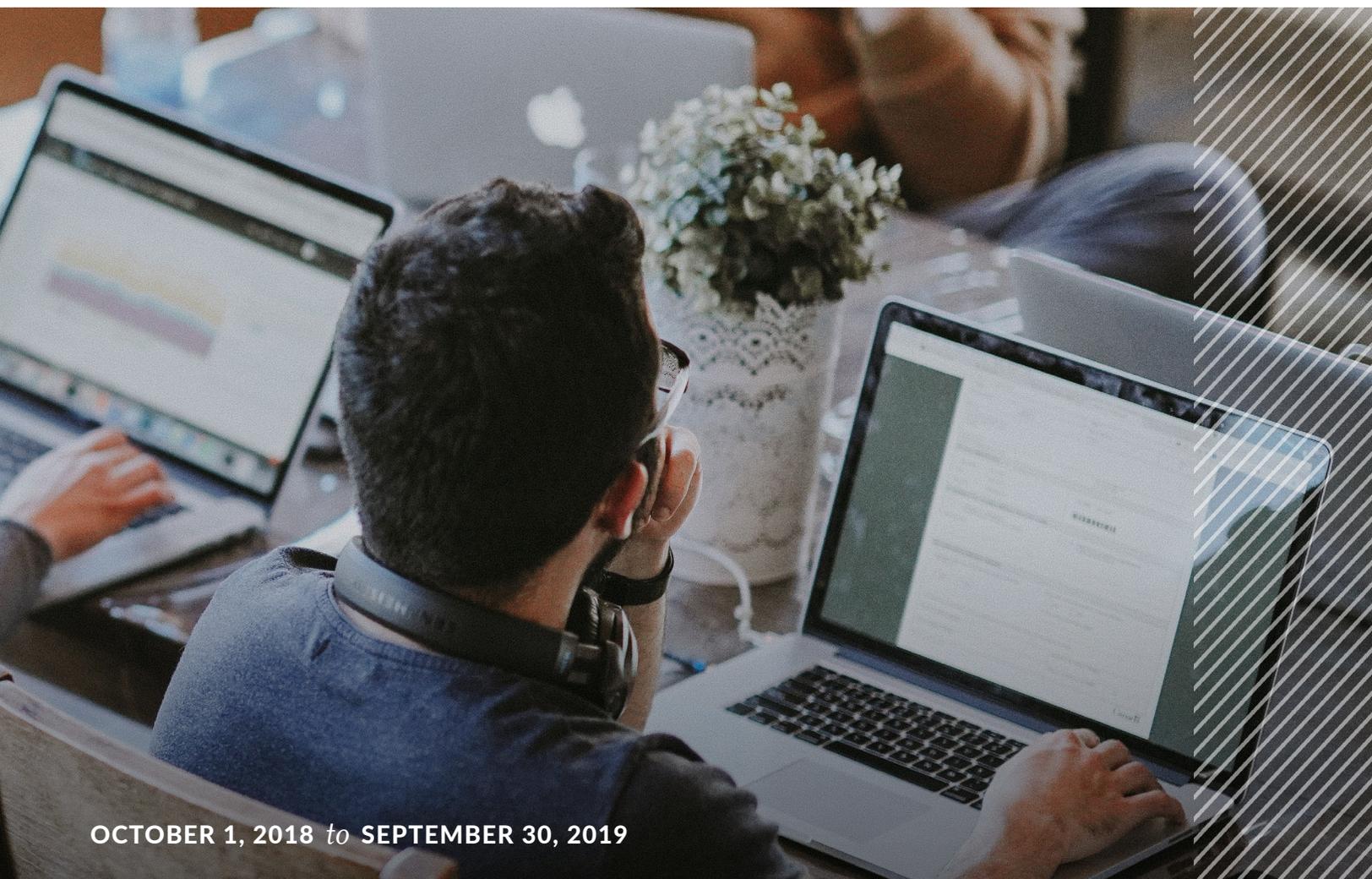




RURAL
ONLINE
INITIATIVE™

RURAL ONLINE INITIATIVE

Annual Program Report Year 1



OCTOBER 1, 2018 *to* SEPTEMBER 30, 2019



CONTENTS

Background Information	1
Program Goal and Results	2
Job Creation	2
Regional Unemployment	3
Engagement	4
Community Engagement	4
Partner Engagement	4
Impact	5
Participant Impacts	5
Economic Impacts	6
Success Stories	7
Future Plans	9

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

During the 2018 legislative session, H.B. 327, the Rural Online Initiative, was signed into law by Governor Gary R. Herbert. Funding was appropriated to Utah State University Extension for program development and delivery across 15 targeted rural counties. The Rural Online Initiative (ROI) team formally began program delivery to rural residents in October 2018.

