





2012 - 2013

Center for Rural Virginia

Annual Activity Report

-  Rural
-  Mixed Rural
-  Mixed Urban
-  Urban



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Annual Activities Report

July 1, 2012 – July 1, 2013

Executive Summary

The 2012-2013 year for the Center for Rural Virginia was a year focused on preparing the organization for future transition. The Center worked to revise its strategic plan as well as prepare for a transition in leadership of the organization. The Director of the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at UVA worked to facilitate a strategic plan working group which produced a specific focus for the Center on areas and issues of most importance to rural Virginia. This working group conducted a strategic assessment of the six economic essentials the Center has traditionally build its work around to narrow the Center's focus and ensure specific results for the future. Also, as the Executive Director neared retirement, the organization used this year to prepare for new leadership, assembled an Executive Director Search committee and worked for months choosing a new leader.

In addition to these transition activities, the 2012-2013 year for the Center for Rural Virginia consisted of continued efforts to serve as a catalyst for collaboration among leaders and stakeholders dedicated to improving the quality of life throughout rural Virginia. The Center for Rural Virginia Trustees worked closely with the Council for Rural Virginia Board, operating together under a Collaborative Activities Agreement as the Virginia Rural Center, to maximize stakeholder engagement. Staff worked to build coalitions to provide leaders with proven, powerful tools to enhance rural research, policies and practices at the regional level. The Center works with various organizations including, state and local chambers of commerce, planning district commissions, economic development marketing organizations, local economic developers, the Rural Caucus of the Virginia General Assembly and other leaders at all levels of the public and private sector to stimulate, accelerate and broaden policy and program innovation throughout rural Virginia. The ultimate goal is to create more vibrant rural communities and to contribute to the increased economic vitality of the Commonwealth.

While Virginia has seen economic and demographic regional shifts over recent decades, rural Virginia remains a critical and vital resource to the ultimate success of the Commonwealth. Rural communities throughout Virginia contribute significantly to Virginia's economy and quality of life. These communities will continue to serve as leaders in the years ahead as Virginia works to address challenges and capitalize on the opportunities of our resources, including the environment, agricultural growth and food supply, abundant and affordable energy, and arts and culture. Each of these examples rural gems are unique to rural Virginia. The Virginia Rural Center will build partnerships and strategic coalitions to support policies and projects that improve the quality of life in rural Virginia for the betterment of prosperity throughout entire Commonwealth.

The Center Board has Six Rural Economic Essentials as the guiding focus for its work. These "Essentials" are Education and Workforce, Community Capacity, Economy and Jobs, Infrastructure, Health and Agriculture and Natural Resources. The Center partnerships and sector relationships address these elements in each of the rural regions.

In 2012-2013 the Center Board completed the establishment and adoption of the Center's *Action and Value Proposition*. This strategic plan sets forth the Center's work as an advocate for rural Virginia, working to resolve institutional impediments, identify and share best practices, and expand the exchange of information throughout rural communities.

Strategic Plan Development

Dr. John P. Thomas, Director of the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at UVA, convened a working group of Center leaders to conduct a rigorous exercised aimed at revising the Center's Strategic Plan to ensure the Center is properly focusing on the issues of most importance to rural Virginia. The Final Report of Dr. John Thomas, Director of the Weldon Cooper Center of Public Policy at UVA is below:

Final Report: Center for Rural Virginia Strategic Plan

This Report represents the culmination of a comprehensive multi-step process employed to develop a targeted, precise, strategic plan with implementation recommendations.

By way of background, it is informative to recall how the organization arrived at this final stage Board of Director's meeting on April 9 and 10, 2013.

The Center had previously adopted Six Rural Economic Essentials as the guiding focus for its work. These "Essentials" were the result of extensive listening sessions and interaction with broadly representative groups of rural Virginia stakeholders. The resulting six elements are: Education and Workforce, Community Capacity, Economy, Infrastructure, Health, as well as Agriculture and Natural Resources. In addition, the master document includes 5 to 7 subsets within each category. For example: Education includes Pre K-12, Community College, Voc/Tech Schools, Higher Ed Centers, and Colleges/Universities.

