

2018 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.



Councils collaborating and facilitating

Top to bottom: Michigan Rural Council, Arizona Rural Development Council, GrowSmart Maine, and Wisconsin Rural Partners.

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.**

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

- ▶ That SRDCs shall include representation from all agencies, organizations and individuals who are dedicated to enhancing economic and social opportunities for rural citizens.
- ▶ That SRDCs shall seek the support and participation of the governors of the states in which the SRDC operates.
- ▶ That participation in SRDC decisions and operations shall be open to all who wish to participate.
- ▶ The SRDCs shall represent the diversity of states' rural populations and geography.
- ▶ That 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.
- ▶ That SRDCs shall provide open, neutral environments where all participants' voices can be heard and where major decisions are reached, whenever possible, through consensus.
- ▶ That SRDCs shall receive financial and other support from diverse sources.
- ▶ That 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.
- ▶ That all SRDCs shall participate in the nationwide network of SRDCs known as Partners for Rural America.

State Council Highlights



Arizona

Overview of 2017 Accomplishments

Arizona Rural Development Council (AZRDC) is working to strengthen Arizona's economy in multiple ways. AZRDC helps rural businesses become more competitive in order to reduce economic leakage from their communities by providing business owners tools and resources including new technology training, marketing opportunities, and strategies for business development. Additionally, AZRDC works to drive new dollars to rural places through increasing in-state tourism by leveraging arts and culture, Main Streets, and agri-tourism. Finally, AZRDC works to empower rural Arizonans to improve their access to healthy foods which has health and economic benefits for all residents.

The Arizona Rural Development Council (www.azrdc.org) and a team of 12 staff with 6 statewide offices. Additionally, AZRDC has a statewide blog, which gets read 13,000 times per month, an email list of 6,078 subscribers and LFA has over 300,000 social media followers. These resources are available for our rural businesses and community partners to promote and educate all Arizonans about all that rural Arizona has to offer.

The Arizona Rural Development Council works to create new models of community and economic development that tie together small businesses, historic downtown main streets, tourism strategies, and community planning. The Rural Advisory Board consists of representatives from all 15 counties that work to develop quality topics and a diverse array of speakers for the Rural Policy Forum each year.

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 Safford to share successes and best practices.

Science Happens Here: Bringing STEM education to communities in new ways

AZRDC **launched** Science Happens Here (www.sciencehappenshereaz.com), a science trading card game aimed at students in 4-6th grades. Students collect cards with everyday science on them at local businesses and conduct experiment to win prizes. The café has the card with the science of caffeine, and the bakery has the science of yeast, etc. Over 800 students in one small town have played over two years, and plans for expansion into another town are underway.

Healthy Food Systems: Fueling Rural Arizona

Food is at the center of our daily lives, and agriculture and food production are major driving forces in the state's economy. Supporting Arizona food entrepreneurs, farmers, ranchers, and others in the local food industry is an important part of our mission in fostering food-based community economic development and expanding access to affordable, fresh and local foods in both urban and rural areas. Our portfolio of foods initiatives demonstrates the connection between food, health, community and the environment, as well as fosters new opportunities for Arizona farmers, ranchers and food artisans. In 2017, AZRDC completed a food hub feasibility study in the Copper Corridor region of Arizona. Findings have been used to promote collaboration and drive new resources into the area.

Good Food Finder AZ - Good Food Finder is Arizona's first statewide directory of healthy foods, featuring growers, producers, ranchers, farmer's markets, community gardens and more. There's information on resources available to beginning farmers as well as restaurants looking to source more locally produced food.

Food & Farm Finance Forum - This year's Food & Farm Finance Forum was held in the Central Arizona region, with over 230 farmers and producers and economic development entities, local food system advocates, and students convened for two days to change the way our desert state feeds itself. This year's focus was on marketing and outreach, food aggregation and distribution, and access to capital and business development with an overall emphasis on building food hubs and collaboration.