The Rural Online Initiative (ROI) is a program designed to prepare Utah's rural workforce for the future of work by providing education, training, and services for remote work opportunities as an employee, online freelancer, or e-commerce entrepreneur. The program begins with the *Master Remote Work Professional* certificate from USU Extension, a free course for residents of rural Utah. Residents can learn more or sign-up for the course at remoteworkcertificate.com.

The 1-month certification course teaches participants the skills required to function successfully in a remote work environment. Participants learn everything from effective communication techniques for team collaboration to specific software tools commonly used in telework settings. The course also assists participants in their preparation to find and interview for legitimate remote jobs, bid on online freelance jobs, or start an e-commerce business. Scholarships for additional skills training are available at the end of the course to enhance participants' professional skill sets.

PROGRAM GOAL AND RESULTS

The target counties in the legislated ROI service region were divided into three geographic regions, with an assigned Program Coordinator for each region. A key employment goal for the program was to generate at least one remote job per month in each of the three regions, with an annual goal of 36 jobs generated in the first year.

The program has greatly exceeded the initial employment expectations. Since the first cohort started in October 2018, a total of 55 remote jobs have been created in 16 different Utah counties. The greatest success has been in Emery County (11 jobs), Washington County (10 jobs) and Sevier County (7 jobs). A significant number of additional jobs (20+) are expected to be generated by the end of 2019.

JOB CREATION

Table 1. Preliminary job creation from July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019



COUNTY	PART-TIME JOBS	FULL-TIME JOBS
Beaver	1	1
Carbon	1	1
Daggett	1	
Emery	5	6
Garfield	1	
Grand		
Iron	3	
Kane	1	
Piute		
San Juan	3	
Sanpete	3	
Sevier	6	1
Uintah	1	
Washington	8	2
Wayne	2	
Other Counties	9	2
Total	45	13

**The economic impact of creating these 58 remote jobs in rural counties is equivalent to 7,079 jobs in Wasatch Front counties (Source: Utah Department of Workforce Services 2016. Analysis based on the goal of reducing unemployment by 1/2%. Statistics based on county labor force current rate of unemployment and extrapolated number of jobs required.)*



REGIONAL UNEMPLOYMENT

A preliminary analysis provided unemployment statistics for the 15 counties within our service area. Results showed declines in the unemployment rate for 10 counties since the inception of the program. There was no change in the unemployment rate for Beaver, Daggett, Kane, Uintah, and Wayne counties. The average decline in unemployment across the 15 counties served by the program was 0.2% (see Table 2).

Table 2. Preliminary unemployment statistics by county for July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019

Note: Yellow shading represents counties with a decrease in unemployment.

COUNTY	UNEMPLOYMENT (%) (JULY 2018)	UNEMPLOYMENT (%) (JUNE 2019)
Beaver	3.5	3.5
Carbon	4.5	4.2
Daggett	4.2	4.2
Emery	4.8	4.3
Garfield	7.4	6.9
Grand	4.5	4.2
Iron	3.6	3.2
Kane	3.2	3.2
Piute	5.2	4.8
San Juan	6.2	5.3
Sanpete	3.7	3.5
Sevier	3.5	3.4
Uintah	4.7	4.7
Washington	3.4	3.2
Wayne	5.7	5.7

The best working talent Utah has to offer is not possessed exclusively by those who live in urban counties. Utahns from across our state are embracing remote work as a new opportunity to improve their lifestyle and build up their communities.

