



2019

Annual Report

The Partners for Rural America is the national organization of State Rural Development Councils Working together to improve the quality of life in rural America.





PRA



Partners for Rural America

*Working together to improve the
quality of life in rural America*

www.partnersforruralamerica.org

Partners for Rural America

The Partners for Rural America (PRA) was founded in 1998 to support the efforts of its member State Rural Development Councils (SRDCs), which are uniquely positioned to expand economic and social opportunities for America's rural communities and their residents, promote equal treatment of rural America by government agencies and the private sector and provide a collective voice for rural America. SRDCs across the country work in their states to conduct research, work with state and federal government officials, partner with other community and economic development organizations and serve as leaders representing the perspective and needs of rural communities throughout their states.

This multi-stakeholder collaborative structure creates the best possible atmosphere to help citizens and policy-makers in rural areas develop vitality-improving projects and initiatives, reduce regulatory and other barriers, address their community needs and build confidence in the local and regional development process. Rural areas often have an overburdened local leadership and local government staffs. State Councils can serve as an experienced convener and vehicle for collaboration.

Issues vary from state to state, but most SRDCs work to improve community and economic development, education, workforce training, infrastructure development and access to broadband, transportation and quality healthcare, to name a few of their areas of focus. These organizations work on the ground in the communities as well as with local, state and federal government leaders to promote the assets and opportunities in rural America.

Many SRDCs provided a summary of their current activities and initiatives for this report. All councils welcome input, suggestions, ideas but most of all your support and involvement. States that would like to learn about starting a council should contact Partners for Rural America at www.partnersforruralamerica.org.

Arizona: azrdc.org

Idaho: irp.idaho.gov

Illinois: ruralpartners.org

Iowa: iowardc.org

Maine: growsmartmaine.org

Maryland: rural.maryland.gov

Michigan: cedamichigan.org

Missouri: mrdp.net

Nevada: ruralnevada.org

North Carolina: ncrdc.org

Oregon: smith@uoregon.edu

Pennsylvania: whsturges@gmail.com

Utah: curtis@suu.edu

Vermont: vtrural.org

Virginia: cfrv.org

Washington: partnersruralwa.org

Wisconsin: WIRuralPartners.org

Wyoming: wyomingrural.org

Congressional Support for Rural Vitality

Every Farm Bill since 2002 expresses Congressional support and encouragement for maximizing public-and-private-sector collaboration, and minimizing regulatory redundancy to empower and build the capacity of States and rural communities to design flexible and innovative responses to their own special rural development needs, with local determinations of progress and selection of projects and activities. This is highlighted by the following provisions:

- Establishment of a National Rural Development Coordinating Committee composed of each Federal agency with rural responsibilities, representatives of national associations, public interest groups and other nonprofit organizations.**
- Creation of a National Rural Development Partnership composed of the coordinating committee and the state rural development councils whose purposes are to empower and build capacity of States and rural communities to design flexible and innovative responses to their own special rural development needs, with local determinations of progress and selection of projects and activities, facilitate coordination and develop strategies to reduce or eliminate administrative and regulatory impediments.**
- State Rural Development Councils (with their association Partners for Rural America) shall be composed of representatives of Federal, State, local and tribal organizations, regional organizations, the private sector and other entities committed to rural advancement and have a nonpartisan and nondiscriminatory membership.**
- The State Director for Rural Development of the USDA, other employees of the department and employees of other Federal agencies with rural responsibilities shall fully participate as voting members in the governance and operations of the state rural development councils.**
- Authorization of funds to support responsibilities, activities and initiatives of the Coordinating Committee, National Partnership and state rural development councils.**

State Council Highlights



Arizona

Overview of 2018 Accomplishments

Arizona Rural Development Council (AZRDC) is working to strengthen Arizona's economy through a multi-prong approach. AZRDC helps rural communities reduce economic leakage by providing technical assistance to rural business owners that may include new technology training, marketing workshops, business/strategic planning, and business development programming. Additionally, AZRDC works to drive new dollars to rural places through increased in-state tourism by leveraging arts and culture, historic downtowns, and through the development of rural community identities and branding. Finally, AZRDC works to empower rural Arizonans to improve their access to healthy foods through food system development, co-op development and agri-tourism.



Rural Policy Forum: Driving Innovation in Rural Arizona

The annual Arizona Rural Policy Forum offers a venue for connecting rural economic development professionals, nonprofits, community leaders, business owners, government officials and other rural stakeholders who are interested in sustaining rural communities. This year's 12th Annual Arizona Rural Policy Forum convened 300 representatives from every Arizona county to participate in two and a half days of workshops, speakers, breakout sessions, tours and more. Over 60 speakers from Arizona and 3 national leaders in rural economic development joined us in Wickenburg to share successes and best practices.

