South Lincoln County Rural Tourism Studio
Twelve Month Progress Report
June 2013

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A. Introduction and Key Observations

This report presents a progress assessment for the Rural Tourism Studio (RTS) program in South Lincoln County (SLC). The region is comprised of the southern third of Lincoln County, located between the Coast Range and the Pacific Ocean along the central coast of Oregon. The RTS program workshops commenced in February 2012, and wrapped up in mid-May 2012.

In November of 2012, six months after completion of the RTS workshops, all participants received an electronic survey to gauge their short term impressions of what aspects of the program had proven most useful and effective as the community moved into project implementation. Survey results, including comparisons with other RTS communities at the same stage of implementation, were summarized in a Six Month Progress Report and those results are referenced in this report where appropriate.

Based on past RTS experience, communities tend to make breakthroughs on their projects between six and twelve months after the workshops end. For South Lincoln County, the evaluation schedule for the RTS program was shifted. We are now formally checking back with participating communities twelve months after program completion in order to better capture progress on projects as well as emerging technical assistance needs that Travel Oregon or its partners could help to address.

This report draws on phone or in-person interviews with several steering committee members and other key stakeholders as recommended by Travel Oregon. Interviews were conducted in May and June of 2013. The Appendix includes a summary of key interview questions.

Susan Woodruff	Waldport
Andrea Scharf	Go Yachats
Dave Locke	Overleaf Lodge
Sandy Dunn	Yachats City Councilor
Melissa Steinman	Teacher
Maggie Rivers	Port of Alsea
Rick Hill	Green Bike Program
Ron Brean	Yachats Mayor
Caroline Bauman	County Econ Dev
Joanne Kittel	Trails Committee

OVERALL ASSESSMENT
The Rural Tourism Studio seems to have significantly hit its stride in South Lincoln County. For every item on the logic model expected benchmark, there has been significant progress. There are promising projects being implemented. These projects **borrow from the experience of past RTS communities** with bicycle tourism and the We Speak project. The SLC projects also look likely to yield lessons for future RTS communities around trail map development, events, and sustaining We Speak capacity through videos.

As with past communities, there was some loss of momentum after the RTS workshops ended. It would be advisable to shore up action team leadership by identifying co-conveners for each group at the final workshop. This will enable successful action team launch, even if the original lead cannot fulfill his/her role. The action teams should set their first meeting date and draft agenda at the final workshop.

B. Key findings related to perceived value and impact of the program

The e-survey asked respondents to rate their progress on two categories of success factors for tourism development: their level of personal engagement to work effectively on tourism development, and community conditions—the broader context in which they operated. For respondents who were currently active on action teams or who owned tourism-related businesses, there were additional questions added to the e-survey for the first time.

The e-survey show strong evidence that RTS has led to positive change on most short term parameters in the logic model. RTS had a positive impact on all variables related to the level of personal engagement in future tourism development, and on all community conditions related to tourism. The greatest reported changes were around knowledge of emerging market opportunities; stronger working relationships and increased collaboration; and clearer vision for tourism development.

All of the **indicators related to personal engagement** in future tourism development improved significantly (by greater than 27%) after the RTS workshops. In terms of level of personal engagement, the two indicators (of 6) that changed the most and ended the highest were:

- Knowledge of emerging market opportunities for tourism development (+87.6% change)
- Effectiveness of working relationships with other organizations working on tourism development. (+61.7% change)

In terms of which changes were most perceived to have been caused by the RTS program, respondent rankings were somewhat different. The two changes most caused by RTS itself were:

- Level of personal involvement with tourism development
- Awareness of assets and resources for tourism development

In terms of their **starting level of community conditions**, SLC respondents rated themselves higher, on average, than past RTS communities. Nevertheless, all of the indicators related to community conditions for future tourism development improved positively (by greater than 6%) after the RTS workshops. In terms of community conditions related to tourism, the four indicators (of 12) that changed the most were:

- Level of collaboration (+58.1%)
- Clarity of community vision for tourism development (+44.1% change)
- Level of trust within the community around tourism development (+41.7%)
- Clarity of action plan (+34.7%)

This is the first of the RTS communities to report "level of collaboration" as the single most significant change. This is also the first of the RTS communities to experience a redesigned, more intensive visioning process during the first month of the program. The purpose of the redesign was to develop a vision that would "stick" as a guide for action and motivate participants to work toward common goals.

The e-survey results suggest several specific areas for additional probing in interviews:
- What about the visioning and action planning has remained valuable as you are implementing?
- What contributed to increased trust and increased collaboration?
- How could the RTS program improve connections with regional and statewide organizations?

