

*Research
Report
on America's
Cities*

Rural Work Force Development

Issues and Strategies for Rural Leaders

*One of a series of Research Reports
on major empirical studies of conditions
and policies in America's municipalities.*



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Rural Work Force Development

Issues and Strategies for Rural Leaders

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Rural Work Force Development
Issues and Strategies for Rural Leaders

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Foreword

Preparing today's work force for the demands of the emerging knowledge-based economy is a major concern of municipal officials across the country. Municipal officials and other leaders in rural areas face unique challenges regarding work force development. These include inadequate child-care and transportation services, less diversified economies, and workers with lower skill and educational levels compared to urban areas.

The National League of Cities seeks to provide municipalities with timely information that they need to help them effectively address serious local issues. The National League of Cities is pleased to present *Rural Work Force Development: Issues and Strategies for Rural Leaders*, written and published as a service to municipal officials and state leagues. This book provides an overview of issues related to rural work force development and examples of promising strategies for dealing with these issues.

Rural Work Force Development builds on NLC's commitment to improving the quality of life by strengthening the capacity of local governance and advocating the interests of local communities. The book is an outgrowth of NLC's 1992-1993 research under its Rural Workforce Project and reflects NLC's broader strategy to address work force issues that includes NLC's Urban Poverty, Economic Development and Cities Project, the Children and Families in Cities Program, and the Futures Process of NLC's Advisory Council, as well as the ongoing work of NLC's Human Development Policy Committee.

This publication was researched, managed, and written by Phyllis Furdell, manager of NLC's Rural Workforce Project in NLC's Center for Research and Program Development. We acknowledge and commend her fine work. We express our appreciation to The Ford Foundation whose grant, through the Aspen Institute's State Rural Policy Program, supported this work. We also thank the Georgia Power Foundation, which provided additional support for this project.

We welcome comments and questions from readers because we are committed to continually improving how we assist municipal officials, local governments, and others concerned about America's cities and towns.

William R. Barnes
Director, Center for Research
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Preface

In 1992 and 1993, the National League of Cities (NLC) undertook a study with the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) for the Aspen Institute's State Rural Policy Program, supported by a grant from The Ford Foundation. The purpose of the study was to determine how state, federal, and local resources for developing the work force were being integrated to meet the needs of people and local economies in rural areas. The Center for Work Force Development at the Institute for Educational Leadership took the lead in researching state-level systems; the National League of Cities concentrated on how these systems played out locally or were used to enhance local strategies.

After surveying national, regional, and state-based organizations working in the areas of education reform, employment and training, and welfare-to-work programs and conferring with state and local officials with expertise in rural matters, we identified fifteen states that appeared to have policies and processes targeted to improve the work force. From those, we selected (on the basis of size, demographics, specific policy initiatives, and other characteristics) four states—Maine, North Carolina, Oregon, and Texas—as a focus for our study of work force issues in rural areas.

Within those states, IEL interviewed state-level officials from the public school system, the community college system, and education and training programs funded under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), and the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills program (JOBS) under the 1989 Welfare Reform Act. Together, IEL and NLC visited the four states. In Texas, we observed a state-wide conference of the Quality Work Force Councils. In the other three states, focus groups incorporating a mix of state and local representatives were organized to discuss work force issues for the purposes of this study. These “input round tables” helped us understand rural capacities and constraints experienced by both local and state level officials who dealt with work force development systems in rural areas.

Even though the scope of the original research turned out to be too broad and the sample too narrow to arrive at conclusive findings and recommendations, NLC and IEL's study of state and

local efforts to address rural work force issues yields valuable lessons for both state and local officials struggling with work force systems and issues in rural America. In order to share these lessons, both IEL and NLC have produced separate but complementary reports. NLC's report focuses on promising local practices for addressing rural work force development; IEL's report focuses on state efforts to counter the rural brain drain and accompanying economic decline.

The purpose of NLC's report is to share our observations based on the interviews we conducted with more than 100 rural officials in twenty rural communities. In particular, we want to share what seemed to be working in rural areas to address work force issues, what the more effective strategies had in common, and what circumstances seemed to be the most conducive to successful programs.

NLC's report is especially timely. Knowledge, learning, and the ability to learn have increasingly become economic factors. NLC's Advisory Council is currently exploring the implications of this for municipal officials. The 1995 Future's Report of the Advisory Council will focus on the roles municipal governments can play in creating competitive local work forces that can compete in today's global economy.

IEL's report, *Rural Brain Drain: Challenges to the States*, provides an analysis of the current systems and programs that provide resources that address work force development and describes state level efforts to create more coherent systems, particularly in North Carolina, Maine, Texas, and Oregon. The IEL report is available from The Institute for Educational Leadership, 1001 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20036.

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Part I

Issues, Conditions, and Strategies

Affecting Rural Work Force Development

Work Force Issues in Rural Areas

In the context of today's emerging global economy, rural leaders face a major challenge. Proposed cuts in federal spending for welfare, education, and training programs threaten to further reduce thinly spread rural resources available for work force development programs. At the same time, the growing knowledge-based economy is creating new demands on America's education and training systems. One-fourth of America's population lives in rural areas. This translates into one-fourth of the American work force. The question for rural leaders today is: Can rural areas nurture competitive work forces?

NLC's Study of Local Rural Work Force Development Efforts

With this question in mind, NLC examined its 1993 study of twenty rural communities. Even though our initial objective turned out to be much too ambitious for the scope of the research, this report is a result of our certainty that this research did yield some valuable insights for rural leaders and policy makers. Further, these insights are supported by what we are learning through our work on urban issues related to education, poverty reduction, regional economies, and economic development.

We initially set out to determine how state, federal, and local resources were being used to address work force issues in rural areas. Our assumption was that, while state and federal resources and policies are important, the delivery of services is essentially a local affair and understanding how services are delivered at the local level is crucial.

Our findings are based, for the most part, on anecdotal statements and observations of people working in rural areas — public school superintendents, community college presidents, JTPA administrators and program operators, social service workers, and municipal officials in rural towns and cities. The rural communities we chose to study were recommended by officials from state agencies, intermediary organizations, NLC's state municipal leagues and other organizations who worked with and were familiar with rural issues and model programs in rural areas.

In spite of our focus on rural areas considered to have better-than-average programs for work force development, both our literature review and our observations indicated that partnerships were rare among rural institutions, and that there was little coordination between economic development planning and education and training strategies. Work-related education and training institutions and programs in the United States currently constitute a non-system that is largely uncoordinated with separately funded services targeted to different client groups. Rural officials must cope with an array of program-based funding streams that have generated systems that often compete with each other. Further, most education and employment training programs have been designed with urban areas in mind, while most rural areas require tailored solutions.

In spite of these difficulties, some of our conversations with rural leaders provided insights into how local leaders could use resources from many systems to serve local needs and meet local goals. Most agreed that the nation's public employment and training system was failing to solve the nation's work force problems in either urban or rural areas. However, through leadership, ingenuity, and cooperation, along with the ability to identify and access existing capacities and favorable circumstances, some rural areas have been able to stretch scarce resources and to develop and implement strategies to solve local work force problems.

Part II of this report provides seven examples from the communities we studied that illustrate how rural leaders were able, as of 1992-93, to develop local strategies to deal with locally identified work force issues.

Before turning to these promising strategies and looking at how some rural communities are changing the ways in which they deal with work force issues, it will be helpful to look at some of the problems rural economies are facing and how rural areas are changing.

Rural Characteristics that Constrain Work Force Development

Many rural areas have experienced stagnant or declining economies in the past few decades. These areas shared a number of characteristics that increased the difficulty of developing effective work force strategies.

These characteristics were:

- The skill and literacy levels of workers are lower than in urban areas.
- Most of the available jobs in rural areas are low-wage and low-skill jobs.
- Underemployment and unemployment are higher in rural areas than in urban areas.

- Poverty rates are higher in rural areas than in urban areas.
- Job growth rate is slower in rural areas than in urban areas.
- A mismatch often exists between the skills of rural workers and those required by growth industries rural developers want to attract.
- Rural areas are burdened by inadequate public transportation and child care services.
- Rural areas have a smaller pool of people from which to find skilled and resourceful leaders.

The USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS), which provides detailed information on education and training systems in rural America, described in *Education and Rural Economic Development, Strategies for the 1990s* the poor performance of the rural economies in the 1980s. ERS observed that rural per capita income fell in relation to urban areas, the pace of new job creation slowed, and real earnings declined. Unemployment rates rose faster in rural areas and have stayed higher. At one point in the 1980s, the rural poverty rate was 35 percent greater than in metropolitan areas. At the same time, more than half the nation's rural counties lost population.

