

RURAL PARTNERS NETWORK



BUILDING RURAL PROSPERITY

ANNUAL REPORT

2022

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Welcome to the Rural Partners Network

The Rural Partners Network (RPN) was created by the Biden-Harris Administration to ensure rural Americans have every opportunity to thrive and can find those opportunities right at home in rural America. In our first year of operation, the Rural Partners Network has begun to change the way the federal government listens to, partners with, and delivers resources to rural people.

We are doing this by placing more staff in rural communities to work hand-in-hand with local leaders to access the combined resources of the federal government alongside state, local, and philanthropic resources to meet their goals for the future.

The Rural Partners Network is also leading an alliance across the government to improve programs for and increase investments in rural America.

With equitable access to resources, all rural communities – and everyone living in them – can build a better future.

“...for America to succeed, Rural America must succeed.”

- President Joe Biden





What We Do



Build Trust: Listen and respond to the diverse people and perspectives across the nation.



Promote Equity: Improve social, economic, and health outcomes for everyone in rural America.



Provide Expertise: Connect inspired people to resources and technical assistance to plan and fund community improvements.



Develop Capacity: Increase the know-how of local people to plan and carry out projects that fit the community's vision.



Increase Investments: Develop funding priorities and new programs that meet the needs of rural people.



Leverage Assets and Multiply Returns: Marshal public and private resources to maximize outcomes.



Support Long-term Sustainability: Establish federal supports – including programs, staffing, and priorities – that are effective, lasting, and sustainable.

Federal Partners



THE WHITE HOUSE



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES



DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT



DEPARTMENT OF LABOR



DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY



SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION



APPALACHIAN REGIONAL COMMISSION



CONSUMER FINANCIAL PROTECTION BUREAU



SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION



DELTA REGIONAL AUTHORITY



DENALI COMMISSION



NORTHERN BORDER REGIONAL COMMISSION



SOUTHEAST CRESCENT REGIONAL COMMISSION

Who We Are

USDA is leading a broad partnership of federal agencies, offices, and commissions collaborating to bring funding and opportunities to rural America. These partners support a growing number of RPN Community Networks across the country to drive resources to high-priority areas while improving program priorities and processes in ALL rural communities.

The U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) has made equity its top investment priority to ensure that our program resources are invested in places most in need of assistance. The Rural Partners Network strengthens our commitment to the communities we seek to serve by directly investing in the critical capacities each community needs to successfully plan for and implement its vision for a prosperous, safe, and healthy future.

- Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development
Alejandra Y. Castillo

Rural People Lead the Way

In early 2022, the Rural Partners Network met with a wide range of leaders and stakeholders in rural areas where research indicated there was a need and the opportunity to improve federal program delivery and outcomes. These areas were identified based on data and qualitative analysis of levels of economic distress, social vulnerability, persistent poverty, low participation in federal programs, local capacity, readiness to participate in a program like the Rural Partners Network, and other factors.

In areas where local people considered the Rural Partners Network to be a good fit, those same people determined the geography – or footprint – of their Community Networks. The Rural Partners Network helped leaders engage stakeholders from all parts of the community to identify their top priorities for community improvement and economic development.

112
COUNTIES AND
MUNICIPIOS
(Puerto Rico)

4
TRIBAL
NATIONS

825
RURAL
PARTNERS

PARTNERING
WITH

36 COMMUNITY
NETWORKS



"Our community does come together and we're very eager to collaborate with all... We have a great team working together for the betterment of our community."

