



Partners for Rural America

# 2015 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

- ▶ 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.

## Recent Highlights of Partners for Rural America and State Rural Development Councils

- ▶ Received reauthorization from Congress in the 2014 Farm Bill to continue and expand our work.
- ▶ Held annual conferences in Vermont (2013), Wyoming (2014) and Virginia (2015) attended by most of the active SRDCs to conduct organization business, plan for the future and learn from successful initiatives of the host SRDC and each other.
- ▶ Held regular, monthly, mission focused board meetings as learning and sharing opportunities to help SRDCs advance their work.
- ▶ Submitted an appropriation request to Congress to enable SRDCs to expand their work in helping localities and regions address their initiatives based on community based actions and assets. Although unsuccessful, this funding request helped to inform committees of Congress of the ongoing successful work of SRDCs and strengthened support for our mission.
- ▶ Representatives from three SRDCs are active participants in the State Rural Policy Initiative panel (along with the Rural Policy Research Institute and state policy centers from around the country) to assemble and recommend best practices, help implement rural research, advance rural leadership and build a coordinated rural development approach.
- ▶ Most SRDCs have been actively involved in annual rural summits and conferences to call attention to rural needs and successes and build collaboration to address rural challenges. These events bring together representatives of the federal, state and local government, the nonprofit community and private sector to marshal, lead, coordinate, and empower local populations and identify resources.
- ▶ Provided support and guidance to several states that are forming or reactivating a SRDC.
- ▶ Updating and enhancing the national website to make it more usable and helpful to SRDCs and its partners and rural constituents.
- ▶ Updated the PRA By-Laws to be operationally in tune with current practices and needs.
- ▶ Accepted the resignation of Mary Randolph of Wyoming and Mary Ann Hayes of Maine from the PRA board (with great appreciation for the excellent leadership and support given to PRA and SRDCs).
- ▶ The SRDCs in Oregon, Idaho and Washington received grant funds from USDA Rural Development to advance and enhance initiatives across state lines, eliminate impediments, share expertise and seek new opportunities for rural progress.

# Partners for Rural America and State Rural Development Councils

The Partners for Rural America (PRA) is the national organization of State Rural Development Councils:

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

## A Brief History on the National Rural Development Partnership and State Rural Development Councils

The concept for a federally supported network of State Rural Development Councils (SRDCs) was initiated by the National Governors Association during President George H. Bush's administration. Non-partisan and multi-sectorial Councils formed through the 1990s and their success led to further statutory authority when the U.S. Congress included the National Rural Development Partnership (NRDP) in the 2002 Farm Bill. USDA RD facilitated a process that certified State Rural Development Councils that met the standards for composition and decision-making set forth in federal law, and today State Councils are leading community and economic development efforts in support of rural communities in states throughout the United States.

The NRDP was reauthorized in the 2008 and 2014 Farm Bills. While no federal resources have been allocated to SRDCs since the mid-2000s, State Councils have received USDA and other federal agency grants for a range of project and programmatic activities. A number of State governments also provide financial and in-kind support to the SRDCs to assist with the facilitative rural program and policy coordination work that they undertake locally and statewide.

The State Rural Development Councils help local communities define their core assets and challenges, identify key long term priorities for development, collaborate to advance local initiatives and seek affordable alternatives. The work of Councils helps coordinate requests for federal and state funds and minimize regulatory redundancy – important reasons why Congress has continued to authorize State Councils in the Farm Bill since 2002.





## About the State Rural Development Councils

Pursuant to federal law, the State Councils are neutral, nonpartisan organizations composed of representatives from all levels of government, community and regional nonprofit organizations, and the private sector. State USDA mission area offices are nearly always participants, as are a varying mix of other federal agencies. 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 overworked county/municipal government staffs. The State Councils serve an essential need as an experienced convener and vehicle for collaboration between USDA, other Federal agencies, state agencies, the nonprofit community and the private sector. This helps the rural areas address their needs, grow their communities, create jobs and provide essential infrastructure while reducing duplication of government efforts and efficiently overlapping planning and funding assistance.

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The SRDCs bring together diverse interest groups to build on local community assessments and strategic plans – both to set new directions in policy and program development and to use resources wisely in times of scarcity. The State Councils can tap the large network of experienced staff from other State Councils across the country to implement best practices, obtain technical assistance, determine funding sources and assist local leaders with community development. This information (gathered nationally) helps members of Congress identify and respond to needs through policy coordination and direction, proposed regulatory changes, targeted resources and private sector partnerships.

Many State Councils also take an active leadership in state rural summits and conferences generating a positive, nonpartisan climate for genuine advancement of policy issues, collaboration, best practices, attraction of resources and building of rural leadership capacity.

# State Council Highlights

State Rural Development Councils (SRDCs) address a wide variety of issues that affect rural communities. The following are brief highlights of some of our SRDCs recent initiatives. Given the complexity and range of the Councils' efforts, these highlights provide a glimpse--not a complete picture--of that work. As shown below some SRDC work improves the ability of key rural institutions to function effectively and other SRDC programs have a more direct impact on rural citizens. In all cases, however, the Councils are working to improve the quality of life in rural America.



