

SERVING RURAL AND TRIBAL COMMUNITIES OPPORTUNITIES FOR STRATEGIC COLLABORATIONS

**June 11, 2003
Washington, DC**

SUPPORTING NATIVE AMERICANS AND WORKING IN INDIAN COUNTRY

9:00 am – 11:30 am

Welcome and introductions

Dianne McSwain, DHHS Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, opened the meeting with a word of welcome from the Department of Health and Human Services, host for the meeting. Sally Maggard, USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, described the objectives the meeting. In two sessions, participants from federal agencies, the National Rural Funders Collaborative (NRFC) and its funders, and non-governmental organizations will explore collaborations to revitalize rural and tribal communities and improve the quality of life for families and rural places. Participants will be better able to engage programs across traditional boundaries, serve low-wealth communities, and work through interagency and public/private partnerships.

Representatives from six federal agencies, the National Rural Funders Collaborative, ten non-governmental organizations, and three land grant universities participated in the meetings. They briefly introduced their agencies and the resources they brought to the table. A list of participants is attached.

National Rural Funders Collaborative (NRFC) overview

Jim Richardson, Executive Director, described the background and purposes of NRFC.

NRFC is a collaborative of a dozen private foundations and several public agencies, including USDA, Dept. of Health and Human Services and Appalachian Regional Commission. It has been established as a vehicle through which multiple funders pool resources for investments to revitalize rural communities, especially in areas of persistent poverty. Jim reviewed the process of establishing the NRFC and discussed its efforts to develop models of regional strategic change, raise rural policy issues, and leverage new or untapped financial resources to support sustainable developed and improved quality of life for rural families and communities.

NRFC has identified three cross-cutting issues, or areas of engagement, around which to organize its funding, learning and policy work: building wealth, building leadership, and building self-sufficient families. Long-term its goal is to establish a more sustainable resource base at the regional level and increase capacity for on-going development through strengthening institutional resources, increasing financial resources, and

A PUBLIC-PRIVATE ENDOWMENT FOR RURAL AMERICA

**June 12, 2003
Washington, DC**

Welcome

Dianne McSwain, DHHS Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, opened the meeting with a word of welcome from the Department of Health and Human Services, host for the meeting. She emphasized that DHHS Secretary Tommy Thompson is committed to improving the department's capacity to serve rural America and supports efforts to insert the "rural voice" into government programs and policy.

Opening comments

Luis Luna, Deputy Administrator, Office of Community Development, USDA-Rural Development, stressed the need for strategic partnerships today. He noted that the public-private partnerships we are developing include intellectual as well as financial capital, both important for successful collaboration. He pointed out that rural America is very diverse and that we will not be able to meet every need. We need to find areas with commonalities and assemble resources to build self sufficiency, leadership, and capacity for locally-led development. We also need to develop performance measures that are widely applicable and can generate a shared language for gauging success. Luis also encouraged us to bring additional people to the table. For instance, the National Rural Development Partnership and the National Rural Development Coordination Council, now being established, can provide a strategic focus for our efforts.

Introductions

Representatives from seven federal agencies, five private foundations, five non-governmental organizations, and three land grant universities participated in the meetings. Participants gave a brief introduction to their agencies, interests in a public-private endowment, and resources they bring to the table. A list of participants is attached.

National Rural Funders Collaborative (NRFC) overview

Jim Richardson, Executive Director, described the purpose and history of NRFC. An important innovation in private philanthropy, NRFC is a vehicle through which multiple funders pool resources for investments to revitalize rural communities, especially in areas of persistent poverty. Jim reviewed the process of establishing the NRFC and discussed its efforts to develop models of regional strategic change, raise rural policy issues, and leverage new or untapped financial resources to support sustainable development and improved quality of life for rural families and communities.