Accompanying the developmental work described above was a process in which the Center's Board of Directors completed the establishment, and adoption, of the Center's *Actions and Value Propositions*. That document contains descriptions of the six "Action Statements:" serve as a Conduit, serve as a Catalyst, be an Advocate, Work to Resolve institutional impediments, Identify and Highlight best practices, and Expand rural information exchange.

In September of 2012 the Center used its two-day Annual Rural Summit as a forum to generate structured conversation/deliberation among the roughly 250 attendees. In preparation for the event the Summit Planning Committee had selected three issues for in-depth consideration: Transportation, Education & Workforce, and Tax Structure/Funding Systems.

As a consequence of the aggregated activities the Center had derived a comprehensive set of ideas and suggestions for further consideration. Thus the Board Members were in a position to convene in April for the express purpose of narrowing the issues and hone in on precise strategic priorities for the near future—the next several years.

The Board's April priority setting exercise included several ingredients.

A review of the four sets of documents, referenced above, which had been provided in advance of the session: Economic Essentials, the Value Propositions, a summary of the Rural Summit, and Regional Progress Reports.

The Board's assignment was twofold. First was to gain clarity and mutual understanding of the six primary issue areas and to select from among them several priorities that would constitute the strategic focus. Secondly, was to focus on those chosen with the purpose of establishing specific and measurable goals.

Members were asked to express themselves using a voting system that enabled persons to both select their priorities and add emphasis to their choice. It was made clear that the process did not mean elimination of any Center issue or agenda. Rather the goal was to establish an order of priority and intensity.

The exercise included time for personal reflection, group consideration, and highlighting of those elements with the greatest probability for measureable success in the near future.

The successful voting process revealed three key elements that far surpassed the others: education/workforce (overwhelmingly), economy, and health.

Board members were then invited to participate in whichever work group most appealed to them. Each group was asked to articulate specific possible actions then synthesize them for the entire Board to discuss and adopt. A further step for the very near future is to drill into each of the recommendations to articulate the desired outcomes.

The Three Summaries are as follows.

I. Education and Workforce: (voted the most important issue by a wide margin). Their summary report is presented in the format of the Center's Value Proposition.

As a Conduit;

- Identify and highlight best practices for change and innovation (related to rural concerns),
- Reconsider credit and non-credit community college classes for high priority concerns.

As a Catalyst;

- Articulate the impact of community college boards and presidents—from a rural perspective,
- A Rural Orientation for all community college leaders can make a DIFFERENCE.

As an Advocate;

- Rural Center publish the roles, responsibilities, and processes of community college leadership,
- Reconsider the State reimbursement ratio for community college service to rural areas.

As an Impediment Reduction;

- In rural areas, facilitate communication among leaders from K-12 education, business, community, and citizens. (Include private institutions),
- Teach the teachers about technology needs and application in all aspects of business and society.

Best Practices;

- The Rural Center is in an excellent position to identify and highlight best practices as they relate to rural concerns,
- There can be far more use and creativity in the application of technology in sharing these messages.

II. The Economy

- This summary was presented in a slightly different format. They stated that each element in the Value Proposition should be restated to address the several highly significant “missing ingredients” when considering Virginia’s economy.
- There has been a breakdown in the traditional view of “Economic Development.” Success no longer is derived from chasing the “golden answer.” There must be a total reconsideration of how to achieve economic success especially in rural areas and the Center is the prime entity to lead such an effort.
- There is a dramatic lack of collaboration among rural communities where economic development is concerned. Competition among each other seems to be the preferred mode.
- Current practices, procedures, and experience preclude the integration of effort around commonly desired economic outcomes.
- The above situation even precludes effective coordination of developmental efforts.
- Economic development must be scaled to the community(s).
- There exists far too little understanding and communication regarding the implication of State tax policy on local economies.

