

Rural Community College Initiative

Mid-Year Report

December 2003

Introduction

The Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI) is now beginning to realize positive returns to rural communities from investments made in training for college teams and the coaching support provided by the partner land-grant universities and regional rural development centers (RRDCs). Civic engagement activities have helped colleges better understand their communities and build new relationships while strengthening existing ones. Coaching and the connection with land-grant university systems have led to new opportunities for community and tribal colleges in training, technical assistance and access to resources. Similarly, the connection to the RCCI process has helped land-grant university faculty develop new partnerships. Most importantly, the RCCI efforts in most locations are yielding a diverse group of people, organizations and institutions working together to pursue a viable future for the community and increased opportunities for the people of the rural communities that the colleges serve. While the college/community teams vary in the progress they have made in planning for the future, the excitement and hope emerging from the process bodes well for the implementation phase of each project. In addition to the ongoing support of college teams in the planning efforts, specific activities for this year are discussed below.

Research on Coaching

Given that the coach is an integral part of RCCI success and that the majority of Extension faculty are used to providing a different type of assistance to advance economic and community development, applied research that examines the coaching role and its fulfillment by Extension faculty is extremely important. Dr. Mary Prentice, RCCI coach for Mesalands Community College and faculty member of the New Mexico State University College of Education, is interviewing the Phase II RCCI coaches to determine the effect that geographic and social proximity has on the coaching process.

Dr. Prentice's questions primarily focus on four distinct areas. These include the preparation of the faculty member for the coaching process; coaching experiences, including successes and challenges encountered; the advantages and disadvantages of acting as a coach for a community while either living or working inside or outside of the community; and the social and civic processes that the coach engages in as a member of the community in which they coach. The outcome of this research will be invaluable in recruiting other coaches for further rounds of the initiative.

Communications

One of the factors that the RRDCs feel is critical to the success of the program is communication between the Centers and the various schools. To improve communication between the RRDCs and the college teams, monthly conference calls with the college presidents, team leaders and coaches have been implemented and are in the process of being evaluated to determine their usefulness.

The structure of these conference calls varies greatly among the different groups and from month to month. As a general rule, the conference calls include updates from each participating RCCI team and announcements of new issues or concerns. However, this is where the similarity ends. The presidents' conference calls typically focus on government policy that affects the operations of community colleges. This focus is facilitated by the advocacy roles that at least two of the presidents play: Dr. Jim Owen, Piedmont Community College, participated in the 2003 American Association of Community Colleges Rural Issues Roundtable Forum, and Dr. Joe Sertich, Northeast Higher Education District, is chair of the RCCA Policy, Research and Advocacy Committee.

The team leaders' calls usually focus on the updates and progress that the teams have made since the last call and the nuts and bolts of the particular processes that the teams happen to be involved with at that particular time. Finally, the coaches' calls focus on the interaction between Extension and the community colleges and the methods that each of these partners will typically employ to achieve their objectives. The methods' discussions range from instructional methods and objectives to federal funding policies and the competition for funding.

We anticipate making some changes to the format in response to the evaluation data we have collected. While all conference call participants would like to discuss how the applicable role (president, team leader, coach) affects the RCCI process, the presidents would like to have more in-depth discussions on policy matters that affect rural community colleges. The coaches and team leaders want guest speakers that can discuss topics particular to the coaching or team leader roles.

The second form of "mass" communication in use is a newsletter that is devoted to the RCCI process as well as other materials published by the RRDCs that the Centers feel could be helpful to the teams and the coaches. One of the changes that will likely be implemented in the newsletter is the inclusion of short articles that focus on specific tools that can be used in the RCCI process. Requests for these types of articles were primarily targeted at economic development, evaluation and civic engagement topics.

Third, the RCCI website (<http://srdc.msstate.edu/rcci>) is continually being updated and new materials added. A new section has been included to showcase the newsletters, and team members are being added to the team information section.