- LT. GOVERNOR SPENCER J. COX

ENGAGEMENT

To encourage participation in the program, the ROI team focused initial efforts on building partnerships with economic development leaders in each county to educate residents about opportunities provided through the program. Effective engagement efforts included:

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Information & Marketing

TYPE OF EVENT / TOOL	NUMBER	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS
Town Halls	37	Over 700
Job, Career, & County Fairs	11	Over 1,000
Media Stories / Articles	Over 40, with 5 National Articles	Over 27,000 Views
Newsletter	Weekly Distribution	Weekly Subscribers, 1,801
Social Media	Daily Engagement Using 4 Platforms	101 Instagram, 249 Facebook, 126 Twitter

Training Opportunities

TYPE OF TRAINING	NUMBER	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS
Master Remote Work Professional Certification	12 Course Cohorts	786, 73% Female, 27% Male; 7% Ethnic Minorities
Remote Work Network / Job Meeting	4	100
Amazon E-commerce Entrepreneurship Workshop	1	32
Career Coaching Sessions	Over 400 Individual Sessions	400
Skill Scholarships	82 Awards	Valued at \$18,500
Specialized Training & Workshops	5	150

PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

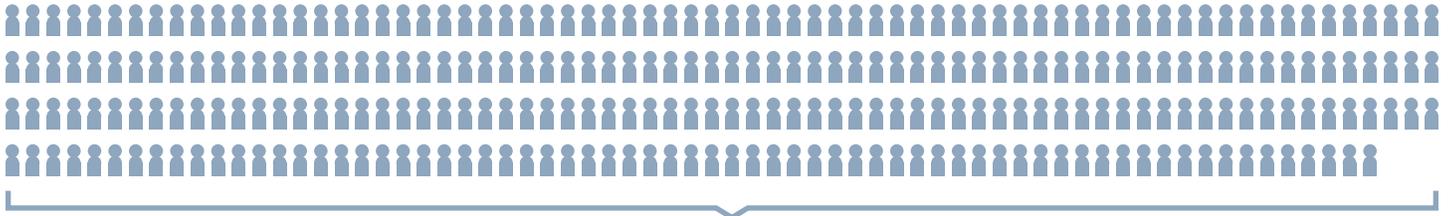
To generate support and awareness of the ROI program, program coordinators presented information to stakeholders across Utah. Several presentations were made to national audiences, leading to partnerships and interest from institutions in 10 other states.

TYPE OF TRAINING	NUMBER	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS
Rural Partner Meetings	141	1,881
National Conference Presentations	7	~ 630

IMPACT

PARTICIPANT IMPACTS

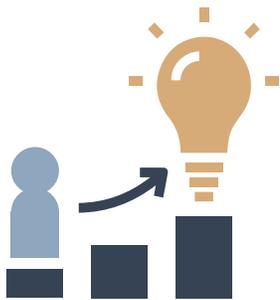
Between July 2018 - April 2019, ROI program staff were hired and trained. The *Master Remote Work Professional* (MRWP) certificate course was then developed and successfully piloted, and data collection systems were engineered to align with research methods. Between May-July 2019, 281 participants completed the MRWP certificate course. An evaluation of short-term outcomes captured changes in participants' knowledge, attitudes, skills, and aspirations toward seeking remote employment. Results:



281 PARTICIPANTS BETWEEN MAY AND JULY OF 2019

KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge tests were administered to participants before (pre-test) and after (post-test) the course. Results showed **statistically significant differences between pre and post-tests** for all eight modules.



This indicates significant increases in participants' knowledge after completing the MRWP certificate course.

ATTITUDES



On average, participants felt **neutral** toward their current jobs.



Desired higher incomes between **\$50,000 to \$74,999**.

This indicates an opportunity for improving job satisfaction through meaningful remote employment.

SKILLS

On average, participants had high overall mean scores across all skills.

After completing the course, participants felt they had better abilities to:

- Balance their professional and personal lives
- Manage their professional and personal productivity
- Solve problems
- Communicate digitally
- Use online technology
- Manage their careers
- Work as a team member

ASPIRATIONS

After completing the course:



Felt their value as a remote worker improved.



Also felt empowered to seek remote work.



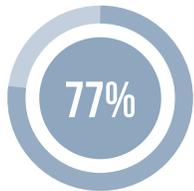
ECONOMIC IMPACTS

A short survey was sent to all 754 participants who completed the MRWP certificate course (N = 754). With a response rate of 27%, a total of 206 graduates completed the survey (n = 206).