III. Health

The subgroup on health condensed their deliberations to two key elements impacting rural areas.

1. Medicaid expansion with accompanying waivers and reform.
2. Drill deeply into the issue of substance abuse as the essential element of an overall health and rural economic development focus.

Numerous other ingredients of the health issue were articulated. Each was accompanied by a degree of frustration that the solutions were imbedded in a much larger societal response to the problems.

The impacts, however, were identified with the following descriptors.

- Consistent quality of care is abysmal in rural areas.

- There is insufficient attention given to individual responsibility in addressing chronic diseases. There seems to be more attention in treating the “well” versus the truly sick.
- There is a severe lack of training opportunities for persons with disabilities.
- The health delivery system is severely deficient in rural areas. The lack of population density implies that answers may lie in the use of health care professionals rather than doctors.
- A corollary to the above condition is that there could be a major infusion of health-related jobs for secondary level and certificated persons. The related education and training could also provide an economic infusion.
- The under-utilization of health care technology may be a huge reservoir of benefit waiting to be tapped in rural communities.
- End-of-life concerns and decisions could be significantly enhanced with appropriate education and medical resources.
- And finally, a concern was expressed that many of the health related issues could be a drain, and strain, on the limited resource of the Rural Center.

In Summary, this Report articulates numerous targets of opportunity for the Rural Center and its partners. It is clear that achievable objectives can be defined for most of the recommendations.

Supplemental Observations to the Rural Virginia Strategic Plan

It is not unusual in strategic planning exercises to avoid the “Elephant-in-the-Room.” Frequently there exists an issue or situation which is so overwhelming that the assumption is made that taking it on will drain the energy and resources required to achieve success in lesser but more attainable goals.

In rural America, including rural Virginia, that “elephant” is community capacity—or more specifically the lack of it. The core of the issue is the lack of home grown community leaders. The last three decades in rural communities especially have witnessed the drain of community leadership. Long-time leaders have moved-on or passed-on.

Nowhere is this issue more clearly articulated than in a major Study and Report produced by the Southern Growth Policies Board. In a nutshell the Report states that the merger and acquisitions of long-held local businesses has “displaced” huge numbers of locally developed leaders. These were leaders who could see a direct correlation between the success of their business and a successful community. It was natural to apply their leadership skills and energy in both sectors.

The new leader is “not-from-here,” talented and energetic but success is measured in a business sense not a long-term community sense. The Result! Community leaders are substantially fewer in number, significantly overextended, and there is virtually no “bench strength.”

While a deficiency of financial capital and infrastructure are common conditions in many rural communities that situation is nowhere near as dire as the lack of human and social capital. These two ingredients are the absolute core elements of community capacity. In an Information Economy

competition among leaders is a severe hindrance. Success goes to those who collaborate. The latter is a sociological concept not an economic one, foreign to most community leaders.

The “Elephant?” Every one of the specific items targeted in the Strategic Plan provides an opportunity to EXPAND the leadership pool. New members can be brought into the implementation processes, which then double as a training ground.

Success in this arena will not be a by-product. Deliberate attention is required to achieve such a goal. There are proven strategies, tools, and techniques available. This is not an easy mission. Some very fundamental cultural norms must be abandoned such as, “they may be in my community but they aren’t like me.” Ahhh, it is their community too! New behaviors and attitudes would be required.

Going forward, the Rural Center could find this to be the perfect time to add cross-cutting components to the strategic agenda which would add tasks and measureable mechanisms to enhance community capacity.

As a final comment to the Report, it is important to restate to the rural Virginia community that the well-established Broader Goals of the Rural Center remain at the core of the institution’s mission. This Planning Exercise has, however, provided more articulate guidance for numerous strategic and timely actions to be undertaken by the Rural Center.

One closing note: the Center must remain VIGILANT for the opportunities to provide the rural perspective on ALL relevant issues as they arise in the Commonwealth.