Rural Community Activation Programming

In 2018, over half of Arizona's rural counties, each comprised of multiple rural cities and towns, accessed AZRDC programming to enhance projects in the areas of business development, community development, youth engagement, tourism and marketing, waste and sustainability, and food system integration. More than 30 technical assistance workshops were conducted, four regional weekend tourism itineraries were executed, 400+ STEM experiments were conducted outside the classroom through Science Happens Here, two community brands were launched, and 230 farmers and food producers were connected to a statewide food system for enhanced distribution and access to healthy, local food.

WeekendZona: Discover Small Town Arizona

WeekendZona aims to redirect the billions of dollars Arizonans spend on average vacationing out-of-state each year back into our unique and diverse small towns. WeekendZona encourages exploration of Arizona, investing in the revitalization of its rural economies, facilitating job creation, and generating Arizona state pride. Through planned itineraries, travelers from all over the state get to explore rural towns through the eyes of a "local", while assisting in community reviews, social media posts and overall word-of-mouth marketing for the community. In 2018, WeekendZona was the recipient of the Arizona Governor's Conference on Tourism Award for Outstanding Tourism Partnership - Rural.



Graham & Greenlee County Micro-Loan Fund

AZRDC works to build resilient small businesses in rural areas through its innovative programs, providing tools and resources to local entrepreneurs. Shifting economic support to focus on small business development, even micro-entrepreneurs, has proven a highly successful strategy to create new job opportunities and rebuild communities. A single successful local business can support several ancillary business services such as accounting, website development, or graphic design, keeping dollars circulating through the local economy in a multiplier effect.

In 2018, Local First Arizona Foundation launched a micro-loan fund, with the intent to (1) infuse desperately needed capital into rural small businesses, and (2) stimulate rural investment from other existing lenders. The fund advances small business entrepreneurs in Graham and Greenlee Counties, creating jobs and retaining dollars in the local economy. Working strategically with a multidisciplinary team, LFAF is demonstrating the viability of both existing small businesses and start-ups while defining pathways to infuse capital in rural communities.

Footnote: The loan fund, supported by Freeport-McMoRan, is limited to Graham & Greenlee Counties and is focused on \$5,000-\$25,000 loans.

Guiding principles for State Rural Development Councils (SRDCs) from the National Farm Bill

- ▶ **SRDCs shall include representation from all agencies, organizations and individuals who are dedicated to enhancing economic and social opportunities for rural citizens.**
- ▶ **SRDCs shall seek the support and participation of the governors of the states in which the SRDC operates.**
- ▶ **Participation in SRDC decisions and operations shall be open to all who wish to participate.**
- ▶ **SRDCs shall represent the diversity of states' rural populations and geography.**
- ▶ **All that participate in SRDCs shall have a voice in their decision and that the SRDCs shall be free from control of any single individual, organization, agency, sector, political party or interest group.**
- ▶ **SRDCs shall provide open, neutral environments where all participants' voices can be heard and where major decisions are reached, whenever possible, through consensus.**
- ▶ **SRDCs shall receive financial and other support from diverse sources.**
- ▶ **SRDCs shall retain an executive director to manage the operation of the SRDC if financially able to do so, and if not, the SRDC shall be operated by a working board of directors.**
- ▶ **All SRDCs shall participate in the nationwide network of SRDCs known as Partners for Rural America.**

Idaho Rural Partnership has proudly served as Idaho’s rural development council for 27 years. Our 35-member board includes public, non-profit, and private sector partners who work together to strengthen Idaho’s rural communities. Highlights and accomplishments over the last 12 months are summarized below.

Idaho Community Review Program

2020 will be the 20th anniversary of IRP’s Idaho Community Review program. The program teams local residents and leaders with visiting professionals to engage the larger community in efforts to identify high-priority goals, and develop detailed action plans. Increasing the number of residents actively involved in community and economic development projects is a key objective. This year will mark the completion of our 44th community review in Harrison, ID. Ashon and Blackfoot are other communities that have recently benefitted from the program. Issues consistently coming up in the rural Idaho communities we work with include, in no particular order: Business expansion and attraction; Downtown revitalization; Quality and quantity of available housing; Improving educational, recreational, and other opportunities for youth and families; Desire for increased community involvement; Availability and cost of broadband internet; Lack of connection between community and cultural groups; and Condition of local streets and sidewalks.