Complete community assessments

AZRDC works extensively in rural Arizona to help build self-reliance and strong, diverse economies. In 2017, workforce development assessments, tourism assessments and supply chain development work was completed in four rural communities: Bisbee, Ajo, Superior, and Globe.



Illinois Rural Partners

Illinois

As Illinois Rural Partners prepares to celebrate its 30th year, we are reminded of our commitment to intergovernmental cooperation and collaboration to help rural communities become empowered, build their assets and advance their initiatives. In the 1980s, the Rural Partners/Kellogg program, “Helping Rural Communities Prepare for Economic Development” was the genesis for the public-private partnership that grew into Rural Partners, and was designated as the rural development council for Illinois. With strong leadership from Illinois Extension and partnership from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and sponsoring organizations in 12 program counties, those counties built leadership capacity, developed strategic plans, and built the foundation for economic development. Some of the issues identified then remain, and other obstacles and opportunities have surfaced, so our work continues.

Because of the strong leadership of Norman Walzer and Chris Merrett and co-sponsorship by the Illinois Institute of Rural Affairs, the Office of the Lt. Governor and Illinois Rural Partners, 260 attended the 29th annual rural community economic development conference in March 2018. With two plenary and 18 breakout sessions addressing rural manufacturing, asset based community development, the arts in rural economic development, community leadership, rural entrepreneurship, local public finance and rural workforce development, 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.

Illinois Rural Partners continually seeks input from its members and others to identify current challenges and opportunities, including rural population decline, youth outmigration, education and workforce development to meet current job opportunities, wealth transfer, local governance, creative business models such as community supported businesses, health care and other services to meet the growing elderly population in rural areas, the opioid crisis, accessible and high speed broadband, renewable energy and others.

Financial support for Rural Partners comes solely from its dues paying members. To involve and show appreciation to these members, two special “member only” events were held.

Members of Rural Partners met with Dr. Sameer Vohra, SIU School of Medicine, after the Rural Partners Board meeting November 14. Dr. Vohra provided information on social determinants of health and projects to address [health issues in Illinois](#). Illinois State Senator Andy Manar also joined the group to discuss recent school funding formula reform that he spearheaded that is expected to benefit small and rural schools. SIU School of Medicine hosted the Rural Partners board meeting and presentations as part of an effort on behalf of the Rural Partners board to offer special activities and presentations to members of Rural Partners.

The second event, in July, was a showcase of community and economic development projects including a visit to Casey, Illinois, home of world’s largest wind chime, rocking chair, golf tee, pitchfork, wooden shoes and mailbox (www.bigthingsmalltown.org) which are a great tourist draw and an example of a local business giving back. The second tour of the day was to the Center for Clean Energy Research and Education at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston.

ruralpartners.org

2019 PRA Annual Conference



Illinois Rural Partners (IRP) and Abe Lincoln are hosting the 2019 Partners for Rural America annual conference. You’ll enjoy the sights and experiences of its state capitol, [Springfield](#), set amidst fields of corn and soybeans as far as the eye can see. But there is more

– the hospitality of Midwesterners, successful community and business projects and initiatives, presentations by nationally recognized rural experts, and visits to Lincoln’s home, the [Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum](#), [Lincoln’s law office](#), the [old state capitol](#), the [Dana-Thomas house](#) designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, and many more historic venues within walking distance of the host hotel. Contact IRP to find out more: info@ruralpartners.org.



Iowa Rural Council Expands Operations, Hosts Successful Summit!

The Iowa Rural Development Council (IRDC) took tremendous strides this year, formalizing its operations and hiring an executive director. And it hosted its second Iowa Rural Development Summit, drawing more than 300 people to downtown Grinnell.

IRDC has operated informally for the last eight years, meeting quarterly and mainly operating as an information-sharing platform for members. But this year it raised its profile, began soliciting contributions from members, expanded membership to include private-sector partners, and actively engaged in issues facing small towns.

IRDC contracted with former USDA Rural Development state director Bill Menner to serve as its executive director. It also organized a “Housing 360” team to assist rural communities seeking support in developing housing strategies.