Additional Challenges of Rural Areas to State and Local Leaders

What we consistently heard from people in rural communities was that the two most serious work force issues were the need for economic diversification that would lead to the creation of more jobs and the need to increase the educational and skill levels of rural workers. We found few instances of efforts to develop a comprehensive strategy to meet both needs.

A common dilemma for rural officials was how to provide new skills to workers without knowing which ones would be needed. We found only one instance of an attempt to develop work force skills prior to an existing demand for those skills. A community college in Texas was providing training in the repair of stringed instruments to music majors in the hope of attracting manufacturers of stringed instruments.

In addition to the stagnant or declining economic conditions and their concomitant characteristics, rural areas present special challenges to both state and community leaders around how to do better economic development planning and also to link this planning to work force issues. This is especially difficult in view of the following:

- Many young people leave rural areas to seek better opportunities.
- Rural areas have 10 percent fewer high school graduates and 7 percent fewer college graduates than do urban areas.
- Rural schools usually cannot provide the level of instruction that urban schools do in the areas of foreign languages, higher math, and other specialized courses, and per pupil expenditure is lower in rural schools than in urban schools.

- Company officials who want good schools for their own children are reluctant to locate their businesses in rural areas because of the lack of first-rate educational resources.
- Economic development organizations and local elected officials have been slow in recognizing an educated and skilled work force as an economic development incentive.

Changing technology and new business methods require a flexible, responsive job training system, so much so that a community often cannot undertake effective economic development strategies without seriously examining education and training resources and work force quality.

The Systems Serving Rural Areas Are Not Adequate

Schools that do not do their job

Although the United States spends more than 4 percent of its gross national product on elementary and secondary education (one of the highest rates in the world), the quality of many public schools in America seems to be declining, at least in terms of national test scores. Yet our schools are bearing heavier burdens. Schools are often expected to deal with increasing social problems related to drugs, gangs, and teen pregnancies. The vocational component, especially, sometimes seems irrelevant, and is often viewed as a dumping ground for students who don't go to college. School dropout rates have been consistently increasing throughout the country in both urban and rural areas; they are consistently higher in rural areas.

American colleges and universities perform better and are recognized as second to none in the world. Yet dropout rates are greater than 50 percent in some colleges, and, in some cases, more than half the students must take remedial courses. In spite of nearly a decade of alleged education reform, our schools seem to be failing. As a result, local government leaders are being pressured by the public to address the fallout created by the inadequacy of the educational system. Citizens are also requesting that local officials get more involved in solving work force problems, and local officials are starting to realize that a poorly prepared work force will stifle economic development.

Education and training systems that do not serve the business and economic needs of rural areas

In *Education and Rural Economic Development, Strategies for the 1990s*, ERS, after looking at the role of education in the rural economy, concluded that other attributes of rural life, rather than the quality of the schools, were hurting rural America's economies. They found that local employers were not looking for advanced skills, and that local dropout rates and education levels were unrelated to economic growth. They concluded that rural areas needed access to information and specialized services to overcome the undiversified nature of their labor market.

ERS supported the improvement of education and training programs in rural areas, because owners of small businesses in rural areas needed training in planning, accounting, new technologies, and work organization and because firms and families considering a move to rural areas care a lot about the quality of rural schools. On a wider scale, education enhances the total national competitiveness, resulting in a healthier national economy from which rural areas might benefit. If education and training reform in rural areas is to lead to more than improved employability for emigrants to urban and suburban areas, it may need to be a part of a comprehensive rural development strategy.

Top-down, one-size-fits-all, fragmented policies for education and training that do not work

One big problem for education and job training in the nation is the lack of coordination among federal and state programs. The solution to development problems cannot be simply to create more programs, because the national employment training system is already fragmented and inefficient. Local officials presently cope with an incredible array of program-based funding streams and fragmented systems that often compete with each other, pitting state officials and local policy makers against one another.

A recent Government Accounting Office (GAO) report contains the following observations:

- At least 154 programs administered by fourteen federal agencies provide employment training assistance. Many of these programs target the same populations, a duplication of effort that adds unnecessary costs at each level of government. Services cannot be tailored to the needs of those seeking services. In addition, some programs lack basic tracking and monitoring systems. GAO is convinced that a major structural overhaul and consolidation of employment training programs is needed.
- Conflicting eligibility requirements confuse clients, while different annual operating cycles keep program administrators from planning together.
- Federal agencies involved in employment training assistance do not collect information on participant outcomes, nor do they conduct studies of program effectiveness. For about half the programs in GAO's analysis, agencies did not collect data on whether program participants found jobs, or on their wages.

Taken as a whole, these systems defy logical explanation, even by experienced officials and policy analysts. Some analysts have suggested that current programs and funding arrangements help perpetuate low-wage, low-skill jobs in nonmetropolitan areas, because employment programs often support low-wage industries and do little to promote higher wage opportunities for residents.

In addition, resources available under the Job Training Partnership Act, the nation's primary employment and training program, serve only about 4 percent of the eligible population. According to the JTPA director for a county in southern Texas, JTPA was providing services to only about 400 of an eligible population of 139,045.

In general, as a result of some of the above observations, there were few examples of locally developed strategies in place in rural areas specifically targeted to rural work force development. Even though many local officials, program directors, and educators identified the exodus of young people from rural areas as a key work force concern, little was being done to address this. Where there were locally developed strategies in place, they generally emerged out of economic development considerations.

States attempting to reform systems

A more detailed analysis of the work force development system and the difficulties posed by its fragmentation is offered in a related report by the Institute for Educational Leadership, *Rural Brain Drain: Challenges to the States*, a companion piece to this report. (See Preface for more information.) Summarizing our joint findings regarding attempts to improve this system, the IEL report concludes:

Many states are attempting to reconstruct their service delivery arrangements. Unfortunately issues concerning the relationships between various levels of government and between various programs are too often not being addressed....No easy solutions exist for the work force and education dilemma. Nonetheless, evidence exists that, at least in some states, and localities, progress is being made toward creating more coherent systems. (These) share three features: more client oriented, more performance driven, and more consolidated.

A key finding of our study regarding state attempts to address rural conditions, as stated in the IEL report, is that, "unless these strategies include local leaders, they will not be effective. Indeed, strengthening the capacity of local leadership to guide, shape, and evaluate the outputs of multiple agencies and organizations for a common purpose appears to be an essential ingredient for success.

In our study of the four states that were the focus of our research, we found that information does not exist to determine whether education and welfare reforms and growth of employment and training initiatives were producing positive results, particularly in rural communities. It was not possible to determine how client services have been affected as a result of budget cuts in any specific program. Nor could we find either local or state tracking systems to document the numbers of people turned away or placed on waiting lists for services.

Our findings related to the components of the work force development system, which are dealt with more fully in the IEL report, were as follows:

- The state of Oregon is on the right track with its benchmark initiative to establish indicators of well-being for young people as part of its educational reforms.
- 1990 Perkins II legislation is significant for its potential to link high schools with community college curricula and redirect resources by bringing the vocational education system into the K-12 educational reform area.

- A strong network of postsecondary technical training institutions is a necessary component for states and absolutely essential for rural areas.
- Resources under the Job Training Partnership Act are not sufficient to meet the needs of the disadvantaged, unemployed, and dislocated workers in America and are especially inadequate to meet the needs of rural areas.
- The Family Support Act's Job Opportunities and Basic Skills component shifted emphasis from transfer payments to education. But, because states have chosen a concentration of populations eligible for welfare as the basis for establishing JOBS programs, some rural counties cannot even participate in the program. In rural areas that have programs, their impact often depends on the ability of local service delivery agencies to collaborate.

What Seems to be Working in Rural Areas

The Importance of Collaboration as a Rural Strategy: Boosting the Regional Economy

In March 1992, the National League of Cities' Small Cities Council surveyed rural and suburban municipal officials about the most serious problems facing their towns. First on the list was finance, including state and federal budget cuts, unfunded mandates and regulations, and a decreased tax base. In second place were economic development issues, including creating jobs, reducing unemployment, and improving education. These concerns were reflected in other surveys of rural municipal officials.

Collaboration among communities may offer a solution to economic development problems. NLC's study of rural work force issues suggests that the success of state-level work force development initiatives depends on strong horizontal relationships at the local level. In fact, almost all the recent writings about rural revitalization focus on the need for collaboration within and among rural communities.