Western Community Assessment Network

The Western Community Assessment Network (WeCan) is a multi-year collaborative effort of the Idaho Rural Partnership, Wyoming Business Council, and Montana Economic Developers Association to evaluate and increase measurable outcomes from the community assessment programs in our respective states. Project participants met in Idaho Falls in May 2019 to celebrate successes, share challenges, and identify further opportunities for collaboration. Go to www.communityreview.org for more information about this effort.

Rural Health Initiative

In late 2018 IRP entered into a partnership with the Idaho Community Foundation and Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health to conduct outreach activities in selected rural Idaho communities to gain a real-world understanding of health issues, gaps in health services, and opportunities for improvement in rural Idaho. The ‘Voice of the Community’ project will combine an analysis of data previously collected by IRP and other entities with focus groups attended by health stakeholders. Long-term, information collected and conclusions reached through the project will help reduce the health disparities that exist between rural and urban communities.

Welcoming New Board Members and Thanking Other Members for Their Service

In the last 12 months the IRP board of directors welcomed new board members representing the Coeur d’Alene Tribe, Nez Perce Tribe, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and USDA Farm Service Agency. The Board Development Committee continues working with the Governor’s Office to appoint additional board members.

Sponsors and Contributors

The efforts of the Idaho Rural Partnership are made possible by in-kind and financial contributions from numerous public agencies and private employers. These include Region IV Development Association, Idaho Department of Labor, Idaho Transportation Department, Idaho Housing and Finance Association, University of Idaho Extension, USDA Rural Development, Bayer USA, Idaho National Laboratory, Elwood Staffing, Federal Highway Administration, Blue Cross of Idaho and the Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health, Inc., and regional and local businesses and municipal governments in the communities we serve.

Jon Barrett, Executive Director: jon.barrett@irp.idaho.gov or 208-332-1730.





Illinois Rural Partners

Illinois

As Illinois Rural Partners celebrates its 30th year, we have been busy planning some exciting events in 2019. In August, we will host the annual

PRA Conference in Springfield, the city where Abraham Lincoln practiced law, started his family, and ran for the office of President. We've planned a bus tour of economic development projects in Western Illinois, Abraham Lincoln site visits in Springfield, and a range of panelists and presentations. As part of the PRA Conference, Illinois Rural Partners will host a reception to celebrate our 30th Anniversary, where we will invite current and former members as well as officials who have supported Rural Partners through the years.



With Rural Partners members Norm Walzer and Chris Merrett, and co-sponsorship by the Illinois Institute of Rural Affairs, the Office of the Lt. Governor and Illinois Rural Partners, 265 attended the 30th annual rural community economic development conference in March 2019. With two plenary and 17 breakout sessions addressing cooperatives, rural health care, broadband, rural demographics and youth outmigration, support for rural volunteerism, affordable housing, solar energy, place-making, grocery stores and rural food deserts, and local project funding and technical assistance strategies including TIF, and programs offered by state and federal agencies including USDA, University of Illinois Extension, DCEO, Illinois Finance Authority, US EPA, Small Business Administration, Corporation for National and Community Service, and the EDA, among other agencies, rural leaders went home better informed, more committed and better prepared to lead. Presentations from the last five conferences may be found at www.iira.org under events.

At the March conference, Rural Partners introduced a briefing paper entitled Promise and Programs in Rural Illinois. The paper discusses issues we're facing in rural Illinois and recommendations for action to move forward with new and innovative approaches. It provides a non-partisan snapshot of selected approaches, implemented in other places, which might be considered in Illinois. The paper can be found on our website: <https://ruralpartners.org/download/RP-Promise-and-Programs.pdf>

Financial support for Rural Partners comes solely from its dues paying members. To involve and show appreciation to these members, the Board hosted two member-focused special events. The first served as a membership drive, while the second event was for members only.

Members of Rural Partners met with Dr. John Jackson, from the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Dr. Jackson discussed the 2018 mid-term elections and their impact and implications for Rural America. Dr. Jackson is a frequent contributor to local, state and national media coverage of government and politics.

Rural Partners board and members visited Mattoon on May 14, 2019 to learn more about Mattoon in Motion and the community and economic development work happening in the Eastern Illinois community and surrounding region. Following the Rural Partners regular business meeting, attendees heard from Mattoon Chamber of Commerce executive director Ed Dowd, Americorps/Peace Corps Fellow Carlos Ortega, and WIU Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs Director Chris Merrett about the impressive work happening in the community. Mattoon in Motion recently received a community development grant supported by Google.

