- West Virginia University Research Grants

Doug Arbogast, Extension Specialist, West Virginia University Extension Service
While local passion and stakeholder group formation help serve as the spark for planning, several interviewees cited the importance of buy-in from their state to ensure the long-term sustainability of outdoor recreation economies.

For instance, in the case of the PA Wilds Center;

"The collaboration between the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and Department of Community and Economic Development to support the work at a policy and funding level was huge."

TaEnos, CEO, PA Wilds Center
Frequent cooperation between state and local stakeholders helps ensure coordination between the region's public lands and stewardship goals and the state's economic and community development programs. Outcomes of this partnership could be built infrastructure (as in the case of destination conservation/heritage visitor centers in the PA Wilds), new policy and grant programs (as in the Utah Outdoor Recreation Grant, Great Outdoors Colorado Grant Program, New Mexico Outdoor Equity Fund, or Washington Wildlife and Recreation Fund), or dedicated state offices to train rural communities (as in Utah's Business Development and Community Strategies offices collaborating to support rural residents).

Achieving this buy-in can be a challenging task if a state has limited fluency with the benefits of outdoor recreation or expresses reluctance to commit to a relatively newer strategy for economic development. This takes significant, high-value effort from local officials as well as other municipal, private, state, and federal agencies.

"Sometimes it's a 4.5-hour drive to Salt Lake City, but I show up. I think it's important to go to meetings in person (if possible), and not call in. The governor knows my face and voice, as do legislators, the lieutenant governor, and staff. That level of familiarity makes all the difference."

Emily Niehaus, Mayor, Moab, UT

Other avenues for support include state parks departments, whose park managers, superintendents, and staff often have close ties to these communities. Park staff work to build relationships with community members, stakeholders, volunteers and/or non-profits such as youth conservation corps in developing resources within parks, augmenting programming and increasing economic development potential.

Additionally, Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans (SCORPs), which are necessary to qualify for Land and Water Conservation Fund grants (and are used to guide state departments of conservation and natural resources on outdoor recreation priorities), could be written to more effectively integrate state goals for public health and economic development so that future grant applications resonate with a broader range of elected officials.

One interviewee cited the value of getting attention from a relevant member of Congress to help draw attention from local, state, and/or federal land management officials toward a certain project or opportunity.
12. Plan For Destination Management

Once local enthusiasm is mobilized, financial support identified, and/or state partners engaged, local planners must carefully consider implementation plans to avoid certain pitfalls that have affected other outdoor recreation-centric communities.

These strategies can fit under the umbrella of ‘Destination Management’, a distinct framing from ‘Destination Marketing’, which often focuses more on external interest versus community needs.
"It's important to ask these questions of communities— if you want to maintain the culture you have today, is it going to be a limit to growth? Is it going to be a restriction of commercially zoned parcels? There are ways a community can lock down size—but it can be difficult to lock down culture. Early collective visioning is super important—so that you are creating what you want to see, and avoiding unintended consequences."

Emily Niehaus, Mayor, Moab, UT

Issues including traffic management, housing affordability, wildlife impacts, new business development, schools, healthcare services, basic infrastructure, connectivity, large landscape planning, and community character should be raised proactively, rather than reactively to increased visitation and attention. The Colorado Tourism Roadmap and Oregon Tourism Studios program are useful examples of such planning.

This visioning is made difficult in unincorporated communities, where there are no land use regulations or limitations at all, as noted by Randy Carpenter, Project Director at Future West.
13. Ensure Value Capture

Ensuring comprehensive value capture for communities is also critically important.

In the perspective of Kendra Briechle and Katie Allen at The Conservation Fund:

"It needs to be a holistic approach—are these places considering permitting and infrastructure for business administration? Is the rest of the value chain bought in and aware of the opportunity (e.g. hotels, restaurants, and other services to support)? If there are holes in the value chain, you won't capture all the money spent in communities."
As Brielcher and Allen astutely observe, it is advantageous to capture visitors' spending throughout the value chain to multiply benefits for the community. Additionally, flexibility and creativity in the structure of taxes and permitting can also contribute to these benefits.

The "tax structures" they refer to may include new lodging or sales taxes to capture visitors' economic choices.

**Molly Theobald**, Director of the Division of Critical Infrastructure at the Appalachian Regional Commission added on, noting that:

"If folks go down trails and camp, but bring their own food and only buy gas, that has zero impact on the local economy. We want someone to be able to get off a trail and have an opportunity to spend money on music, arts and crafts, etc. so that they can stay a day or two and really invest in the visit. That means that the whole vision must be considered--make sure the trails connect to the overall quality of the visit. If you can get people off the trail right into downtown to buy lunch, visit a local outfitter, bring friends along and come back and spend several days/nights on the trail, that sells it for us."

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**END OF SECTION**
Several interviewees underscored the need for servicing basic infrastructure needs as a prerequisite for outdoor recreation economies to reach their growth potential.

In many locations, peak visitation may exceed the year-round population by several multiples during weekends or holidays. This pressure puts immense strain on a community’s infrastructure, including broadband, emergency services, water and sewage, and roads, among other basic assets.

Broadband for internet connectivity was cited frequently as an inhibitor to rural development and entrepreneurial potential. As the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic increases the likelihood that families will
relocate closer to places that they enjoy for outdoor recreation opportunities, broadband improvements can support both existing businesses as well as "work-from-home" opportunities in general. "We have a number of places where basic broadband issues limit their capacity for growth. With broadband, we have a number of places that could be top-tier destinations for workers from around the world."

"Infrastructure is the most important thing. If you build the monument and don't do anything to improve the infrastructure, it's like building a billboard and putting it in your basement."

