

# U.S. Dept. of Commerce Awards USU Extension \$1.1 Million for Remote Work Training

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The U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) recently announced a \$1.1 million CARES Act Recovery Assistance grant to Utah State University Extension to develop the Remote Online Initiative (ROI). The grant will provide specialized training to help position businesses for economic recovery and prepare workers for success in remote environments. The grant, to be matched with \$264,182 in local funds, is expected to create more than 450 jobs and generate \$40,500 in private investment.

“President Biden is committed to harnessing the full power of the federal government to ensure our nation not only recovers from this pandemic but builds back better,” said U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gina M. Raimondo. “This EDA investment in Utah State University will provide training to business leaders across the state in developing effective remote work environments that will help them create and retain jobs.”

Utah Gov. Spencer Cox said in the last year, remote work has become an increasingly important part of Utah’s workforce.

“We’ve proven that it works, and we’re thrilled that Utah State University will be receiving these funds to continue supporting the ROI program, which is a great tool for those who are new to remote work or want to improve their efficiency while working remotely,” he said.

Ken White, USU Extension vice president, said the ROI program has been especially important during the rapidly changing economy of 2020.

“In 2020, our remote work certification courses led to the creation of 167 new remote job placements in rural counties, which is equivalent to the economic impact of over 6,154 jobs in urban counties,” White said. “It’s been incredible to see how many individuals and families the ROI program has helped since it was funded by the Utah State Legislature in 2018. We are extremely grateful to the EDA for providing this new grant, and we know it will benefit many more people.”

Paul Hill, USU Extension professor and director of the ROI program, explained how the EDA’s investment will support businesses in urban Utah counties in their efforts to adopt remote work as a modern workplace practice post-pandemic.

“Our research found that most U.S. organizations that implemented remote work in response to the pandemic considered the experience favorable,” Hill said. “We know from theory that a positive experience with an innovation on a trial basis increases the likelihood of adoption in the future. Ultimately, remote work reached a tipping point during COVID-19 and is here to stay. This means that businesses are evolving from being designed for the collective to being personalized to every individual. This specialized training program will coach business leaders on the Wasatch Front through effectively developing remote work plans for their organizations so they can thrive in the future of work.”

The project was made possible by regional planning efforts led by the Mountainland Economic Development District and the Wasatch Front Economic Development District, which EDA funds. The organizations bring together the public and private sectors to create an economic development roadmap to strengthen the regional economy, support private capital investment and create jobs.

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