The Iowa Rural Development Council had the opportunity in 2019 to work closely with Governor Kim Reynolds to Empower Rural Iowa – an initiative launched by the governor via executive order, an order that singled out the Council as a key partner.

Empower Rural Iowa is an effort aimed at lifting up small towns and rural areas across Iowa. The governor, with input from the Council, appointed 66 self-nominated individuals to three Empower Rural Iowa task forces. The “Growing Rural Iowa” task force was to focus, initially, on addressing rural leadership and strategic planning needs. The “Investing in Rural Iowa” task force was charged with developing solutions to the state’s rural housing shortage. And the “Connecting Rural Iowa” task force looked at broadband connectivity and options for improving access to high-speed internet.

The Rural Development Council was represented on each of the task forces, and Council members played leadership role during a series of meetings. In those meetings, each task force studied its specific issue, heard insights from experts and Iowans impacted by that issue, and began discussing possible solutions. The Governor’s Office and the Council together helped shape the agenda for each task force and identify resources for the members.

When Governor Reynolds gave her “State of the State” address to the Iowa Legislature in January, 2019, she was pleased to recognize the work of the Council and the Empower Rural Iowa task force, and shared with legislators her rural platform. The package of recommendations were direct outcomes of the work of the Council and the task force members and included new broadband grant dollars, revived a housing tax credit program, and created a rural-specific leadership position in the Iowa Economic Development Authority.

Governor Reynolds signed the bill into law in front of an historic candy store in Wilton, Iowa, celebrating small-town Iowa and the impact of rural places on the state and its economy. The Iowa Rural Development Council continues its work with the Empower task force, identifying possible issues for future consideration and communicating with members who have ideas and recommendations on next steps.

Meanwhile, the Council welcomed almost 400 individuals to its 3rd Iowa Rural Development Summit. The three-day event highlighted Empower Rural Iowa issues in addition to topics such as rural livability, day care and communications. As was the case in the previous two Summits, communities were required to bring a three-person team to the event. This year, 80 community teams were present, representing every corner of the state.

The Iowa Rural Development Council also saw its membership base grow dramatically this year, thanks in part to its successful Empower Rural Iowa partnership. It is updating its website, revising its by-laws and formalizing its operations. And it is looking ahead to playing a broader role in the efforts to make rural Iowa a more vibrant place.

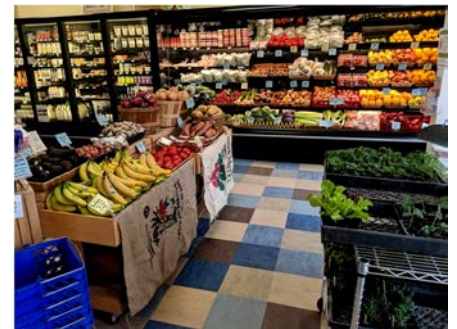


Community Engagement, Events and Advocacy to Build Lasting Prosperity

Making Headway in Sanford GrowSmart Maine is working with city officials and neighborhood families, encouraging residents to identify what they value most, and provide tools to protect and build on those values and assets. This program is part of a city initiative to support community development as they plan the reuse of Lafayette Elementary School which will soon be retired. Meetings with town officials and staff have been laying the ground work for community involvement and community leadership development in 2019.



Maine Alliance for Smart Growth GrowSmart Maine leads this network of communities, individuals, businesses and organizations with a proven interest in promoting and supporting economically and culturally vital downtowns as places with businesses and jobs, community and cultural events resulting from long range vision and design, and strategic public and private investments. We recognize the interdependence of downtowns with the natural areas surrounding them; working farms and forests, open space and waterfront. Our goals are to connect Mainers with each other, resources and expertise; coordinate community engagement for greatest value to communities while maximizing collaboration and minimizing redundancy; and advocating on issues of statewide impact.