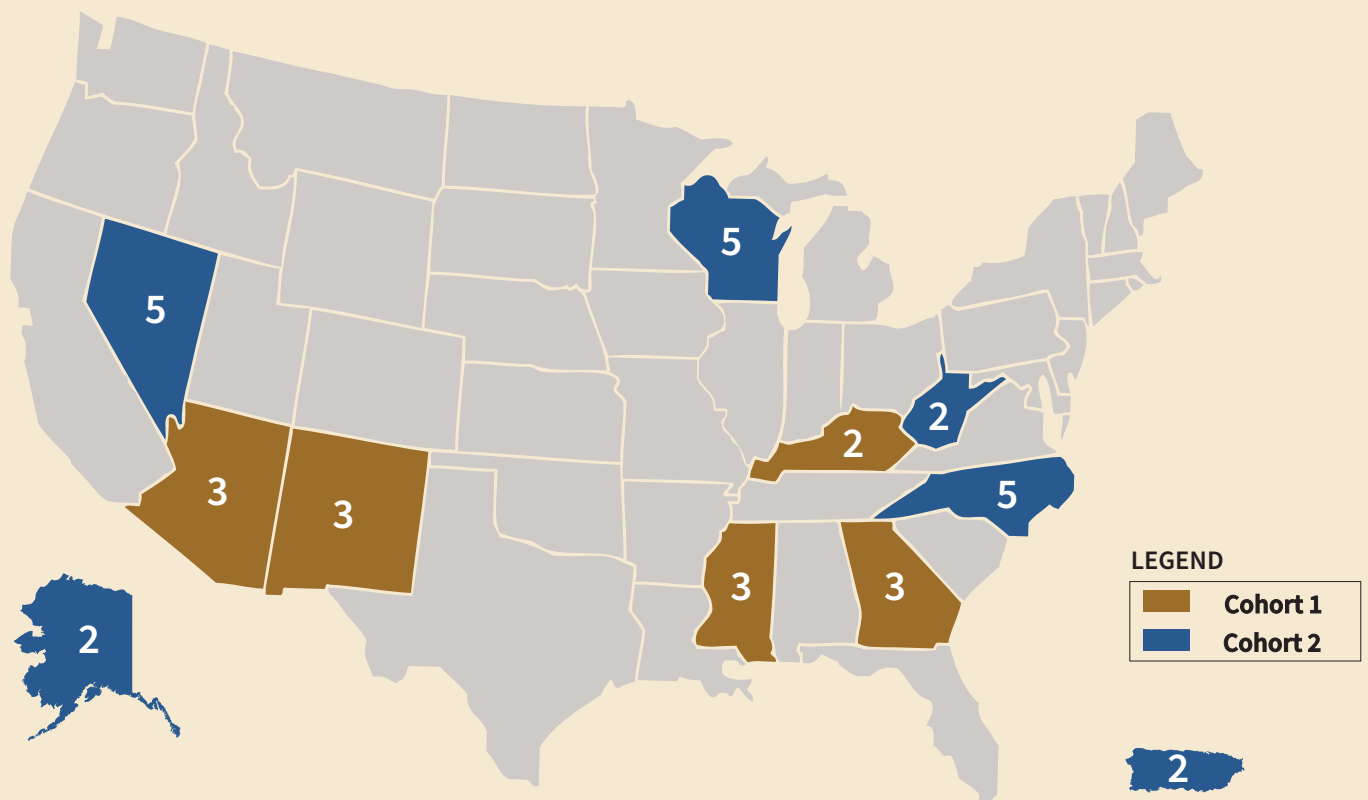
- Ben Hill County and City of Fitzgerald
Community Leader at the Georgia Partners Forum



RPN Community Networks

In April 2022, 14 Community Networks were selected to receive dedicated federal staffing support and technical assistance through the Rural Partners Network.

In November 2022, an additional 22 RPN Community Networks were launched.



SELECTED RPN COMMUNITY NETWORKS

COHORT 1 – APRIL ~o~

ARIZONA

- San Carlos Apache Tribe
- Tohono O'odham Nation
- Cocopah Indian Tribe

GEORGIA

- Southwest Georgia Regional Commission
- Ben Hill County and City of Fitzgerald
- Emanuel County and City of Twin City

KENTUCKY

- Fulton County and South Fulton, Tennessee
- Kentucky Highlands

MISSISSIPPI

- Washington County Economic Alliance
- Lake District Partnership
- Tri-County Delta

NEW MEXICO

- Northern New Mexico Pathways Economic Development District
- Southwest New Mexico
- Doña Ana County

COHORT 2 – NOVEMBER ~o~

ALASKA

- Southeast Alaska
- Western Alaska

NORTH CAROLINA

- Robeson, Bladen, Columbus County
- Glow House Society
- Wilson, Edgecombe, Nash, and Johnston
- Halifax-Northampton
- Albemarle-Roanoke

PUERTO RICO

- Southwest Puerto Rico
- Roosevelt Roads
- Central Puerto Rico-Mountainous Region