When considering the potential for future growth, community stakeholders should consider infrastructure improvements that can support high-quality experiences for both locals and visitors as well as bolster existing businesses and quality of life. Several public funding mechanisms to address infrastructure needs exist at the state and federal level. These moves were described by Rachel Schmidt as giving the community the breathing room to care about conservation and outdoor recreation.

I'd like to learn about federal grants or other technical assistance. This button links to more information.
Finally, states and communities can incentivize economic growth with programs that attract new manufacturing and business development.

These programs can be a win-win for both parties: a state benefits from increased production and economic activity within its borders, and companies improve quality of life for employees by locating near outdoor recreation assets, which improves prospects for recruitment and retention. Companies can also build authenticity around their product and brand by designing and testing on nearby public lands.
As **Stephanie Pack** of the Economic Development Corporation of Utah (EDCUtah) noted:

"The communities adjacent to outdoor recreation opportunities should be top of mind for any outdoor brand because they are the gateway through which their customer base flows. A lot of outdoor companies do manufacturing and product development in-house and want to be near training grounds and end-users for their products."

**Such manufacturing programs could include:**

- Job incentives
- Tax incentives
- Opportunity zone enhancement programs
- Micro-manufacturing hubs
- Grants, loans, and forgivable assistance to companies
- Outdoor recreation degrees (land management, business administration or outdoor product design and development in state universities)
- Increased data gathering on the value of outdoor recreation at the state, county, and town levels

The potential for outdoor recreation to take hold as a viable economic strategy is impeded by the perception that it tends to create low-wage jobs. The programs above can dispel this notion by helping to create and highlight a mix of job opportunities across the pay spectrum.
Deeper Learnings: The Outdoor Recreation Economy Workforce Development Consortium

One effort States may consider contributing to or joining is the ongoing development of the Outdoor Recreation Economy Workforce Development Consortium (“Consortium”), an effort being spearheaded by the Oregon State University Outdoor Recreation Economy Initiative. The Consortium, once formed, will be a collaborative organization that addresses the workforce challenges and needs of the outdoor recreation industry. The Consortium will research and define sectors and job families to inform the creation and adoption of national education and training standards across the outdoor recreation industry. With this information, institutions of higher education can develop programming consistent with those national standards in order to develop a competent, qualified, highly skilled, and diverse workforce with clear pathways into outdoor industry careers for students from all backgrounds. A successful Consortium will bring together higher education in partnership with outdoor industry businesses, associations, and organizations, along with federal and state government agencies. States can partner with the Consortium to support a strong and sustainable outdoor recreation economy, which in turn bolsters equitable health and economic opportunities in both urban and rural communities.
Deeper Learnings: Utah and Attracting Business to Rural Communities

At EDCUtah, the Business Development team (which works to attract new businesses) works closely with the Community Strategy team on recruitment and retention of new companies and helps bridge relationships with individual communities and their goals for growth. A research team supports both teams with demographic and economic data to shape unique approaches with various communities.

Meanwhile, staff for a different program called 'Know the Customer' conduct frequent interviews with executives and site leads to get their feedback on doing business across the state. Utah also has a state program called 'Development Ready Communities', which shares various benchmarks and milestones which economic developers within communities can use to strengthen economic development strategies.

“There are site selection consultants to work with large companies on growth strategies and sustainable opportunities. We want to help communities understand how to market their communities to site selection consultants, or how to respond to RFIs. We want communities to understand that a company might need 20 thousand feet of space to manufacture skis—why should they choose your community over others?”

Stephanie Pack, Business Development Manager, Economic Development Corporation of Utah

Pack also noted the role of the State Office of Outdoor Recreation in uniting recreation and manufacturing interests at the same table.

“The Office of Outdoor Recreation does a great job at bringing recreation/tourism partners and the outdoor product industry to the same table. This bodes really well for rural Utah because brands often have more capital and flexibility to support nonprofits, recreation assets, and organizations that directly benefit their customers.”

Stephanie Pack, Business Development Manager, Economic Development Corporation of Utah
Deeper Learnings: North Carolina's Outdoor Recreation Manufacturing Ecosystem

Despite being a one-person office, North Carolina Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry Director Amy Allison is supported by three organizations that make outdoor gear manufacturing more attractive in North Carolina.

The Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC) "is focused on recruiting new businesses to the state, supporting the needs of existing businesses, connecting exporters to global customers, helping small business owners get their start, and attracting tourists and visitors from all over the world. In pursuit of sustainable job-creation and investment in North Carolina, the EDPNC works closely with public- and private-sector partners at the state, regional and local levels. As a nonprofit public-private partnership, the EDPNC operates under contract with the North Carolina Department of Commerce, while receiving additional financial support from the private sector."
Outdoor Gear Builders is a 40+ member organization of Western North Carolina-based companies "collaborating to share talents, encourage new ideas, and inspire each other." They work to attract companies to move and/or start in Western North Carolina by showcasing the region, products, and businesses through engaging media, and "creating a forum of usable sources to find new materials, fresh ideas, and answers to North Carolina’s Outdoor Recreation Manufacturing Ecosystem problems." This forum allows them to more easily quantify the impact of their work for interested stakeholders: Outdoor Gear Builders members have provided 760 jobs region-wide, and over $8,000,000 in local sourcing of materials and contracts within WNC.

In addition, the Growing Outdoors Partnership, which formed through a nearly $1 million grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission’s POWER Initiative, works to expand and support the outdoor recreation industry across the Appalachian region of North Carolina, through five main focus areas: Workforce & Outdoor Careers; Entrepreneurship & Access to Capital; Growing Markets; Connecting the Industry; and Economic Development.
Finally, the North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Coalition, whose members include manufacturers, retailers, guide companies, and conservation NGOs, exists to advocate on behalf of the outdoor recreation industry at the North Carolina General Assembly and within executive agencies.