<http://growsmartmaine.org/initiatives/maine-alliance-for-smart-growth/>

GrowSmart Maine Summit 2018 “The Power Of Localism: Tapping Into a Maine Tradition” The New Localism defined in urban settings is readily translated to Maine’s small communities in rural regions. Mainers recognize this pragmatic approach as our heritage. Today our rural towns are responding to changing conditions in population, economy, and climate and are trying to retain those attributes that define hometowns while creating economic opportunities. This event featured Bruce Katz, Co-Founder and inaugural Director of the Nowak Metro Finance Lab at Drexel University and Jase Wilson, CEO & Founder of Neighborly, a San Francisco-based tech startup that is modernizing access to public finance – the billion dollar per day market that funds vital public projects like schools, parks, and next-generation infrastructure like municipal broadband and community solar. Breakout sessions and Bangor Experience tours rounded out the day. <http://growsmartmaine.org/events/annual-summit-2018/>



Smart Growth Awards! GrowSmart Maine invited nominations for Lifetime Achievement, Outstanding Project, Outstanding Public Policy, and Outstanding Plan. Smart growth is a common sense concept that helps communities welcome growth while maintaining the historic and natural beauty of our state. This concept can be difficult to explain, and that’s why GrowSmart Maine launched the first annual Maine Smart Growth Awards. Highlights of the six award winners are found here: <http://growsmartmaine.org/maine-smart-growth-awards/>



Rural Maryland Council Highlights for Fiscal Year 2019

The Rural Maryland Council partnered with Grow and Fortify and Mid-Atlantic Farm Credit to host a successful 2019 Value-Added Agriculture Summit that was held on December 6, 2018 at the Chesapeake Bay Beach Club in Stevensville, Maryland. Breakout sessions were held and in addition to AgPitch - a Shark Tank-style business competition for entrepreneurs to present their agriculture business ideas before an audience to compete for cash and business related services. The Summit focused on supporting and promoting Maryland's value-added agricultural producers, growers, agritourism operations and small food businesses.



From left, Mid-Atlantic Farm Credit's Tom Truitt, Charlie Taylor, Zach Marnane, Eric Peterson and Tom Marnane accept first place for MADTECH'S agricultural drone concept at the 2019 Value-Added Agriculture Summit.

The Task Force for Rural Internet, Broadband, Wireless and Cellular Service, chaired by the RMC Executive Director, held meetings throughout 2018 to develop an approach to improving broadband across the state. The Task Force published its report on Rural Internet, Broadband, Wireless and Cellular Service in November 2018. The 2019 Maryland General Assembly Legislative Session was positive overall for rural communities. Highlights for the RMC included full funding for the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF) in the State's Fiscal Year 2020 Operating Budget in the amount

of \$6,334,000. The Council supported legislation to create a tax credit for angel investors and state incentives to encourage investment in rural Opportunity Zones. The Legislature passed the Broadband Task Force recommended proposal to allow rural electric cooperatives to utilize their rights-of-way for broadband services.



RMC Executive Director (Charlotte Davis) presented with the State of Maryland Proclamation by Lieutenant Governor Boyd K. Rutherford on Rural Maryland Day 2019.

Rural Maryland Day was held on February 14, 2019. This event offers an opportunity for legislators to meet with rural constituents and stakeholders to discuss opportunities and initiatives in rural Maryland communities. In partnership with the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts and the Maryland Dairy Industry Association, the council hosted a luncheon with 250 attendees.

Increasing Opportunities in Rural Michigan

Small Town and Rural Development Conference

From April 15-17, more than 190 rural leaders gathered in Northern Michigan for the 15th annual Small Town and Rural Development Conference. Presentations for rural communities across Michigan explored topics such as planning for renewable energy, transforming community hospitals, and assessing tourism investments. The conference featured a town hall meeting where representatives from communities across the state were able to come together to discuss challenges facing their communities and innovative solutions to address issues. Participants were able to network with other communities to share ideas on addressing some of the biggest problems rural communities in Michigan are facing. There was also a keynote presentation by Doug Griffiths, bestselling author of *13 Ways to Kill Your Community*.



USDA RD State Director Jason Allen addresses the attendees at the 2019 Small Town and Rural Development Conference

The annual conference provides an opportunity to showcase topics critical to rural development in a way that facilitates discussion of new ideas that can be moved into action. Participants are inspired to see the innovative ways other rural areas across the state are driving their economies, increasing wealth, and improving the lives of their residents.

Consumers Energy Pitch Competition

At this year's annual conference, Rural Partners of Michigan partnered with Consumers Energy to hold the first-ever pitch competition to showcase project ideas that put communities on the map. Ten finalists from across the state presented their ideas to a panel of judges at the Small Town and Rural Development conference for a chance to win funding for their project from Consumers Energy. The first place winner received \$7,500 for their project to develop a vacant lot in the center of town into an interactive and dynamic space where tourists and community members will gather, interact and be entertained. Second place received \$5,000 for their project to commission local artists to paint murals on the back of downtown businesses, and third place received \$2,500 to create small incubator space locations that will allow small, start-up businesses to come to life downtown.