WEST VIRGINIA

- Southern West Virginia
- West Virginia Pioneer

WISCONSIN

- Northern Wisconsin
- Greater Menominee
- Forest County
- Northwestern Wisconsin
- Adams County Visionary

NEVADA

- Southern Nevada
- Sierra Region
- Moapa Valley
- Nevada 95-80 Regional Development
- Southern Clark County

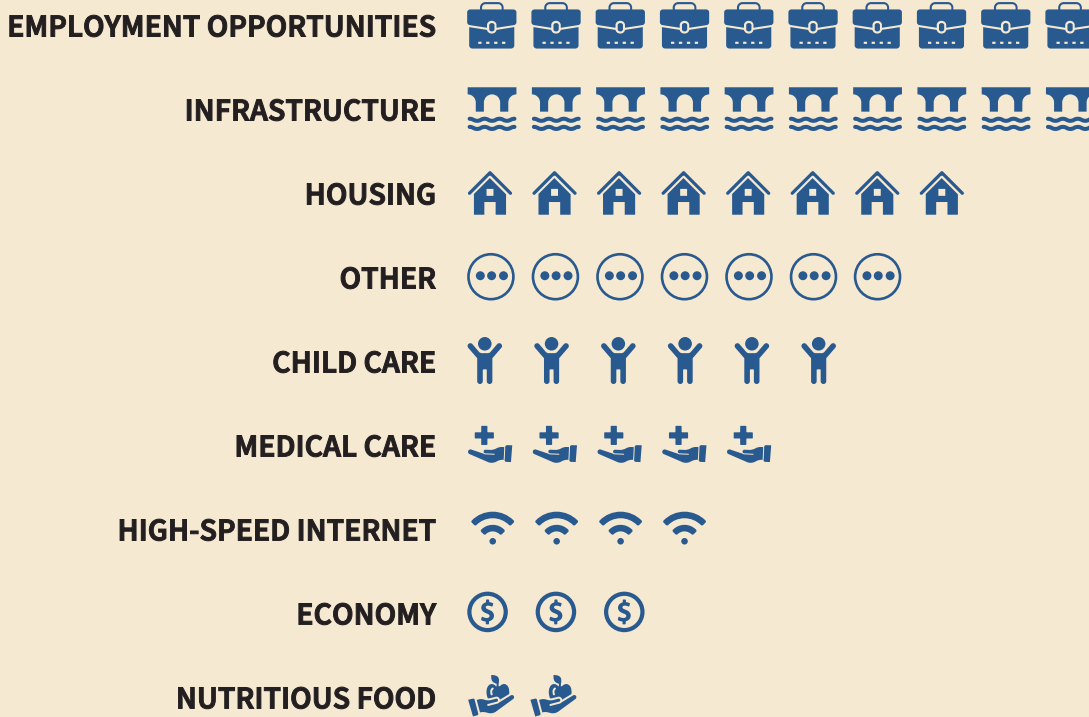
"The Energy Communities Interagency Working Group and the Rural Partners Network share a common mission to help people in communities often left behind to rebuild their economies and prosper in the clean energy economy. RPN is already helping coal communities in eastern Kentucky and West Virginia access a range of federal grants."

- Brian Anderson, PhD, Executive Director
Interagency Working Group on Coal and Power Plant
Communities and Economic Revitalization

You can learn more about each RPN Community Network at this link: www.RURAL.gov.

Locally Driven Priorities

TOP AREAS OF INTEREST ACROSS ALL RPN COMMUNITY NETWORKS



Employment opportunities, infrastructure, housing and broadband comprise

65

percent of top priorities for RPN communities.