In combination, these four organizations help provide and sustain a business-friendly climate on the ground for local manufacturers and build recognition for North Carolina as a hub for outdoor recreation businesses, locals, and visitors alike.
Despite a proliferation of communities nationwide who benefit from developing outdoor recreation economies around outdoor assets, a number of social, environmental, and economic barriers to these economies' collective growth exist.

**Skepticism about new ventures**

Outdoor recreation advocates struggle to achieve consensus in certain communities due to rightful skepticism about new economic initiatives replacing older industries, and unintended consequences of a rapid transition to an outdoor recreation economy.

When **Sarah Shrader**, Founder of the Grand Junction Outdoor Recreation Coalition reflected on her community of Grand Junction, CO, she remarked on a multi-generational "hardening" toward future downturns:

"100 years of boom and bust creates so much hopelessness. Even when you’re in the boom cycle, you know the other shoe is going to drop."
This sentiment can prevent communities from jumping at the next chance for economic diversification, even when data seems to support its efficacy. Additionally, outdoor recreation has the perception of creating a tourist-centric economy that doesn't benefit locals.

"Outdoor recreation presents new economic and workforce opportunities for rural communities. However, there are warranted community reservations about shifting from a reliance on one cyclical economy to another, such as tourism. It's important to think about the outdoor economy beyond tourism and as an opportunity for outdoor assets to retain and attract talented workforce and spark business growth in other sectors."

Jack Morgan, Program Manager for Resilient Economies and Communities at the National Association of Counties

Convincing data cannot overcome this skepticism alone; a community's economy creates an identity that shapes steadfast values, belief systems, and perceptions about what holds the community together.

"All newly elected officials go through what we call "County College." It's a 9-month program to train on how to be an elected official. At one of the opening dinners, I gave a presentation about the outdoor recreation economy, provided national data, and how it connects to the extension service. Despite this, some of the commissioners said, 'No, tennis shoes and bikes aren't going to save my community. Timber is the answer.' There are a lot of cultural perceptions to overcome, even when the data is right there. In one case, it wasn't until a medical doctor talked to a commissioner about the benefits of trails and provided health data and what a path would do for people in the county that they changed their mind."

State Economic Development Supporter

"There's some reticence around certain concepts in outdoor recreation, particularly the tourism context--a reticence that these communities 'have to' in the absence of the extractive industry because it means that they'll bring people to the community in ways that they're not entirely comfortable with."

State Office Director
It is important to recognize that these feelings aren’t always misperceptions of the value of outdoor recreation— in certain cases, unintended consequences of outdoor recreation economies have left communities strained by new visitation pressures.

As Randy Carpenter notes;

"Communities like Deer Lodge, MT are experiencing social strife. People are being priced out of homes as they’re being told that the future is in recreation. What does that mean? 20 years ago you told us it was in tourism—people traded a job at a mill or in a mine to be the manager of a convenience store in Bozeman. Kids can’t stay here in a million years. Housing is a monster issue. Headwaters just came out with a study that recreation-based economies come with affordability problems."

Economic growth in previously poor communities can generate challenges with traffic management, housing affordability, wildlife impacts, new business development, schools, healthcare services, basic infrastructure, connectivity, large landscape planning, and community character. As noted in the 'Plan for Destination Management' section, these challenges should be expected and addressed early in the visioning process with policies and planning that control development and growth.

"There are certainly pros and cons to leaning into a recreation economy. When a tax base is too heavily dependent on tourism, things can get skewed. We’re being responsive to community needs and concerns about relying too heavily on one aspect or another. These are communities that have seen what happens in a boom/bust economy, and how they’re left to rebuild."

Kristin Kovalik, Director of Land Conservation, Trust for Public Land Oregon
Concerns about environmental impact

Additionally, outdoor recreation economic development faces resistance from conservation groups who are concerned about the impacts of overuse on wildlife habitats and overall ecosystem health.

"I'm concerned about the conservation implications of outdoor recreation and don't think enough attention has been given. There's a theory that we can move to a great new clean world based on recreation. I think it's important to understand that there's a whole different dynamic to that change. Both economies (outdoor recreation and extraction) impact the natural environment...Some research has been done, but it's uncomfortable. There are indications that it can have really significant ecological impacts—maybe the impacts that are happening now are canaries in the coal mine."

Randy Carpenter, Project Director, Future West

New outdoor recreation technology (e.g. durable lightweight gear, e-bikes, and snowmobiles) that allow users to go further and faster than ever before amplifies these concerns.
These perspectives could be addressed by funding new research that studies the relationship between outdoor recreation and ecosystem health, with a particular focus on climate change, and involving the community in a plan for sustainable use. For example, future studies could examine scenarios where the impacts of climate change are more intense and outdoor recreation is minimally restrained, and use such research to create scientifically-informed sustainable recreation policy and regulations that balance human enjoyment with ecosystem health.

Conservation and outdoor recreation interests have also historically worked hand in hand by uniting around the ecosystem services of protected land, including wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, groundwater recharge, clean water, runoff yield, and agricultural use. The outdoor recreation community should elevate these benefits when reaching out to conservation partners.
Potential leaders have existing commitments

Rural economic development via outdoor recreation development is also hamstrung by administrative bandwidth issues in communities where potential leaders have various existing commitments and minimal extra time to spearhead a new initiative.
As Chris Floyd from the Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation noted, even when his team makes the effort to bring all necessary interests and perspectives to the table, it is difficult to get people to commit to the necessary amount of time, especially during COVID-19. They try to maintain a group of 25-30 people but consider it a success to keep 15 or 20 engaged on a regular basis, recognizing the challenges of time commitment and working closely with others who have different interests and opinions.

