



Partners for Rural America

2020 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.



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

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 these guiding principles:

- ▶ **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.**

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

Pennsylvania: whsturges@gmail.com

Vermont: vtrural.org

Virginia: cfrv.org

Washington: partnersruralwa.org

Wisconsin: WIRuralPartners.org



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

www.partnersforruralamerica.org

State Council Highlights



Arizona

Overview of 2019 Accomplishments

Local First Arizona (LFA) operating as the Arizona Rural Development Council (AZRDC) is working to build equitable systems for Arizona's local businesses and communities that create a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable Arizona economy. 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, workforce development, and business development programming. Additionally, AZRDC works to drive new dollars to rural places through increased in-state tourism through the development of rural community identities and branding. Finally, AZRDC works to empower rural Arizonans to improve 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 14th 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 65 local officials, non-profit leaders, and business owners were given platforms to discuss creative solutions to some of the most challenging issues impeding growth in rural Arizona encompassing business development and retention; tourism and marketing strategies; healthy community initiatives; and stewardship and sustainability 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.

RuralAZ.com: Discover Small Town Arizona

To help tell the story of AZ's rural communities in a way that captured quality of life and amenities, the AZRDC launched the RuralAZ.com initiative. With a goal to redirect 10% of current vacation spending (\$6.5B annually) into Arizona's rural communities, LFA developed online profiles of 11 Rural AZ towns that showcase a diverse array of arts and culture, history and heritage, outdoor sports and recreations, food and drink, and even small business entrepreneurial opportunities. The profiles are available for use in resident and business recruitment, inspiring local connection to place, and enhancing tourism.



Science Happens Here | Rural STEAM Programming

Science Happens Here is a scavenger hunt card game that encourages students to discover the breadth of STEM-related activities happening daily in their local community. This program bridges the gap between schools and local businesses, encouraging local families to 'buy local' and local businesses to support education and youth engagement through school programs. To play, students and their families are asked to collect Science Happens Here trading cards from local businesses in the community. Each card explains a Scientific, Engineering, Art, Technological, or Mathematical (STEAM) process used within that independent business to showcase the breadth of science-related activities happening outside the classroom on a daily basis. The collectible cards then allow students to unlock household experiments on the Science Happens Here website (www.sciencehappenshereaz.com), earning them a point for their classroom.

Our two newest communities of Kingman and Camp Verde conducted a record-setting 528 experiments in just one semester!

Community Engagement in Rural Idaho

Idaho Community Review Program

2020 marks the 20th anniversary of IRP's Idaho Community Review program. The program has completed community engagement and strategic planning processes in 45 of our rural communities. Recent Community Reviews have been initiated or completed in McCammon, Ashton, Blackfoot, and Harrison. A need to address housing, education, recreation, health, broadband, and community involvement challenges are increasingly being raised in the rural communities we serve.



Harrison Community Review, Sept 2019

We continue to develop the Western Community Assessment Network (WeCan) with University of Idaho Extension and peer organizations in Montana and Wyoming to share information and improve the community assessment programs in the three states. This collaboration has resulted in increased efforts to document the impact of past Community Reviews and in placing greater emphasis on providing post-Review coaching to participating communities. Community coaching in 2019 and 2020 helped the communities of Plummer, Emmett, Cascade, and McCammon achieve goals related to, for example, downtown revitalization, brownfields clean-up and redevelopment, community involvement, recreation, and infrastructure. See communityreview.org for more information.

Voice of the Community Rural Health Project

In 2019 Idaho Rural Partnership developed a partnership with Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health and the Idaho Community Foundation to identify gaps in health services and facilities in rural communities. Grant funding from the Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation was used to conduct focus groups with health stakeholders in six rural Idaho communities and complete analysis of secondary health data. Project findings point to transportation, mental health, substance abuse, dental care, post-treatment care, social isolation, health care costs, health education, recreation, and housing as health-related concerns and needs communities want to address.



