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Providing Capacity in Rural Communities: Planning for Alternative Transportation

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Providing Capacity in Rural Communities: Planning for Alternative Transportation

OTREC-TT-11-02
March 2011

PROVIDING CAPACITY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES: PLANNING FOR ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION

Final Report

OTREC-TT-11-02

by

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for

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16. Abstract <p>This technology transfer proposal linked service learning with rural multimodal transportation planning through a collaborative partnership between University of Oregon (UO) experiential learning programs and three rural Oregon communities. As this planning and technical support to rural communities occurred, lessons learned were gathered and will support future service-learning projects focused on transportation planning. The primary products for this project are the: (1) Completion of multimodal transportation planning projects that increase rural community capacity; and (2) a website with resources for communities, faculty and students. Three further outcomes were: (1) Increased capacity for transportation planning in rural communities; (2) Increased capacity in existing transportation planning professionals working in rural communities; and (3) Increased capacity in young planning professional and graduate students.</p> <p>This project was led by the Community Service Center (CSC) at the UO and engaged two programs of the CSC. Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE), founded in 1994, is a field based service learning program, affiliated with the UO's Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management (PPPM). Each year RARE places 20 graduate level participants in rural Oregon communities where they live for 11 months while working for local agencies on planning and community development projects. Community Planning Workshop (CPW) is an experiential learning program also affiliated with PPPM. Established in 1977, CPW is campus-based, with teams of graduate students working on projects for public and non-profit organizations.</p> <p>Product One: Three community projects focused on multi-modal transportation planning were selected as RARE host sites. These projects included: a bike/pedestrian trails planning project with the City of Lebanon and Build Lebanon Trails, a local non-profit; a bike/pedestrian trails planning project with the City of Warrenton and Warrenton Trails Committee; and transportation needs assessment for the Rogue Valley Transportation District. These projects were selected from a pool of applicants based on project feasibility, community support, and host agency support of the CSC's service learning objectives.</p> <p>In October 2007, three RARE participants were placed in these three communities and worked closely with local community supervisors to complete planning projects that specifically address multimodal transportation planning. The deliverables were multi-modal planning and projects, specifically addressing public, bike/pedestrian and recreation-related transportation, in three rural communities.</p> <p>Product Two: Through the creation of a website with lessons learned and example projects, the knowledge gained in developing the plans and projects is being disseminated.</p>			
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This *technology transfer* proposal linked service learning with rural multimodal transportation planning through a collaborative partnership between University of Oregon (UO) experiential learning programs and three rural Oregon communities. As this planning and technical support to rural communities occurred, lessons learned were gathered and will support future service-learning projects focused on transportation planning. The primary products for this project are the: (1) Completion of multimodal transportation planning projects that increase rural community capacity; and (2) a website with resources for communities, faculty and students. Three further outcomes were: (1) Increased capacity for transportation planning in rural communities; (2) Increased capacity in existing transportation planning professionals working in rural communities; and (3) Increased capacity in young planning professional and graduate students.

This project was led by the Community Service Center (CSC) at the UO and engaged two programs of the CSC. Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE), founded in 1994, is a field based service learning program, affiliated with the UO's Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management (PPPM). Each year RARE places 20 graduate level participants in rural Oregon communities where they live for 11 months while working for local agencies on planning and community development projects. Community Planning Workshop (CPW) is an experiential learning program also affiliated with PPPM. Established in 1977, CPW is campus-based, with teams of graduate students working on projects for public and non-profit organizations.

Product One:

Three community projects focused on multi-modal transportation planning were selected as RARE host sites. These projects included: a bike/pedestrian trails planning project with the City of Lebanon and Build Lebanon Trails, a local non-profit; a bike/pedestrian trails planning project with the City of Warrenton and Warrenton Trails Committee; and transportation needs assessment for the Rogue Valley Transportation District. These projects were selected from a pool of applicants based on project feasibility, community support, and host agency support of the CSC's service learning objectives.

In October 2007, three RARE participants were placed in these three communities and worked closely with local community supervisors to complete planning projects that specifically address multimodal transportation planning. The deliverables were multi-modal planning and projects, specifically addressing public, bike/pedestrian and recreation-related transportation, in three rural communities.

Product Two:

Through the creation of a website with lessons learned and example projects, the knowledge gained in developing the plans and projects is being disseminated.

1.0 BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The project addressed technology transfer in two specific ways: by supporting the development of existing and emerging professionals in the transportation planning field and creating tools with broad applicability while completing multimodal transportation projects in rural Oregon.

This project presents a strong opportunity for collaboration between the University of Oregon and three rural communities. By working together to complete actual transportation planning processes, the communities gained increased planning capacity and now have the foundations necessary to move from the planning to implementation phases. Communities also gained from the increased level of citizen involvement made possible by the partnership with University student researchers.

The project met several State of Oregon priorities including the Oregon Department of Transportation's mission "to provide a safe, efficient transportation system that supports economic opportunity and livable communities for Oregonians," the Oregon Transportation Plan's goal of doubling the number of bicycling and walking trips over the next 20 years, and Statewide Planning Goal 12: To provide and encourage a safe, convenient and economic transportation system.

Oregon's rural communities faced population decreases in the 1990's. However, shifting demographics indicate that most rural communities in Oregon are now, and will continue, experiencing population increases, placing increased pressure on already limited transportation systems. In addition, small communities do not have the capacity to complete multimodal transportation planning and as the baby-boomer generation of planners and city managers begins to retire, it is even more critical to provide opportunities for technology transfer.