**Complex grant requirements**

This lack of availability can inhibit the ability of stakeholders to participate in the collective visioning process for their community, or to invest the time necessary to meet complex federal and state grant requirements.

"Some communities don't have the resources to spearhead such a thing. Everyone has rural jobs and they don't have the time to figure out what the blueprint would be. They're eager about outdoor recreation but don't have the capacity."

"Complaints I’ve fielded about the NPS’s LWCF application process have been about the ever-increasing, high degree of planning, administrative, and occasional legal skills required to complete a meaningful application or its defense.

“As one long-time manager told me, we’re doing a lot of the same type of projects now that we did fifty years ago, but the administrative packages have gone from three pages to forty—this is a real deterrence for many communities to want to use LWCF as a resource, with no distinction in requirements between large and small projects.”
Reliance on Volunteers

Additionally, when it comes time to implement projects or perform maintenance on existing assets, communities frequently rely entirely on volunteers, which can create impediments to efficient and time-sensitive work.

“...an incredible dependency on volunteer labor, donated materials and use of equipment to build and maintain outdoor recreation (public) infrastructure, seemingly more than any other industry, which is a challenge.”

Inter-agency tensions (e.g. between recreation managers, parks agencies, tourism offices, and economic development offices over roles, authorities and values) can also inhibit progress on initiatives, particularly when an organization is hoping to prove its efficacy at the local, state or national level.
There is no easy solution to address these challenges—rural leaders work tirelessly to make ends meet, often balancing multiple jobs and obligations to their community and family alike. That said, some strategies mentioned earlier in this summary can assist stakeholders in their efforts.

This can include having a designated nonprofit to facilitate and convene gatherings (and provide stakeholders modest compensation for their time, if possible) and providing accessible professional development opportunities for leaders. Communities could also utilize existing grants and technical assistance (particularly the USDA Rural Economic Development Initiative, EPA Recreation Economy for Rural Communities, and EDA Economic Adjustment Assistance Strategy Grants) for the creation of economic development plans and grant writing support.

Additionally, states can support local stakeholders by expanding state outdoor recreation offices with more staff to provide full-time administrative support to communities or by building outdoor recreation-specific grant programs to support convening efforts, planning, and implementation.
"When building, maintaining, or protecting trails, we've generally been 100% run by volunteers, but we know that doesn't work in the long term. We've been vocal about needing funds in perpetuity. There should be a line item for the general fund— "this goes to trails in rural and urban areas."

Sarah Shrader, Owner, Bonsai Design, Founder, Grand Junction Outdoor Recreation Coalition
Youth Conservation Corps (‘Corps’) are locally-based organizations that engage young adults (generally ages 16 – 25) and veterans (up to age 35) in service projects that address recreation and conservation, among other desired outcomes.

More than 230 active member organizations are currently recognized as part of the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps, which saw bipartisan support in Congress in the 2019 John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act. Corps work on all types of conservation, restoration and resilience and disaster response work, and provide outstanding quality of service at a fraction of the cost compared to traditional government contract workers.

Corps can be utilized to advance green infrastructure projects across urban and rural communities, creating thoughtfully-designed open spaces that help manage stormwater and provide clean air and water.

Many low-income communities and communities of color experience under-investment in infrastructure and green spaces. Corps can be utilized to help correct these inequities by creating usable, modern outdoor spaces, and be utilized cost-effectively to complete locally targeted projects. In addition, Corps can provide income and work experience to individuals in communities who have been hardest hit by the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.
Finally, even in communities where widespread passion for outdoor recreation exists, efforts are limited by lack of capital to finance initial efforts or to provide a necessary match for state and federal grants.

**Land and Water Conservation Fund Matching**

For instance, the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) requirement of 50-50 cost-sharing for stateside Land and Water Conservation Fund grants (among other match programs) presents a significant challenge for many communities, leading to an inequitable disbursement of funds to larger communities who can provide the match.
"... Right now so many units of local government are broke from having no income streams due to the virus so that it could well be two years from now before anybody has the disposable income for LWCF’s necessary match. The statutory, 50-percent required share sounds equitable but is totally beyond the reach of most localities to afford even in good times, which really needs to change if the program’s benefits are to amount to anything for other than the most well-heeled grant applicants."

John McGarrity, Senior Planner, West Virginia Development Office

Several state directors of outdoor recreation cited the difficulty of achieving matching funds. For some, a rural community might have just over 1000 people and scarce financial resources; for others, state and local governments facing large budget deficits are limited in their ability to provide match. In many communities with outstanding outdoor recreation potential, this results in leaving available funding on the table. In addition, many communities simply don’t know where to start the search for funding, or how to navigate existing funding opportunities.

"Some communities don’t have the extra staff or resources to spend looking for grants and funding opportunities. And when these opportunities do present themselves, communities still need the support of skilled grant writers, matching funds, and other resources to help them implement their plans for growth."

Amy Allison, Director, North Carolina Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry
Kristin Kovalik from the Trust for Public Land Oregon noted that basic lack of understanding about requirements can be a barrier to federal grant programs. Even if landowners could apply, oftentimes they don't because they're too busy, or the program's requirements are too difficult to manage.

As illustrated by the funding example in rural West Virginia earlier in this toolkit, where a combination of funding from CDFIs, foundations, federal agencies, and the State of West Virginia enabled a stakeholder group to convene, these funding difficulties are not insurmountable, but can be nearly impossible unless the community has a dedicated fundraiser working on their behalf to unite funding sources and pitch potential projects.