Voice of the Community Focus Group, Pierce ID, Nov 2019

The project is working with stakeholders in Pierce and Weippe in 2020 and 2021 to develop an action plan addressing one or more of the health-related needs identified during their focus group.

Coronavirus Pandemic Response

In spring of 2020 we began supporting communities as they respond to and recover from the pandemic. We continue using social media channels to publicize available resources and share examples of successful efforts. In July 2020 we conducted a statewide survey of 333 rural community residents and leaders to increase our understanding of how the pandemic is impacting small towns and to help identify specific topics around which communities need training or other support.

The survey results indicate Idaho's rural communities are in need of funding, training, and other support in the following areas as they recover from the pandemic: broadband, housing, education, strategic planning, youth and family services, small business start-up, and increasing trust and understanding between individuals and organizations. A significant number of survey respondents also expressed concern that a potential increase in people relocating from urban to rural areas could impact the community by, for example, changing cultural norms and reducing community cohesion.

We are currently developing a "rapid response" community review process to allow us to more efficiently and effectively support the large number of communities facing pandemic-related challenges.

Jon Barrett, Executive Director: jon.barrett@irp.idaho.gov or 208-332-1731

irp.idaho.gov | facebook.com/IRP4Idaho



Illinois Rural Partners

Illinois

Rural Partners, Illinois' Rural Development Council, celebrated its 30th year in 2019. In August, we hosted the annual Partners for Rural America (PRA) Conference in Springfield, the city where Abraham Lincoln practiced law, started his family, and ran for the office of President.

We spent the first day on a bus tour of economic development projects in Western Illinois. PRA members visited Abraham Lincoln sites in Springfield. The second day was filled with exciting presentations by PRA and Rural Partners members. Anne Hazlett, Office of National Drug Control Policy, was the keynote speaker.



Partners for Rural America Board

As part of the PRA Conference, Illinois Rural Partners hosted a reception to celebrate our 30th Anniversary. We invited current and former members as well as officials who have supported Rural Partners through the years.

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>.

On December 5, Rural Partners members and guests heard from experts on the 2020 census and its impact on rural communities. We invite you to check out their presentations!

2020 Census Overview and Update: <https://bit.ly/IllinoisCensus2020>

IL Count Me In 2020 Program: <https://bit.ly/IL-CountMeIn2020>



Rural Partners Board

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.

Iowa Rural Council Launches Grant Program to Build Local Capacity

The Iowa Rural Development Council (IRDC) and utility partner ITC Midwest rolled out a grant program this year to provide funds to communities looking to do strategic planning, feasibility studies or cover soft costs related to projects enhancing that town. ITC Midwest operates nearly 6,700 circuit miles of transmission lines in Iowa, Minnesota, Illinois and Missouri, and holds utility status in Wisconsin. IRDC and ITC Midwest leaders identified a hole in existing grant programs that focus on programming or bricks-and-mortar projects. ITC leadership indicated they would be willing to seed what is now known as the “Power of Connection” to empower those communities making projects happen:



The grant program provides up to \$5,000 to communities of under 10,000 and requires successful applicants to leverage meaningful local resources.

“We hope this grant program gives small, rural communities new resources to get things done,” said Sandy Ehrig, IRDC Chair. “It seems that grant funds are more easily accessed when a town is doing a construction project, buying equipment or rolling out new programs. But feasibility studies, strategic planning, and nuts and bolts soft costs—like engineering, architecture or environmental costs—are often not eligible. We were pleased to work with ITC Midwest to change that.”



Stanton, a community of 689 in Southwest Iowa, was the first Power of Connection grant recipient. Local leaders wanted to restore downtown building facades as part of its sesquicentennial celebration. More than a dozen property owners of buildings on Main Street have indicated a willingness to restore the fronts of those structures.

“The City of Stanton was honored to receive the first Power of Connection grant,” said Stanton Community Development Director Jenna Ramsey. “This award is crucial to move our Downtown Façade Renovation project forward with architecture design and will be key to help us raise funds for our goal of completing this project.”