Those actions set the stage for Iowa Rural Development Summit 2.0, a two-day affair that focused on people, places, leaders and housing. Almost 70 different communities sent three-person teams to the Summit to build capacity in those areas, develop blueprints for action and learn from the successes of other small towns.

IRDC also used the Summit as an opportunity to celebrate those successes. It presented its first-ever Rural Innovation Awards, recognizing places that were doing amazing things. Woodbine Main Street and the City of Woodbine were honored for demonstrating local leadership. The Jackson County Economic Alliance was recognized for its impact on people and the local workforce. Clayton County Development Group and Farmers Mutual Telephone Company were honored for their innovative housing efforts (they are the first two groups to work with the IRDC Housing 360 Team). And the Hotel Grinnell, which hosted the Summit, was recognized for its investment in the community. The 44-room boutique hotel is located in what was the city’s former junior high.

Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds and Lieutenant Governor Adam Gregg, both natives of rural communities, addressed the Summit and praised the 300+ attendees for their efforts to create vital rural places.

As the Iowa Rural Development Council evolves from an ad hoc group of partners who meet informally to an organization that actively engages in rural issues, supports communities and build capacity, it is expanding its membership and its outreach.

A key to that strategy is paid staff (executive director Bill Menner), a social media presence, and a website. IRDC was fortunate to have a rural Iowa native, Kris Winter, step forward to help. Kris owns M2K Marketing Group and put her team on a website that can be found at www.iowardc.org. The Council is eager to make the best possible use of the site and the team.



Governor Kim Reynolds and Lieutenant Governor Adam Gregg participate in the Rural Summit working lunch, interacting with leaders from Ely and Monticello. All 70 communities facilitated lunch discussions.

Community Engagement, Events and Advocacy to Build Lasting Prosperity

Making Headway in the Katahdin Region

GrowSmart Maine brought our community engagement program to three towns in the Katahdin Region as they face the challenge of transitioning from an identity as paper mills towns to “what’s next.” Over 50 community members from Medway, East Millinocket and Millinocket identified shared reasons they choose to live in these towns. Residents and business owners then completed several projects to connect their communities to each other and to these values of family and youth, easy access to beautiful and rich natural resources that serve as their own invitation to the region, a sense of heritage and culture, and a need for investments in infrastructure in the downtown areas to create opportunities for growth. <http://growsmartmaine.org/initiatives/making-headway-in-your-community/>



Mainers gather at GrowSmart’s Annual Summit (top) and the Community Celebration for Making Headway in the Katahdin Region

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. The Alliance is open to all Mainers and does not end at Maine’s coastline but extends into the Gulf of Maine to inhabited islands. 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 2017

Maine’s premier annual smart growth summit attracts leaders from across sectors and across the state to share experiences, build knowledge, and create connections. The all-day event featured success stories and replicable models through interactive morning tours and workshops nested in the host community followed by engaging sessions with experts in the afternoon. The theme of this year’s Summit, “First, Build a Bridge,” tied to our community engagement tools in Bridging the Divide between developers and neighbors. Featured speakers included John Robert Smith of Smart Growth America and Jonathan Arnold of Arnold Development Group. <http://growsmartmaine.org/annual-summit-2017/>

Climate Change and Energy Efficiency

GrowSmart Maine works within the collaborative framework of The Maine Climate Table to connect and enhance existing resources, programs, and networks toward increasing uptake of Energy Efficiency measures statewide and across all sectors. In addition, we lead Maine Climate Table’s ‘Communicating with Mainers on Climate Change’ workshops, sharing Maine-based behavioral research on known climate change impacts in Maine including the need for energy efficiency, the economic value of clean energy, Maine farming, marine and coastal sectors. <https://www.maineclimatetable.org/>



Maryland

2019 Legislative Budget Includes Historic Funding for Rural Maryland Communities

On April 10, 2018, the Maryland Legislature adjourned. Among the session's many accomplishments, the Legislature approved the Fiscal Year 2019 State Operating Budget that includes funds to support the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF), a key step forward in addressing disparities in the State's rural areas.

The Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund will receive \$6,000,000 in funding for targeted investment to promote economic prosperity in Maryland's traditionally disadvantaged and underserved rural communities. These funds will sustain efforts to promote rural regional cooperation, facilitate entrepreneurial activities, and support key community colleges and nonprofit providers. For Fiscal Year 2018, 27 grants were distributed to 27 organizations throughout the State. Information on grantees may be found at www.rural.maryland.gov.



RMC Executive Director, Charlotte Davis, RMC Board Chair, Josh Hastings, and the RMC Executive Board were presented with the Rural Maryland Day Proclamation by Governor Larry Hogan on Rural Maryland Day 2018.



The Rural Maryland Council was awarded the "Community Partner of the Year Award in Recognition of Outstanding Dedication and Commitment to Maryland Community Action Agencies." The Council's Vice-Chair, Matthew Tefteau, Director of Government Relations (pictured left, accepting the award) for the Maryland Department of Agriculture, accepted the award on behalf of the Rural Maryland Council. The Council is proud to be a partner with an organization that is striving to making collaboration work across government, business, philanthropy, non-profit organizations and citizens to achieve significant and lasting social change.

The Council also held a successful 2017 Rural Summit on December 1, 2017 entitled "Bridging the Divide: Strengthening Rural and Urban Communities". Nearly 300 rural stakeholders gathered in Annapolis to discuss challenges in agriculture, community development, economic development and health care. Keynote Speakers included Lieutenant Governor Boyd Rutherford, Attorney General Brian Frosh, and University System of Maryland Chancellor William Kirwin. The Summit also held its first "Ag Pitch" competition where five finalists presented their agriculture technology ideas/business plans to compete for cash and related business services. The grand prize winner of \$7,500 cash and prizes was Ben Lee of Rockville. Lee's firm NABAS Group, Inc., (Nano Air Bubble Aeration System) increases crop yields by 20 percent and extends the harvest's freshness for an additional seven days.

On April 24, 2018, Governor Larry Hogan signed into law SB968/HB243—Task Force on Rural Internet, Broadband, Wireless, and Cellular Service — Study and Extension. The legislation expands and extends the work of the Task Force on Rural Internet, Broadband, Wireless, and Cellular Service. The 22-member task force, which includes four members of the Senate and four members of the House of Delegates, must study and make recommendations regarding how Western Maryland counties; Southern Maryland counties; Eastern Shore counties; and Frederick, Carroll, and Harford counties can work together to obtain federal assistance to improve internet, broadband, wireless, and cellular services and accessibility in the affected counties.

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Increasing Opportunities in Rural Michigan

Small Town and Rural Development Conference

More than 150 rural leaders gathered in April in Northern Michigan for the annual Michigan Small Town and Rural Development Conference. Presentations from rural communities across Michigan included topics such as rural broadband access, the Michigan Employer Resource Network, Children's Savings Accounts, and Talent Development and Attraction. Staff from the offices of Senator Debbie Stabenow and Senator Gary Peters were on-site to talk about progress on the Farm Bill as well as other rural economic development programs. We also had a presentation by the new Michigan USDA Rural Development Director Jason Allen.



Michigan USDA Rural Development Director Jason Allen addresses the attendees at the Michigan Small Town and Rural Development Conference

The conference provides an opportunity to showcase topics critical to rural development in a way that facilitates discussion of new ideas and moves ideas to action. Participants are inspired to see the innovative ways that rural areas across the state and country are finding ways to drive economies, increase wealth of rural areas, and improve the lives of residents.

Community Assessments

The Michigan Rural Council offers community assessments to rural communities in Michigan. The assessments provide an opportunity to assess a community's challenges, identify assets, and define issues to be addressed. They are locally led and consist of multiple listening sessions in which everyone in the community has a chance to voice their opinion. After the assessment, communities are provided with a written report which consists of findings from the workgroups and meetings, and opportunities and resources based upon the plans that come out of the assessment. They are also connected with other communities who have successfully completed similar projects to facilitate sharing of best practices. Since 2012, the council has completed assessments in 23 rural communities across Michigan.



