

# GNAR Academy Short-Term Rentals Course Wins APA Utah Beehive Award of Excellence

Elizabeth Sodja

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Written by: Elizabeth Sodja

It was an honor to accept the "Beehive Award of Excellence" on behalf of the GNAR Initiative and our online course: [Understanding and Managing Short-Term Rentals](#) at this year's APA Utah Fall Conference.

When the GNAR Initiative launched back in 2020, one topic surfaced over and over as a challenge in small, rural, gateway and amenity communities across the West – short-term rentals (STRs). After years of talking to community leaders about STRs in their communities and months of research and course development, it's amazing to have the course recognized as a valuable asset for Utah's communities, and having our course selected for the Beehive Award of Excellence is especially exciting. The awards committee said in their award text:

*"This award recognizes the premier planning achievement from all the nominations submitted. This is not an award where nominations are received; rather, it is an award APA Utah grants to the individual or effort that exemplifies the amazing planning work here in Utah. The winner of this award demonstrates the application of APA Utah's mission of encouraging and fostering the principles of visioning and planning for a better future here in Utah... The review committee cited the project's timeliness, applicability, and*

*transferability among communities in the Rocky Mountain West. One described the course highlights video as so informative that they were 'compelled to take the course.'"*

STRs are a thorny topic for several reasons: they directly impact multiple—and at times, competing—personal values that community members hold, like personal property rights, neighborhood character, cost of living, local employment opportunities, etc. No matter which way community leaders decide to go with the use, someone is likely to be upset. Add to this the fact that STRs are an almost entirely online industry, with rapidly-developing technology that's linked to the global tourism economy, and it can feel almost impossible for communities to manage – especially small rural communities with limited capacity.

We'd like to thank APA Utah for the recognition of our online course, and the Utah Land Use Ombudsman's office for the grant that allowed us to develop it. Our team remains dedicated to developing innovative ways to help gateway communities thrive amid challenges and change. Stay tuned for our next course!

You can also see the video shown during the awards ceremony below.

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**Elizabeth Sodja**, MNR, MCMP, is the Program Coordinator for the Gateway & Natural Amenity Region (GNAR) Initiative at Utah State University (USU) Extension. She has a decade of communications and

community outreach experience, and has worked with federal, state, and local government agencies. Before joining GNAR, she worked for USU's Center for Community Engagement and the National Park Service. She grew up in a small town in Utah where most family vacations were either camping, fishing, or in a National Park, and has a passion for helping small towns around the west preserve what is special about them. When she isn't working, you can usually find her and her husband climbing a rock, living out of a tent, or driving down a dirt road covered in dog hair.