Developing a platform for an endowment fund

Kathy Moxon, Humboldt Area Foundation and NRFC consultant, discussed NRFC activities through its first two funding cycles, the goal of leveraging regional resources in rural areas, and the need for an endowment fund. She described the geographic distribution and funding tiers of groups NRFC is supporting. In its first year, NRFC awarded four three-year grants to regional community collaboratives (Alaska, South Carolina, New Mexico, and Appalachian Ohio) and five one-year seed grants (Central Valley California, Nebraska, western Maine, Arkansas, and Community Alliance of Interdependent AgriCulture). These groups are working on diverse priorities including critical health and wellness issues, community wealth creation, entrepreneurial development, housing, new agricultural cooperatives, new and expanded businesses, housing, and community ownership of natural resources and infrastructure. These collaboratives, twelve other finalists, the NRFC funders, and other partners now constitute a Learning Network working to broaden knowledge of rural economic and community development practice and policy.

The regional collaboratives vary in the degree to which they are prepared to meet various opportunities. “Mixes of money” currently available for their activities come from a labyrinth of private philanthropy, federal to local governments, and the private sector. As communities attempt to assemble resources to support their strategic objectives, they struggle with “deal flow,” unfillable gaps in their work, a lack of debt instruments and equity products, undercapitalized rural-serving community capital institutions, few intermediary or secondary resources, and difficulties identifying and capturing competitive public and private funds. In short, rural communities need assistance accessing resources, and rural investment markets are underserved and ripe for development.

General discussion

Several themes ran through the general discussion as participants responded to opening remarks and shared their ideas about the journey of making a public-private endowment fund a reality.

- ***“Coalition of the willing and able” – How many penguins do we need?***
 - o We are forming a new community of the willing and able. Everyone doesn’t have to participate.
 - o We need to articulate principles of our collaboration.
 - o Following Thomas Jefferson’s instruction, we can change institutions to better serve the people.
 - o Use our mandate to collaborate as a “cover” for leaving inertia behind.
 - o Who will be the first penguin in the water? Will we hold hands and jump in together, following the NRFC model?

- ***What is the NRFC role – “Let’s Make a Deal”***
 - o NRFC can make the process of working with funders transparent. Resources need to be accessible and technical assistance ever present.
 - o NRFC is a broker: connect communities to broader financial markets, leverage resources, and get information to funders and communities.
 - o NRFC can help federal agencies and other entities recognize the impacts their programs have on the broader rural and tribal community, including unintended negative impacts and engage them in an effective policy of practice.
 - o NRFC can help strengthen organizations on the ground and build readiness to meet opportunities and to inform policy.

- ***Community readiness***
 - o Many leaders and community organizations in low-wealth rural and native communities need help accessing and using financial tools.
 - o Over time, the NRFC regional coalitions are moving toward “strategic readiness,” a desired end to community capacity building. It is a concept the NRFC learning partners developed at their January 2003 meeting.
 - o Sustaining capacity building is an issue, as in Indian Country.
 - o We need “circuit riders.” Technical assistance must be on going.
 - o There is a dramatic need for easy access to funding information.
 - o Capacity building includes community learning, not just individual.

- ***We need a “Wizard” - soon***
 - o an information platform – with overlays of resources and ways to sort – that is a comprehensive source of information;
 - o multiple ports of entry;
 - o covering the full spectrum of agencies and community capital sector;
 - o tied into developing e-government resources;
 - o meets serious accessibility issues for many rural and tribal communities.

- ***Working with federal agencies and other funding entities***
 - o Budgets are shrinking; there is pressure to do things differently, better.
 - o Federal policymakers need help removing the “urban criteria” problem.
 - o Raise the “rural voice” (i.e. SBA query: “Is anyone working on rural? No!”).
 - o Federal agency line staffers face real restrictions directing public dollars guided by legal authorities and congressional mandates for project-specific activities.
 - o Strategic partnering offers a way to use federal funds more flexibly (i.e. fund regional partners who innovate).
 - o Strategic partnering depends on proper local connections. NRFC is building local capacity that expands this opportunity.
 - o Collaboration and rural investments need to be an agency priority and have strong leadership. Discretionary funds exist and can be used for innovation.
 - o Constraints for other funds include idiosyncrasies of large suppliers and restraints on pension funds.
 - o Reward behavior change that includes rural and collaboration.

- ***Working with state and local governments***
 - o State governments are in fiscal crisis and need to leverage scarce funds.
 - o Local governments are overwhelmed by complexity of federal grants and need a broker. Officials are part-time and largely volunteers.
 - o NACo can carry messages to congress.
 - o NACo can link to local communities.