I'd like to learn about federal grants or other technical assistance. This button links to more information.

This work is likely too much to add to state offices' existing workload, and multiple interviewees suggested the hiring of a regional coordinator at the state level to manage development opportunities and source funding.

"A general barrier is that typically someone knows the answer to whatever the challenge is, but damn it's hard to find that person. It's not even intentionally hidden, sometimes it's just tricky—you have to work with federal and state agencies at the same time."

Cailin O'Brien-Feeney, Director of the Oregon Office of Outdoor Recreation

"I'll never be in the game of administering federal grants because of the legalese and multi-layered requirements for administration—it's complex enough that with my one-person office it's unlikely that I could administer."

Colin Robertson, Administrator of the Nevada Division of Outdoor Recreation
Private Fundraising

In certain cases, communities privately fundraised within the community to meet funding needs.

"We fund our projects through a combination of public engagement. We have a few Winter Wildlands Alliance film festivals each fall and winter, which raise a lot of revenue. Local merchants— including ski shops, restaurants, inns, and others, as well as larger outdoor ski, backpack, and equipment manufacturers donate items for silent and live auctions. We also have an event called Wild Corn in the Spring— we have all sorts of events and exhibitors and a party that goes into the night. We've also got some big individual donations from folks, and our expenses are fairly low."

Rick Jenkinson, Board President, Granite Backcountry Alliance
Comprehensive Funding Resource

However, private fundraising is not a viable strategy in low-income communities. One useful effort by state leaders and the outdoor recreation community at large would be the development of a comprehensive list of outdoor recreation funding opportunities, including public sector, nonprofit and philanthropic interests.

“We have been interested in developing a directory of sorts that assists communities in accessing federal grants and technical assistance. This could be a road map of federal assistance—programs like EPA brownfields, DOT, USDA. When we look at these communities who could use funding and technical assistance, it’s not necessarily rural versus urban, but underserved vs served.”

Ideally, the resource Ratcliffe describes would include state and local assistance as well, as federal assistance is usually combined with other forms of assistance. The directory could also be searchable by geography, outdoor recreation activity, and eligibility requirements.

New Funding Channels

As mentioned in comments prior, a trust fund or other dedicated grant source that targets low-income rural communities could help fill the gap, as could other state mechanisms such as lottery funds and/or bond bills. For instance, Vermont has implemented a community grant program dedicated to growth of outdoor recreation communities:
Finally, for the outdoor recreation industry to reach its fullest potential, the private sector may have to increase its investment in the future of outdoor recreation economies.

"It would be great to jumpstart other funding around outdoor recreation. Philanthropic foundations have big budgets, but sometimes need a paradigm shift around outdoor recreation. Government funding is constantly shrinking so it's not always reliable. Can we unlock corporate dollars to connect companies to where their gear is being used?"

Kendra Briechle, Manager, Community and Economic Development and Katie Allen, Conservation Leadership Network Director, The Conservation Fund

As outlined above, targeted grants and technical assistance from public, private, or nonprofit sources are integral to the growth of outdoor recreation economies. In the face of difficult community match requirements, grants and technical assistance can bridge the gap, generating economic and health benefits, fulfilling companies and associations' commitments to social impact, and expanding the reach of the outdoor recreation industry. Such partnerships are critical for the long-term sustainability of the outdoor recreation industry in the American economy.

END OF SECTION
Conclusion

Economic development via outdoor recreation is a coherent strategy for the future of rural America. At a time when the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic push more people outdoors than any time in recent history, and the Great American Outdoors Act will unlock millions of dollars in funding for outdoor recreation infrastructure, there is no better time for the expansion of outdoor recreation into the American fabric.

No longer a matter of legitimate debate, outdoor recreation provides real benefits to communities, from the economic benefits of a revitalized main street, new entrepreneurship, and increased visitation to existing businesses, to the public health benefits to communities that have accessible outdoor recreation from their front door.
The future of this strategy as an economic driver rests on the outdoor recreation community’s ability to identify areas of opportunity and bolster existing leadership through targeted funds, diverse collaboratives, and professional development support, while proactively identifying pitfalls related to economic development to prevent unintended consequences. By bringing traditional economic development perspectives together with the opportunity for rural communities to invest in existing natural assets, the outdoor recreation community can turn these visions into sustainable economic realities for rural communities across the United States.

END OF SECTION
Multiple interviewees cited the potential for active transportation legislation and outdoor recreation development to go hand in hand. Specifically, state efforts to decrease emissions contributing to climate change (e.g. Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards) may increase focus on opportunities to build active transportation infrastructure as an alternative for commuters.

Partner with Active Transportation Efforts
"Outdoor recreation and rural communities are sensing the need to shift efforts to active transportation—this is where dollars are currently—we need to serve the general public and get people active. Active transportation allows you to bump out your jurisdiction—you're working now with the transportation district and can incorporate outdoor recreation into transportation planning."

Laurel Harkness, Executive Director, Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals

"I see transportation as a tool to promote outdoor recreation, but we need to consider the impacts and sustainability of transportation at the same time. In Nevada, the Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard has been set, creating industrial energy targets for the state's climate initiative. Given that, transportation emissions are the next key component of climate and sustainable recreation initiatives. Outdoor recreation (It's right in, and as a group, we have the opportunity to take on transportation, active and otherwise, as a topic.)"