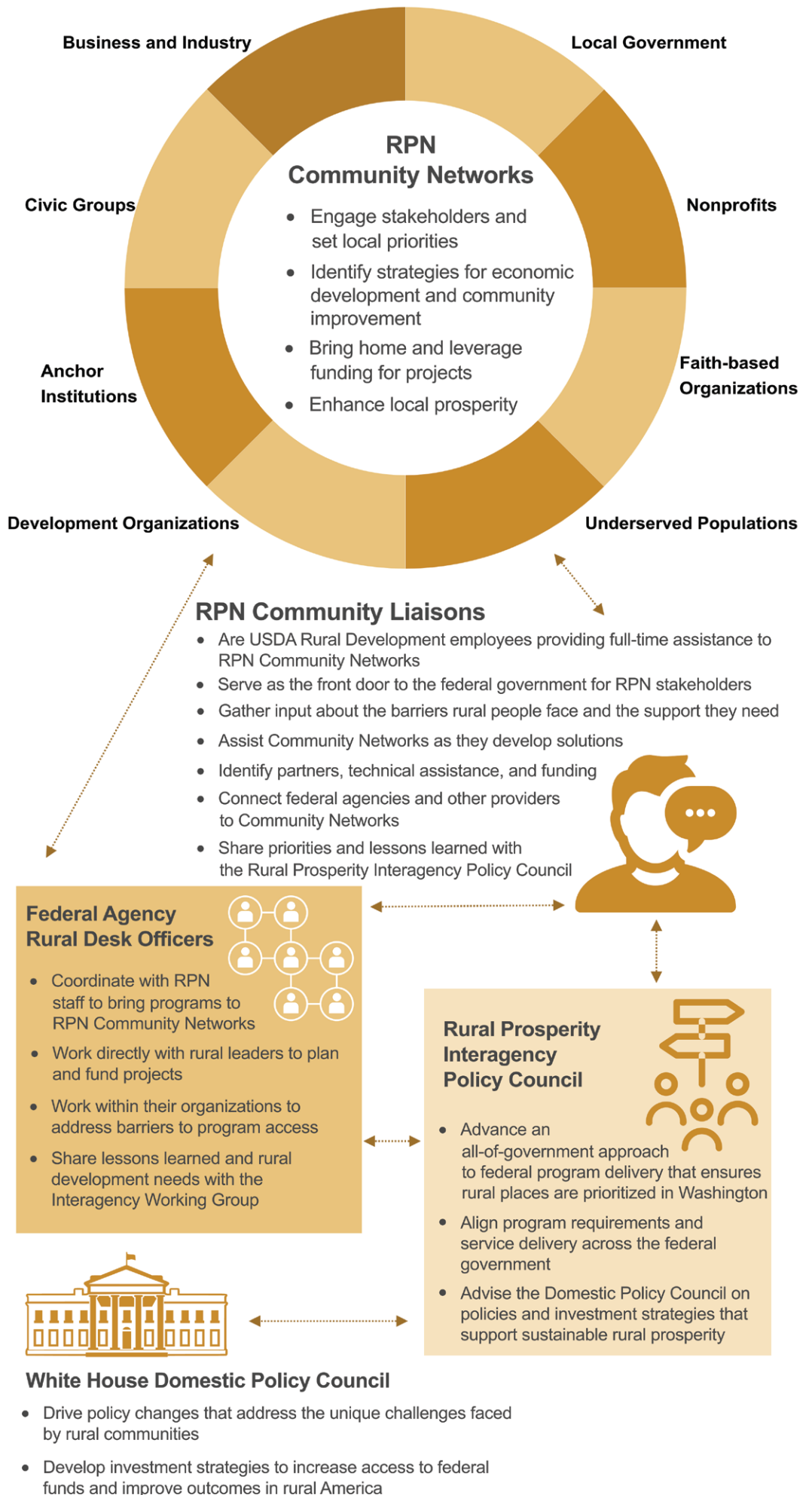
“All people, including those living in small towns and rural communities, deserve access to clean air, clean water and healthy lands. EPA is proud to participate in the Rural Partners Network as we work to advance environmental justice, improve vital infrastructure, and ensure economic opportunity for rural communities.”

-Michael Regan,
EPA Administrator

“Housing in rural areas is becoming something that blindsided us during COVID. We need affordable housing to accommodate people who are residents and working from home, as well as newcomers who are coming and buying places sight unseen. We need balanced growth, so mixed income and affordable housing are necessities.”

-Community Leader Participating in the San Miguel,
New Mexico Rural Partners Forum

How We Partner with Rural People



Signature Projects

RPN Community Network members have identified key projects in their communities they want the Rural Partners Network to support. Here are some examples:



SOLAR ENERGY GENERATION AND DISTRIBUTION San Carlos Apache Tribe, Arizona



In response to increasing electricity costs for homes and businesses, the San Carlos Apache Tribe is evaluating solar energy solutions, including a power generation facility that would not only lower utility costs and increase reliability, but would also generate income for the Tribe and create high-paying jobs in the community.