Missouri Rural
Development Partners

Missouri

Survey Identifies Key Issues for Missourians

The Missouri Rural Development Partners (MRDP), in The 2017 Missouri Survey Report

The Missouri Rural Development Partners (MRDP) in partnership with the University of Missouri and the Missouri Department of Economic Development, launched a state wide survey in early 2017. The survey was designed to gather input from citizens across the state on how they felt their communities were doing, what were key challenges and opportunities. Survey results were coupled with economic and demographic data to provide a comprehensive view of the state. The report is available for download here: <https://extensiondata.missouri.edu/Pro/ExCEED/Docs/Missouri%20Rural%20Survey%202017%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>



Key findings include:

- Only 21 of Missouri’s 115 counties have exceeded 2007 levels of population and employment.
- 25 counties gained population but not jobs and 14 added jobs but not population.
- 52 counties are still below 2007 levels of employment and population.

One of the most telling responses came from the question “My Community is doing fine and doesn’t need to change.” Nearly 82% 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, most felt that the local economy would not improve over the next 5 years.

There was a recognition of the mismatch between worker skills and employers needs, but a lack of awareness of where and how to get job training.

Other areas of concern included:

- Housing — rental housing is a particular need in outstate Missouri.
- Infrastructure — respondents concerned about their local government’s ability to maintain existing infrastructure.

2017 Annual Meeting

MRDP held its annual meeting on September 19, 2017 with nearly 100 members in attendance. Speakers discussed demographic and economic changes, broadband and rural health. The conference marked MRDP’s first statewide gathering in a number of years and was the re-launch of the organization. The 2018 Annual Conference will be held on October 3, 2018.

mrdp.net Sharon Gulick, Executive Director, MO RuralPartners@gmail.com



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.



Members of the Pennsylvania Rural Partners present at the Annual Briefing for the Pennsylvania Legislature.

2017/2018 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 this April in the Pennsylvania State Capital. The Hearing provided insight into the role of safety net providers in meeting the health care needs of rural underserved populations.

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

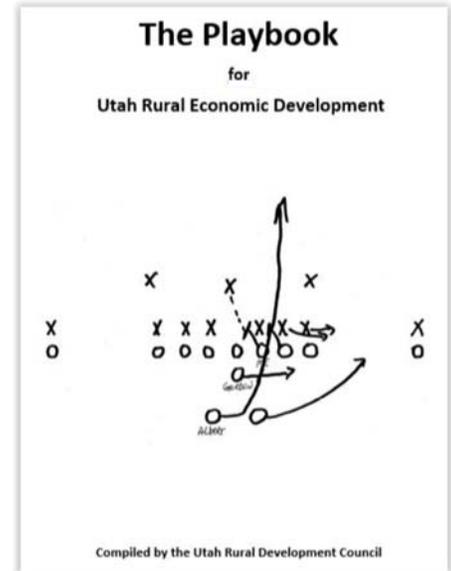


Utah Rural Development Council

The highlights of this past year were the development of a rural Utah economic development *Playbook*, and the hosting of the 30th annual Utah Rural Summit – the nation’s longest running rural development conference.

In January 2017, Utah Governor Gary Herbert announced in his State-of-the-State address a goal of creating 25,000 new jobs in rural Utah by 2020. This goal was set in recognition of the fact that many rural counties were not sharing proportionately in the strong economic growth being experienced in the urban areas of the State. The Governor challenged all state agencies, as well as business leaders, to engage in this effort.

In response to this call to action, the Utah Rural Development Council (URDC) met with rural economic developers to brainstorm ways to stimulate rural job creation. From these initial discussions it became clear that there were many good ideas for economic development, but they needed to be prioritized and pursued via a strong policy and legislative strategy.



With this in mind, the URDC assumed the leadership role in developing this strategy. In coordination with the Governor’s Office of Economic Development, the URDC surveyed rural leaders on economic development rural issues and priorities, and reached out across the state for ideas to strengthen rural economies. Through this outreach, 68 unique ideas were submitted by individuals and organizations. These were compiled into what became known as *The Playbook for Utah Rural Economic Development*.