- ***Working with higher education and the land grant university system***
 - o A wealth of often-untapped resources is available through the land grant universities. The USDA Regional Rural Development Centers can help tap them: intellectual capital, outreach education and training networks that reach to the local level, and applied research and practical information. They can coordinate and convene to mobilize diverse resources around program related investments.
 - o Partnering with universities can institutionalize investments and support an “exit” strategy for public and private funders (i.e. Rural Community College Initiative of the Ford Foundation).
 - o By bringing the academy into the process, NRFC is developing an evaluation strategy to help communities identify and apply regional and national indicators and guide their own development activities.
 - o The land grant community can help bring the big picture to the table – leading to wise grants and applications rather than those that hurt rural America.

- ***Inclusive language, infrastructure, and technical challenges***
 - o Native communities and tribes don’t identify and see themselves in the picture when we refer to “rural communities,” “local and county governments,” and the “federal government” without including tribal governments and native communities.
 - o Indian country faces a severe lag in technology for accessing web-based resources for collaboration and funding.

- ***Build on creative models and existing resources***
 - o Start via the New Markets Tax Credit; CDFI could be a sister fund.
 - o First Nations is a model for Community Development Financial Institutions in Indian Country: tribes control assets and own their economic future.
 - o Participate in and strengthen the public-private partnership Ford Foundation is supporting between universities and rural and tribal community colleges.
 - o Build up technical assistance and capacity building by capitalizing on and coordinating resources at local level: Extension Service, county agents, Resource Conservation and Development Councils, SBA’s SCORE program for small businesses, consultants.
 - o R-CAP’s small flows infrastructure exchange is an innovation to slow the individual community hunt for dollars to meet the “plausible association” match requirement.

- ***Structuring a “Rural Opportunity Investment Fund”***
 - o Calvert Foundation is a possible intermediary to establish and administer fund.
 - o NRFC can serve as broker with funders, public partners, grantees.
 - o Staffing will be needed to support the work at both Calvert and NRFC.
 - o Motivated local leadership is essential.
 - o Fund can become an exit strategy for funders as the investment strategy is fully capitalized.

Take aways and next steps

- Demonstrate a “reverse RFP”: Whose obligation is it to conform to whom? Granters should complete for opportunity to fund communities!
- Next step is to develop a prototype of collaboration, test, and demonstrate it.
- Keep the focus on rural and tribal communities – “What helps rural?”
- Add others – bring potential partners and investment institutions to the table.
- Discover resources in our own agencies and organizations.
- Keep a comprehensive focus and hold to the principle of community-as-leader
- Insert the “rural voice.”
- Identify strategic partnerships to link federal dollars to local innovations.
- Visit the NRFC Learning Communities for priorities and connect general ideas to specific community needs.
- Create the wizard/central repository and include best practice sites and models.
- Assemble profile sheet for participants and a participants list and circulate.

New chapter to our collaboration

Jim Richardson closed the meeting by observing that we have launched a new chapter in collaborative efforts between public and private partners. The economic context has changed since the years when the Rural Working Group of the Council on Foundations began work toward a funders’ collaborative. As relative prosperity falls away, every state faces economic crisis with particularly severe impacts in rural places. Even in this context, the meeting today demonstrates that we have new opportunities and new synergy for moving forward together. We can move together, in increments, toward a more collaborative approach and demonstrate how we can resource these opportunities.

Additional resources

A resource profile of participants, maintained at the Southern Rural Development Center, is available through the SRDC web site at <http://SRDC.MSSState.edu/assetprofile03.htm> and NRFC website at <http://www.nrfc.org>.

See the NRFC website at <http://www.nrfc.org> for the Collaborative's history and approach. Click the "Rural Connections Online" tab and see Issue 2, Spring 2003, for current work.

leveraging the various resources available to enable rural areas to make a measurable difference.