Missouri Rural Development Partners

Missouri

2018 Missouri Survey

In comparing employment and population prior to and following the recession we found that only 20 of 115 counties have exceeded 2007 levels of population and that 55 Counties are still below 2007 levels for employment (-9.3% average deficit) and population (-3.9% average deficit). 29 Counties have gained population but not jobs and 11 have added jobs but lost population.

One of the most telling responses in the survey came from the question “My Community is doing fine and doesn’t need to change.” Nearly 81% of respondents disagreed, only half felt that their community was forward-looking, and less than one-third believed that their community had a plan for the future. Additionally, more than half (55%) felt that the local economy would not improve over the next 5 years.

Other areas of concern included: Housing, rental housing is a particular need in outstate Missouri and Infrastructure, respondents are concerned about their local government’s ability to maintain existing infrastructure.

MRDP 2019 Legislative Priorities

- **Broadband Expansion:** MRDP supports programs that will bring access to high-speed internet to all citizens of the state. MRDP believes that the solution lies in supporting funding for expansion of broadband access throughout the state, regardless of whether the provider is a public, private or joint public/private partnership.
- **Infrastructure:** MRDP supports continued efforts to identify fair and equitable solutions to funding Missouri’s need to improve its’ vital road system and deteriorating bridges. We continue to support and encourage solutions to Missouri’s highway and bridge infrastructure needs. MRDP supports efforts to address the lack of public transportation in rural areas.
- **Rural Health:** Rural Hospitals are closing at an alarming rate and the loss of access to healthcare, as well as the well-paying jobs associated with healthcare, are creating a crisis in rural Missouri. MRDP encourages our state and federal legislators to work toward solutions that will maintain access to healthcare to all citizens.
- **Workforce Development:** MRDP supports the increased funding for Skilled Workforce Missouri and encourages our economic development leadership to focus on the creation of jobs that pay a living wage.
- **Housing:** The declining inventory of affordable housing, especially for middle-income families, is a serious threat to the many rural communities. MRDP supports efforts to expand housing development assistance programs to encourage and support affordable housing.
- **Economic Development:** State economic development policies and approaches must recognize regional differences and support and encourage efforts around entrepreneurship, small business development, tourism and other efforts that support rural economic development.





Pennsylvania Rural Partners

The Pennsylvania Rural Partners (PRP) is a voice and a resource for Economic, Community and Human Development.

The PRP is an independent, non-profit organization that brings together viewpoints from every sector of the economy to improve the quality of life for Rural Pennsylvania. PRP's fundamental goal is to establish sustainable economic community and human development by providing counsel and leadership in identifying and addressing the issues facing Rural Pennsylvania.

Rural Pennsylvanians comprise a significant segment of Pennsylvania's population. 3.5 million of the state's total 12.7 million residents, according to the 2010 census and rural counties are projected to grow and become more diverse in the future. It's undeniable that the advance of Pennsylvania's 48 rural counties is vital to the overall progress of the Commonwealth.

2018/2019 Highlights

The Pennsylvania Rural Partners along with the support of the Pennsylvania State Office of Rural Health and The Center For Rural Pennsylvania produced a video to showcase rural communities, our history, rural industries, recreation, tourism and rural living in Pennsylvania. The video may be viewed on our website at www.paruralpartners.org.

Rural Health Legislative Briefing

The Pennsylvania Rural Partners in support of the Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health along with numerous Rural Organizations holds an Annual Briefing for the Pennsylvania Legislature on the status of Pennsylvania's Rural Health delivery systems. This year's Briefing was held on May 1st at the Pennsylvania State Capital. The Briefing provided insight into the impacts on the Community Impacts of Broadband Access, including: Broadband Access and Its Impact on the Delivery of Health Care Services in Rural Areas; The Intersection of Agriculture and Broadband; and The Community and Economic Implications of Broadband Access.

The Hearing was co-chaired by Senator Michelle Brooks, Senate Majority Chairperson of the Health and Human Services Committee and Representative Kathy Rapp the House Majority Chairperson of the Health Committee.



Unleashing the power of Vermonters to create a better future!

“Making It Happen” 2018 Vermont Community Leadership Summit

In October 2018, over 500 Vermonters came together to learn, share, and work together for their communities and for the future of Vermont. The Summit was designed to help support leaders, but also asked: “In the face of the challenges before our society, our economy, and our local communities, what should be done to better encourage, inspire, and train leaders with the skills they need to succeed?” VCRD captured a list of action ideas and Summit findings to contribute to a strategic planning process in 2019 to prioritize ways we could collaborate to advance opportunities, training, and support to meet the needs of different populations of leaders as they address local needs throughout Vermont.