Generally speaking, the most effective programs found in rural areas were characterized by a high level of coordination and collaboration. We found examples of new patterns emerging for rural problem-solving and revitalization. Locally, people in some areas were attempting to coordinate programs and pool funds to address their own unique situations.

In *Multicommunity Collaboration: An Evolving Rural Revitalization Strategy*, the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (NCRCRD) says that multicommunity efforts to provide services, develop infrastructure, or create jobs may have the best chance of success in rural areas.

Local officials in rural areas may be in the best position to pull together the multiple resources needed to re-establish the horizontal links which, the NCRCRD report points out, were once the strength of rural communities until they were replaced by the vertical links of business franchises, big banks, and government agencies.

Rural Areas Part of Regional Economies

The effectiveness of such collaboration across sectors illustrates that even in rural areas economies are regional systems. The economy as a monolithic national entity does not exist, nor do local economies that coincide with jurisdictional boundaries. A 1994 report from the National League of Cities — *Local Economies: The U.S. Common Market of Local Economic Regions* — describes, as the title indicates, how the national economy is really a common market of local economic regions, regions that show tremendous variation from the single national measure of trends and performance that policy makers and analysts use. The idea of a single U.S. economy invariably leads to one-size-fits-all solutions that don't work for the problems of individual regions. When communities and agencies work together they can develop solutions and strategies targeted to the specific needs of the local economy.

Economic Development Concerns Revealed Work Force Issues

Our study of more than twenty rural communities revealed a number of promising efforts of towns and counties to engage in county-wide visioning, strategic planning, and collaborative problem solving or service delivery. Even though economic development and community revitalization needs often drove such efforts, broad-based community involvement is the factor that in many instances leads to development of goals regarding social issues, educational improvements and work force development.

Indeed, any attempt to address work force issues in rural areas almost requires a regional approach because of multiple overlapping boundaries of agency service areas and relevant jurisdictions. The Job Training Partnership Act in rural areas is administered through multi-county service delivery areas; social services and the JOBS program are usually administered at the county level; community colleges in rural areas often serve two or more counties; school districts are administered through yet another jurisdiction, usually congruent with neither county nor municipal boundaries. A regional approach may be the only way to bring all the stakeholders together in rural areas.

More information is needed about such partnerships, especially since more than 90 percent of the municipal and town or township governments in the United States serve communities with fewer than 10,000 residents. Most small communities lack a strong management capacity and show low levels of intermunicipal cooperation. Although the commitment of top elected leadership is probably necessary for successful collaborative programs, partnership formation is a relatively rare occurrence among small, especially rural governments. There are a number of explanations for this:

- Political entrepreneurs who understand cooperative or collaborative ventures are rare.
- Partnerships are not understood well either by public officials or by citizens.
- Rewards for such efforts are not immediate.

- The initiation of cooperative ventures is hampered by administrative inadequacies within and among governmental units.

With this understanding in mind, an interesting perspective emerges in almost all recent writings about rural revitalization. The need for collaboration among rural communities and the development of a community's ability to help itself to determine its own future is pivotal. If this is the direction rural communities are going to have to take, the leadership demands on municipal officials and other individuals in key positions in rural areas are clearly changing.

The National League of Cities' research on work force issues in rural areas found promising examples of "best practices" taking place in three states: North Carolina, Oregon, and Texas. The findings suggest that through collaborative planning across institutional boundaries, scarce resources can be better used to deal with work force issues. A number of communities that we studied were trying to design new strategies to revitalize their communities or to better educate and train a rural work force. These strategies were characterized by strong cooperation among local agencies and institutions, which together were working to solve local problems. Crucial to such community efforts is the realization that no sector or group can do it alone. Once a broad-based community group has participated in visioning together and has identified issues to be addressed, coming to a consensus about where to start naturally leads to identification of local assets and resources. Since the stakeholders are all at the table, opportunities for collaboration among those who control or can access needed resources become evident.

Elements of Successful Collaborative Efforts

Local Leadership

Many of these innovative strategies for education and job training depend on public school resources, colleges, public employment and training services, and economic development at the local level. Some states are encouraging innovation and cooperation, while others are mandating it. Yet substantial evidence suggests that unless these strategies include local leaders, they will probably fail. Indeed, strengthening the capacity of local leadership to guide multiple agencies toward a common goal appears to be essential for success. According to the President's Council on Rural America, in a 1992 report titled *Revitalizing Rural America through Collaboration*, rural community development "depends heavily on the ability of local leadership to guide the community to a clearly understood vision and a plan for achieving it."

Crucial to the development of collaborative solutions to rural problems was a community leader with the initiative to identify a problem and form a coalition to solve it. Collaborative and cooperative partnerships draw heavily on the ability of local leadership to act as facilitators. In our study, this role was filled by many types of people: a county manager, an elementary school principal, a mayor, a community college president, a school superintendent, and a county economic development director.

Rural areas need leaders with facilitation and consensus building skills as well as expertise in revitalization strategies. If a state does not set work force and education goals, or implement a process for regional consensus building and economic development planning, as in Oregon, rural leaders themselves will have to take the initiative for goal setting and strategic planning.

A number of leaders from areas in our study had begun to reach across political boundaries to other towns and counties to solve specific problems collaboratively or to participate in visioning and strategic planning. Next, they set goals and identified strategies for achieving their vision. Only then were funding and implementation questions addressed.

Visioning and Goal Setting

Leadership is necessary to the formation of a community group that undergoes a visioning process, sets goals, prepares a strategic plan, and oversees the implementation of the plan. Key to this process and the life of the group is the identification of shared goals. In the communities we studied, this group was generally composed of key leaders and stakeholders, as well as residents of the community. The area from which the group was drawn ranged from a single municipality to a multi-county area. The role of the initiator or convener of the process often diminished in this phase because many leaders were needed to cover all aspects of the process. Sometimes a facilitator was called in to lead the process.

Establishing Priorities

Community groups generally started by identifying all the key issues that needed to be addressed. Lists ranged from raising the literacy level of residents and improving schools to economic development concerns. Lists could be very long. Key to moving into the implementation phase was establishing priorities and from there an actual starting point. Improving education often became a central concern to the groups, and a starting point for improving the work force. Improvements in education, they thought, could attract new businesses and improve existing ones, reduce a variety of social problems, and — by improving their quality of life — keep young people from moving away.

These community efforts often resulted in a consensus on key issues. In many areas, the visioning process revealed that communities were most concerned about the education system, illiteracy, and school dropout rates. In many rural areas, improving the education system became a key economic development strategy.

The process of community visioning, goal setting, and strategic planning tended to put the issue of funding in perspective. Public funds for strategies were accessed and coordinated locally when appropriate. However, local strategies were not limited to federal and state program funds. National and local foundation funds were sought as well as assistance from local business and industry. Other sources of assistance accessed by rural communities included national and state intermediary organizations, local educational institutions, and the private sector.

Conditions Conducive to Rural Partnerships

Responsive State Actions

The states have a major role to play. States can address the difficult relationships among jurisdictions and agencies and distinguish between urban and rural needs. Some states are creating more coherent systems of service delivery to replace the current bewildering array. In addition, states can encourage coordination and collaboration among agencies and local officials for development of solutions to local issues. Some states had empowered local efforts through the creation of regional planning councils for work force and economic development planning.

State initiatives that were considered most helpful at the local level in rural areas were those that promoted or required coordination, encouraged local planning and decision making, improved the quality and accessibility of relevant information for planning, and supported leadership development training.

Oregon, for example, had developed benchmarks that set statewide goals for all agencies and made educational reform a state priority and the key to work force development. Regional councils were established throughout the state to develop economic strategies based on a consensus of urban and rural leaders in the regions. Lottery funds paid for these strategies. Furthermore, work force planning committees were also established in each region to link economic development and work force development strategies. The communities studied in Oregon were noteworthy for their incidence of interagency coordination at the local level and for strong local networks of program operators and agency directors.

In North Carolina, the state-funded Rural Economic Development Center has provided leadership training and technical assistance to rural areas as well as help in regional strategic planning. North Carolina had the highest incidence of leadership training participation among those interviewed at the local level (87 percent) as well as the most community-wide and regional strategic planning efforts of states in this study.

In Texas, Work Force Quality Planning councils link businesses to high schools and technical and vocational institutions to make sure that technical education is based on local labor market information. The Work Force Planning Councils that covered multi-county areas did much to create a regional identity for many rural areas and facilitated an information exchange between educators, training program directors, and the business community.