First Nations Development Institute

Jim Richardson introduced Sherry Black, Vice President of First Nations Development Institute (First Nations), and asked her to share perspectives on how we can effectively partner in Indian Country. Sherry described her experiences moving from a federal government position at the Indian Health Service, where approaches were based on a deficit model of native communities, to work at First Nations Development Institute (founded in 1980), where programs reflect an asset-based model. This fundamental difference in perspective helps explain why First Nations has not coordinated work with the federal government for many years, although possibilities for collaboration are emerging.

First Nations programs include grant making and a variety of intermediary services. It collaborates with tribal governments and the new native non-profit sector emerging as tribal governments develop. First Nations has identified 1200 non-profits (including community radio stations, schools, and CDCs), sponsored a native non-profit forum, and convened native grant makers.

A forthcoming Ford Foundation study, “Native Americans of the New Millenium,” ranks First Nations as the twelfth largest funder in Indian Country from 1988 – 1998. In 1993 First Nations created the Eagle Staff Fund, a funders collaboration that has made over three hundred grants for a total of \$10,000,000. Forty percent of First Nations work is directly or indirectly related to food. It has developed a Native American Hunger Program and sponsored the first Native American food summit. Currently they are exploring connections between food systems and native agriculture (with Kellogg support) and related opportunities for entrepreneurship. It has funded a study on predatory lending in Indian Country and developed a curriculum and trained educators for a Native American Financial Literacy Coalition. Fannie Mae Foundation distributes the curriculum free of charge. First Nations’ communications program includes publishing “Native Americans Millenium,” a magazine devoted to the entire hemisphere of native issues. It also works internationally with “First People World Wide.” Its Native Assets Research Center (NARC) is drawing lessons from the field to inform policy and development practice.

Sherry stressed the need for an indigenous social investment strategy that engages corporate and other funders. First Nations’ Alista established the Lakota Fund as the first CDFI on Pine Ridge to help native communities control their own assets. There are now more than twenty certified CDFIs in Indian Country and seven native IDA programs.

First Nations brings to the table models of public-private partnerships, experience in indigenous development, opportunities for networking, and an interest in and resources for building a clearing house and data base.

Rural Community College Initiative

Bo Beaulieu, Director of the Southern Rural Development Center, described the new phase of the Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI). With support from Ford Foundation, the Southern Rural Development Center and North Central Regional Center for Rural Development are developing long-term partnerships between land grant institutions and rural and tribal colleges. Goals are to increase access to education for under-served populations, enhance civic participation, and contribute to sustainable economic development. Coaches are working with community and tribal college teams in a process of planning and problem solving as the teams engage their surrounding communities in strategic planning. The partnership also provides access to technical training in economic and community development and entrepreneurship.

RCCI is no longer a program of direct grants from Ford Foundation to the colleges or a model of experts assisting recipients. The RCCI is now based on long-lasting partnerships between communities, rural and tribal colleges, and universities. A “coaching” role is evolving as an important brokering tool for information and resource dissemination, and the nature of the partnerships supports tailoring development approaches to local needs and diverse communities. Twenty-five communities and colleges are engaged.

The Rural Community College Association is calling for proposals for its conference on “Revitalizing Rural Economies,” October 6-8, 2003, in San Antonio Texas. Bo encouraged participants to consider organizing sessions or making presentations that demonstrate collaboration and innovative partnerships that revitalize rural and tribal communities. See the conference website: <http://srdc.msstate.edu/rcca03> or contact Susan Fey at the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development at 515-294-2878.

Discussion of key initiatives, challenges, opportunities

In a general discussion following these opening remarks, participants described a variety of exciting initiatives in and for Indian country, identified challenges in the work, and explored opportunities for aligning resources, programs, and funding.

Building capacity that is sustainable

In the Pacific Islands, building capacity for success with grants took twelve years. Communication about available resources is difficult because of remote locations and technology limitations. Grant writing requires special skills. In addition, tribal colleges need highly skilled leadership, but rapid turnover makes professional development particularly difficult.

