

What is the GNAR Initiative Toolkit?

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05/13/2021



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My father was a pretty firm believer that there wasn't much worth seeing beyond the borders of the intermountain west. Couple this with a family that I don't believe *fully* understood the idea of the interstate highway system, and you can understand why we took every backroad possible on our trips. This way of experiencing the west gave me lots of time to fight with my siblings, look for license plates and billboards, and, perhaps most important, see and experience some of the gems hidden throughout the western United States.

These gems were not just the scenic vistas and vast landscapes, they were also the communities and people there that made them unforgettable. I guess I have loved gateway and natural amenity regions (GNARs) and their communities before I even knew what they were! Enough of my reminiscing, let's talk GNAR!

If you don't already know, the GNAR Initiative is all about helping western GNAR communities thrive and enhance the things that make them special. That is a hefty and complicated task, and operationalizing that mission for the GNAR Initiative takes many forms. I want to tell you about one of my favorite ways we are working to help communities.

As we have listened to [communities and the experts that work to support GNAR communities across the west](#), it became clear that GNAR communities were looking for tools and resources tailored to their situations. Out of this simple request was born the [GNAR Toolkit](#).

Now, I love tools and I have collected a few over the years. When you have the right tool for a task, everything is

easier. That said, there are a handful of tools that I use when doing almost every task. When I do need a tool for a specific task, I know which of my neighbors has one and I trade them a plate of cookies for a tool loan. I also sometimes check out the other tools hanging above their workbench to see if there are any I could use in the future, or learn about new ones.



The [GNAR Initiative's toolkit](#) is really the same thing. You likely have some great tools you are already using. Additionally, there may be some unique challenges that you wish there was a tool out there to help you with. Consider the GNAR Initiative as your neighbor that has been gathering helpful tools from around the western neighborhood and we are happy to share. These "tools" are resources your community or organization could use to continue doing your work keeping GNAR's special and helping them thrive.

However, this community tool sharing model only works if *you* bring the plate of cookies to share! This proverbial "plate of cookies" is simple: We want you to contribute and help us build and diversify our toolkit – take a tool, and leave a tool if you can. The GNAR Initiative doesn't make tools – we share them!

What can you share? Well, you may have already crafted a great "tool" already. Or, maybe you have seen one used, promoted, or talked about. Tools can be model ordinances, community guides, reports, white papers, videos, blogs, podcasts, case studies, or just good examples of someone tackling a GNAR-ly problem! Whatever the tool, we would like to know about it so we can check it out and share it with others. Bottom line, we can't share effective and specialized GNAR tools without your help. When you explore our toolkit, we hope you find a few tools you never thought about that you can use to tackle the challenges in your community.

If you have a tool or resource to can share, please reach out to our GNAR Initiative Coordinator, Liz Sodja (liz.sodja@usu.edu) and let her know what you can share. The mission of the GNAR Initiative is ambitious, but, like a good backroads family road trip, the destination is well worth the long journey.



Jake Powell is a native of Utah and spent his childhood exploring the backroads of the intermountain west. These experiences formed a deep love for the landscapes, the communities, and people of the west. Jake found landscape architecture as a way to unite people and places, and earned his BLA from Utah State University and MSLA from Penn State University. In his current position as a Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning Extension Specialist, Jake works to bring design and planning solutions to Utah's communities. As the lead for the Gateway and Natural Amenity Initiative, Jake works with an amazing team to bring attention, resources, and new opportunities to the gateway communities of the Intermountain West.