The URDC then convened a meeting of rural leaders from across the state to determine the top priorities from the Playbook ideas. Using the survey data as a reality check, the URDC facilitated the process of identifying the top five priorities to be pursued in the coming months, and also helped develop a policy and legislative strategy for the next legislative session.

Many counties followed up by using the Playbook to help develop local economic development priorities and strategies.

Additionally, the URDC made the Governor’s *25k Jobs Initiative* the centerpiece of the annual Utah Rural Summit. At the Summit, sessions were focused on job creation in key rural industry sectors, and the Governor committed to meeting with each county individually to learn how the State could support their local economic plans and priorities.

By the end of the Utah Legislative session in March, 2018, three of the top priorities selected through the URDC process were adopted by the legislature, including funding for a rural job creation incentive, and funding for a major pilot project to train rural workers and connect them with free-lance and work-at-home job opportunities – jobs that can be performed from even the most remote rural towns.

Unleashing the power of Vermonters to create a better future!

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 2017 the program worked intensively in Pownal and Middlebury. In Pownal nearly 150 individuals participated in the *Empower Pownal* process and lined up priorities to improve recreation and trails, enhance economic development, create an agricultural network, and institute community-wide green-up activities. In Middlebury over 70 residents are now working to improve the transportation system, assist farmers in transitioning to more climate-friendly practices, work with homes and businesses to reduce energy use and increase renewable energy generation, and develop an organization to support climate action in the Middlebury area.



Residents of Middlebury gather in a community forum to discuss transportation—one of 8 community forums held throughout the day to line up potential ideas for the future of the climate economy.

Catalysts of the Climate Economy: Advancing our Economic Future in an Age of Climate Change

In September 2017, VCRD held the cc:econ Catalysts of the Climate Economy Summit drawing over 500 business leaders, entrepreneurs, investors and innovators from across the country to advance the national Climate Economy. The Summit built connections, investment, and momentum around the national climate economy effort and positioned Vermont as a leader and center point for climate economy innovation.

Community Visits

VCRD leads strategic action planning sessions to help communities set key priorities and connect with resources to advance them. In 2017, VCRD led Community Visits in Lyndon and Burke, VT. Over 62 volunteers are working in Lyndon to establish a recreation program, support economic development and build a co-working space in a revitalized downtown building, and revitalizing downtown businesses, events, and storefronts. In Burke, task forces are lined up to rebuild water and sewer infrastructure in the villages to support building revitalization and business development, expand and improve education facilities, and improve traffic and pedestrian safety and build trails connecting East and West Burke.



Residents of Burke Vermont come together for Community Meeting Day to review action ideas, select key priorities for the future of the town, and sign up for task forces to move those priorities forward.

Working for a Prosperous and Sustainable Future in Rural WA

On May 18th, 19th and 20th, 2018 Partners for Rural Washington (PRWA) staff and Board members attended the Regards to Rural (R2R) Conference in Portland OR. This bi-annual conference showcases current, rural community development trends, highlights best practices and promotes discussion about current items of import in the NW region of the US. The theme this year was “Bridges Between Rural and Urban” and included among many other pertinent sessions, a workshop on how rural broadband needs could be better met.

In Washington state, PRWA has prioritized working to help meet the need for rural broadband by focusing on technical assistance capacity building. To this end PRWA has helped form a partnership between PRWA, the State Department of Commerce, Washington University Cooperative Extension Service and T3 Tribal Technology Training to offer broadband planning assistance to rural areas. We are currently

focused on three rural regions in WA. Because of this focus in WA, PRWA was asked to help organize the broadband session at R2R which used a panel discussion format that allowed state legislators, broadband service providers, technical assistance providers and industry stakeholders to address a series of pre-determined questions as well as the opportunity to respond to questions by workshop attendees. Focus for this discussion also included how rural areas could best plan for needed broadband with an emphasis on how planning and project development capacity could be better provided to rural regions in need of these services.