Intermediaries, tribal colleges, and working “in place”

Intermediaries, the tribal colleges, and RCCI are essential resources. The Center of Family and Communities Services grew out of RCCI work at Ft. Peck and has since

started a Wellness Center. They rely on a holistic approach, bring together everyone working on related issues, foster networking, identify resources, and discuss ways to build capacity around different issues. The tribal colleges are the premier engines for economic development in Indian Country, and RCCI is helping to integrate more fully into their communities. The coaching model of the new RCCI program, unlike a grants-focused model, brokers connections and partnerships. It also increases the likelihood that development work will be culturally appropriate and tailored to rural places. One size cannot fit all in Indian country or any other of America's diverse rural communities.

The discussion underscored the importance of intermediary organizations. This is a challenge for areas like the rural West where this critical path is weak. The National Rural Development Coordination Council, authorized in the 2002 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act, is being established. It will support increasing non-profit organizations and partnering with them.

Access to resources

Participants discussed a variety of ways of disseminating information about programs and grants. Existing resources and technical assistance capacity at the local level can be better coordinated, and training across fields can improve the quality of technical assistance. Resources Conservation and Development Coordinators, county agents, Extension educators, rural development staff, Forest Service field staff and field staff from non-profits like R-CAP could be linked at the local level to create a more effective pool of local resource people. Such coordination and skills sharing can greatly expand technical assistance for writing grants and can insure long-term commitments.

We could push the envelope further and create "circuit riders" for TA in Indian Country. A Memorandum of Understanding with non-traditional organizations could be developed to insure communications about resources and assistance. A discussion by Forest Service representatives has illustrated that federal agencies can be creative and shift the focus or expand some positions to improve access and a better federal presence on native communities. We also need to look at what works and what doesn't and cross train using best practices as well as failures.

Sorting out roles and getting better together

The roles for government, foundations, and non-profit organizations need to be rethought and clarified. Public and private funders tend to "projectize" the world, pushing communities to try and capture "program related" investments that may or may not fit in with long term strategic goals or immediate needs. Native and rural communities are trying to address multiple and deeply rooted needs, while funders tend to think and act in terms of "sectors." Person-to-person communication is key to addressing this. It will be an important output of the meeting. Everyone doesn't work "in the field," and we need to develop seamless and effective means of communicating across very different worlds of work.

Partnerships aren't easy, and there are many lessons to learn. The South Carolina Association of Community Development Corporations (SCACDC) is developing a Memorandum of Understanding with Clemson University, and in the process it has decided to train its academic partner in working at the community level. SCACDC is working on ways for universities to learn from communities, to value that learning, and to become better partners in the process.

We need to stay focused on the needs in tribal communities and avoid pushing programs at people. Our partnerships need to be "demand-side" driven.

From information overload to an effective resource base

There was agreement that we need information about resources and information about community needs. But people are already struggling with information overload. How can we develop just-in-time and topic-specific information delivery?

Examples of challenges include the "Federal Register" ("It is not an information tool!"). What is the alternative? Does "e-gov" hold promise? Will it lead to a standardized approach rather than to a process that can capture community input and help funders and policymakers quickly reorganize based on local needs? We need a new way of thinking about making resources finger-tip available and about communication flow.

There was further discussion about opportunities for building a resource base, including working with efforts underway at HUD, USDA, and HHS and exploring "Native Edge," an earlier interagency effort to develop non federal-speak communications with partners. Non-federal models exist, like the Native American Literacy Coalition that is a model of cross agency and partner communication in native communities. The Athena Alliance links local, traditional knowledge systems.

Take aways and comments for next steps

- Resolve the tension between information overload and the need to interface with current needs and opportunities.
- Interagency coordination will overcome territoriality and enable tailored and coordinated responses to community needs.
- Help native communities access resources through training, mentoring, management, follow through, and reporting. Circuit Riders are needed.
- Become a "Learning and Doing Circle" to institutionalize this learning community. Commit to regular communications and sharing and fruitful formats to come together regularly to seal partnerships and make them effective. Plan to meet in the West.
- Assess what is available and how to bring resources together.
- Weave work with native communities and tribal governments into all programs and increase resources for native-serving institutions.
- Develop concrete, specific actionable projects to demonstrate collaborations.