In addition to the need for transportation planning for local residents, Oregon's rural communities also benefit from the economic impacts of hiker/bicyclist tourism. According to the Oregon Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, "tourism is an important industry, and Oregon's natural beauty and bicycle-friendly reputation attract many riders from out of state. The Oregon Coast Bike Route enjoys an international reputation. Communities benefit from bicycle riders who purchase food and other needs locally."

Beyond fostering needed multimodal transportation planning in rural communities, this project helped prepare and train three RARE participants to be future transportation planners. According to Kotval,

“[service learning] courses provide a mechanism for substantive learning and the integration of techniques with theory. The result is graduates who are better planners. While making lasting contributions to communities, students will develop] transferable skills...such as the art of communication (both verbal and written), presenting material,

time management, independent learning, problem solving, effectively working with others, and self-motivation.”¹

Participants and supervisors learned valuable lessons through cooperative learning and assisting community organizations in the process.

Finally, while meeting both US and statewide multimodal transportation planning goals and developing capacity in rural communities, this project will added to the small but growing body of resources available to rural transportation planners through lessons learned and tool kits.

¹ Kotval, Zenia, *Teaching Experiential Learning in the Urban Planning Curriculum*, Journal of Geography in Higher Education, Vol. 27, No. 3, November 2003, pg 298, pg 306,307

2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The mission of the Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) Program is to increase the capacity of rural communities to improve their economic, social, and environmental conditions, through the assistance of trained graduate-level participants who live and work in communities for 11 months. Participants assist communities and agencies in the development and implementation of plans for achieving a sustainable natural resource base and improving rural economic conditions while gaining community building and leadership skills.

In 2007-2008, we developed three RARE placements funded by OTREC. For 11 months, the RARE participants implemented the projects (Phase 1). In Phase 2, RARE staff and a graduate research fellow evaluated the projects, developed lessons learned and service learning white paper as tools for future projects.

Phase 1: Plan Development

Rogue Valley Transit District

The Rogue Valley Transit District (RVTD) partnered with RARE in 2007 in order to meet Federal Transit Administration requirements for data collection related to their operating performance. Traditionally, RVTD only collects fare box data, which does not provide any data regarding stop usage or trip length. The RARE Participant, working with Dr. Jean Stockard, Ph.D. at the University of Oregon developed a methodology for RVTD in which all routes were adequately sampled and the appropriate data was collected. The collected information was incorporated into RVTD's GIS database and is now integral to RVTD's decision making processes, specifically in terms of bus stop improvements, signage, and route frequency. The RARE Participant also conducted public outreach. Both of these unique data sources have been incorporated into the 10 year long range plan for RVTD.

Warrenton Trails Master Plan

The City of Warrenton and the Warrenton Trails Association worked with a RARE participant to complete the comprehensive Warrenton Master Trails Plan in 2007-08. The participant served as the City's Trails Coordinator and assisted with the plan from start to finish, including applying for grants, working toward sponsorships, developing design standards, identifying historic and natural features along the trail, developing signage, public facilities, and sighting the area for trail development. The participant organized multiple public participation events to raise awareness of the benefits of walking and biking. The Warrenton Master Trails Plan serves as a guide for future pedestrian pathways throughout the Warrenton community, as well a framework for the continued participation of the Warrenton Trails Association and the City of Warrenton. The City of Warrenton adopted the master plan in October 2008. A second RARE Participant was then brought in to implement the plan.

Lebanon Master Trails Plan

The City of Lebanon acquired a RARE participant to develop more trails and a trail system strategic plan. The participant worked with the city and a community partnership known as Build Lebanon Trails in conducting feasibility studies for additional trail segments, designing a comprehensive program for construction and maintenance of the trail system, and forming

strategies to mobilize necessary resources. The participant also performed research to identify sustainable revenue sources for the trail system. The feasibility studies were completed and the strategic plan adopted by the city. The RARE Participant stayed for a second year, during which he implemented some of the specific trail plans.

Phase 2: Evaluation and Development of Tools

In the second phase, we conducted stakeholder interviews with the RARE participants, their supervisors and community partners. From this we developed a list of lessons learned for future projects, to be used by faculty, students and community members. We also developed a summary of service learning and transportation lessons learned. (<http://cscotrec.uoregon.edu/index.cfm>).

3.0 OUTCOME AND RESULTS

The outcomes and results come in three forms: (1) three documents were delivered to three community organizations; (2) several events occurred that educated the public about bike and pedestrian transportation and/or implemented specific, on the ground projects; (3) three young professionals became engaged in transportation planning, two continued on in their position and one began graduate school to further her education in transportation planning; (4) lessons learned were developed; and (5) the CSC OTREC website was updated and added to (<http://cscotrec.uoregon.edu/index.cfm>).

All three of the RARE Participants remain in the transportation planning field, either in graduate school or in their position at RVTD.

4.0 FURTHER ACTIVITIES

As mentioned earlier, two of the communities continued working with RARE, without OTREC support, in the next phase of implementation of their project.



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OTREC is dedicated to stimulating and conducting collaborative multi-disciplinary research on multi-modal surface transportation issues, educating a diverse array of current practitioners and future leaders in the transportation field, and encouraging implementation of relevant research results.