ADDED VALUE



Graduates who live outside the rural Utah counties in the ROI service area paid roughly \$99 to take the course.



Most of these graduates (77%) thought the course was worth almost 70% more than what they paid.

This indicates that participants who paid for enrollment thought **the personal benefits of completing the course was worth more than the registration cost.**

REMOTE JOBS



28% of participants (58 graduates) who responded to this survey already successfully found remote work.



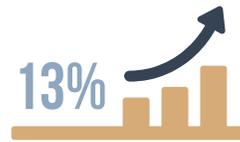
A total of 58 graduates have found remote work, including 2 jobs created after the initial survey.



Of those who had not yet found remote work, 81% said they were confident in their ability to find remote work.

This indicates graduates have a high level of confidence in successfully finding remote work opportunities.

INCOME GENERATED



On average, a graduate who found remote work experienced a 13% average increase in their monthly salary.

Across all graduates who found remote work, total salaries increased by 21%. This result indicates that the total income of graduates with remote work increased by 21% after completing the MRWP course.



ANTICIPATED INCOME

Roughly two-thirds of graduates who found remote work believed their salaries would likely increase by 52% over the next year. This suggests the state government, cities, and counties can expect an anticipated increase in tax revenue from remote workers in the next fiscal year.

COMMUTE



About 84% of participants drove, on average, 18 miles per day (90 miles per week) to a physical workspace before finding remote work.



Since starting remote work, only 30% drive to a workplace, commuting on average 15 miles per day (75 miles per week).



This 54% decline in participants who drove to work resulted in a 75% total reduction in the number of miles driven per week across all participants who found remote work. This equates to a savings of \$1,225 per month across all participants who found remote work due to lower fuel expenses. This results in a total reduction of 3.37 metric tons of carbon emissions per month. Additionally, reduced traffic congestion helps promote clean air quality as remote workers drive fewer miles.

SUCCESS STORIES



High participation numbers demonstrate the ROI program has generated extensive interest and enthusiasm. As an anonymous grandmother who provides sole care for her grandchildren noted after attending a recent Town Hall, the program also provides hope for the future:

"This program gives me so much hope. Before learning about the Rural Online Initiative program, I had decided my only option was to leave the county and move to Salt Lake, but I can now see exciting possibilities and opportunities I had not even considered."

- DUCHESNE COUNTY

For an increasing number of graduates, 58 and counting, the program has led from hope to an even better result, new or enhanced employment and additional income.

Remote Job Doubles Salary: *"Within 1 month of completing the course I got hired on with a great company...I was able to double my personal income with this job, and I know that was definitely in part [because] I had taken the time to better my remote work skills through the ROI program. I would definitely recommend the ROI to anyone looking to jump into the remote working world. There is so much to learn and this program and its mentors can be such an asset to you like it has been to me."*

- WHITLEY P., DUCHESNE COUNTY

Remote Work Helps New College Student: *"After completing the course from the ROI, I was able to find a remote job just 1 month later! I loved the **Master Remote Work Professional** course and learned so much about how to conduct myself as a remote worker. I am more confident with the skills I gained and tools I need to succeed in this new job. I would recommend this course to anyone and everyone looking to work remotely. I am a freshman at SUU in Cedar City this fall and will be able to take my job with me as I pursue my bachelor's degree in biology."*

- ORIN H., IRON COUNTY

ROI Graduate Teaches English Online: *"Participating in the Rural Online Initiative has given me many more skills that I needed to work online. It was not until taking the **Master Remote Work Professional** course that I gained the courage to become an online ESL teacher. I now work from home for Magic Ears, a company that provides English language learning to Chinese students. Having gone through the ROI course has*

made me more aware of remote work opportunities and I am helping my son secure a remote job that will allow him to stay in Richfield instead of moving to the Wasatch Front."