- Develop the model of “intermittent intermediaries;” figure out how to fund brokering, facilitation, and integration; overcome fragmentary resources and funding; and focus specifically (location, place, and time).
- Fill in the gaps and identify additional agencies, non-profits, and funders. Link to other interagency efforts (i.e. HUD) and resources (i.e. HHS’s RAC-on-line).
- Continue to build the capacity of Native Americans to affect public policy at the local, state, and national level.
- Convince skeptics that people in government care; overcome poor history by demonstrating this “new government.”
- Explore a “portal” concept for interactive web-based communications and insure access in Indian Country.
- Institutionalize South Carolina’s strategy for educating academics.
- Link RCCI strategic plans to concrete resources and collaborate to more effectively channel resources to rural and tribal colleges.
- Identify best practices and share strategies to tailor TA to specific places.
- Align performance measures of agency and community success.
- Assemble a profile sheet (one pager – cost of admission to the Learning and Doing Circle) to inventory resources (what we can do for each other and for organizations and communities) and circulate a list of participants.
- QUICKLY translate this meeting into action. Pilot some partnerships; participate in the RCCI conference in October; respond to CDFI’s requests for proposals. Develop concrete, jointly funded projects.

Conclusion

Jim Richardson closed the morning meeting by observing that weaving together the resources we each bring to the table will result in sustainable development work. Dan Kugler added, “The possibilities are limitless.”

SUPPORTING HISPANIC AND AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

1:00 pm – 3:30 pm

Welcome and introductions

Dianne McSwain, DHHS Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, welcomed the afternoon meeting to the Department of Health and Human Services, host for the meeting. Sally Maggard, USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, reviewed the objectives the two-session meeting and the focus on of the afternoon session on serving Hispanic and African American families and communities.

National Rural Funders Collaborative (NRFC) overview

Jim Richardson, Executive Director, described the background and purposes of NRFC.

NRFC is interested in learning how public and private funders can learn to think and work together differently in rural communities. How can we move from a project-based to a holistic approach? Let's identify models of rural success where multiple stakeholders work together for rural transformation in sustainable, unique ways. See www.nrfc.org for detailed profiles of the work being done. NRFC itself is becoming a public/private collaborative and now USDA, HHS, Appalachian Regional Commission have joined the collaborative, along with the dozen private foundations involved.

South Carolina Association of Community Development Corporations (SCACDC)

NRFC focuses on areas of the country that face persistent poverty, including areas that have concentrations of African American and Latin American populations. Jim Richardson introduced Bernie Mayzck, President and CEO of SCACDC, one of the regional community coalitions supported by NRFC, and asked him to share his perspectives on partnerships in African American low-wealth communities.

The SCACDC is creating an infrastructure for grass roots leadership development, capacity-building for community development corporations (CDCs), wealth creation in low wealth areas and long term political change throughout rural South Carolina. Establishing CDCs and organizing them into a regional coalition is creating wealth for individuals and communities and building political infrastructure. The association is a statewide model for capacity building. It impacts policy at the state and local levels and is a new kind of investment structure. SCACDC has won support from the media, the land grant universities, the Chamber of Commerce, and state legislators. But it has been a difficult road to travel.

Their ongoing work is at an historic moment when South Carolina is still trying to figure out if it lost the Civil War. In the period following the Civil War, South Carolina

changed its state constitution to halt reconstruction. The patronage system that followed ended local empowerment and disenfranchised local governments, African Americans, and poor whites. They are still experiencing the vestiges, as many people believe that political permission is necessary to get something done. All SCACDC work is sensitive to and affected by this legacy.

CDCs are community-based, community controlled entities and represent a new era in South Carolina rural and community development history. Work ranges from organizing local communities to building a political collaborative to impact the state assembly. SCACDC has implemented a state Individual Development Account (IDA) program and generated 100 IDAs. These are matched savings accounts for those who meet specific income guidelines and want to purchase a first home, start a small business, or go to school. NRFC is helping the association engage community foundations to broaden the resource base in the state.

SCACDC recognizes land grant universities in the state as pivotal institutions with valuable resources for low wealth communities. It is working with South Carolina State University to develop a minority business program and with all four Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs or “1890s”) in the state to institutionalize this approach. With Clemson University, SCACDC is working to establish a partnership that is sustainable over time. Together they are increasing community development skills among faculty, training faculty to broker resources for development projects, and helping the university community learn from communities and to value that learning.