Colin Robertson, Administrator of the Nevada Division of Outdoor Recreation
"It would be interesting to focus efforts around the transportation reauthorization bill. The bill will greatly increase the amount of dedicated funding for trails and active transportation—increasing the amount of funding for two programs that together comprise the largest sources of federal funding for trails and active transportation in the country: Transportation Alternatives (TA) and the Recreational Trails Program (RTP). The biggest game-changer of all is likely to be a new initiative designed to fund critical links between existing active-transportation facilities for the creation of safe, connected walking and biking networks in the form of Active Transportation Connectivity Grants."

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The Outdoor Recreation Industry Must Lean Into the Political Process

Many of the efforts in this paper can be bolstered by the outdoor recreation industry's continuing to engage in the political process and making the case at the local, state, and federal level for the holistic benefits of outdoor recreation economies. This can also include increased coordination between state offices of outdoor recreation to advocate for shared goals.

“If the outdoor rec industry looked like any other industry in terms of understanding the political process, and funding opportunities, that’s a win. Storytelling, lobbying, advocacy. The outdoor rec industry/state offices need a 501c6.”
"The state is tackling a statewide conservation plan, which focuses heavily on protecting wildlife habitats, and riparian and forest health in Colorado. In this context, outdoor recreation is often viewed as a threat—to agricultural heritage, migration corridors, and property rights. We need to work on messaging that guarantees money for outdoor recreation infrastructure in the same way that it's guaranteed for conservation—big game habitats, landscape conservation, and consumptive recreation. Conserve the spaces, but don't preclude the opportunity for rural Colorado to diversify our economy through outdoor recreation."

"What if the outdoor industry were to have an equivalent of the American Petroleum Institute? How do we make sure that every individual in America thinks that protecting public lands so that industries can thrive is a good thing, in the same way that we decided Ford F150 trucks were the best flag-waving thing out there?"

Nathan Fey, Director, Colorado Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry

Lucas St. Clair, Executive Director, Eliotsville Plantation Inc.
The role of outdoor recreation as an economic driver will also grow as more states create offices of outdoor recreation, and existing state offices expand their staff, as is the case in more senior offices like those in Colorado and Utah.

"If there were 7 of me it could accomplish the level of demand that's out there."

Cailin O’Brien-Feeney, Director of the Oregon Office of Outdoor Recreation

"While I am part of the state parks division and have plenty of support from it, I report to the deputy director and the agency director—so I am not in a position to just pick up the phone and call the governor. We have a process to go through for communicating at that level. We have also started an interagency working group that I chair to help combine the resources of the executive branch to move the needle on outdoor recreation as an economic driver for the state."

Chris Floyd, Manager, Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation
"We have a staff of 4—more than other offices. That gives us the ability to send people out in the fall, do presentations in communities about grants, say here's what's available, here's how you match and provide other matching grants. Typically commissioners in rural counties would have limited knowledge about our office, but having extra staff means that we can build relationships over time that can be useful for checking in and understanding progress and opportunities for support."

Pitt Grewe, Director of the Utah Office of Outdoor Recreation
Interviewees underscored the potential to engage with partners across the spectrum of private sector and NGO groups. Private industrial timber landowners were cited as potential collaborators:

“We’re looking at a land base that’s currently in industrial timber ownership. We’re hoping to extol the benefits of wildlife, resilience, health, water quality, and outdoor recreation opportunities. We have many communities that are largely dependent on the industrial timber economy. We need to figure out how to add to that or in some places shift away to a more sustainable model that balances timber harvest and forest health with recreation opportunities.”

Kristin Kovalik, Director of Land Conservation, Trust for Public Land Oregon
Additionally, landowners on the individual scale could be utilized more effectively:

"A lot more recreation would be possible on private land if we clarify some recreational liability statutes (e.g. around ATV and camping)--is there a way to compensate private landowners for liability and usage?"

Cailin O'Brien-Feeney, Director of the Oregon Office of Outdoor Recreation

"Much of Eastern MT is private land--many communities are agriculture-based--could we interface with them more effectively?"

Rachel Schmidt, Director of the Montana Governor’s Office of Outdoor Recreation
Reggie Chapple, Acting Assistant Director of Partnerships & Civic Engagement at the National Park Service, had very creative ideas for future partnerships to boost economic development via outdoor recreation:

"Partners like the Council of Philanthropy or local centers for non-profit management would be valuable for NPS to connect to in their economic development goals. The Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) could share what they’ve learned from community development, jobs, youth and recreation, and what we might consider in our strategies moving forward. LISC was central in helping us figure out how to keep hold of the Carter Woodson home—they did the initial financing and holding of the property and put historic preservation tax credits in there. We at NPS are oftentimes in bundled funding relationships with other funding entities, but we don’t acknowledge that.

Reggie Chapple, Acting Assistant Director, Partnerships & Civic Engagement, National Park Service
"Other partnerships that would make sense—Urban Land Institute and their real estate knowledge, the American Planning Association and their knowledge about communities. Department of Energy, who talks about helping with partner networks. The $3B budget at NPS is a blink for DOE. The National Community Reinvestment Coalition. Neighborhood Housing Services. In general, we should seek to work with organizations already working on these issues, use some of their assessment tools, and look at financial institutions like banks and insurance companies.

"Sometimes low-to-moderate income communities fit squarely into banks’ investment priorities. Let’s not miss the strategy to talk about a strategy for economic development in rural and urban contexts. There is a role there for banks or financial institutions to do gap financing. When money has to get from a bill (like the Great American Outdoors Act) to service or infrastructure projects, there’s gonna be some lag time in the middle. Banks and financial institutions can help with that."

Reggie Chapple, Acting Assistant Director, Partnerships & Civic Engagement, National Park Service
Ideas to Support On-The-Ground Implementation

Some interviewees noted the difficulty of implementing infrastructure development plans and shared creative strategies or future pathways to assist development.