The U.S. Department of Energy and other Rural Partners Network agencies are advising on next steps, including finding expertise and funding for a feasibility study. Subsequent project phases include predevelopment, construction, and workforce development for an interconnected and self-sustained generation and distribution system. Additional RPN partners stand ready to provide technical assistance and capital as the project progresses.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING NEW CONSTRUCTION Fulton County Community Network, Kentucky



Attracting and keeping workers requires access to adequate, affordable housing. Not only are growth opportunities for local business and industry hampered without adequate housing, but local schools also struggle to retain experienced teachers who prefer to live close to the workplace. No private-sector housing development has occurred in the City of Fulton for nearly two decades, and most housing in the county is rental property.

The Community Network is partnering with the city, a local housing nonprofit, and a custom manufactured housing builder to plan and develop affordable single-family homes across the city. The Rural Partners Network is helping identify federal grants and incentives to assist the city with predevelopment, infrastructure buildout, and gap funding and to also make homeownership education and financial assistance available for residents.



EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE

Ben Hill-Fitzgerald County Community Network, Georgia



First responders rely on effective communications systems to protect citizens during law enforcement operations, fire events, natural disasters, and other emergencies. With the county's current communication system, first responders cannot always maintain constant contact with other agencies. The Community Network is championing a project to build out a P-25 system; an advanced standard of two-way radio communication with the bandwidth to allow coordination with federal and state agencies and provide the most efficient and effective public safety operations.

The Rural Partners Network is working to identify multiple funders for the estimated \$3 — 5 million project, helping create a viable capital stack, and developing competitive program applications.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Lake District Partnership, Mississippi



The current expansion of the Milwaukee Tools factory in the Grenada, Mississippi area is creating more than 500 construction jobs and is expected to create 1,000 additional permanent, family-wage jobs upon completion of the facility. To help local people prepare and compete for these new employment opportunities, the Community Network is working to create a workforce training center in a newly vacated and underutilized commercial site.

The Rural Partners Network is helping identify funding for the purchase of the site, as well as for the development and implementation of a worker training program.

Investment Strategy

Unprecedented federal funding opportunities are available for infrastructure, high-speed internet, business and workforce development, transportation, and community improvements through the American Rescue Plan, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Inflation Reduction Act, and annual appropriations. The Rural Partners Network is working to make sure rural communities get their fair share.

In addition to directly helping rural communities unlock these funds, we are also coordinating across agencies to prioritize rural places for targeted investment and addressing barriers for small and rural places to successfully apply for programs.

RURAL PARTNERS NETWORK INVESTMENTS IN DIRECT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

May — December 2022

RECIPIENT	INVESTMENT	DESCRIPTION
Eleven RPN states	\$4,580,000	To hire federal staff dedicated to support community networks and locally driven projects
Three Arizona Tribal nations	\$900,000	RPN funding to each Tribe to hire and support community development staff
Two state-based organizations	\$100,000	To deliver program outreach and technical assistance to help connect local projects with federal program dollars
Three national organizations	\$1,160,000	To deliver direct technical assistance to rural and underserved communities



FEDERAL PROGRAM INVESTMENTS PRIORITIZED THROUGH THE RURAL PARTNERS NETWORK

RECIPIENT	INVESTMENT	DESCRIPTION
Five RPN Community Networks	\$1.6 million	Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge: USDA Rural Development has funded technical assistance providers to support collaborative, locally led community improvement planning.
Eleven high-priority counties	varies	Closing America's Wastewater Access Gap Community Initiative: This collaborative effort between the U.S. EPA and USDA Rural Development illustrates how direct program outreach and technical assistance can connect rural projects with their fair share of \$55 billion in new funding for drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure funding in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL).
Multiple selections pending	Up to \$25 million (DOT) \$5 million (HUD)	Thriving Communities Program (TCP) Technical Assistance: The U.S. Department of Transportation provides two years of deep-dive assistance to selected communities to facilitate the planning and development of transportation and community revitalization tools to ensure that under-resourced communities, including rural places, can access the historic funding provided in the BIL. This includes a specific community of practice to support rural and small towns, and Tribal communities with project scoping, developing applications, and delivering transportation projects. HUD is coordinating with DOT to provide technical assistance to help expand housing opportunities near transportation investments.
New Mexico Community Network	\$6.4 million	Good Jobs Challenge: The U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration is supporting work to create pathways for workers into high-paying jobs in health care and construction.