Hispanic serving institutions as resources

Jim Richardson introduced Irma Lawrence, USDA/CSREES National Program Leader for Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and asked her to comment on working with Hispanic communities and families. Irma explained that HSIs have twenty-five percent Hispanic enrollees and fifty percent or more low income enrollees. Her priorities include faculty development and a new initiative to insure a “2+2” seamless transition from two year community colleges to four year institutions. Most Hispanic students go to community colleges because these institutions are often closer to home and allow Hispanic students to meet family responsibilities.

Irma is traveling extensively via the “Irma-mobile.” She reports dramatic success in increasing applications for federal grants available to HSIs. Personal mentoring through the granting process is essential. In an interagency partnership with HUD’s Office of University Partnerships, Irma is helping link HUD resources to HSIs and vice versa. She is planning a conference in California on how to leverage the funds among different agencies. She has also created a listserv of the HSIs and will make it available to participants.

Discussion of key initiatives, challenges, opportunities

Jim opened the meeting for general discussion. Participants described a variety of resources they bring to the table, identified challenges, and explored opportunities for collaboration. In general, the discussion focused on how to better communicate available resources, help different kinds of minority communities take advantage of opportunities, create communication lines that enable minority communities to influence programs and policy, and do interagency work that supports holistic community development.

- In rural African American communities there are few jobs available. This makes it difficult to create economic development opportunities, especially when local elites do not want change as is so often the case in the Delta. In South Carolina it is difficult to expand access to capital. There are no CDFIs serving low wealth communities, a gap in CDFI certification that must be addressed. The Office of Intergovernmental Affairs in the Small Business Administration (SBA) understands that different kinds of communities need different amounts of money. Business Carolina is the statewide CDFI. The SCACDC is working to build local capacity to access that capital.
- African American community assets are being lost, especially land as developers exploit inheritance patterns. This presents an opportunity for working with African Americans who have a stake in communities and want to see assets used to grow wealth. The Presidents' Council of the HBCUs is receptive to working on this and other rural development issues. Federal partners have a role as well. The State Forester in South Carolina has been working with African American farmers to help them value their timber assets.
- Interagency coordination and partnerships with non-governmental organizations will enable us to support holistic approaches and have more sustainable outcomes. For example, tax incentive programs need companion investment in community capacity building to be effective in low wealth communities. To involve companion organizations to create a more holistic portfolio we need to know who these organizations are.
- Again a discussion of information overload pointed to the need to provide just-in-time interagency information as communities identify opportunities and to educate all partners about available resources.
- In the university community, there has been a sense of noblese oblige that persists despite concerted calls for engagement. The degree to which colleges and universities are engaged with their surrounding communities is highly variable. Current fiscal problems in the states may worsen the situation. But this may also be an opportunity. Collaborations like the ones we are building today are essential.
- What specific options exist for increasing higher education engagement?
 - CDCs would be a good partner for universities, given limited resources today.
 - The South Carolina partnership developing between the academic community and

- SCACDC is creating a real opportunity to learn from each other and engage higher education in rural and community development.
- We need to build capacity at the grass roots level to come to the table and declare that rural and tribal communities are partners as well as the “Monsantos” of the world.
 - White House initiatives are encouraging tribal colleges and universities, HBCUs, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Asian American and the Pacific institutions to increase participation within their service areas. We need to increase capacity to compete for these federal grants. CDCs would be a good link. This is an opportunity to reinvent what we do and how we work in higher education.
 - Calls for proposals for grants should be structured to require collaboration.
- We are using the term “capacity” a lot, but what do we mean?
 - Do we mean building someone’s ability to do something alone without any help?
 - Is it learning to be connected, recognizing individual strengths and assets, and linking them to others?
 - When is this business driven? Are we collaborating only to prepare a business plan? Increase the return on investments?
 - We need to shift from the self-sufficiency myth of capacity building to a paradigm of collective work. This means re-educating, redefining terminology, shifting the rationale behind policy, and changing ways of working.
 - Making communities self-sufficient so people can work and live there requires revitalizing rural economies. How? Few resources support this. Can existing resources link and leverage each other?
 - How do we organize what we represent here today?
 - We need to provide a more complete infrastructure for people to use as needed.
 - Public/private partnerships can bridge gaps between grants and programs.
 - Interagency work is fundamental.
 - Develop a process that will knit together resources to fund and support broad community strategic planning and a community’s plan for its future. When communities assess themselves and where they want to go, we will be ready to offer resources that sustain development over time. This shifts public/private funding from program related investments to enabling serious longer-term approaches that enable local people to provide their own solutions.
 - *We should test and demonstrate a “reverse Request For Proposals” (RFP) model.* Federal agencies and private foundations assume that programs are always useful to people. We need a recursive learning network.
 - Communities generate strategic blueprints – which they present to a panel of Federal/NGO resource people. What are the programs that respond to the needs? Why don’t we have anything? How do we respond?
 - Steve Daniels, Director, Western Rural Development Center, created a graphic image to illustrate the shift in paradigm we are discussing and the new kind of information flow we need (see attachment).

