

Coalition of State Rural Policy Centers Overview

The Coalition of State Rural Policy Centers is an informal collaboration among the rural research and policy centers in nine states: North Carolina, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Texas, Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, Utah and Vermont. The Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) serves as a convenor for the Coalition.

Coalition directors met for the first time in Raleigh, NC in May, 2005. There have been three meetings since then, in Warrenton, VA in November, 2005; Austin, TX in March, 2006, and in Annapolis, MD, October, 2006.

The Coalition acts as a learning network. Members share information about their mission, vision and activities in an effort to learn from one another and to develop a sense of common ground and ways they might work together for mutual benefit. At the meetings in Virginia, Texas and Maryland, external speakers have been included to bring new information and perspectives to the directors.

The Coalition has been financially self-supporting to-date.

The Coalition has chosen to remain an informal organization during its developmental stage. However, in Virginia, the group adopted its name (Coalition of State Rural Policy Centers) and a statement of mission, vision, goals and strategies. That document contains a statement about member assets that serves as a useful description of the Coalition and its members:

Participating organizations are all engaged in statewide rural initiatives and influence statewide policy development on a multitude of diverse issues with special importance paid to rural as a place. They are typically the main resource in their state on the current status, changes, and future of rural places. In this way, they provide the basis on which rural policies are made. Past experiences in the strategic thinking process with state policymakers and rural stakeholders have generated credibility and direct access to the decision-making process. The organizations have fund-raising experience and contacts with federal agencies and private foundations. They are all committed to developing and sharing solid experience-based and successful rural policies and/or best practices.

These assets and common interests equip member organizations to collaborate in shaping, or reshaping, public policies or practices involving rural issues and interact in an emerging and important field of public interest.

The state rural policy centers are very heterogeneous in their structure, age, size, institutional homes, etc. The three smallest have five or fewer employees and annual budgets less than one million dollars, while the three largest have more than 30 employees each and budgets in the millions of dollars.

Collectively, the nine Coalition members have annual operating budgets of approximately \$20 million and additional funds from grants and other “pass-through” activities over more than \$150 million. The centers’ partnership with RUPRI in the Coalition gives them a reach beyond their individual states and connections to resources and expertise that supplement those at the state centers.

In an informal survey in 2005, at least five of the nine centers claimed significant work in the following areas:

1. local leadership/capacity building
2. telecommunications
3. healthcare
4. physical infrastructure
5. agriculture
6. entrepreneurship/business development.

Four centers claimed significant work in education and workforce development. Fewer than four claimed significant work in a variety of areas including immigrant issues, transportation, local government and housing.

A majority of centers conducts studies in-house as well as sponsor or support studies and surveys by others. A majority publishes newsletters and convenes meetings or focus groups of individuals or organizations on the state, regional, and local levels. *All are actively engaged with policymakers and contribute to or develop rural policy in their states.*

Another way to see the scope and character of rural center work is to examine the research they conduct and sponsor. Three of the centers (IL, MN and PA) have formal, institutional research programs, and another (NC) does extensive project development research.

Lists of research/publications at those centers may be viewed at the following websites:

Illinois: <http://www.iira.org/pubsnew/index.asp?search=listing>

Minnesota: <http://www.mnsu.edu/ruralmn/pages/Publications/publications.html>

Minnesota (rural journal):

<http://www.mnsu.edu/ruralmn/pages/Publications/rmj/rmjmain.html>

Pennsylvania (fact sheets): http://www.ruralpa.org/fact_sheets.html

Pennsylvania (research reports): <http://www.ruralpa.org/reports.html>

North Carolina: <http://www.ncruralcenter.org/pubs/index.html>

Other centers may not have such extensive programs of research, but they nonetheless produce reports demonstrating the depth of their knowledge bases. See, e.g., Texas' reports on the status of rural Texas at <http://www.orca.state.tx.us/publications/pub.htm#orca>.

For more complete information on each of the members of the Coalition, please view the websites, listed below.

Web Addresses for Nine Rural Policy Centers:

North Carolina: www.ncruralcenter.org

Pennsylvania: www.ruralpa.org

Illinois: www.iira.org

Minnesota: www.ruralmn.org

Maryland: <http://www.ruralforvm.state.md.us/>

Utah: <http://rural.utah.gov/index.html>

Texas: www.orca.state.tx.us

Vermont: www.rovers.net/~vcrd

Indiana: <http://www.in.gov/ora/>