"We ended up with a lot of volunteer support. We had some locals with knowledge about cutting glades, we ended up hiring some trail designers. Other folks have walked on since—like some people who developed Mountain Bike trails. To operate a chainsaw on national forest, the Forest Service requires that chainsaw operators be certified sawyers, and go through Forest Service Training. We've probably certified about a dozen people to be sawyers. When they show up for workdays, we organized into teams under pack leaders who have been trained on specific intricacies of what's allowed and not allowed. Having a pack leader makes the process more controlled. Before this strategy, the first year was just mayhem—chainsaws going, kids running around, dogs everywhere. It's important to manage the process."

Rick Jenkinson, Board President, Granite Backcountry Alliance

"We're not able to administer our own construction projects—a state or federal agency has to do the work on behalf of ARC. There are logistics and technical skills to manage—it's not enough to just say I have a lot of money for a project—you need to overcome bureaucracy to make it work. This requires partnerships with state/federal agencies. The more agencies at the state or federal level that could open their eyes to outdoor recreation would be huge. If EDA were to get into this work, it could be a game-changer as they receive a lot of funding through the CARES program."

Molly Theobald, Director of the Division of Critical Infrastructure, Appalachian Regional Commission
Outdoor Recreation Buying Guides/Data/Resources to Support Businesses

Some interviewees noted that the cultural transition that takes place when outdoor recreation interest grows in a community requires support systems to enable new and existing businesses to thrive in an outdoor recreation economy.

"Kent Wilson is the commissioner of Emery County. He sees the success of recreation and tourism in Moab but doesn't understand the culture. He wants to capitalize on a place like Joe's Valley but also doesn't want to be a Moab—overrun by tourists, in conflict with the community. When I think of Kent Wilson, I think of access. Kent Wilson needs a program to think about how to get him to feel comfortable at the bouldering festival in Joe's Valley, and as a legislator, how to provide amenities (e.g. know what these folks eat, where to provide water, how to build a Sprinter van campground). He won't know that unless he's immersed in climber culture. What are they cooking their food on? What are they wearing when they climb?"

Emily Niehaus, Mayor of Moab, UT

"Really unique economic and business development resources haven't been compiled in one place for the specific challenges of outdoor recreation businesses (seasonality, living wages, workman's compensation, being interpreted more than just "summer jobs" but real economic engines)."

Kendra Brieche, Manager, Community and Economic Development and Katie Allen, Conservation Leadership Network Director, The Conservation Fund
The idea of state- or county-specific data linking public health benefits was also raised as an important tool to support outdoor recreation.

"Are there any other data linking public health benefits to increased outdoor recreation, especially at the state, or better yet, county level? That would be a helpful resource to have as I stress that connection to New Mexican lawmakers."

Axie Navas, Director of the New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division

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**Refine NAICS/Opportunity Zone Tax Program Codes**

"Can we refine NAICS codes so that OREC-specific manufacturing and export strategies are standardized nationwide - disaggregating these from broader categories like Textiles, or Miscellaneous Manufacturing? Can we replicate/rein the Opportunity Zone Tax Program to incentivize private investment in recreation infrastructure? I have similar thoughts for leveraging Colorado’s Enterprise Zone Tax Program."

Nathan Fey, Director, Colorado Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry

END OF SECTION
Examples of Outdoor Recreation Collaboratives

Bighorn Basin Outdoor Recreation Collaborative (Wyoming)


Link
Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership (Mammoth Lakes, CA)

Alpine County, City of Bishop, Inyo County, Town of Mammoth Lakes, Mono County, Inyo National Forest, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest

Granite Backcountry Alliance (North Conway, NH)

Granite Films, Run the Whites, Jackson X-C Ski Touring, Great Glen Trails, Coos Cycling Club, Friends of Tuckerman Ravine, Saco River Brewing Company, Upper Saco Valley Land Trust, Appalachian Mountain Club, Bretton Woods Ski Patrol, Allspeed Cyclery & Snow, Cranmore Mountain Resort, HEB Engineers, Memorial Hospital, Rochester Area Sports Trail Alliance

Link
Growing Outdoors Partnership (Asheville, NC)

Mountain BizWorks, Outdoor Gear Builders, Western Carolina University, Natural Capital Investment Fund, Burke Development Inc., Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce, Graham County, Southwestern Commission, North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Industry Office, Appalachian Regional Commission

Link

EndeavOR New Mexico (Farmington, NM)

505 Cycles, Santa Fe Guiding Company, MST Adventures, Taos Fly Shop, Trout Unlimited, KOA Alamogordo, Ski New Mexico, Enchanted Circle Off-Highway, Global Opportunities Unlimited, Defenders of Wildlife

Link
Katahdin Collaborative (Katahdin, ME)


Link

Maine Outdoor Brands (Portland, ME)

Outdoor product manufacturers, outdoor guides and outfitters, outdoor media and creatives, non-profit partners Mon Forest Towns Partnership (Monongahela National Forest, WV) Monongahela National Forest, West Virginia University Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development, 10 rural communities that surround Monongahela National Forest

Link
Outdoor Recreation Coalition of the Grand Valley (Grand Junction, CO)

Bonsai Design, Mountain Racing Products, Rapid Creek Cycles and Paddlesports, Hot Tomato, RockyMounts, Boneshaker Adventures, Powderhorn Resort, the Christi Reece Group, Vitality Films, Colorado West Land Trust, Grand Junction Economic Partnership, Western Co Community Foundation

Pennsylvania Wilds (PA Wilds) (Ridgway, PA)

