

# Check out the 2024 GNAR Initiative Highlight Reel!

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Dear Friends,

We blinked, and 2024 had entered the history books. This past December marked five-years since our team started having conversations about gateway communities in the west, and we've enjoyed reflecting on our program anniversary, especially on all our accomplishments of 2024.

Through your generous support, collaborative efforts, assistance and on the ground insights, the GNAR Initiative was able to keep being a resource and hub for communities, researchers, experts, and those passionate about helping these incredible communities preserve what makes them special and thrive into the future. We are looking forward with excitement to what we hope to accomplish in 2025 to build off our successes this past year. Keep scrolling to see what GNAR got done in 2024, including our GNARly Blog posts, new online course, and our Basecamp conference!

If you would like to get involved in our work in other ways, please contact our Coordinator, Elizabeth Sodja (liz.sodja@usu.edu). We can't do this without your support, so thank you.

We wish all of you the best, and happy 2025!

Warmly,

The GNAR Initiative Team

## Launched: The GNAR Academy!



In March of 2024, we launched the first course in the online GNAR Academy - [GNAR Academy Fundamentals!](#) Our goal with the GNAR Academy is to develop and offer online courses that are designed to empower community and organizational leaders in rural gateway and natural amenity communities. It provides accessible training on critical topics to help leaders better understand and advocate for their community's needs. The Academy's courses present high-level, easy-to-understand content, making it accessible even for those without formal planning backgrounds. Our primary audience includes mayors, city council members, planners, local NGOs, university professionals, and others invested in navigating growth, development, and planning challenges. The first course, *GNAR Academy Fundamentals*, is a leadership course that consists of seven lessons, each of which introduces key concepts, principles, and skills that are important for community leaders to understand to help GNAR communities thrive and effectively navigate challenges and change. It features seven lessons covering key concepts such as conflict management, collaboration, and community engagement. Participants receive a digital certificate, LinkedIn badge, and opportunities for peer networking.

### Lessons in this course include:

1. **What is a GNAR Community?**
2. **Finding and Following Your North Star – Turning Values into Vision**
3. **Navigating Conflict: Fundamentals of Conflict and Collaboration**
4. **Navigating Conflict: The Situation Assessment**
5. **Empowering Community Engagement**
6. **Working Across Boundaries**
7. **Charting Your GNARly Future**

Upon completion of this course, participants can digital certificate of completion from USU Extension, a digital badge that can be linked to your LinkedIn profile, access to facilitated peer-to-peer learning opportunities, and 7 AICP Certificate Maintenance (CM) credits (for AICP members) We aim to continue to develop and update courses as new resources and partnerships emerge, and sponsorships are welcomed to expand future offerings.

## First Basecamp Conference



Our 2024 Basecamp conference in Moab, Utah, gathered over 130 participants from academia, government agencies, non-profits, and private organizations to foster collaboration on outdoor recreation and gateway community planning. Hosted by the Institute of Outdoor Recreation & Tourism, the seven-day event featured plenaries, workshops, field visits, and service projects. The conference focused on three key themes—collaboration, visitor management, and destination stewardship—and showcased real-world solutions from the Moab area, such as Trail Ambassadors educating recreation users and innovative affordable housing initiatives. By dividing sessions into two thematic tracks, attendees could tailor their experience, while shared workshops, such as conflict resolution training led by Dr. Danya Rumore, helped bridge the divide between outdoor recreation and community planning professionals.

Participant feedback underscored the conference's impact: attendees appreciated the chance to make meaningful connections, learn from experts across sectors, and engage in dynamic field visits. One participant noted, "Each presentation I attended was helpful and pertinent to my work, which rarely happens at other conferences." Others praised the mix of professionals and the diverse perspectives represented. The overwhelmingly positive response highlights a strong demand for forums like Basecamp that prioritize the unique needs of small, rural gateway communities. As the GNAR Initiative looks ahead to future events, the success of Basecamp 2024 reaffirms the importance of creating spaces for cross-sector collaboration and community-focused solutions.

## The GNARly Blog at a Glance



Not familiar with our blog? The GNARly Blog is one way the GNAR Initiative spurs inter-community communication and shares stories and best practices from communities addressing challenges and innovating on the ground.

These posts can be about lessons learned, case studies, model ordinances, new programs, or opportunities for collaboration within communities.

**We are always looking for new topics and bloggers, so if you have an idea you'd like to share, check out our [blog guidelines](#) and/or email [liz.sodja@usu.edu](mailto:liz.sodja@usu.edu).**

**[Here's a complete list of all 2024 GNARly Blogs:](#)**

- **Feb 8** - Seasonality and "right-sizing" infrastructure in Gateway Communities (Philip & Scraps #1)

- **Mar 13** - Spilling Over in Sedona, Arizona (Philip & Scraps #2)
- **April 3** - How Former Teachers Revamped Public Participation in Planning in Summit County
- **May 8** - The Many Gateways to Joshua Tree National Park (Philip & Scraps #3)
- **Oct 30** - Reflections & Takeways from Basecamp 2024
- **Nov 6** - Shaping Communities & Sensitive Lands: The Triple Bottom Line the Managing Recreation in Sensitive Lands
- **Dec 12** - Our First GNARly Vlog!: Using Outdoor Recreation to Diversify a Rural Economy in White Pine County, NV

## GNAR Team in the News

Finally, our staff were interviewed and/or quoted in four news articles this year across local and regional publications. Check them out below!

- **Jan 9 (Salt Lake Tribune)** - Could public lands be key to solving the housing shortage?
- **Jan 18 (Salt Lake Tribune)** - State offers plan to help towns grow outdoor recreation — without turning into Moab
- **Mar 7 (High Country News)** - Could building on public land address the housing crisis?
- **Oct 2 (KUER)** - Where's the new St. George-Zion bus? A driver shortage has slowed its roll