Access to Resources

In light of the fact that resources for education, training and social services are more thinly spread in rural areas than in urban areas, rural leaders need to be able to identify and access other sources of funding and technical assistance, if they are to implement more effective local strategies for work force development. Resources for local efforts can come from: national intermediary organizations; state rural development councils; national, state and local foundations; and local

corporate foundations and business groups. Another way to fund local development strategies is to use existing funds and resources in new ways.

In the examples of rural strategies in the next section of this report, a number of strategies are implemented with assistance from the national and state Communities in Schools offices which provide program models, training and support to local officials who want to establish a local program, as well as ongoing technical assistance. This was especially true in Texas and North Carolina.

The kinds of resources available to rural areas seem to differ from state to state and even among regions within a state. North Carolina, for example, seemed to have more philanthropic foundations than did the other states studied, and foundations provided funds for many of the local strategies developed in that state. In Texas, many rural municipalities had local civic and industrial foundations in their towns which supported local education projects and leadership development.

In almost all of the strategies in the examples in Part II, existing resources under JPTA, the community colleges and public schools, or other federal funds were accessed or redirected to provide support to a project.

Strong Local Networks

As pointed out earlier, one of the main strengths of many rural areas is that people often know everyone in their community. Many program operators and agency officials that we interviewed said they consistently worked together. This was especially true for representatives of programs long mandated by federal law to coordinate plans and services, such as vocational education and JTPA. Through these networks, many people in rural areas concerned about work force development already know many of the issues.

Owing to the sparser population and existing relationships among rural officials, it can be easier to pull together all the right community stakeholders for visioning and goal-setting activities. Although strong local networks do not guarantee the formation of collaborative partnerships, collaborative partnerships are not likely to be formed without these networks.

State actions can do much to further empower and encourage local networks. The state of Oregon has mandated local coordination among directors of JTPA, the JOBS program, vocational education and other federal and state programs. State initiatives mentioned earlier, such as Texas' regional Quality Work Force Planning Committees and Oregon's regional Quality Work Force Councils and regional Economic Development Strategies Councils, have all encouraged and furthered multi-community collaborations. In North Carolina, strong regional councils of governments have played a similar role.

Although Maine was one of the states included in NLC's research, no example of a promising local strategy was included in this report, because we found no outstanding example in our research. One of the reasons for this was a real lack of horizontal relationships among the agencies and institutions we looked at. The significant relationships in rural areas of Maine were based on state-local arrangements. According to the IEL report, the core of the dilemma in Maine was that, despite state efforts to create more coherent work force strategies, the state lacked "effective local

networks that build upon a common local agenda within a goal-oriented framework established by the state.”

Conclusions

Neither work force development strategies and educational reforms nor current rural economic development efforts alone will turn rural economies around. Work force and economic development strategies need to be designed in concert. Neither new federal and state initiatives nor strong local capacity will suffice alone. Both are part of emerging patterns of rural problem solving.

State governments continue to struggle with rural issues, including the creation of more effective work force development systems. Our study indicates that states are well advised to look more closely at ways to support community initiatives to solve local work force problems.

The success of rural revitalization and work force development efforts, as is also true for similar efforts in inner-city areas, may increasingly depend on the ability of rural leaders from public, private and nonprofit sectors to work effectively together. The extent to which rural leaders can do this may have an impact on the level of outside resources the area can attract from both foundations and national public initiatives.

For example, the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) recently announced the grantees for the second round of the NADO Research Foundation Partnership Project which provides funds to small metropolitan areas and rural areas for projects ranging from business development in minority and low-income communities to improving local systems for delivering job training and other government services.

Grants for projects were awarded in areas where regional development organizations and nonprofit organizations had collaborated to improve governmental service in rural areas and towns. According to NADO President, James C. Tonn:

In the current climate of political uncertainty and dwindling public and private resources, collaboration is an efficient way for communities to leverage limited resources and expertise to remain competitive. Partnerships, particularly nontraditional ones between governmental and nongovernmental organizations, enable partners to access hard to reach populations or localities of their region.

Coincidentally, of the areas represented in the seven examples of rural strategies included in the second half of this report, two of them have been designated to receive grants under President Clinton's Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community initiative. The Rio Grande Valley of Texas was one of three rural areas in the country to be designated an Empowerment Zone and receive \$40 million in flexible social service block grants and tax breaks. Robeson County in North Carolina was named one of thirty rural Enterprise Communities which are designated to receive \$25 million each in economic development grants and social service grants.

New Assumptions for Rural Work Force Development Strategies

The following is a summary of observations of local program operators and other officials in the rural areas from which the seven example strategies and programs in Part II of this report were drawn. These programs often provided a new way of doing business and brought people, agencies, and government together in a new way. Those involved with these programs believed that rural areas gained ground in their struggle with work force issues when they began with the following concepts:

- **Local leaders need not limit their strategies to federal and state funded program.** Traditional top-down strategies involve funneling resources into rural areas for uncoordinated, one-size-fits-all programs. The traditional approaches were clearly not solving problems or bringing long-term benefits in the areas we studied, and in fact, were part of the problem. They result in competing local development strategies that meet the needs of the funding source but not those of the specific community. Further, most federal and state education, employment, and training programs were designed with urban areas in mind.
- **Local problems require local solutions.** We found rural community leaders that were no longer content to wait passively to be told what to do. These leaders were able to bring the community together to develop a vision for the future of the area, consensus on goals and priorities to be addressed, and strategies for action. The impact of resources targeted to rural communities may depend both on the capacity of local leaders and on more coherent state and federal strategies. Promising strategies in our study were locally planned; they identified and shaped goals that took precedence over those of individual agencies or programs.
- **Local problem solvers need to be comprehensive in their approach.** People in rural communities consistently told us that the most serious work force issues were the need for more and diverse jobs and the need for more education and training. The most effective examples of problem solving we found included efforts to develop a comprehensive strategy that addressed both needs.
- **Local problem solvers must analyze their area's position within the larger region.** Efforts to address economic development and work force issues in rural areas must involve players from many overlapping service delivery areas and municipal boundaries. This ensures that all stake holders are informed about state and federal education and training programs, local resources and issues, and the needs of the residents.
- **Information must be shared across sectors, service delivery areas, and political boundaries.** In most rural areas, linkages between economic development and work force development are not the norm. There are often disconnects between state and local governments and another between elected officials and government agencies. Local officials in rural areas may be in a position to facilitate collaborative planning, but

this will not happen unless state and regional officials, educators, and local leaders share information.

Part II

Examples of Promising Rural Strategies from NLC's 1992-93 Research

Harlingen, Texas

Enlightened Leadership Links Educational Strategies and Skill Training to Economic Development

The low skills and educational levels of many rural residents are serious work force issues in many states, and in Texas this was especially so. In 1990, the percentage of Texans over 25 who graduated from high school was 72.1, ranking of 39th among the states. Only 63 percent of rural Texans had completed high school, compared to 75 percent of their urban counterparts. And rural residents were half as likely as urban residents to attend college. Among the states, Texas ranked 38th in median years of education and 47th in adult literacy rates. The Texas economy, based on oil refining, agriculture, and an expanding manufacturing base, is the 10th largest in the world. But rural Texas was struggling because of the downturn in world oil prices during the 1980s and the shift away from an agrarian economy.

Harlingen, the center of a large rural area, is located in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, a three-county area in south Texas bordered by Mexico and the Gulf of Mexico. Its three counties — Hidalgo, Willacy, and Cameron — are primarily agricultural. Harlingen, in Cameron County, with a population of almost 50,000, had the lowest unemployment rate in the area: 11 percent in 1991, compared to Cameron County's 12 percent and neighboring Hidalgo's 16.3 percent. Unemployment in some parts of the tri-county area was as high as 20 percent and the level of

educational attainment was one of the lowest in the state. Cameron County, 77 percent Hispanic, had a poverty rate of 32.7 percent, compared to 18.3 percent for the state.

The biggest challenge this growing area faced was that the available work force did not meet the needs of existing business and industry. Publicly-funded employment and training programs were having little impact. The Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) provided services to only about 400 of the 139,045 people in the region living below the poverty level; welfare recipients made up a very small percentage of those served because they were not perceived as employable.

Growing Sense of Regionalism

At the same time, a strong sense of regionalism had started to grow in the Lower Rio Grande Valley because of its proximity to Mexico and the potential opportunities under the North American Free Trade Agreement. Key to this growing sense of regionalism was the state's recently formed Quality Work Force Planning system, designed to integrate the state's job training system and respond to the needs of local industry through its twenty-four regional Quality Work Force Planning Committees. The Quality Work Force Planning system is a collaborative effort of three state agencies: the Texas Department of Commerce, the Texas Education Agency, and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

According to the executive director of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Quality Work Force Planning Council, "Regional strategy is crucial because new companies look at the region as a whole when assessing its strength. In the past the Valley had always operated as a series of separate communities, and they are just now starting to work together because of the potential of the free trade agreement."