- BROOKE J., SEVIER COUNTY

ROI Program Gives Rural Utah Resident a Second Chance: *Everyone makes mistakes. The poet, Nikki Giovanni stated, "Mistakes are a fact of life. It is the response to the error that counts." One young man, living in a tiny community in rural Utah, made some mistakes as a young man that required him to serve time in jail. After serving his time, he desired to find a good job and be a contributing member of society. While he had some technical skills and a professional resume, he sent out approximately 30 copies per week for several weeks with no success. He was unsuccessful getting interviews or obtaining a job in his rural county. He learned about the ROI program from the local Small Business Development Center and immediately enrolled in the certification course and registered with a recommended online freelance website. Within 2 weeks, he had obtained part-time employment as a remote IT support freelancer. He quickly impressed the employer with his skills and work habits and has been moved to a full-time position, working from his home in rural Utah.*



Local Writer Replaces Lost Employment with Freelancing

Gigs: *"I managed our local newspaper for years until it was acquired. Not long after, I found myself unemployed. I love my community and had no desire to move but was worried that I might have to. After completing the **Master Remote Work Professional** certificate course, I was able to integrate my existing writing skills with what I learned in the course to become a successful freelance writer. I now contract with multiple clients and love working as a freelancer."*

- PATSY, EMERY COUNTY

Mother Returns from Maternity Leave to Work Remotely in Marketing & Social Media:

"I love the ROI program. I thought the networking and tools were incredible. It also made working remotely feel like a normal concept. I was initially really insecure about working remotely, and thought for sure that it would not last, but it's happening everywhere! I think the timing of it is also really cool. To have USU, who taught the course, turn around and hire me as a remote employee is awesome."

- CHARLEEN R., BOX ELDER COUNTY

FUTURE PLANS

In the first year of its 3-year pilot program, the Rural Online Initiative (ROI) program focused on satisfying demand for remote work through delivering the **Master Remote Work Professional** certificate course across 15 rural counties. In its second year, the program will continue to focus on meeting demand for remote work in rural Utah with a more concentrated effort on high school seniors. In addition, the ROI program will provide resources toward cultivating the supply of remote jobs through the **Master Remote Work Leader** certificate course.



Pilot first cohort of the Master Remote Work Leader certificate course. This course will target business leaders in Utah's urban counties and train them in the best practices of managing remote employees and developing and implementing remote work policies/procedures. The ROI program will measure the number of remote jobs created and adapted by business leaders after taking the course.



Develop strategic plan for expanding ROI program statewide. Successful delivery in urban counties will not only improve the quality of life and job satisfaction of Utah's workforce, but also help businesses become more productive. In addition, as more people from the Wasatch Front work remotely, traffic congestion will be reduced which will also have a positive effect toward efforts to improve air quality.



Develop Reformed Remote Work Professional, an adapted curriculum for delivery to Utah's incarcerated populations. The ROI program will partner with USU Extension to combat recidivism by teaching remote work and entrepreneurship workshops to prisoners. An estimated 68% of released prisoners were arrested within 3 years, 79% within 6 years, and 83% within 9 years. Studies have found these rates to significantly decline when released prisoners can find employment with a livable wage. Those who participate in an education program while incarcerated are 20% less likely to reoffend.



Facilitate quarterly entrepreneurship training. The ROI program will facilitate a blended entrepreneurship training for participants who have previously completed the **Master Remote Work Professional** course. This new course provides specialized E-commerce training and is designed specifically for those interested in starting or expanding an existing business (e.g., running an Amazon shop, Etsy, or eBay store).

Remote work options for employees mean that everyone wins. Employees win. Managers win. Our air wins. Rural wins. The taxpayer wins. It is time for more of our employers, both private and public, to seriously consider this more sustainable, efficient, balanced mode of work.

-LT. GOVERNOR SPENCER J. COX



Design and pilot Remote Work Assembly curriculum to high school seniors in three rural counties. The Kem Gardner Institute projects the trend of population decline to intensify in the future, estimating that rural counties will make up less than 5% of total population by 2060. According to the 2017 State of Rural Utah Report, by the age of 19, the population will decline significantly in rural counties as youth leave for college, LDS missions, military service, or work elsewhere. While some youth return after college or a few years of professional work, most youth are not returning and are not being replaced by in-migration. The Kem Gardner Institute reports that youth will not stay when jobs are not available and few employers are interested in relocating when the local labor force is small.



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