In addition to the broadband session, the RDC boards and staffs from WA, OR and ID met to have a tri-state discussion about funding sources, current projects and to share best practices. USDA Rural Development State Office staff were also present along with some staff from state government and other rural stakeholders. Focus for this discussion included how the stakeholders present could better work with each other and support our respective rural work.

In mid 2017 PRWA worked with the State Department of Commerce and the Association of Washington Cities to hold rural listening sessions around the state. We were able to meet with community leaders from approximately 25 rural communities in eastern and western WA. The need for high speed broadband in rural areas emerged as one of the top priorities for the communities who attended. As a result of this PRWA has been able to:

- ◆ Form a work partnership between PRWA, State Department of Commerce, WSU Cooperative Extension and T3 Tribal Technology Training to work collaboratively to provide needed technical assistance capacity for rural broadband in WA state
- ◆ Form a 2018 plan to assist 3 communities in the state with planning assistance to help meet local broadband need
- ◆ Identify and secure funding to help with planning assistance for the rural broadband projects noted



May 2018 Regards to Rural Conference attendees in Portland OR listen to presenters at a rural broadband discussion. Focus was on how rural areas can best plan for and develop needed broadband services.

Crossroads to a Bright Future

Wisconsin Rural Partners (WRP), unlike some other state rural development councils, is a strictly all volunteer organization without paid staff. WRP does not receive financial support from state government or any other type of supported organization. The resources WRP receives are earned through fundraising, partnerships and the delivery of services.

As a result, WRP found itself at a crossroads in 2017. Unable to sustain itself, both financially and in leadership capacity, WRP contemplated dissolving. Faced with declining resources, dwindling board membership/participation, and a void of executive leadership; the WRP board met with the intent to shut down operations. Before making the final decision, however, it was agreed to seek the opinion of two key constituency organizations - the Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) and the Wisconsin League of Municipalities (WLM). Both organizations strongly encouraged WRP to continue citing that WRP was the only independent nonpartisan organization representing and promoting the interests and needs of rural communities throughout Wisconsin.

Buoyed by the encouragement of WCA, LWM and other partnering organizations, WRP embarked on a reorganization process. A strategic planning session resulted in a new focus and priorities. The mission statement, vision and objectives were rewritten. Long-term board members left and new board members were recruited. A concerted effort was undertaken to improve relationships with existing partners and reach out to create new partnerships. The annual Wisconsin Rural Summit was restructured to focused on four priority need topics: Infrastructure, Health Care, Housing and Agriculture.

The outcome of these efforts was a newly seated board (at full capacity for the first time in more than 5 years) with broader representation from across the state. New board members included representatives from public secondary education, private sector business, economic/community development organizations and an agency coordinating services to older residents. New collaborations have been developed and created with Farm Union, Farm Bureau, Wisconsin Telecommunications Alliance, Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance among others.

The focus of WRP shifted from membership generations to partnership creation which resulted in a broad framework for identifying policy needs and priorities, information sharing and strategy development to maximize resources. The emphasis shifted to collaboration and cross-organizational cooperation. The WRP board has been pleased and excited by the outpouring of support for this new direction.

WRP ends the 2018 year reinvigorated and full of optimism for the future.

Over 125 people attended the 26th annual Wisconsin Rural Summit in April including a number of state elected officials and congressional representatives. Three new innovative and successful local projects were awarded recognition as a Top Rural Development Initiative; the 19th year WRP has recognized rural communities for their efforts to address local needs. Working in collaboration with a variety of agencies, WRP conducted four regional Small Community Forums. These forums target activities in communities of 1,500 or fewer residents. The WRP website has been redesigned providing an easier to use portal of information about rural services and activities.



Wisconsin Rural Summit attendees touring Cardinal Glass and listening to a presentation by the plant manager.

A Salute to State Rural Development Councils

The Partners for Rural America Board of Directors salute the commitment and leadership of the State Rural Development Councils (SRDC) across the country and their success in making rural America a better place. 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.

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



Board members and guests at the 2017 annual PRA Conference hosted by Rural Maryland Council.

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