Community Visits

VCRD leads strategic action planning sessions to help communities set key priorities and connect with resources to advance them. In 2018, VCRD led Community Visits in Newport, Wallingford, and Montgomery VT. Volunteer task forces are now lined up in these three communities to expand events, boost outdoor recreation, improve community broadband access, revitalize water and sewer infrastructure, advance economic development, and more.

Climate Economy Model Communities Program

The Climate Economy Model Communities Program is helping Vermont communities build and implement priority actions that increase economic vitality and affordability in a time of climate change. In 2018 the program continued implementation work in Middlebury and initiated efforts in Randolph and Swanton. In the springtime, over 300 citizens participated in the Randolph Region Re-Energized (R3) public engagement process and task forces coalesced to rally around energy opportunities, downtown and economic development, and attracting visitors to the community. In Swanton the program has united the local municipal electric utility with Vermont’s energy efficiency utility and natural gas utility to work with residential customers and businesses to identify energy savings opportunities.

Policy

In addition to its direct services to communities, VCRD serves as a strategic policy convener on issues vital to the future of rural Vermont with leadership in the past year for the Vermont Climate Economy Action Team and the Vermont Working Lands Coalition.



Over 500 Vermonters came together to celebrate, discuss, and set direction for the future of community leadership in Vermont at “Making It Happen” the 2018 Vermont Community Leadership Summit.



Residents in Wallingford, VT gather for a community dinner as part of their Community Visit Day to brainstorm action ideas for the future of their town.

The Virginia Rural Center

Over the last year, The Virginia Rural Center (The Center) continued to advance positive change and long term prosperity in Virginia. The Center is a partnership of the Center for Rural Virginia, a Virginia legislative entity advocating for rural policy, and the Council for Rural Virginia, an entity organized by federal statute that is a conduit for building rural capacity by facilitating the collaboration and creation of coalitions of the key economic regions and sectors of the Commonwealth. Accomplishing this mission, The Center gathers stakeholders to bring focus to rural causes in Virginia through several annual events.

Governor’s Summit for Rural Prosperity – An annual event that grows each year, 2018 brought more than 200 attendees. The Summit featured presentations from Governor Ralph Northam, numerous Cabinet officials, economic development representatives and representation from the business community. Summit attendees were encouraged to pursue new and creative ways to attract business, train the workforce, and bring universal broadband access to all Virginians. In addition, panel discussions included: rural economic development and workforce development.



Governor Ralph Northam speaking at The Center’s premier event, The Governor’s Summit for Rural Prosperity

Rural Broadband Roundtable - A primary advocacy point of The Center, current and future efforts surrounding the expansion of broadband access was discussed at a roundtable meeting occurring in Prince George County that included over 150 stakeholders. Attendees gained practical knowledge and discussed solutions for broadband deployment throughout rural Virginia. The event featured media coverage from numerous news outlets.

Rural Caucus Legislative Reception - More than 200 business and government leaders attended the 2019 Rural Caucus Reception in Richmond. A joint effort of The Virginia Rural Center, Virginia Association of Counties’ Rural Caucus, and the General Assembly’s Rural Caucus, the Rural Caucus consists of legislators who represent rural communities in Virginia. The caucus also meets weekly during the General Assembly session to discuss the impact that proposed legislation has on rural Virginia. Speakers included the Governor, Lt. Governor and a representative from the Richmond Federal Reserve Bank.

Rural Housing Roundtable - State, local and federal officials convened in Farmville, a rural town, on June 5 for a Virginia Rural Housing Roundtable luncheon designed to spark dialog around affordability, availability and other issues affecting rural housing across the Commonwealth. Panelists noted the demographic need for affordable housing and discussion occurred surrounding a renewed focus on manufactured housing to ease rural housing challenges.



Stakeholders at the Build Virginia – Workforce Development Meeting

Build VA – Workforce Development Meeting - More than 50 individuals representing the small business community, education, local economic development, training providers, as well as, elected officials from state and local governments were present at the Build Virginia Workforce Development meeting focused on addressing the present and future needs of business and industry in all areas of Virginia.

Working for a Prosperous and Sustainable Future in Rural WA

Partners for Rural Washington (PRWA) is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization that advocates for locally identified rural priorities in the state of Washington. The mission statement for PRWA reads as follows: *“Working with rural communities to develop their capacity to create a prosperous and sustainable future.”* Our goals of elevating the rural voice in our state, advocating for rural priorities and seeking to provide capacity where needed to rural areas, remained our top priorities in 2018.