Other communities are lined up, seeking both financial assistance and the impact of the community meeting. One city administrator raved about that contact with the Rural Council team. “The time you committed to us was such a empowering afternoon for me, and I am extremely grateful. At the risk of sounding super cheesy, the power of the connection was so compelling!”

“We have been thrilled to partner with the Council on this project,” said ITC Midwest CEO Dusky Terry. “The impact we are having together on rural communities across Iowa—both those that our company services and those we don’t—is significant. We’re making a difference and ITC Midwest is pleased to be an Iowa Rural Development Council member.

Community Engagement, Events and Advocacy to Build Lasting Prosperity

Maine Alliance for Smart Growth: MASG connects its members at the intersection of community, equity, economy, and environment, enabling coordination and collaborative advocacy around common issues. We advocated for the State's historic rehabilitation tax credit, earning an extension of the sunset for this critical economic development tool. The launch of our Smartini events, postponed by COVID, commenced in August 2020 with smart growth walking tours in two communities. These are COVID-compliant outdoor gatherings of twenty or fewer people open to members of GrowSmart Maine and our steering committee organizations.

<https://growsmartmaine.org/public-policy>

Energy Efficiency Toolkit: While the pandemic creates urgency on all fronts, we continue our work addressing the personal, economic, community and climate impacts of Maine's heavy reliance on fossil fuels. In partnership with the Island Institute, we launched the Energy Efficiency Community Campaign with workshops in Rockland, Windham, and Biddeford. When COVID-19 hit and all in-person meetings were put on hold and in-home energy efficiency work was suspended, we broadened the focus from weatherization to overall energy efficiency to facilitate timely action.

Housing Choices for a Well-Rounded Community: We designed and are exploring partnerships to launch this workshop/action program modeled on the Energy Efficiency Community Campaign. Building on positive response to a Summit 2019 workshop, we will address the widespread demand for municipal tools to advance a variety of housing choices as a critical component of community and economic development.



GrowSmart Maine Summit 2019: Smart Growth Builds Wellness At this annual event, participants tapped into an emerging recognition of personal, community, and global values of smart growth by examining how "Smart Growth Builds Wellness." Our keynotes provided national expertise followed by workshops and City Experience tours that added Maine perspectives to the issue. Over 200 people attended the event where the second annual Maine Smart Growth Awards recognized initiatives in Millinocket, Bethel, Arundel, Portland, and Biddeford.

<https://growsmartmaine.org/2019-summit>

Focus on Equity: We took the Black Lives Matter conflicts across Maine and beyond seriously and began to address this within our organization by drafting and publishing a Racial Equity statement in June. We have devoted time since in research and self-reflection, framing the work ahead in both our programming and organization structure.



Maryland

Rural Maryland Council Highlights for Fiscal Year 2020

The Rural Maryland Council hosted the **2019 Rural Maryland Summit** with the theme **Rural Maryland Rising: Investing in Resiliency, Collaboration, and Innovation** on December 12, 2019 at the DoubleTree Hilton Hotel in Annapolis, Maryland. This one-day conference covered topics on Agriculture, Forestry, Community Development, Economic Development, and Health Care. Other sessions included hearing from our Maryland State Secretaries as well as a panel of State Legislators. Our plenary sessions featured a welcome introduction from Lt. Governor Boyd Rutherford, a presentation of awards for the 2019 AgShowcase, and closing remarks from Comptroller Peter Franchot. Keynote speaker, Paul Costello, Ph.D., executive director of the Vermont Council on Rural Development, set the tone for the Summit. "In the face of our rural challenges, to build unity and momentum to get things done, we need to carry relentless optimism," says Dr. Costello. "Let's stop defining rural as a failure and as a deficit. Let's define it by its strengths and its critical importance to the future, and let's work together for a New Ruralism, a renewal and re-engagement with all the creative forces for good in rural communities."