Local Leadership

In this context, leaders of Harlingen, Texas, were becoming increasingly aware of the concerns that local businesses had about the quality of area schools and of the lack of linkage between education and job training and economic development.

Strong leadership for innovation in education and job training was provided by Harlingen's mayor, H. William Card, who saw the crucial relationship between the educational infrastructure and economic growth. Because his economic development experience taught him that companies considering a move to the area were concerned about the skills of the local labor force, Card believed that work force training and education programs could be used as economic development incentives.

A retired Marine colonel and banker, and mayor of Harlingen since 1987, Card saw his roles as that of a visionary and risk taker. As a former member of both the local private industry council that oversees JTPA funds and of the State Job Training Coordinating Council, he understood how to leverage resources for work force development. Because of his team-building leadership style, he was able to pull together a team to develop goals, objectives, and strategic plans for the city;

his team grew from fifty people in his first year as mayor to more than 400 in the past few years.

Building Consensus

In 1991, Mayor Card gathered together city commissioners, key business people, school officials, and other community leaders to participate in "Target 96," a city-wide conference on strategic visioning. The effort produced thirty strategies to advance economic development in Harlingen, including the following education goals:

- being designated an America 2000 school (top priority);
- targeting at-risk students through a Communities in Schools program;
- enhancing literacy programs and opportunities for job skills training.

At a result of the consensus building and strategic visioning process, the mayor was able to respond to the request of area businesses for better vocational training. The city of Harlingen allocated \$2.5 million over five years to Texas State Technical College in Harlingen, to be used in conjunction with JTPA funds. This enabled Texas State Technical College to develop the area's first aerospace program for General Dynamics, a new company in the city. The city also was able to devise a city tax "swap" that generated local funds to support the public school system. This involved cutting local property tax by half a cent and increasing the sales tax by the same amount. The sales tax generated four times more revenue for the city than the property tax would have. Such strategies helped to develop more than 6,000 new jobs in the city over five years.

Implementation and funding

Harlingen's "Target 96" led to strategies to keep students in school and develop the support children needed at home. Through collaborative efforts between the city and the school district, the schools began to reach out to the larger community and jointly conducted a parental involvement outreach pilot program for parents in three of Harlingen's housing projects. Services developed for the parents included graduate equivalency diploma instruction, family wellness events, English-as-a-second-language classes, computerized instruction, and parenting classes. Two goals were to help parents develop more self-esteem through parent support groups and to increase their involvement in school functions. Parent Centers are now in all elementary schools in Harlingen and will be expanded to the junior and senior high schools. The city donated a building for use as a literacy center.

The Parent Centers access multiple resources, from the state of Texas to Harlingen neighborhoods. Project workers called "parent educators," community leaders hired for their ability to develop rapport with parents, are trained by the Texas Association of School Boards. These "parent educators" become liaisons between the schools and the parents and between agencies and parents. They work from offices at the housing projects, which makes it easy for the parents

to come for help. As a result of the work of the "parent educators," the number of parents from the housing projects taking part in parent-teacher conferences increased by almost 100 percent.

Another program in Harlingen aimed at keeping kids in school is the New Directions Leadership Series for grades nine and ten which provides college visits, leadership classes, and community projects. New Directions is funded by a 2-year Harlingen Area Educational Foundation grant of \$100,000. Harlingen's beautification and recycling projects also offer opportunities for junior high and high school students to take leadership roles in community efforts.

Local business involvement in the city's educational goals include student motivation and mentoring programs that are among the largest in the country, and the Harlingen Industrial Foundation provides funding to support improvements in the public schools.

Conclusions

Through the efforts of Mayor Card and other city leaders, the city's school dropout rate fell from 15.2 percent in 1988 to 7.7 percent in 1992, and the number of dropouts seeking graduate equivalency diplomas tripled.

Harlingen's accomplishments have been recognized in a number of ways. In 1992, the National Civic League's All-American City awards program declared Harlingen one of the nation's ten most progressive and innovative cities. Harlingen's school district was the first in Texas to be designated an America 2000 school, and Harlingen was declared one of President Bush's Points of Light. In 1991, the city won the Governor's Community Achievement Award.

Cleveland County, North Carolina

Community Visioning for Economic Development Leads to a Focus on Education, Social Issues, and Improved Family Support Systems

Leaders in Cleveland County, North Carolina, were looking for ways to address low literacy rates and inadequate work skills among the county's existing and future work force. Most students in the county taking the 1989 SAT tests scored below the state average. Drug abuse, child abuse, teen pregnancy, and crime rates were escalating. Existing resources could not help many families, and most human service agencies dealt with crisis, not prevention.

Today, thanks to strong leadership for economic development, effective community consensus building, and the county's strategic planning process — Cleveland Challenge — residents benefit from a number of developments: a Communities in Schools program that is reducing the dropout rate, an expanded chamber of commerce mentoring program, a demonstration program that helps families gain self-sufficiency, and computerized case management to simplify social service delivery.

Background

Cleveland County has a population of 83,500, of which 14,700 live in Shelby, the county's largest municipality. The poverty rate stood at 11 percent. Food stamps, AFDC, and Medicaid rolls showed increases for the 15 months prior to this study. The textile industry, the county's largest, had declined to about 40 percent of the economic base. Manufacturing had diversified in the past two decades, but most of the available jobs were still low-wage and low-skill jobs. The unemployment rate was 7.6 percent.

Of the adults in Cleveland County, 36 percent had not finished high school, compared to the statewide figure of 30 percent, and 23 percent of the residents had less than a ninth grade education. The county dropout rate had increased in each of the five years before the study, and 13 percent of the county's 16-to-19-year-olds were dropouts.

Local Leadership Linked to Regional Leadership

Credited with getting Cleveland Challenge off the ground is Lane Alexander, the county manager who organized the Challenge Implementation Team. He also helped spearhead the Carolina Partnership, a thirteen-county interstate collaborative to do strategic planning for the region. Another leader of the Challenge effort was Hal Mason, Community Development Director of the Economic Development Commission of Shelby. Also taking an active role in the Challenge planning stage were the mayor of Shelby and the chair of Cleveland County's Board of Commissioners.

Visioning

In May 1988, the Economic Development Commission for Shelby proposed a task force to chart the area's economic future. It was hoped that long-range strategic planning would replace traditional decision making. The city's economic development commission, together with its counterpart on the county level, appointed members of both the public and private sectors to a steering committee, with the goal of researching one or two projects that could improve the county's economic outlook.

Under the "Cleveland Challenge," the steering committee in 1989 surveyed community leaders, held a public forum, and heard reports from various human service agencies. The steering committee identified three related problem areas: education, social issues, and infrastructure. Task forces were then set up to research each of these subjects, and the goals they recommended at the end of 1989 were approved and compiled into the final Cleveland Challenge report early in 1990.

Collaboration

Following the report, Cleveland County Manager Lane Alexander established the Challenge Implementation Team to provide leadership for the implementation process. Chaired by Alexander, the team included members from human service agencies, cooperative extension, three school systems, the community college, local businesses, and the United Way. The Challenge Implementation Team met monthly to develop and monitor Challenge programs and to define measures of success.

Overall, more than 300 people were involved in the Cleveland Challenge visioning process — representatives of county and municipal governments, human service agencies, non-profit groups, and the private sector. The state Department of Economic and Community Development, forty agencies, and eighty community leaders were involved in the process. Funding for Cleveland Challenge is shared by the county and the three largest municipalities with the county funding 75 percent and the three towns providing the remaining 25 percent.

The task forces next developed implementation strategies to address the steering committee concerns about education, social issues and infrastructure. Chief among the strategies developed and agreed upon was implementing a Communities in Schools program. This would address a number of identified problems — increasing dropout rates, educational concerns, and social service issues. The next challenge was to find funding for the project.

Funding and Implementation

In the spring of 1991, Cleveland Challenge was awarded a \$29,000 United Way Venture grant to hire a director for a Communities in Schools (CIS) project. A Cleveland County proposal to the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation requesting a \$1 million Opportunities for Families (OFF) grant for a Communities in Schools program succeeded in obtaining funding.