In terms of the causal effect of RTS on community conditions, **respondents in general judged RTS to be a significant factor in explaining the changes they observed. Specifically, participants cited change associated with the level of collaboration and the level political support for tourism as attributable to RTS. On the other hand, the changed conditions *least* perceived to have been affected by RTS were the level of trust in the community, level of community involvement, capacity of organizations to implement, and general community support for tourism.**

Here are some survey and interview quotes about the **positive outcomes**:
- *"What's different? Yachats had already been tourism oriented, but now Waldport has stepped up to the game, and Seal Rock beginning to get involved too."*
- *"RTS really highlighted that trails are a key asset of the area. They can be a unifying force, hopefully make all the nearby trails into a system."*
- *"In developing a new event like the Gravel Epic, so helpful to have a knowledgeable partner. He coached us, we needed his professional guidance".*
- *"We are working together- Yachats with hotels, Waldport with bay, Seal Rock with galleries- working together for the good of the cause"*
- *"The trails we are developing respond to a local constituency as well as create an asset for visitors."*
- *"At the last Steering Committee meeting, I said "Where are we guys going to our talents next?!" It's exciting."*
- *"Thanks to Travel Oregon for providing awesome hands-on help to develop a marketing plan, quickly"*
- *"We were able to tap our collective network for influence and expertise- Steve Cash, who helped with the Gravel Epic, knew a local resident through work in the Eugene area. One of our Trails Committee members used to serve of the State Trails Committee. "*
- *"There has been a big change in the Yachats Chamber, more collaborative, turf not an issue"*
- *"Being part of RTS has raised our profile- we get a lot more attention in the press".*

The personal interviews and the email survey also reveal some challenges.
- *"Only frustration- of the people who attended, few are still active- some dropped out because their focus area wasn't selected for project, business owners can't do it, some people got burned out."*

- *"Need to be clearer during workshops that community is making real decisions to take real actions- and that community members will be leading implementation"*
- *"It has been hard to get people to track progress and impact with a meaningful measure besides room tax"*
- *"The marketing team did not work out and has been temporarily disbanded in frustration. Was made up of people with very strong, very specific agendas"*
- *"We needed another facilitated session after the end of the workshops to help us nail down our priorities and launch our teams. Felt rushed"*

C. Logic Model vs. Actual Activities and Outcomes

When the initial Rural Tourism Studio program was first being designed, Travel Oregon developed a "logic model" to identify the intended benefits and results of the program as it unfolded in each host community over time. The chart below summarizes the key **logic model milestones for the first twelve months of activities after the RTS workshops are delivered, and the associated indicators of progress for South Lincoln County** during this time period. The rows shaded in green show milestones that have been completely met. The yellow rows show milestones where some notable progress has been made, even if incomplete. Red rows indicate milestones and activities that have stalled. In the case of South Lincoln County, many milestones have been fully met, and there are no areas in which activity has totally stalled.

Immediate outcomes **as per logic model**:

Logic Model Milestone	Progress Indicator for South Lincoln County
Formation of action teams to move ideas and projects forward	Yes. Workshop participants self-organized into four action teams at the final RTS workshop in May 2012. • Host Adventure Race (Gravel Epic) 5 initial members • Trails/Trails map- 5 initial members • Regional We Speak- 5 initial members • Regional Marketing- 7 initial members
Newer, more diverse mix of people involved with action teams	While the co-chairs of the steering committee do not report significant change in participation in terms of new people engaged beyond those who participated in RTS, there appear to be many highly engaged, passionate committee members drawn from RTS who are actively working to implement projects. Compared with the level of collaborative activity prior to RTS, there are significantly more people involved. The business community is not yet heavily involved: co-chairs plan personal visitation of businesses to explain and inform about projects and goals
New awareness and knowledge of tourism development opportunities and resources	Yes, this was cited as a major benefit in the personal interviews and in survey results (as reported in more detail in the six month progress report). • The "trails focus" was already in place as a tourism strategy, but the extent to which high value-added nature tourism could be attracted to the area was new information. • The Gravel Epic event was a new and somewhat serendipitous project idea that emerged at the start of the RTS project. RTS information about bicycle