Comptroller Peter Franchot, Trina Chiasson, Ovipost and Thomas H. Truitt, Jr., President and Chief Executive Officer of Mid-Atlantic Farm Credit

The 2020 Maryland General Assembly Legislative Session was shortened due to the coronavirus pandemic; however, highlights for the RMC included full funding for the **Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF)** in the State's Fiscal Year 2021 Operating Budget in the amount of \$6,327,575. The Council supported tax relief for sales and use taxes on aircraft parts and property taxes for data centers. Expansion of rural broadband deployment was incentivized through a \$9,160,000 Capital Budget appropriation and authorization was approved for Choptank Rural Electric Cooperative to provide broadband services.

Rural Maryland Day was held on February 4, 2020. 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.

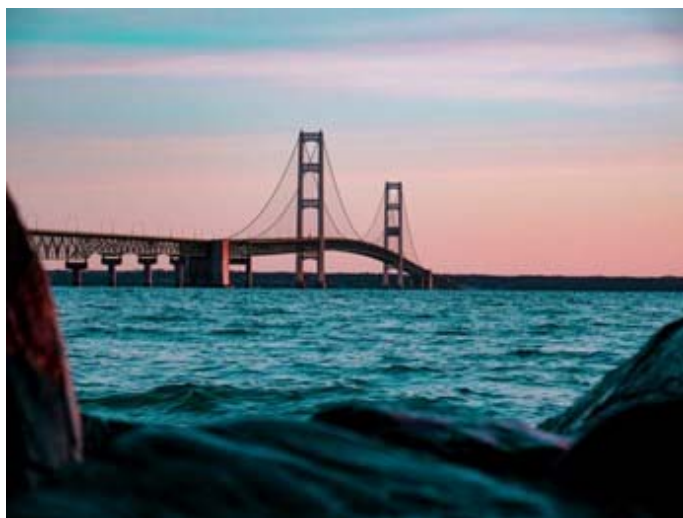
In May 2020, the Council, in partnership with the Rural Maryland Foundation, released a new video, **"We Are Rural Maryland."** To produce this video we crisscrossed the state, visiting **dozens of communities, logging over 2,300 miles** to talk to rural Maryland residents about the projects and programs that they provide for our state. We talked with farmers, health care providers, educators and entrepreneurs. Whether we were in Westminster or in Cambridge or Waldorf we heard stories about resilience and passion. What we really learned was as Marylanders we all have the same joys, struggles, challenges and strengths, and more importantly collectively we share more in common than what differentiates us.



Michigan

Increasing Opportunities in Rural Michigan

Rural Partners of Michigan (RPM) connects and educates community leaders, provides expertise, and advocates for policy and projects that impact rural Michigan. RPM takes part in growing conversations around the state regarding rural community and economic development. Our members are excited to serve as a resource and partner in the work to make rural Michigan a great place to live, work, and play. We do this by advocating for policy and projects that impact rural Michigan, keeping RPM members informed about rural news and opportunities, and hosting an annual conference (the Michigan Small Town and Rural Development Conference) that brings together rural stakeholders from all over the state to engage, learn, and plan for the future of Michigan's rural communities.



In 2020, COVID-19 presented unique challenges for rural communities in Michigan. Due to the pandemic, RPM had to cancel our annual conference that takes place in April. However, we were able to provide learning opportunities and facilitate the sharing of best practices across rural communities with virtual webinars in 2020. One of the main focuses has been on broadband access for rural areas, and we continue to work on policies that increase access across Michigan.

RPM also served on the Michigan Food and Agricultural Housing task force, organized the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, which examined the lack of agricultural housing across the state. Members of the task force included state government departments, nonprofits, USDA-RD, Farm Bureau, and other organizations working in rural Michigan. The goal of the task force was to get input from rural communities and develop an action plan for addressing the housing shortage in rural communities across the state. The report will be released in January, 2021.

RPM, in its partnership with the Community Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM), also went through a year long planning process to include diversity, equity, and inclusion in our organization's work. We look forward to implementing our plan in 2021.