Rural Partners Network: Year One



MARCH ~o~~

11 states and one territory selected for the Rural Partners Network pilot project

JULY ~o~~

First Rural Partners Network Community Liaison hired in Kentucky

NOVEMBER ~o~~

Cohort 2 Community Networks launch in Alaska, Nevada, North Carolina, Puerto Rico, West Virginia, and Wisconsin

APRIL ~o~~

Cohort 1 Community Networks announced for Arizona Tribes, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, and New Mexico

RURAL.gov launched as the official website of the Rural Partners Network

SEPTEMBER ~o~~

First Community Network Rural Partners Resource Forum held in Georgia, with others to follow in New Mexico and Mississippi

RURAL.gov major update and launch of the Rural Connections Blog

Rural Connections Newsletter released

DECEMBER ~o~~

Community Liaisons hired for Cohort 1 Community Networks

24 Community Liaison positions advertised for Cohort 2 Community Networks

Cohort 1 Community Networks identify signature projects

Early Wins

DELIVERING IMPROVED OUTCOMES FOR RURAL AMERICA

Driving technical assistance, engagement, policies, and programs to community-driven projects that have immediate needs



\$1,600,000

Placemaking funds supporting Cohort 1 Community Networks



20

Federal agencies prioritizing RURAL programing



110

Communities, Tribes and municipios engaged



13

Signature projects identified by RPN Community Networks for partner collaboration



DISASTER RELIEF ON DAY ONE

Eastern Kentucky was struck with an extreme flood event in July 2022, just days before the first-ever Rural Partners Network Community Liaison came on board. Assigned to the Kentucky Highlands Community Network, the new liaison played a key role in connecting community leaders to federal programs and residents to immediate and short-term aid. Her ongoing assistance is helping the community develop strategies to address unmet needs and fill funding gaps to repair or replace critical infrastructure, housing, and businesses.

The Rural Partners Network Ripple Effect

Place-based community empowerment is a process that moves forward over time, with strategic collaborations needed at all levels. Even though the Rural Partners Network has just gotten started, rural Americans are finding a federal government that is listening.

Just one short year ago, the Rural Partners Network was a concept without a name. Since then, we have held 170 in-person and virtual meetings to invite rural leaders to partner with us. The response was tremendous, and 36 Community Networks comprised of more than 825 stakeholders have joined the program.

We are placing Community Liaisons on the ground to provide full-time, direct assistance in these places to help advance locally driven priorities and capture federal program dollars for projects. As this work is done, each community will build capacity and increase momentum, taking on larger and more challenging projects over time. The Rural Partners Network will be with them every step of the way.

At the same time, we are making sure rural people are heard in Washington, D.C. Our Community Liaisons are directly sharing with federal leaders and decision makers the lessons learned from this place-based work and providing deeper insight about – and more solutions to – the challenges faced by rural America today.

Our Rural Partners Network staff, along with the Rural Desk Officers of 20 federal agencies and commissions and the White House Rural Prosperity Interagency Policy Council, are collaborating to respond to these needs through policy development, program alignment, and innovation.

The impact of the Rural Partners Network is already rippling out to benefit all rural Americans through improved programs, more focused investment priorities, and agency problem solving to make programs work better for rural people.



WHAT IS PLACE-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT?

Place-based approaches engage the unique opportunities and people of a place to activate planning, collaboration, and development of community-driven strategies and projects.



At Rural Partners Network We Believe ...

- Rural people know what's best for them and are ready to lead community-driven solutions.
- The nation's spirit and character are embodied in rural people, who provide the everyday essentials upon which our entire country depends.
- Rural America is incredibly diverse – economically, racially, culturally, and geographically. What makes sense for one community may not for another.
- With equitable access to resources, all communities – and everyone living in them – can have the opportunity to thrive.

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