Through this new funding, the CIS program was established, and agencies and community groups are working together to meet the complex needs of children and families. A demonstration program is in place to bring families greater economic self-sufficiency and remove barriers that block their move out of poverty. With additional funding from three school systems and the county government, Family Resource Centers were established in the county's three school districts by late 1991. The Communities in Schools program is now part of the services offered at the centers. The Communities in Schools program was able to expand an existing mentorship program sponsored by the Cleveland County Chamber of Commerce, through which volunteers from industry and business work with at-risk junior and senior high school students.

The success of Cleveland Challenge has also attracted private sector funds; \$100,000 each in corporate donations from IBM and Cox, Little and Associates provided the funding for a computer-based case management system. The county allotted an additional \$354,000 over two years for implementation. Implemented by the Department of Social Services and Communities in Schools, the new management information system will ensure maximum support to families experiencing multiple risks by allowing agencies to share and coordinate information. Educa-

tional programs in the future will be financed through a two-cent county tax approved by residents for that purpose.

Conclusions

After taking part in the Cleveland Challenge, some of its leaders are convinced that states should provide assistance for regional coordination because municipalities and counties can no longer afford to compete with each other. And just as officials from separate jurisdictions were recognizing the need to work together, many agency officials *within jurisdictions* in Cleveland County realized that a narrow focus on their agency's goals was not serving the community well and blocked their seeing the big picture. Now agencies are working together better, and economic development is a county-wide effort that also addresses social and work force issues.

The success of Cleveland County in coordinating the services available to families, and in connecting family well-being to scholastic achievement and to economic well-being for the county further down the road, points to a number of lessons:

- Turf battles among jurisdictions and agencies must be and can be overcome in order to work collaboratively on a common vision.
- Local businesses and industries are willing to help not only with volunteers and ideas, but also with funds, when public, private, and nonprofit sectors demonstrate that they can work together and produce improvements that will benefit the business community.
- Finally, broad community participation is crucial, not only for shaping policy and gaining support for programs, but also for helping leaders see clearly the public's problems.

As one agency official remarked after participating on one of the Cleveland Challenge steering committees, remarked, "Municipal officials finally seem to understand the connection between education and economic development."

Ontario, Oregon

Interagency Cooperation at the Local Level Leads to Centralized Services for Rural Residents

A recent Rockefeller Foundation report on effective job training for women points out that "one-stop services offered at one location rather than services dispersed throughout the community" are the most effective approach, especially if child care is included at the site. To address the dual challenges of transportation and effective service delivery in rural Malheur County, Oregon, local leaders created a center that could offer, in one place, job training, education, counseling, and child care. If services could be offered in a central location, the transportation

burden on clients would be reduced. It would be easier to establish car pools and van services to bring people in from remote areas.

Background

Malheur County, Oregon's easternmost county, is one of the largest and poorest counties in the state. Its economy depends on agriculture, timber, and food processing. Because of the decline in the timber industry, many unemployed timber workers needed jobs and retraining. Farmers were devastated by a drought in 1992, and at about the same time, area processing plants announced that they were accepting no corn that year, too late for farmers to change their crops.

Malheur has a large population of unemployed migrant workers, Hispanics, and Native Americans. Because of the county's lack of professional opportunities, capable young people emigrated to urban areas for better job opportunities. Further exacerbating these social and economic ills was the lack of transportation and adequate child care, which caused serious problems for poor residents who needed access to education, training and other county services.

Public service agencies in the county ran many programs but lacked any single place to house them. Because of the distances between local service delivery agencies in the county and the isolation of the town of Ontario — the largest municipality in the county with a population of 9,400 — local schools were the sites of most community programs and activities. One program jumped from classroom to classroom at Treasure Valley Community College (TVCC), another operated out of a TVCC staff advisor's office, and a third operated out of a church basement near the Ontario High School. Many programs could not find temporary space.

The idea of a human resources center came up at a Malheur County public hearing that elicited ideas for a state-administered HUD Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). At the meeting, TVCC grant writer Dale Haynes mentioned that she needed space for TVCC's Single Parent and Displaced Homemakers program. The Ontario school district superintendent stated he needed room for an alternative school for at-risk children. Representatives of several other human service agencies echoed the same need for program space. The county economic development coordinator, ZaDean Auyer, suggested that everyone needing space could work together.

Leadership

Several people played key roles in developing the one-stop center. An advocate and supporter of JTPA programs, Ontario's mayor obtained approval from the state for the alternative school for at-risk kids, and he developed public support for centrally housing key county programs in the town. Three county commissioners advocated for the Teen Parents program and placed the issues on the public agenda for the county.

According to the program operators, the success of the endeavor depended on the ability of elected officials to involve, excite, and include as partners those who would actually be administering

the project. That kind of ground-level ownership of the project was key to getting the necessary cooperation that led to its success.

Local History of Community Cooperation in Place

A history of cooperation between jurisdictions and agencies existed in Malheur County. When a planning committee to search for a site was established, volunteers for the committee came from the county economic development office, JOBS and JTPA agencies, and the community college. At the first committee meeting, the community college president suggested that an old dormitory — vacant for several years and soon to be demolished — might be suitable for a center. After pricing the renovation of the building and developing a funding strategy, the committee asked the county for help obtaining CDBG funds. TVCC's grant writer, school superintendent, and county economic development coordinator together wrote the block grant proposal. Even though the center was to be located within the city limits, the county agreed to guarantee and monitor the project.

Implementation and Funding

In April 1991, a \$267,000 block grant was approved for the renovation of the building. The Albertson Transition Center became a reality in 1992, housing the alternative school for at-risk students and an impressive list of other tenants: Ontario's 8-C School District, the Training and Employment Consortium which administers JTPA funds for the area, the Malheur County Education Service District, and the Malheur County Child Development Center. These offices provide displaced homemaker programs, life skills education for persons with low incomes, English as a second language classes, supplemental instruction for college students in vocational programs, and programs for job searching and job testing. Formerly, these offices had been scattered at sites around Ontario. By pooling resources and stretching budgets, agencies would now be able to provide more efficient services.

In addition to the Oregon Community Development Block Grant, which covered the costs of renovating the building, the Ontario 8-C School District provided \$98,726 for the Malheur Academy, the alternative school for at-risk youth. Other contributions included: \$75,000 from a Carl Perkins grant for the Single Parent, Displaced Homemakers and Single Pregnant Women Programs; \$38,150 from Carl Perkins funds and from the Juvenile Services Commission for the Teen Parent and Gender Equity Programs; and \$19,345 from Carl Perkins funds and from TVCC for the Balancing Work and Family Program.

Conclusions

All agencies at the Albertson Transition Center are developing cooperative strategies to serve the special needs of the Center's clients. The Center's philosophy and its programs are committed to flexible, evolving, client-centered service. The idea of child care, for example, was conceived because the English literacy program held at the Center was not drawing the young Hispanic

women its organizers had anticipated. Although the women wished to participate, they could not afford child care. As a result, a child care component was added to the center. Child care is available, space permitting, for clients of any agency in the Center.

Program coordination and funding at the Center depend on a network of personal relationships that is typical in rural places. Human service agency personnel, college faculty, and grant writers, since they are colleagues on a first-name basis, regularly meet with one another informally. They are able to brainstorm, share funding ideas, and put together funding from several sources.

ZaDean Auyer, a consistently active participant in the Albertson project, emphasizes the project's client-centered mission. "The main point is, it's ongoing and flexible, adapting to the needs of clients," she says. "In five years, the programs actually in the Center may change, but the mission will still be to serve the needs of the client group."

Cottage Grove, Oregon

State Education Reforms and Goals Support Small Town's Vision for Local School Innovations

The small town of Cottage Grove, Oregon, shows how national education goals, state education reforms, and good local planning can dovetail to bring innovations to a rural community's school system. The local high school became one of just six in Oregon selected as a site for shaping the high school of the future.

Background

Cottage Grove, population 7,400, is in Lane County, twenty miles south of Eugene, in western Oregon. Like most rural cities in the state, Cottage Grove's livelihood depends on wood products, but in 1990 the industry accounted for just 9 percent of all jobs in the county, down from 20 percent in 1970. Despite its advantages — Cottage Grove is close to universities, a metropolitan area, and an interstate highway system — unemployment, poverty, and high school dropout rates in Cottage Grove and Lane County were higher than the state average.

At the same time, education reform was in the air, thanks both to national education goals and, in Oregon, state initiatives and legislation. Because of an early planning and visioning process undertaken by Cottage Grove, the town was ready to take advantage of the Oregon Education Act for the 21st Century before it was passed.