Pennsylvania Rural Partners
Voice of Rural Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania

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.



Vermont

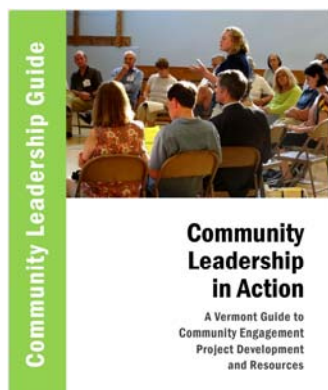
Unleashing the power of Vermonters to create a better future!

COVID-19 Recovery Efforts

VCRD is a convener of public process—we bring people together. In early 2020 VCRD convened Community Visit processes to set priorities and develop action for the future in Wheelock and Rockingham. Then, with the COVID-19 crisis, VCRD quickly pivoted to support recovery efforts, becoming the backbone and facilitator of local **Community Response Teams** and convener of coordinative efforts from statewide **Resource Providers**. VCRD was invited by the Governor to lead his **COVID-19 Local Solutions and Community Action Team** to lead and support local recovery efforts. With that team, VCRD has led a series of **Strategic Recovery Visits** in every county to approach challenges, recovery strategies, and ideas for the future. The Visits have connected Resource Providers to recovery work on the ground to spur local progress.

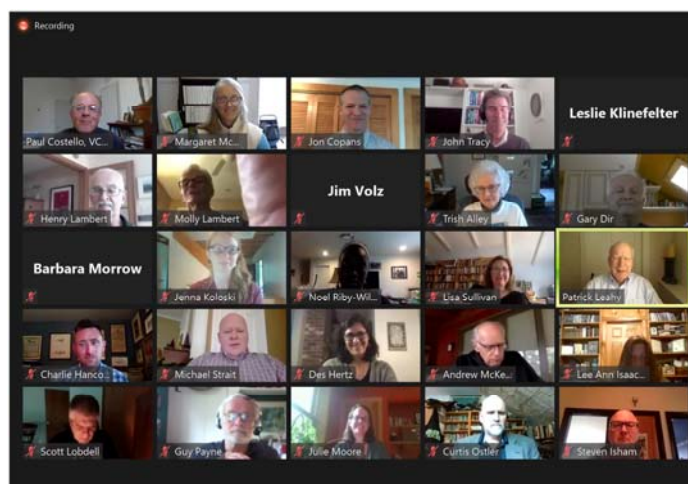
VCRD Launches Community Leadership Network

In August, VCRD launched the **Vermont Community Leadership Network** to offer support for new, emerging, and veteran community leaders through training and coaching, connections to resources, and other support for advancing local projects. VCRD serves as the network backbone, systematically convening for skills training and around project arenas and, over time, will convene affinity groups of leaders



working on similar projects which can provide peer support and lever mutual success. VCRD also launched the **Community Leadership Guide** with over a dozen short chapters on leadership skills and another score on projects frequently prioritized for community action.

Chapters describe how to get it done, who can help, and where to find resources to succeed. This unique compendium will become the workbook for future projects by a new generation of town leaders stepping up to renew their communities and set paths forward.



One screen of many showing attendees of the Community Leadership Network launch that drew nearly 200 Vermonters

The Vermont Proposition

Twelve years after managing the Council on the Future of Vermont, VCRD is evaluating the needs and values expressed by Vermonters in that process, Vermont's recent policy history, and findings from communities and from COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, to frame a dialogue designed to build a conceptual framework for the future of the state. A first draft of the proposition is currently being developed which will be shared, tested, corrected and honed by public and stakeholder engagement over the course of the fall 2020 and early winter 2021. Once done, it will be presented for adoption by all interested people, organizations, and businesses in Vermont, who together will make up the Partnership for the Future of Vermont. A strategic leadership team from this partnership will further refine and drive the implementation of key proposition strategies, toward policies for a healthier, more equitable, prosperous and resilient future for the state.

