What is the GNAR Academy?

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America's most iconic destinationsare surrounded by some of America's most iconic communities. More than just a place to stay overnight or fuel up for an upcoming adventure, these communities are also home to ordinary people and families – the people who steward the land, and the people who serve up yummy food at the local diner. These "gateway communities" and the beautiful regions around them have become increasingly popular in recent years–not only to visit, but also to live and own property in.

Tragically, however, this popularity also brings numerous challenges. Many "gateway" and natural amenity communities and the regions around them grapple with "big city" issues, including severe congestion, lack of affordable workforce housing, and sprawl.

What is the GNAR Academy?

To help equip communities with tools and skills to help them navigate these challenges more effectively, the GNAR Initiative is launching a new program we're calling the GNAR Academy.

The GNAR Academy is an online course library that seeks to fill in the gap between what community leaders and practitioners have the capacity for, and what their communities need, by providing accessible training around critical topic areas to help communities better understand and advocate for their own needs.

Who is the GNAR Academy Designed For?

Our target audience for the GNAR Academy are the community leaders with limited capacity in gateway and natural amenity communities–and their regions–across the West (although communities in the East facing similar challenges can also benefit from it!). That said, courses are designed so that no formal training in community planning is needed to understand the content. This means that anyone who is passionate about these communities and has a desire to learn how to better help these places can benefit from them. This could include:

- **Community leaders (town mayors, city council members, county commissioners)**
- **Community staff (clerks, city manager, economic development/tourism, planning)**
- **Local leaders (P&Z boards, local NGO leaders)**
- **Private consultants or practitioners who work with gateway and GNAR communities**
- **Academics who study these communities**
- **University Extension professionals**
- **Agency and land manager staff adjacent to these communities**
- **And more!**

GNAR Academy Structure

The structure of the GNAR Academy will be as follows:

Participants will start by going through a "foundations" course. Loosely based on the outcomes from our Fall 2022/Spring 2023 "Planning for a GNARly Future Online Learning Series", our first course will be called **GNAR Academy Fundamentals: Foundations for planning and collaboration in gateway communities and regions.** This required course will be the foundation for all of our future in-depth content courses.

Future in-depth courses will focus on critical topic areas highlighted in our research and participant feedback from our online learning series. Our goal is to continue building additional courses for the GNAR Academy as our

resources and capacity allow. Please note that our first in-depth content course will be on affordable housing.

GNAR Academy Fundamentals Course

This course was developed by multiple members of the GNAR Initiative team. Each instructor has over a decade of experience of working with and/or living in gateway communities around the West, and we are all incredibly passionate about helping these places thrive and preserve the things that make them special.

Regardless of whether a community is struggling with affordable housing, traffic congestion, or high visitation rates, many challenges can be tackled using a similar foundational set of tools and approaches. Combined with on-the-ground practice and research, our fundamentals course will equip participants with skills-building in areas such as: how to navigate community conflict, how to better engage community members around challenging topics, how to look at challenges (and solutions!) through a regional lens, and more.

Benefits of Course Completion

Upon completion of the course, participants will be able to receive the following:

- A digital certificate of completion from Utah State University Extension
- A digital course badge that can be linked to your LinkedIn profile
- Access to twice-yearly facilitated peer-to-peer learning and networking sessions with other course participants
- Access to an online LinkedIn group of other GNAR community leaders who have taken GNAR Academy courses
- For certified community planners, Certification Maintenance (CM) Credits

How to Stay in the Loop

Our expected launch date for the GNAR Academy Fundamentals course is March 2024. To stay up-to-date on our launch dates and future content, you can sign up for our GNAR Academy email list.

We hope to see you there!

Questions or feedback? Feel free to reach out to us at liz.sodja@usu.edu.