

GNAR Initiative Receives National Innovation and Creativity Award by NACDEP

Jake Powell

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Written by: Jake Powell

The work of the GNAR Initiative has always been one rooted in our team's love for the vibrance, charm, and enduring character of gateway communities throughout the west. Although we tend to do this quietly, our work often gets noticed – and occasionally recognized. When this happens, it is always an honor, and an occasion for celebration!

In June of 2025, I was able to attend the 2025 National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP) conference in Charleston West Virginia to accept the 2025 NACDEP Innovation and Creativity Team Award for both the Western Region, and Nationally, on behalf of the GNAR Initiative team and the many people and organizations that have supported our efforts.

NACDEP is a professional organization of Extension professionals engaged in community development in all its various facets. NACDEP was established

to create a space for community and economic development professionals to gather, discuss, collaborate, network, educate, and tackle the complex issues facing communities across the United States. The organization also works to recognize the efforts of its members through annual awards and recognition.

According to the NACDEP call for award proposals, the Innovation and Creativity Team award recognizes a team “who have developed an outstanding effort or program that integrates innovation and creativity in Community Development program design or implementation that shows demonstrated effectiveness” and the winner is selected by an impartial jury of NACDEP members. The GNAR Initiative was selected as both the western region winner of this award, as well as the national winner for this award.

It was an honor to be selected for this national recognition, and our team is grateful to NACDEP for recognizing the important impact the GNAR Initiative is making regionally and nationally. As we place another award on our shelf, our team remains dedicated to continuing to develop innovative ways to help gateway communities thrive amid challenges and change!



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.