	tourism opportunities helped it to gain momentum.
New connections made across diverse sectors in the community	New connections made between communities that have made other things possible. • The Gravel Epic event will start and end in Waldport, but Yachats and the Port of Alsea are active partners because of the regional benefit. • The trails project and the "we speak" project are also regionally focused. • As one interviewee said, "we collaborated before, but it was because we had to. Now we want to, and we are looking ahead to new projects!" • People from Seal Rock, an unincorporated community to the north of Waldport, are also connecting into regional tourism development projects.
Community in agreement on a vision for tourism in their area and critical next steps to move forward	Yes, Vision statement and action plan complete. Clarity of vision is one of the community conditions for tourism most improved by RTS, according to the e-survey summarized in the six month progress report.
Establish deeper relationships between state and regional tourism development organizations and local players	• Stronger connections with Travel Oregon- the communities feel very well supported. For example, the hands-on marketing plan assistance provided by the Travel Oregon team post-RTS was valuable and the marketing strategy roughed out there is now being implemented. • Connections with regional tourism development organizations did not improve in the short term, because the RDMO (Oregon Coast Visitors Association) was and still is being reorganized. It is improved from the start of the RTS program.

Short term follow up *activities* as per logic model (3-12 months):

Logic Model Milestone	Progress Indicator for South Lincoln County
Action teams meet, grow, make decisions on priorities, begin implementation	Yes. Workshop participants self-organized into four action teams at the final RTS workshop in May 2012. • Host Adventure Race (Gravel Epic) @12 members, with 5-7 very active, meeting monthly • Trails- 10 people , meeting monthly • Regional We Speak Committee has 4-5 people coordinating the topics with the Chamber of Commerce, but does not otherwise meet as a committee; 20+ people have attended initial trainings, with more watching on video • Regional Marketing- see below. Original action team not currently active. • The steering committee meets monthly, with 5-7 regular attendees . It takes on marketing tasks as part of its agenda
Submittal of matching grant applications to Travel Oregon that reflect clear connections to goals of RTS	Yes, but last $2,500 remains unallocated due to community request for deferral. Given the instability in larger regional marketing, this was a wise decision. These funds are available to the community for at least (how long?)

	The matching funds have to date been allocated as follows: • $5000 for the Adventure event (Gravel Epic) • $2500 for the Trails map • $0 for We Speak (Travel Oregon limited the community to three projects to be supported with matching funds. The community has tapped other resources for WeSpeak. As noted below, the community has raised more than the required matching funds.
Products from RTS completed (e.g. strategic plan, vision, asset inventory, etc)	Yes, the vision, interim goals, action plan and asset inventories were completed during the RTS workshops.
Follow up assistance provided from Travel Oregon, Regional Destination marketing organizations (RDMO), and partners	As noted above, Travel Oregon has provided follow-up assistance with the marketing plan, as well as in-kind assistance with implementing the We Speak program? Travel Oregon has also provided in-kind assistance through development of marketing "toolkit" by Wieden and Kennedy. Will be helpful for development paid advertisements.
Ongoing evaluation	Yes. Plans to do a comprehensive visitor survey associated with the Gravel Epic event to learn more about how to refine future events, and tap other bicycle tourism opportunities. Will include questions not only about ride experience, but about what else people do when they come, size of travel party, etc. The co-chairs note that it is difficult to identify and gain support for measuring other indicators of successful tourism development activities besides room tax. They are working on this.

Short term (3-12 months) *outcomes* as per logic model:

Logic Model Milestone	Progress Indicator for South Lincoln County
Visible synergy and momentum of action teams	Absolutely. Yes.
New projects underway or progress on pre-existing projects	• The Gravel Epic race is scheduled for October 2013: race day volunteer recruitment is beginning • The trail map is due to be complete in September 2013 • We speak: two of twelve planned workshops have been filmed (whale watching and clamming/crabbing/shrimping), two others have been delivered but not yet filmed. More planned, to be completed by end of 2013.
Businesses are testing new tourism products and markets with some initial success	Businesses are beginning to see themselves as potential beneficiaries of tourism, as evidenced by their willingness to support the Gravel Epic.
Public and nonprofit support organizations are testing new tourism products and markets	• But what about Yachats potentially not funding Go Yachats in future? • Port of Alsea is cross-promoting river trails/guided tours with South Beach State Park

with some initial success	• Potential issue- Yachats may not fund GoYachats staff position for marketing. Mayor of Waldport seeking solution, perhaps marketing partnership between the two communities
New partnerships and new resources for tourism development, including more integrated relationships between state and regional tourism development organizations and local players	• City of Waldport, City of Yachats, Port of Alsea, Chambers all working much more collaboratively. • Expertise and connections of local residents mobilized to advance projects especially trails project • Leveraging resources for projects through Lincoln County Economic Development Corporation (trails map), business sponsorships, grants secured by the Port for tourism projects (such as the Kayak Shack) and more • More press attention- Grants Getaways, Travel Oregon website that people attribute to the visibility gained through Rural Tourism Studio • Regional chamber/RDMO situation still evolving
Increased integration of tourism planning with other community and regional planning, other community and regional stakeholders	• Tourism now a greater focus for Waldport; it has consistently been a focus for Yachats (evidence?) • Broad support for and assistance with WeSpeak • Involvement of Port Director in RTS projects • Commitment of Waldport Mayor to RTS and tourism as economic development strategy • Continued effort to coordinate events and items of interest across multiple websites- cities, chamber, port.

