

USU Extension ROI Program Receives National Award

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Utah State University Extension's Rural Online Initiative (ROI) program received the Creative Excellence Award from the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP) at their 2021 annual conference in May. ROI team members who received the award include Paul Hill, Russell Goodrich, Emy Swadley, Amanda Ali, Jordan Leonard, Trenton Willson, Mike Sarles, Dolores Heaton, Kaylee Hanks and Abbey Bean.

The Creative Excellence Award, sponsored by the Joint Council of Extension Professionals (JCEP), creates a platform for community development work to be showcased in a professional setting beyond the state level and creates a pathway toward national distinction.

"One of the benefits of NACDEP membership is an opportunity to be recognized for outstanding work by our peers," said NACDEP President Adam Hodges of West Virginia State University Extension Service. "These award winners who are being recognized represent the best of the best and will provide new ideas for expanding our work across the nation."

Paul Hill, ROI program director and Extension professor, said it is an honor to be recognized by the NACDEP for the impact of the remote work training program.

"We are grateful to serve the residents of rural Utah and for fantastic partnerships with county commissioners, state legislators, the Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity, Department of Workforce Services, the Economic Development Corporation of Utah and Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce," he said. "Coming together to

solve the critical issues faced by our rural counties truly is the Utah way. We will never stop working to develop creative solutions for the unique challenges of our state."

USU Extension's ROI program began in 2018 and has been strategically focused on rural economic development in Utah. As rural Utahns have experienced high levels of unemployment, the ROI program created the Master Remote Work Professional certificate course, a specialized training that equips rural residents with the skills needed for remote employment. Although legislatively funded pre-pandemic, remote work employment opportunities further benefit rural communities impacted by COVID-19.

Created in 2003, the NACDEP is dedicated to improving the visibility, coordination, professional status and resource base of community and economic development Extension programs and professionals. NACDEP has over 350 individual memberships representing more than 40 states and territories. Active members are currently employed as Extension professionals with at least a 25% Extension appointment who have responsibilities in community and economic development.

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