Leadership

To protect their community's economy and quality of life, leaders in Cottage Grove decided to reduce the dropout rate in Cottage Grove High School (CGHS) and teach students the new skills they would need in the rapidly changing work place. Stronger links among the high school, Lane

Community College (LCC), and local businesses would be crucial. Strongly supportive and active in these efforts was Cottage Grove's mayor of eight years, Jim Gilroy, a strong supporter of educational reforms. Married to an educator and a former teacher himself, Gilroy had worked closely with school officials throughout his administration.

History of Local Collaboration

In Cottage Grove, service delivery collaboration among the schools, JTPA program, and JOBS has a long history. The community college and the high school cooperatively offer the Teen Parent GED program and share staff and space for several other programs. In 1991, the state JTPA gave the school district an award for its interagency accomplishments. The school district is also a contractor to provide life skills instruction and case management services to teen parents under the JOBS program. The South Lane School District has a history of cooperation with local business and industry — even before the Workforce 2000 II project, students could serve a type of apprenticeship in local businesses. The Cottage Grove Chamber of Commerce has brought educators and business executives together: the district superintendent, the mayor, and a community college official all serve on the Chamber Advisory Board.

History of Local Efforts to Improve Public Education

In 1990, in order to improve instruction and reduce the dropout rate, the high school launched the Genesis Project for students planning to enter the work force, trade school, or community college directly after graduation, using the 1989-90 sophomore class as a study group. Assisted by a \$136,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the Genesis Project aimed to make students more technologically literate. Through the use of computers in classrooms, students were connected with a wider network of students and linked to scientists, computer specialists, and chief executive officers of corporations.

In another initiative, Cottage Grove schools began researching an outcomes-based education model and obtained an \$80,000 Workforce 2000 II state grant to become a pilot site for Oregon's education reforms. This money was combined with Carl Perkins Funds for special students, JTPA funds for remedial education, local school district funds for staff development and technical support, and state funds for planning, curriculum development, and new technology.

Visioning

A strategic planning process also started in the fall of 1990 that included the South Lane School District, business leaders, students, teachers, school board members, parents, clergy, and city officials. The purpose was to develop vision statements and goals for the schools. Early in 1991, the group brought in more people and divided into subcommittees to work on individual action plans for each goal. The original committee prioritized the identified areas for action and reviewed the subcommittees' action plans. The final draft of the strategic plan was approved in July 1991. That fall, the school board endorsed the plan and announced that its top priorities would be

developing family partnerships and fostering curriculum and staff development. Other interests were programs for at-risk students and the use of technology in schools.

In the fall of 1992, the strategic planning committee began to link South Lane schools to both the national education goals — devised by President Bush together with the nation's governors — and Oregon's Educational Act for the 21st Century. The latter required that the state's system of education be redesigned by the year 2000, using the Oregon Benchmarks set of priorities. The committee applied to make Cottage Grove an America 2000 Community, which makes the school district eligible for a one-time federal grant to launch a New American School. The goal is to close the gap between what students currently learn and what the 21st century work place will demand.

Implementation and funding

Cottage Grove used the Workforce 2000 II grant to develop a cross-disciplinary curriculum, career education, and closer ties to colleges and businesses. The Workforce 2000 II grant requires that students work toward either a "Certificate of Initial Mastery" or a "Certificate of Advanced Mastery." The former indicates that a student meets state standards for students who have finished twelve grades or are sixteen years old; the latter degree, awarded after the first, shows that students who have completed twelve grades meet state performance standards.

Another initiative that Cottage Grove put to use was the national Tech Prep program funded through Carl Perkins grants which makes community college an easier option for the 60 to 70 percent of high school graduates who do not go to four-year colleges. This program enabled students to enter community college with up to thirty college credits by the time they graduate from high school.

Capital projects were planned to build a new campus that would house a city-operated library, a restructured high school, and a community college. Private companies have shown interest in becoming partners on the site. A cable television company planned to establish a regional headquarters next to the high school to provide students with media laboratories. Weyerhaeuser was also interested in locating on the site.

Cottage Grove schools have incorporated several work force related benchmarks: developing a professional technical program, creating a seamless relationship with the community college, and adjusting the curriculum to meet higher standards for math, reading, and writing.

Conclusion

In the school restructuring — the cornerstone of the America 2000 project — teachers and administrators are in control. The locally driven process has been the most important factor in the success of the school district's reforms. Faculty and staff, through pride of ownership of the process, have the incentive to make sure the programs succeed. A history of local cooperation and collaboration among organizations, and enlightened leadership of the mayor, were prerequisites for implementing the local vision for educational reform.

Three Programs in North Carolina

Rural Programs Addressing Child Care, Illiteracy and School Dropout Rates Benefit from Links to Regional Visioning and Strategic Planning Groups

Robeson County, North Carolina: Taking Literacy to Rural Neighborhoods

Robeson County, North Carolina, is targeting illiteracy and the lack of transportation that keeps many rural poor from attending available programs. The Teaching Adults Basic Skills program (TABS) uses a computer lab on wheels to take literacy classes to the people.

Background

Robeson County, located in the southern part of the state, had an economy that was based on agriculture but is now predominantly industrial, the main industry being textiles. Lumberton, the county seat and largest of the county's seven towns, is home to 18,600 of the county's 105,800 residents. The county is one-third African American, one-third white, and one-third American Indian.

Median family income was \$23,201 in 1990; per capita income for 1988-1990 was \$10,845 — the fourth lowest of North Carolina's 100 counties. The poverty rate was 24 percent, and 43 percent of the county's adult population did not have high school diplomas. The dropout rate for the county's 16 to 19 year-olds was 15.3 percent. Robeson County's 1992 unemployment rate — 10.5 percent — was nearly twice the state's rate.

Rural Poor Benefit from Strategic Planning for Local Economy

Tony Brewington, Robeson Community College's Director of Literacy, spent sixteen years doing Christian community outreach before joining the college staff in 1986. "Church missionary philosophy is if the people can't come to you, go to them," he said. "With that in mind, I was looking for ways to take classes to the people." A 1989 conference in New Orleans provided Brewington with a model for a mobile lab program.

While Brewington was looking for ways to implement his project, a committee of 100 Robeson County officials and community leaders were looking for ways to stimulate economic development. This committee's work led to a strategic planning initiative, for which the committee set up a steering committee and various task forces, one of which — the Education, Literacy, and Work Force preparedness Task Force — included Tony Brewington. The task force decided on two goals: the establishment of a Communities-in-Schools program and improving literacy of the county work force. The task force identified a barrier to the second goal: transportation for low income rural residents. Most rural residents rely on personal automobiles, but poor people cannot afford them.

Because TABS was a program that would enable the county to meet a key task force goal, TABS has been supported by county leaders in its efforts to expand its scope. Using funds from the

North Carolina Department of Community Colleges, TABS is raising the literacy levels of county residents. TABS students are expected to complete institutional or state requirements for high school diplomas or to pass the test for a high school equivalency diploma. TABS also helps students find jobs.

Implementation and Funding

Brewington found a company that would lease a tractor-trailer and then found someone who could remodel it so that it would hold a classroom with a dozen computers, a heating and cooling system, and a self-contained generator. The software used in the literacy lab is designed to help users improve math and reading skills, regardless of the level of competency from which they begin. The software also included job skills and life skills programs. With funding from JTPA, the mobile lab was ready by March 1991.

The literacy-on-wheels program serves both JTPA and JOBS clients, as well as pregnant teens and teen parents who are high school dropouts. Because of a lack of reliable transportation to remote rural areas, the lab travels to several sites in the county, including rural HUD housing projects and the Robeson County Community College Extension Center, the latter of which serves mostly Native Americans.

Support for TABS came from many sources. Most of the funding for TABS comes from JTPA — leasing fees for the computers, the lab, the truck, and the software; JTPA and Robeson Community College share the salary of the combination program coordinator/driver/instructor/counselor. Support services for TABS come from the state literacy program, and a part-time coordinator was funded through the North Carolina Department of Community Colleges. The company that leased the TABS truck advanced the costs of the renovation until project funding could be found. As for political support, many county and municipal leaders served on Robeson County's Literacy Advisory Committee and provided a supportive role to the project through site visits and public awareness efforts.

Conclusions

TABS' goal is to allow adults the opportunity to earn a high school diploma or raise their competencies in reading, math, basic skills, or job preparation. The lab served 80 people in the 1992-93 school year and 75 percent of students successfully completed the program. The TABS program also illustrates one way that lack of access can be overcome. It also illustrates an additional advantage of using computers when addressing literacy: many adults who are self-conscious about their illiteracy often are less embarrassed when they use a "computerized skill lab."