D. Opportunities for Follow up

Much of the recommended follow-up has already occurred.

- Assistance with regional marketing plan
- Follow up check-ins and technical assistance from Travel Oregon staff
- Provision of useful templates and tools

The Water, Bike and Hike trail map and the Gravel Epic event(a large start up event tapping a emerging market) represent new types of product development for RTS communities that will undoubtedly yield useful lessons for the future.

Appendix: Questions for Twelve Month RTS Interviews: Revised March 2013

Intent is to both capture progress on logic model indicators, but also focus on capturing project implementation much more intentionally—success stories and characters, tools and resources, lessons learned, opportunities for catalytic follow up assistance.

A. Organization/Process

1. *Tell me about what's been happening related to tourism since the RTS program workshops concluded in May. How have you personally been involved? (*on action team? Was, but no longer? Not, but otherwise involved? Other?)
2. Is your action team active? *Focused? Energized? Effective*? Are there enough members to be productive?
3. Are you satisfied with its progress so far? What support do you need, if any, to help your action team succeed in meeting its priority goals?
4. How much do you know about the work of action teams that you are not personally involved with? Are you satisfied with how much information you have about what is happening across projects?
5. Is the overall steering committee active? Well connected with the work of the action teams? What is it doing that is important for your future success?
6. What support do you need, if any, to help your steering committee and/or action teams be effective going forward? (reference any results available from technical assistance needs survey)
7. *For steering committee chair—number of people very active, any changes in composition, background, etc*

B. Causality of changes

1. What changes in relationships/collaboration have you seen in after RTS? Do you see a link between RTS and that change?
2. What changes do you see in the level of involvement in tourism development after RTS (*who is involved, how many people are involved)*? Do you see a link between RTS and that change?
3. Probe specific cause and effect questions as noted in the e-survey for given community

C. Project Implementation: Success and Lessons

1. Tell me about your projects that are underway? Which, if any, are you personally involved with?
2. Are there any projects you had planned to do but that didn't move forward? Why? Any further action on these?
3. What are you most proud of having accomplished so far?
4. **For each that this person is familiar with, ask:**
   a. **Origins of the project idea**
      i. Destination development opportunities or challenges this project was intended to address
      ii. The inspiration for this specific idea
      iii. How it got off the ground

      iv. Did this idea come up directly as part of the RTS workshops, or in some other setting? Or is an old idea that finally hit stride?

      v. What is the intended impact?

      vi. How many people/groups are working on this?

b. So far, what's worked? What challenges needed to be overcome?

      i. What resources needed for implementation?

      ii. Cash budget and source? Volunteer hours (estimate if needed)

      iii. Assets/capacity/resources discovered within the community and brought in from outside- anything surprising?

      iv. Key collaborations/partners inside and outside the community- anything surprising?

      v. Lessons learned- any tools, resources, pictures etc. that other communities might find useful?

      vi. Did RTS prepare you to be successful with this project? How?

      vii. Did something new happen new in the community since the RTS program concluded that either helped or hindered your progress?

c. Timeframe

      i. From idea to start of implementation

      ii. From start of implementation to key milestones

      iii. How far along are you to completion?

      iv. Is the project sustainable if it was designed to be sustainable- not everything is.

      v. Next steps/related initiatives now underway?

d. Other miscellaneous info

      i. Do you know of any new business activity related to tourism? New products, services, experiences? Do you know if it's connected at all with RTS?

      ii. Experience with Grant

          1. How close are you to submitting the grant application? Any tough decisions there, or was it easy to agree?

D. Outlook and Next steps

1. What are you most excited about in terms of RTS each project or tourism development in general?

2. Do you have any concerns about challenges that the projects or tourism development in general will face? *Scale, energy, etc*

3. Others we should talk to?

4. Is there anything going on that we might want to be present for to document (get specifics) about your project in the next six months?

5. Is there anything else that Travel Oregon could do now to help you succeed?