Finally, appropriate RRDC publications are sent out to the teams. These publications include the Grant Connections newsletter and SRDC policy briefs. Policy briefs that have been sent out include: *Workforce Development Networks in Rural Areas of the United States* by Gary Green, *Children and Poverty in the Rural South* by Rosalind P. Harris and Julie N. Zimmerman, and *Persistent Poverty and Place: How Do Persistent Poverty Dynamics and Demographics Vary Across the Rural-Urban Continuum?* by Kathleen K. Miller and Bruce A. Weber. RCCI teams have also benefited from learning about a wide variety of web-based resources on civic engagement, evaluation, and economic and community development.

Rural Community College Alliance Conference

The 2nd annual Rural Community College Alliance (RCCA) Conference was held October 6-8, 2003, in San Antonio, TX. The North Central Regional Center for Rural Development and the Southern Rural Development Center provided substantial assistance in the planning and hosting of this conference and were instrumental in achieving the strong land-grant participation that the conference enjoyed (over 30 of the 150 conference participants were representatives of land-grant universities). The regional centers also provided a significant amount of input into the mission statement of the RCCA's Policy, Research and Advocacy Committee.

Community Development Program Formation

Dr. Aaron Kelson, Northeast Higher Education District core team member and economics professor at Mesabi Range Community and Technical College, views the RCCI program as a way to instill the importance of local economic structures and interactions in his students. To do this, Dr. Kelson is integrating a regional economics focus into his principles of economics classes. In order to facilitate this integration, Liz Templin, RCCI coach for the Northeast Higher Education District and faculty member of the University of Minnesota Cooperative Extension Service, coordinated and participated in discovery sessions between Dr. Kelson and the relevant faculty of the University of Minnesota's Department of Applied Economics. Strong partnerships were quickly formed and departmental faculty members have provided Dr. Kelson with presentations, data and analyses in the area of regional economics. This partnership has now developed to the point where Dr. Kelson is creating a two-year community development program at MRCTC that will articulate students into the University of Minnesota's baccalaureate degree programs.

Technical Assistance Activities

The level of technical assistance activities is increasing as the teams finish the data collection phase and begin to develop strategies to achieve the objectives outlined in their vision to action plans. Gene Theodori of Texas A&M University has used methods that he developed while serving as a senior fellow with the Southern Rural Development Center to assist the Howard College expanded team in choosing objectives for their plan that are not only important to the team and the community, but are also accomplishable. Jennifer Ulz, team leader at Carteret Community College, organized and hosted a two-day workshop on appreciative inquiry taught by Mary Emery of the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development. Over 25 persons from the Carteret and Piedmont teams participated and discovered how this powerful tool could help them begin to formulate their strategic plans. In addition, Dr. Emery has met with three college teams to help them create plans for civic engagement.

Other technical assistance opportunities being offered to the teams include educational workshops offered by the Centers. It is anticipated that the demand for these workshops will increase as the teams begin their strategic planning activities. To date, one person from an RCCI team has enrolled in a Center-offered workshop (Business Skills Training).

Academic Influences from RCCI

Four persons involved in this phase of the RCCI initiative are also involved in academic programs dealing with community college leadership. Ed Arellano, Ramon Dominguez and Mary Prentice are housed in the College of Education at New Mexico State University. These faculty members teach and advise future community college leaders in the Educational Management and Development Department. Bo Beaulieu, Director of the Southern Rural Development Center, teaches a course in Economic and Community Development for the Community College Leadership Program at Mississippi State University.

Future Program Funding

In order to continue the funding of the RCCI initiative beyond the second round provided by the Ford Foundation and expand the initiative, Dr. Sally Maggard, National Program Leader for Community Systems with the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, is initiating discussions between the RRDCs and CSREES administration. These discussions will explore the feasibility of submitting a federal request to fund RCCI efforts in all regions of the country. It is likely that initial discussions regarding this expansion will take place in March.

Individual College Reports

Carteret Community College has undergone a comprehensive method for determining the existing and emerging leaders in the county and has formed their expanded core team from these leaders. The coach for this team has been thoroughly integrated into the process and has worked closely with the team leader and core team members. The team chose appreciative inquiry as a method of developing their vision to action plan and hosted an appreciative inquiry workshop for team members and other interested parties.