Mayland Community College Addresses Child Care for Would-be Workers

The lack of adequate child care, especially in rural areas, keeps many women from taking jobs or preparing for them. In the North Carolina counties of Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey, eighteen

child care centers had room for 603 children. The population of children under the age of five was 2,800. As a result, the three counties had growing waiting lists for child care slots.

To address this, Mayland Community College, in Spruce Pine, set up its own child care center for children of community college students and other area residents seeking more education and better job skills.

Background

Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey counties, in a row along North Carolina's border with Tennessee, have a combined population of 44,719. The economy is somewhat diversified, with agriculture, mining, logging, light manufacturing, and tourism providing most jobs, but job opportunities are limited and unemployment and poverty are high. Of North Carolina's 100 counties, Avery ranks 85th in income levels of its residents, Mitchell County ranks 82nd, and Yancey ranks 87th.

Leadership

Playing a pivotal role in creating the Child Development Center was Mayland Community College president Dr. Virginia Foxx. Native to the area, Dr. Foxx was the only top-level female executive in the tri-county area. Under her leadership, the college has almost doubled its enrollment. Dr. Foxx believes that community colleges in rural areas can and should be hubs of economic development. Dr. Foxx was on the Z. Smith Reynolds Advisory Board, the Center for Public Policy Research Board, and the Board of the North Carolina Institute for Political Leadership.

Tri-county Strategic Planning and Visioning Efforts Lead to Focus on Low-income Families

In 1991, the Chamber of Commerce in Mitchell County established the Group of 50 — community leaders and representatives from schools, hospitals, small businesses, and other groups — to develop a list of county goals and priorities. Several Mayland Community College staff members, including the planner for the college, sat on subcommittees of the Group of 50. Along with transportation and economic development, day care was identified as a priority.

Because of the strategic planning and visioning process, area leaders became more aware of the need for day care. A local survey of area welfare recipients indicated that transportation and day care were the biggest obstacle to going to work.

At the same time, Dr. Foxx was putting together a team to write a grant proposal to the Z. Smith Reynolds Opportunities for Families Fund to fund a day care center. The focus of the Group of 50 made it easy to build a broad-based team of county commissioners, social service providers, transportation providers, educators, and client groups. The team also included in the proposal, plans to develop new small businesses and offer revolving loans to existing small businesses in the region.

Implementation and Funding

Many local people and groups donated money, services, and materials to the Child Development Center. Grants funding for the center included \$20,000 from the Cannon Foundation, \$30,000 from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, and \$6,000 from the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina. A Community Development Block Grant and a Rural Electrification Administration grant provided \$173,200.

Donations from individuals and businesses provided an additional \$190,000. The college estimated that the total cost of construction for the Child Development Center would be cut in half by the community's assistance. A former Mitchell County teacher, principal, and school superintendent contributed \$75,000 to the center. A local welding company donated the use of a crane and labor to build a retaining wall; a local stone company donated gravel while the scaffolding was delivered free by a trucking company. A local artist and community college alumnus donated wood carvings for the building. Finally, about \$300,000 worth of nearly cost-free labor for the project was provided by inmates from the Avery County minimum security prison who are enrolled in Mayland Community College's basic construction classes. One inmate who worked on the retaining wall was hired for a masonry job upon his release from prison.

The center is designed to serve 100 children when it is fully operational and provide skills and literacy programs to fifty families. The first priority for day care is children of students, but other children from low-income families will be accommodated as space permits. Planned as a self-supporting center, services are to be provided year round with summer programs for school-aged children. Jobs created by the center will be filled by welfare recipients. The center serves as a resource to the students in Mayland's Early Childhood Education program.

An Initiative in a Small Rural School Becomes a Four-County Strategy Through a Regional Visioning Process

The Communities in Schools program was identified as a key strategy for achieving a four-county regional vision in rural North Carolina. The goal was to break the cycles of illiteracy, low skills, and poverty in the region. The model for the strategy came out of a CIS project in the Rosman Elementary School, a small town of fewer than 400 people, located in the four-county region.

Background

Transylvania County, population 25,500, is located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina, just above the South Carolina line. The county's largest city, Brevard, has a population of 5,400. Rosman, ten miles away, is home to 385 people. The two towns have, over the years, become popular retirement communities.

In 1990, roughly a third of Rosman Elementary students were considered at risk of eventually dropping out. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 1990, 16.9 percent of Transylvania County's 16-to-19-year-olds had not completed high school and were not enrolled. The county poverty rate was 13.5 percent, with a concentration of poor rural Appalachian families

living in the Rosman area. Close to 39 percent of the area's students participated in the free and reduced lunch program. Half of the county's juveniles on probation were from the Rosman area.

From the Rosman Elementary School Communities in Schools Program....

The principal of Rosman Elementary School led his faculty in a brainstorming session about how they could improve education in their school. The faculty developed a list of student needs, most of which involved motivating at-risk students and increasing their self-esteem through a personalized curriculum and more parental involvement in their education.

The principal used these suggestions in his application for a competitive grant to the RJR Nabisco Foundation that was making awards to risk-taking entrepreneurial education programs across the nation. In early 1990, Rosman Elementary School was awarded a \$750,000 Next Centuries Schools grant, in three annual payments of \$250,000, to implement their proposed CIS program.

The principal invited a Communities in Schools representative (from the Cities in Schools, Inc. program) to present a project orientation. The Communities in Schools staff then worked with a locally designated task force to develop partnerships among the school system, local industries, government agencies, community groups, and others. Local Communities in Schools programs are governed by local boards and operated by local staff to meet local needs. On both national and state-level-levels, Cities in Schools provides the model program, training, and support in establishing the local program, as well as ongoing technical assistance.

....to a Regional Four-County Strategy

Soon after the Rosman CIS program began, the Land-of-Sky Regional Council initiated its "Regional Vision 1995," a strategic planning effort, begun in the fall of 1990 to develop an economic revitalization plan for their four-county area which included Transylvania County and the town of Rosman. The process was led by Katherine Anderson, mayor of Brevard, North Carolina, and chairperson of the Land-of-Sky Regional Council.

This effort involved more than 100 participants, including the director of Rosman's Communities in Schools project. The regional council strategic planning group put education at the top of their five top mission statements. The goal was to "improve communication and cooperation among educators and between educators and the regional community, so that educational opportunities become more accessible and parental and community involvement in the education of children is increased." The group devised three strategies for achieving the goal:

- establishment of educational outcomes for the region's schools;
- development of a regional retraining center through community colleges for the current work force and for second-chance training; and
- establishment of a Communities in Schools program in each school system in the four-county region, as well as adopt-a-school and student-employee mentor programs.

Because these goals are not agency specific but related to the well-being of the community, broad-based support was easy to obtain. In 1991, Transylvania County Communities in Schools, Inc., was incorporated; its goals were to replicate the rural Communities in Schools model, established in Rosman, in every school in Transylvania County. The other three counties in the region planned to do the same.

Implementation and Funding

The county-wide Communities in Schools program has broad-based support. The Rosman Elementary School staff was involved in the early planning stages of the program and continues to play a part in decision making for the program. The board of directors is chaired by the head of the Private Industry Council serving the region. The mayors of Rosman and Brevard are on the board, as are the director of the Jobs Program and the JTPA Service Delivery Area administrator.

RJR Nabisco funds were obtained to implement the county-wide CIS effort. The local board is the entity most responsible for fund raising. Money to replace the Nabisco grant had already been pledged by local corporations, individual gifts, foundations, and government agencies. The Training, counseling and other services are provided by many local institutions. Blue Ridge Community College Center provides adult basic education, graduate equivalency diploma classes, and computer classes for parents; other financial and in-kind services come from the private sector, JTPA, JOBS, the literacy council, community organizations, and volunteers. Brevard College has put together a volunteer network, and the county 4-H Club provides life-skills training.

Conclusion

Rosman High School's dropout rate is improving, down from 12.1 percent in 1989 to 7.2 percent in 1992. At the time of this research, nine of the seventeen young parents who first entered the program went on to Blue Ridge Community College. In addition, more than 150 people have enrolled in graduate equivalency diploma classes, and more than 50 have graduated. Rosman Elementary School was designated an America/North Carolina 2000 school, meaning that it complies with six national and three state education goals.

The county-wide CIS program in Transylvania County, and the plans for CIS in the other counties of the region, illustrate the benefits of broad-based regional visioning and planning. All sectors can help define priorities and strategies for an area; local expertise can be tapped and good local program strategies can be identified and replicated; and working toward common goals provides a basis for multisectoral regional cooperation.

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