Rural Broadband

In 2018, rural broadband was PRWA’s program priority and we focused on providing rural broadband planning and technical assistance to three distinct rural regions in Washington state. These were the Olympic Peninsula, the Methow Valley region in Okanogan County and Stevens County, in partnership with the Spokane Tribe. This was accomplished by working with Tribes, local stakeholders, industry experts and private and public leaders to convene a broadband forum in September 2018 in Port Angeles, WA to discuss regional broadband needs. We assisted local leaders to create a Broadband Action Team (BAT) to develop a broadband action plan for the Methow Valley, Okanogan County, and we provided technical assistance to stakeholders and public and private community leaders to develop a draft broadband action plan focused on improving broadband service in selected areas of need in the Methow Valley, Okanogan County. We also worked with the Stevens County/Spokane Tribe Broadband Action Team (SC/ST BAT) to secure funding to provide additional support for the Two Rivers Resort Pre-positioned Fire Camp (TRR PPFC) project to help address the communications needs for use by public safety responders.

Additional Achievements

2018 was also a year in which we continued to meet PRWA’s rural mission by communication, collaboration, and convening. In 2018, we utilized current partnerships with the Association of Washington Cities, the Department of Commerce and other entities represented by our Board of Directors, to market the availability of the Rural Resource Directory to more rural areas. We helped facilitate a convening of the Rural Development Councils from WA, OR and ID in May 2018 in Portland, OR. All three councils shared their current priorities, best practices, funding strategies and sought ways to mutually support our common missions, which was the purpose of the meeting. Finally, In partnership with other community and economic development stakeholders, such as the State Housing Finance Commission and the Communities of Concern (C of C) Commission, we testified before the state legislature several times this past year in support of policy and funding strategies for rural broadband, affordable housing, community facilities and Tribal priorities in rural areas around the state.

Year of Change and Progress

As Wisconsin Rural Partners (WRP) embarked on a new era, following a year long revitalization effort, the 2019 annual Wisconsin Rural Summit was an indicator demonstrating the relevance of WRP's role and mission. This year's Summit was held in the rural northwest Wisconsin community of Rice Lake, and was a huge success with over 125 people in attendance. The Summit showcased the key role WRP can have in addressing key issues impacting rural communities.

Day One featured a bus tour of local communities and businesses in Barron County. Attendees not only visited a variety of businesses, but sampled locally made cheeses and beverages. The tour will conclude with a reception at Lehman's Supper Club.

Day Two featured a keynote presentation by Dr. David Ivan titled "Can Small Communities be Cool?" Dr. Ivan, from Michigan State University, is nationally recognized for his research on successful community change and vitality. There were also presentations and panel discussions on Housing, Agriculture, Health Care, Broadband, Workforce and Community Development.

A highlight of the Thursday session was an address by the new Secretary for the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). This is the first time that a Wisconsin DATCP /secretary accepted an invitation to speak at the annual Summit. Secretary Pfaff, who grew up on a farm and has spent most of his career working on behalf of Wisconsin farmers and rural residents, believes that WRP has a vital role in addressing the challenges facing rural Wisconsin communities.

Over the past two years WRP has been pleased to assist the Purple River Project at Marquette University as it worked with Wisconsin Public Television (WPT) on a documentary titled "Portraits of Rural Wisconsin." The documentary, which was premiered at the Wednesday evening reception, features a series of interviews with folks from the state's dairy communities and, in their own words, documents life in rural Wisconsin today.

WRP was also honored to collaborate with Wisconsin Public Television (WPT) who recorded the Summit sessions for broadcast on their series entitled **University Place**. University Place is a lecture series that covers a wide range of subjects, including science, economics, the environment, health, art, culture and community development.

Two more outstanding rural development initiatives were recognized at the 2019 WI Rural Summit continuing a tradition of awards going back 20 years. **Soil Sisters** and **Vernon Trails** received the 2019 Top Rural Development Initiatives Awards. Their applications stood out from over 20 application. To read about the two projects visit the WRP website www.WIRuralPartners.org. Also check out the WPT website for [Portraits-From-Rural-Wisconsin](#) and [University Place](#).



WIDATCP Secretary Brad Pfaff speaking at the 2019 WI Rural Summit.



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WIRuralPartners.org Contact: Robert T. Borremans, *Secretary/Treasurer*



Throughout the U.S., Councils facilitate collaboration for community and economic development.



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