13 unique county community planning/development offices, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, County Conservation Districts, PA Historical and Museum Commission, four Local Development Districts, Pennsylvania DCNR, Pennsylvania DCED, U.S. Forest Service/Allegheny National Forest, PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship, Potter County Education Council, Route 6 Alliance, Lumber Heritage Region, Headwaters Charitable Trust, PA Lumber Museum, Susquehanna Greenway Partnership, tourism promotion agencies and other nonprofits
Pikes Peak Outdoor Recreation Alliance (Colorado Springs, CO)

Angler’s Covey, Springs Wealth Group, Adventures Out West, Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, El Pomar Foundation

San Luis Valley Great Outdoors (Alamosa, CO)

Vermont Outdoor Business Alliance

52 businesses and trail associations
Link

Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC)

Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, Randolph Agency of Commerce and Community Development: Department of Tourism and Marketing, Green Mountain Club, Pinnacle Outdoor Group, Northern Forest Canoe Trail, Timber and Stone, LLC, Trust for Public Land, Vermont Trails and Greenways Council, Vermont Association of Snow Travelers, Outdoor Gear Exchange, Pale Morning Media, Kingdom Trails Association, Mammut, VT Traditions Coalition, Southern Vermont Economy Project, Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation, Island Pond Chamber of Commerce
Link
Outdoor Gear Builders of Western North Carolina

43 outdoor companies, 7 experiential/outfitter/retail members, 8 communications organizations and conservation nonprofits

Link
ABOUT OUTDOOR RECREATION ROUNDTABLE

The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) is America’s leading coalition of outdoor recreation trade associations and organizations working to promote the growth of the outdoor recreation economy and outdoor recreation activities.

ORR members represent the thousands of businesses that produce vehicles, equipment, gear, apparel and services for the 144 million Americans who enjoy our national parks, waterways, byways, trails and outdoor spaces. The various outdoor recreation business sectors produce a combined $778 billion output for the U.S. economy and support 5.2 million direct jobs.

We educate decision makers, and the public, on balanced policies that conserve public lands and waterways and enhance infrastructure to improve the experience and quality of life of outdoor enthusiasts everywhere.

ABOUT OSU - OREI

Oregon State University's Outdoor Recreation Economy Initiative is developing a powerful new approach to workforce development and leadership training to help people from all walks of life build a career with purpose.
ABOUT National Governors Association

Founded in 1908, the National Governors Association is the voice of the leaders of 55 states, territories, and commonwealths. Our nation’s Governors are dedicated to leading bipartisan solutions that improve citizens’ lives through state government. Through NGA, Governors identify priority issues and deal with matters of public policy and governance at the state, national and global levels.

About this research

Over three months in the summer of 2020, Chris Perkins, a joint-degree candidate at the Yale School of the Environment and Yale School of Management, and summer fellow at the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) and the Oregon State University Outdoor Recreation Economy Initiative (OREI), explored opportunities, challenges, and best practices related to rural economic development via outdoor recreation. The research is intended to support State Offices of Outdoor Recreation in their efforts, though other stakeholders, particularly communities who wish to develop outdoor recreation economies, will also benefit from the learnings.

Perkins conducted nearly 60 virtual interviews with practitioners in the outdoor recreation industry, including representatives from nonprofit sector organizations (community groups, service corps, and advocacy & trade associations), public sector organizations (community economic development, city and county services, state agencies, and federal agencies), and the private sector industry (manufacturing, retail, services, tours and guides). The full list of participants can be found here:
Full List of Research Participants

ORR, OSU, and the author would like to thank the following individuals for their contributions:

**ORR Member Organizations**
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**State Offices**
Rachel Schmidt, Director of the Montana Governor’s Office of Outdoor Recreation
Cailin O’Brien-Feeney, Director of the Oregon Office of Outdoor Recreation
Carolann Ouelette, Director of the Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation
Jon Snyder, Outdoor Recreation and Economic Development Senior Policy Advisor to Washington Governor
Jay Inslee
{(State Offices, continued)}
Axie Navas, Director of the New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division
Pitt Grewe, Director of the Utah Office of Outdoor Recreation
Colin Robertson, Administrator of the Nevada Division of Outdoor Recreation
Amy Allison, Director, North Carolina Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry
Chris Floyd, Manager, Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation
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This toolkit distills and organizes these conversations, but should not be seen as exhaustive nor complete. Rather, the paper may be useful to motivate initial funding, policy and partnership priorities for the growth of outdoor recreation economies across rural America.
**About the author**

**Chris Perkins** is a joint-degree M.E.M. and M.B.A. candidate at the Yale School of the Environment (YSE) and Yale School of Management (SOM) from Seattle, WA. Chris works to support the development of the outdoor industry by examining opportunities for community economic development, novel strategies for natural resource management, and improved access and equity for park-poor communities. Chris spent the summer of 2019 working for the Natural Resources Committee at the U.S. House of Representatives, and the summer of 2020 working for the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable on various outdoor recreation infrastructure initiatives.

Before Yale, Chris lived in Jackson, WY, where he worked at the Center for Jackson Hole, the nonprofit responsible for the SHIFT Festival, an exploration of outdoor recreation, conservation, and public health. At YSE, he is the founder of Outdoor Rec Industry Student Interest Group, and produces the Heartwood Podcast alongside Assistant Dean of Diversity and Inclusion Thomas Easley. He also helps facilitate the CBEX 2050 Fellows, a monthly consortium with Patagonia Director of Philosophy Vincent Stanley. Chris also was a co-creator of the Outdoor CEO Diversity Pledge ("The Pledge"), an effort to improve inclusion and representation for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in the outdoor recreation industry. As of August 2020, The Pledge has over 180 corporate and non-profit signatories.