## Arizona Rural Development Council

[azrdc.org](http://azrdc.org)

- Holds annual rural policy forums that provide its 250 attendees the tools, resources and relationships to address local needs and priorities.
- Offers an educational program to address the shortage of health care professionals in rural areas.
- Developed a pocket-sized guide to attract tourists and business meetings.
- Is actively involved in promotion of local food initiatives and forums.



## Idaho Partnership

[irp.idaho.gov](http://irp.idaho.gov)

- Concentrates resources on its Community Review Program, offering 3-day assessments to Idaho's rural communities.
- Completed a meta-analysis of the Community Review surveys, summarizing the strengths and challenges that residents identify in their areas.
- Joins diverse public and private resources in innovative collaborations to strengthen communities and improve life in rural Idaho.



## Illinois Rural Partners

[ruralpartners.org](http://ruralpartners.org)

- Partners with the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs and the Lt. Governor's Office to sponsor an annual rural summit and training conference attracting about 300 attendees.
- Co-sponsors rural listening post sessions and rural life polls to capture current, high priority rural needs and issues.
- Council members provide support and follow up assistance for the 6 to 8 rural community assessments conducted each year by the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs.
- Provides seed money for transfer of wealth workshops, manufacturers' roundtables and other activities.
- Promotes and supports the work and programs of each member of the organization.



## Rural Maryland Council

[rural.state.md.us](http://rural.state.md.us)

- Administers and manages the Maryland Agriculture Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund.
- Supports policy identification, development and advocacy through a strategic assessment process.
- Co-sponsors a youth engagement project to involve young people and keep them rooted in rural areas.

- Is reactivating a committee to address health work force shortages.
- Is active with rural conferences and information distribution and is a voice for rural Maryland.



### Michigan Rural Council

[rural.cedem.info](http://rural.cedem.info)

- Holds an annual small town and rural development conference and also works to educate and engage legislators on rural policy impacts.
- Does community assessments to consider communities' problems and challenges, identify assets and define issues.
- Offers quarterly meetings on a variety of topics important to rural areas.



### Oregon Rural Development Council

- Has conducted forums in every county as well as the Oregon Rural Policy Forum which lead to the development of Oregon's first long range strategy for water resources.
- Helps rural communities address their unique needs, enhance community resilience and vitality and leverage resources through partnership building.
- Creates strategies to reduce duplication and conflicting administrative processes, build capacity and reduce barriers.
- Conducts and/or supports annual events such as Rural Oregon Day, Western Regional Summits and Regards to Rural Conference.



### Council of Rural Virginia

[cfrv.org](http://cfrv.org)

- With its partners conducts a strategic plan assessment with the Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission.
- Is active with the broadband and telecommunications workgroup.
- Convenes stakeholders to identify challenges to quality healthcare and working on a food desert study.
- Holds an annual rural summit.



### Vermont Council on Rural Development | [vtrural.org](http://vtrural.org)

- Provides leadership through its annual summits and ongoing policy initiatives that address issues of rural import.
- Leads strategic action planning sessions to help communities set key priorities and connect with resources to advance them.
- Launched the Climate Change Economy Initiative to consider impacts of climate change and advance jobs and prosperity of the State while confronting these impacts.
- Built the Working Landscape Partnership to support local agriculture and forestry, grow and attract farm and forest entrepreneurs, and conserve Vermont's working landscape far into the future.
- Provides leadership for the Vermont Higher Education Food Systems Consortium building food systems education opportunities.
- Initiated programs to advance Vermont's digital economy.



## Wisconsin Rural Partners

[wirural.org](http://wirural.org)

- Publishes *Rural Wisconsin Today* annually, the only publication in the state that provides key data on the status of rural Wisconsin.
- Holds an annual rural summit to provide information on rural issues and trends.
- Conducts community assessments and helps develop plans and strategies to improve and take advantage of local assets and opportunities.
- Has a Top Rural Development Initiatives program. This capacity-building effort recognizes and publicizes replicable tools for others to use.
- Is actively involved in the Small Town Downtown Forum program which provides a venue through which local leaders can learn successful strategies for thriving downtowns.



Partners for Rural America dedicates the 2015 Annual Report to Mary Randolph, retiring Executive Director of the Wyoming Rural Development Council. Mary has played a pivotal role in the progress of Wyoming communities, has led national efforts for the PRA, and throughout her career has been as an outstanding champion for rural America.



## Wyoming Rural Development Council

[wyomingrural.org](http://wyomingrural.org)

- Assists rural communities in developing a vision and strategic plans.
- Serves as a resource for assisting communities in finding and acquiring financial assistance for rural projects.
- Serves as a neutral forum for identification and resolution of multi-jurisdictional issues.
- Continues its long-standing record of leadership and financial support of Partners for Rural America.

For a complete list of State Rural Development Councils and contact information for each state, visit [www.PartnersForRuralAmerica.org](http://www.PartnersForRuralAmerica.org).





Just a few of our committed rural leaders

**2014/2015 PRA officers:**

Chair: Jerry Townsend, *Illinois Rural Partners*

Vice-Chair: Mike Field, *Idaho Rural Partnership*

Secretary: Christy Morton, *Council for Rural Virginia*

Treasurers: Mary Randolph, *Wyoming Rural Development Council* and  
Chris Marko, *Oregon Rural Development Council*



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