The Vermont Proposition effort is a sweeping initiative based on the input of hundreds of creative Vermonters and thought leaders—thousands if you count all those that have contributed to our community processes, participated in community leadership events, or convened to contribute to Vermont policies for the future. The goal is to build a non-partisan policy framework for the key actions the state needs to take over the next five years in order to thrive over the next thirty.

The Virginia Rural Center

The Virginia Rural Center (The Center) has continued to advance prosperity throughout the Commonwealth in 2020, although the implications from COVID-19 and the current pandemic have presented challenges and required an innovative approach. 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 works with stakeholders to bring attention to rural Virginia through education, advocacy and several annual events.

Governor's Summit for Rural Prosperity – The seventh annual Governor's Summit on Rural Prosperity was the first to be held online. More than 200 attendees joined the event and the Community College System served as the virtual host allowing a seamless event free of technical issues.

The Summit featured presentations from Governor Ralph Northam, members of Congress, the CEO of Land O'Lakes and economic development leaders. Northam, along with members of Congress, stressed the need for broadband, particularly with the current increased reliance on internet during the pandemic. Additionally, the economic development leaders discussed what Virginia's economy will look like moving forward in a post-pandemic world, and how rural Virginia can prepare for the future.



Rural Caucus Legislative Reception – The 2020 Rural Caucus Reception occurred in Richmond (face to face) before the pandemic began in February 2020. We had government and business officials from 47 counties in Virginia attend the event. 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 rural caucus also met weekly during the 2020 General Assembly session to discuss the impact that proposed legislation has on rural Virginia.



Economic Recovery Virtual Roundtable – Governor Northam and his Chief Workforce Advisor, Dr. Megan Healey participated in a virtual roundtable with Center Board members regarding the Commonwealth's economic recovery from COVID-19 crisis. The discussion was centered around how to support businesses and workers with the unprecedented challenges they are facing as a result of the pandemic. Board members discussed the challenges they are facing in economic development, workforce, agriculture, higher education, business and healthcare.

Working for a Prosperous and Sustainable Future in Rural WA

Partners for Rural Washington (PRWA) is a nonprofit organization that advocates for locally identified rural priorities in Washington state. 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 a top priority in 2020. The following is a summary of our most recent activities.

In late 2019, PRWA completed its broadband planning work in two areas of Washington state. First, we completed a broadband development plan update for the Methow Valley in Okanogan County. The plan update was delivered to the Methow Valley Broadband Action Team, which decided to take over the development of applications for the necessary resources to complete expansion of the broadband infrastructure in the Methow Valley area. In addition, working through the Washington State University Extension office with funding provided by PRWA, a report was completed on the Two Rivers Prepositioned Fire Camp in Stevens County, in cooperation with the Stevens County/Spokane Tribe Broadband Action Team. WSU Extension provided project management, staffing, and administration of the feasibility/technical assessment for the Two Rivers Fire Camp. Their report summarized the findings, continuing the project. Finally, PRWA worked with tribes on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington to approve the use of the Lower Elwa Heritage Center as a training HUB for local Tribes; helped develop a business partnership for the Emerald Coast Opportunity Zone for broadband development with Jamestown Network; and helped the Lummi Tribe secure a CERB Rural Broadband Planning Grant through Washington State.

In 2020, in cooperation with the Washington Department of Commerce, the Association of Washington Cities (AWC), and several non-profit providers of specific technical resources, we developed a Concept Paper for providing technical assistance to rural communities in Washington state that had previously identified community needs but did not have the resources or staff capacity to prepare applications for the necessary resources to meet those needs. PRWA shared the concept paper with several foundations in Washington and, after a process to identify specific examples of where assistance was needed, received a \$75,000 grant from the Ballmer Group to address specific needs of rural communities in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

PRWA then began a process of contacting small (under 5,000 population) rural communities in Eastern Washington to identify communities that had identified needs but lacked the necessary resources to prepare applications for the resources to meet their needs. Following a two-month process involving discussions with state agencies, AWC and approximately 20 small city and county elected officials and organizations, the PRWA Board agreed to enter a partnership with Innovia Foundation and Avista Corporation to provide technical assistance for two previously identified projects in rural Eastern Washington: The Lincoln County Broadband Expansion Project, and the Development of a Telemedicine Resource Clinic in the town of Garfield, Whitman County. PRWA will provide technical assistance resources to apply for the necessary funding to complete these projects over a two-year period.