- How do we teach our institutions to dance?
 - The changes we are discussing will need a buy-in from leadership at the highest level. There is an inertia barrier: those who don't see any reason to change will move if told to do so. On the other hand, there is an issue of being seen as a pawn of politicians.
 - The National Rural Development Coordinating Committee (NRDCC), authorized in the 2002 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act, is now being established. Not tied to a single federal agency, it provides shelter for agencies implementing new ways of working. It also allows for collaborating with non-governmental organizations.

- We need to demonstrate the way of working we are discussing.
 - The Mid South Delta is a likely place for a first experiment or demonstration. The history of investments there represents the limitations of single-source solutions. The region is also diverse, and the ability to tailor resources for diverse opportunities is necessary. The NRFC, foundations, and several federal entities, and intermediaries are already working toward new partnerships in the region that can demonstrate community-based solutions.
 - We need to move to institutionalize change across the board once we have a successful demonstration.

Take aways and comments for next steps

- Start with non-governmental organizations so they help to set agendas.
- Balance agency/funder self-interests with the need to work collaboratively.
- Clarify benefits to each partner.
- Interagency work is necessary, and we have taken a significant step today.
- Assemble an organizational framework for today's work.
- It all fits. We need to map what is there and work together consistently.
- Asset mapping is needed for real networking among partners.
- National organizations can create opportunities and local people can seize them.
- "Do no harm. The Holy Grail = put the community in the driver's seat.
- Little ideas at the community level can pool to get economies of scale.
- Swiss cheese – who is the cheese and who is the holes (private vs. public)?
- Bring others to the table and permanently link with those present today.
- Expand work with the universities and meet opportunities to work with the RCCI.
- Include the colonias, communities along the southwestern border, and initiatives there.
- Work with county and state level organizations and leaders.
- Write "community" large – not just "towns."
- Make collaboration a habit rather than an exception.
- Move forward with a demonstration and then ways to institutionalize change.

Conclusions

Jim Richardson closed the meeting with comments about the important progress made today toward interagency and public/private partnerships. Our work today will change our ability to support Indian Country, Hispanic communities, and African American communities. Tomorrow we will convene a meeting to explore ways to build a pool of public and private money available on a local and national level to support holistic community-based development and evolve into a sustainable investment strategy. The work is on going. Dan Kugler added, “The ark will float if we keep pasting up on the frame.”

Additional resources

A resource profile of participants, maintained at the Southern Rural Development Center, is available through the SRDC web site at <http://SRDC.MSState.edu/assetprofile03.htm> and NRFC website at <http://www.nrfc.org>.

See the NRFC website at <http://www.nrfc.org> for the Collaborative’s history and approach. Click the “Rural Connections Online” tab and see Issue 2, Spring 2003, for current work.

- A packet of material of First Nations and its programs is available from Sarah Dewees at: sdewees@firstnations.org
- Maps of the land grant institutions including tribal colleges were distributed at the meeting. For additional copies contact Norman Ramos at USDA/CSREES at 202-720-0741 or nramos@csrees.usda.gov.
- Diagram of new paradigm for our work, attached.