May 16, 2013 — John P. Thomas

Rural Center Accomplishments

Developed partnerships to provide a structured forum for reform of the education pipeline and the advancement of workforce development and job creation in rural areas.

Worked with the Governor’s Rural Jobs Council and industry on the future needs and career opportunities from workforce training in areas such as advanced manufacturing, health, education and other technology driven sectors.

Supported the alignment of education, workforce skills training, job creation and business development. In doing so, convened meetings with business and education leaders to address the need to tie skills training with industry and rural regions.

Advocated for Dual Enrollment and Career Coaches as vehicles to allow students to earn college degree credits and to guide them in their planning appropriately for education and training to create career and college plans.

Coordinated a Rural/Urban convening to encourage a dialogue around products and services and market the assets of rural areas that are vital to the success of the Commonwealth and their respective communities.

Developed partnerships to present a public relations campaign about energy, food, fiber and advanced manufacturing development while addressing rural quality of life amenities.

Provide structured forums and messages to expand the number of rural leaders for appointment by the Administration and Legislature to boards and commissions to enhance the rural voice at the policy table.

Joined the collaborative to evaluate and publish a State of the South with the Southern Growth Policies Board addressing "**Re-Imagining Workforce Development**".

Participated in regional workgroup meetings facilitated by the Joint Commission on Healthcare regarding an evaluation of the State Office of Rural Health to determine structures and processes that would enhance the service and health for rural citizens.

Actions

- Organized and hosted Virginia's Annual Rural Summit and Virginia Rural Legislative Caucus which bring together public and private organizations with Virginia Legislators to address policy issues.
- Virginia's 2012 Rural Summit addressed the Core Issues of "Education and Workforce, Transportation, Tax Structures and Funding Systems" and how they impact rural regions of the Commonwealth.
- Coordinated with Virginia Economic Development Partnership, industry and government leaders, state agencies and individual rural leaders to prepare the 2012 Virginia Rural Summit.
- Organized, staffed, promoted and supported the weekly legislative rural caucus as a part of the annual session of the Virginia General Assembly.
- Coordinated and distributed the 2010 Data Update of the Virginia Rural Prosperity Commission (RVPC) Report.
- Communicated the State of Rural Virginia to numerous groups throughout the Commonwealth as reflected in the Rural Virginia Prosperity Commission Update.
- Hosted, in partnership with statewide Local Government organizations, a Rural Caucus Dinner as part of the annual session of the Virginia General Assembly with Legislators and Cabinet Heads presenting in the program.
- Hosted and facilitated in partnership with VSU, VAPDC and VEDA regional caucus/business workshops throughout the rural regions of the Commonwealth, engaging public and business officials, to address issues for the Virginia General Assembly.
- Supported and participated as the rural representative in weekly statewide local government legislative dialogues.
- Coordinated with the USDA State Rural Development Council as a member participant in Partners for Rural America to engage in federal rural policy development.

- Organized, coordinated and hosted a Southern Rural Convening of 14 Atlantic Coast States on behalf of USDA. Promoted cross jurisdictional border collaborative to enhance specific public project development.
- Supported and represented rural Virginia at numerous regional, state, and national trade and organizational meetings.
- Collaborated with Community and National Foundations in support of expanding philanthropy into rural places. Promoted and educated rural leaders on how philanthropy can be successfully implemented in rural Virginia.
- Continue to market the assets of rural Virginia to bring awareness to "Rural as a Quality of Life".
- Supported and promoted the concept of a rural Energy Coalition as an economic development tool for rural places.
- Worked to develop a rural university based partnership to assemble data and conduct rural research needs for economic and social development.
- Participated in Gubernatorial Commission's impacting rural Virginia.
- Partnered with Rural Health Coalitions in support of a Virginia's state rural health needs.

Leadership

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The 2012-2013 Virginia Rural Center Report can be accessed at
<http://www.cfrv.org/Report-2013.pdf>

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