

NeighborWorks Rural Initiative Membership Forum Report



May 7th, 2015
Kansas City, MO



Reviewing Lessons Learned

The Rural Initiative held our annual member forum this May during the NeighborWorks Training Institute in Kansas City, MO. Rural members from every corner of the country gathered to discuss successes and challenges, connect with each other and, envision the future of NeighborWorks in Rural America.

This report highlights key take-aways from our time together.

‘Rural 101’ with Paul Weech

New NeighborWorks CEO, Paul Weech, joined the group for a discussion about how to be a partner in Rural. He stressed his commitment to a number of rural specific issues including; a renewed focus on areas of persistent poverty, innovative ways to attract and retain high quality staff in remote areas, retooling of production metrics to reflect smaller and less dense populations, building relationships outside of the housing industry in areas like health care and big agriculture and, using technology to reach greater service areas.



Paul listening to the concerns of rural groups

Participation

84 attendees

64 organizations represented

60% of the rural network

Faces of Rural

The heart of rural America is its people. The Rural Initiative recognized the impact each of our members has on rural lives by launching a ‘Faces of Rural’ campaign. Over the next year, we will be collecting and sharing rural images to promote the importance of rural community development work.



Check out more photos on our member page and send us your rural faces at rural@nw.org

At the Corner Café



Participants had open discussions about some of the most pressing issues in rural community development over a cup o' joe during the corner café exercise. Here are some of the highlights--

Packaging Loans for USDA Rural Development: *Can this model stand on its own? Yes! If we increase the non-profit fee structure, achieve a sustainable scale and, share packager data electronically*

Rural Jobs, Rural Housing: *what's the right balance? Depends upon the local market but, we need to repeat the message that housing = jobs*

Bring in the Youth, Bring in the Future: *What can we learn from CCRH's Minority Internship Program? Bring in interns in teams or cohorts, build bridge from internships to employment, and improve connections with universities and colleges*

Capital Ideas: *Yes, we all need capital in rural but for what purposes, and at what price?*

Rethinking CRA partnerships and commitments, convening Network CDFIs, utilizing NWA technical assistance

Factory Built Replacement Strategies: *How do we get to scale, and what does scale mean? Fix perception challenges through education, link to homebuyer ed, increase awareness among appraisers, foster a viable secondary market, offer affordable financing products*

Rural Philanthropy: *What will make the investment tide turn to Rural? Focus on individual and local giving as a resource, emphasize rural as a focus area in CRA requirements*

Homebuyer Education: *We know it's valuable, but how do we pay for it? Expand and improve web based training, foster relationships with colleges and libraries to increase client access to technology*

'Safe & Sound' Grantees Announced

Connie Wright of the Wells Fargo Housing Foundation and Chuck Wehrwein of NeighborWorks America were excited to announce 9 awards under the new 'Safe & Sound' rural housing rehabilitation and replacement grant program. The funds will help grantees to rehab or replace 72 substandard rural homes across the country.

Champlain Housing Trust, VT
RUPCO, NY

GROW South Dakota, SD
PathStone Corporation, NY
HAPEC, NY

Universal Housing Development, AR

NeighborWorks Umpqua, OR

Self Help Enterprises, CA

NeighborWorks Great Falls, MT

Rural Rocks! Presentations in the 'Pecha Kucha' Style

To start the day we highlighted the diversity rural work using rapid-fire, '[Pecha Kucha](#)' style presentations. Presenters shared 10 PowerPoint slides that automatically advanced after 20 seconds.

James Arenson—Enterprise Rose Architectural Fellowship at Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership

Trisha Ingalls—Support and Services at Home (SASH) at Rural Edge

Shelia Rice—Resident Owned Communities at NeighborWorks Montana

Gisela Salgado—Diversity Internship Program at the California Coalition for Rural Housing

Rosa Rios Valdez—Salud de Paloma social enterprise olive oil company at BCL of Texas

Kimberly Lorensberg—innovative investing in tribal schools at GROW South Dakota

Check out their presentations on our [member site!](#)

The Story Wall

Throughout the day participants were encouraged to share thoughts and ideas on a story wall



See pictures of the complete story wall on our member site

Afternoon Breakout Sessions

In the afternoon, participants had a chance to dig deeper into select rural topics.

Rural Rental Housing –*closing the gap* Have a close working relationship with USDA Rural Development. Get HUD and RD together to simplify rules and have conversation about where there is flexibility to make projects run more smoothly

Rural CDFIS –*capital and lending in the new economy* Partner with Federal Home Loan Banks, CDFIs, and other entities like NeighborWorks Capital

Rural Rehab –*a new look at a core line of business* Be selective with acquisition, rehab, resale properties, look for innovative funding opportunities, NeighborWorks should do more projects like 'Safe & Sound'

Working with Rural Data –*making those numbers work for you* Data partnerships need better inputs and outputs; NeighborWorks needs a national platform for reporting to streamline data transfer to any agency or funder

Balancing Business with Mission–*exploring the social enterprise model* Many social enterprise models are nonprofit, but greater integration of the for-profit sector is a possibility in the future. Look at models like Next Step, HOPE's multistate credit union, and eHome America's success in homebuyer education

The Green and Healthy Homes Movement in Rural–*opportunities in healthcare* Start a relationship with your local healthcare industry and public health department; look to Medicare and Medicaid for potential reimbursement; work with senior service providers and home health care aids; NeighborWorks can help to share data and stories

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Rural Awards Dinner

After a long day of discussions, participants had a chance to unwind over some Kansas City BBQ. We also presented awards to a few rural superstars

-NeighborWorks Montana and PathStone for their work as Certified Technical Assistance Providers with ROC USA

-NeighborWorks Montana as the highest producer of Next Step replacement homes

-NeighborWorks & Rural Development Partnership Awards—Sherry Farley, Frontier Housing and her partner at RD KY

-Outstanding 502 Direct Loan Packaging production— Rose Decker of Pathfinder Services and Phyllis Crumrin of RD IN

-Outstanding 502 Direct Loan Packaging partnership production - Gloria Reyes of RD TX and Linda Marin of CDC Brownsville

-NeighborWorks Friend of Rural award—Philip Stetson

-Mutual Self Help Partnership Award—Terry Testolin, NHS of Southwest Wisconsin and Eleanor Chicoigne, Habitat for Humanity® of the Sauk-Columbia Area



Terry Testolin with fellow Self Helpers