Year of Change and Progress

For the past 10 years, Wisconsin Rural Partners has partnered with a variety of other statewide agencies and organizations to hold four Small Community Forums annually.



More than half of Wisconsin's municipalities are communities of fewer than 2,500 residents. Despite their large number, these small communities represent a wide variety of geographic and economic areas within the state. Because of their small size, these communities have unique issues and needs that are often very different from those of larger communities.

The Forums are intended to bring together those serving and working in and with communities of populations less than 2,500 to address common issues, network and share best practices and identify strategies to address shared concerns through case studies and roundtable discussion groups.

Everyone who cares about promoting, enhancing and preserving the future of small town Wisconsin were invited to attend these annual events. Communities are encouraged to share their accomplishments, ask questions about successes and challenges in other communities learn about new opportunities, and explore great ideas.

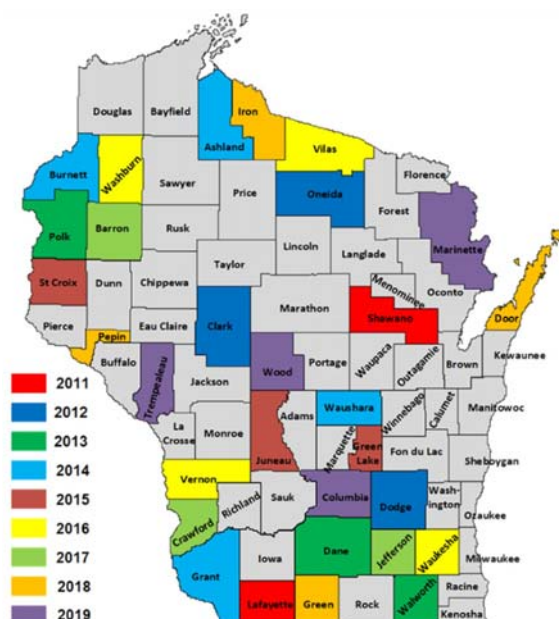
Participants in the forums represent a broad range of community citizens ranging from community leaders, elected officials, area volunteers, business leaders, educators, economic development professionals, planners and others interested in small community issues. Over the past 5 years, more than 500 people have participated in the forums.

The forums are held at geographically diverse sites (see the chart below) chosen so all corners of the State are represented. Local leaders are solicited to participate and serve as host and moderate the events. They are also responsible for arranging the facilities and meeting support services.

The Small Community Forums are coordinated through a coalition of statewide agencies and organizations involved in rural community development. The partnering organizations include:

- League of Wisconsin Municipalities www.lwm-info.org
- USDA Rural Development www.rd.usda.gov/wi
- UW Extension Center for Community & Economic Development
www.cced.ces.uwex.edu/downtownrevitalization/
- Wisconsin Downtown Action Council (WDAC)
www.wisconsinowntown.org
- Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation www.wedc.org
- Wisconsin Rural Partners www.wirural.org

The Small Community Forums will be virtual in 2020. Dates for the forums have not yet been scheduled.





PRA Board members and guests at the 2019 PRA Annual Conference held in Illinois.

2020 PRA officers:

CHAIR: Jessica AcMoody, Rural Partners of Michigan

VICE-CHAIR: Kimber Lanning, Arizona Rural Development Council

SECRETARY: Jon Barrett, Idaho Rural Partnership

TREASURER: Paul Costello, Vermont Council on Rural Development

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