Coastal Bend College is centering the RCCI process around its four campuses located at Beeville, Alice, Kingsville and Pleasonton. By utilizing these campuses, this college can reach its entire service area through the RCCI program. Also, the day-to-day operations of the RCCI effort have been assumed by Duwayne Dumas, Vice-President of Administrative Services. Coastal Bend College has finished the data collection process and is now ready to initiate strategic plan development.

The *East Central Community College* RCCI team has developed a number of unusual partnerships that have the potential to significantly boost the college's economic development activity in its service area. The team has decided to focus its efforts on childcare providers (particularly non-licensed providers) and agribusinesses and to develop educational programs targeted to these sectors. The childcare provider program will focus on helping the child become ready for school while the agribusiness focus will primarily help poultry farmers develop a profitable way to dispose of excrement and dead birds.

At *Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College* the team is working on a strategic planning process to help the college work with the community, and more specifically, to be of service to the community. They are currently working on who to involve in the planning process and

anticipate putting a plan in place within the next couple of weeks. This is a timely effort for this college since a new president, who is looking to expand the role of the college in the community, has just been hired.

Howard College has completed its data collection phase and is now ready to begin developing its vision to action plan with the help of a highly committed expanded team. Howard College allowed this team to develop a high sense of ownership in the RCCI process by letting the team develop and present much of the data that will be used in the strategic planning phase of the effort.

Mesalands Community College continues to work on developing enthusiasm for the RCCI process and building a strong core team. They plan to begin the actual civic engagement portion of the planning process in January.

The **Northeast Higher Education District** held a retreat with their stakeholders group. Subsequently, the president has met with all the colleges and the major communities in the district to update them on the True North Initiative. They will begin planning efforts at the college level after the first of the year. They are also initiating an effort to link the colleges more closely to the business and economic development efforts of the area.

Piedmont Community College is adding to its RCCI administrative team. Susan Scaggs, Dean of the Caswell County campus, and Randy Reynolds, Director of the Small Business Development Center, have been named directors of the Caswell County and Person County efforts, respectively. These individuals, along with their respective county teams, will receive additional training in January on the RCCI process. Robin Roper, Coach for the Piedmont RCCI effort, and Alan Barefield of the Southern Rural Development Center, will facilitate this training.

Rochester Technical and Community College focused their planning process on how to better serve the rural communities in their service area. They are finishing up business surveys in six communities. They plan to follow up with some face-to-face interviews. Once they complete the data collection, they will set goals and work on implementation.

We continue to work with **United Tribes Technical College** on framing a workable planning effort given their wide and diverse service area and unique function.

University of Eastern New Mexico: Roswell is completing an ambitious effort to focus their community engagement for strategic planning on the elementary and middle schools serving the poorest residents in their service area. They have also included the alternative school. To date, they have held a variety of meetings, received input from residents through their dental outreach program, and collected data to support their planning efforts. Their work to date has resulted in over 35 faculty becoming involved in the outreach effort to these schools.

University of Eastern New Mexico: Ruidoso has completed five community focus group meetings across their service area to learn more about residents' thoughts on access to education and economic development. President Miller will also meet with the Mescalero Tribal Board to compile the results, provide feedback to participants, and complete their report.

The *Western Carolina Partnership* is made up of the three western-most community colleges in North Carolina: *Haywood Community College*, *Southwestern Community College* and *Tri-County Community College*. These schools have a long history of working together and sharing programs in order to provide better service to their clientele. This tradition is continuing to the RCCI Initiative. The team is currently exploring a partnership with AdvantageWest, an economic development branch of the North Carolina Department of Commerce, to address a state mandate that requires North Carolina institutions of higher learning to participate in the state's economic development activities. In order to facilitate this and other planning activities, the team has received a \$20,000 grant from the Cherokee Preservation Foundation, which is specifically targeted to further the RCCI initiative in western North Carolina.

At *Williston State College*, the team has held two community meetings with participation from the Trenton Indian Service Agency and the Fort Berthold Reservation. While several additional meetings will be required in order to develop a vision-to-action plan, the relationship building aspect of the process is already paying great dividends for the college.

RCCI

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