



RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE INITIATIVE

Activities Report
July 1, 2004 - June 30, 2006
Ford Foundation Contract #1020-1325-1



A Ford Foundation Supported Initiative

Report Submitted by
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Introduction

The 2004-2006 funding cycle for the Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI) was one of great change for the program. While the basic RCCI tenets of civic engagement, educational access and equitable economic development were still in the forefront of the colleges selected in the previous RCCI funding cycle, additional emphasis was placed on program expansion and institutionalization. All colleges made tremendous progress during this period with regard to their RCCI-related efforts, and the Southern Rural Development Center made great strides in its ability to facilitate the process.

This report will highlight many of the activities and accomplishments of both the program and the individual college teams. Specific attention will be given to the concept of institutionalization and how the individual teams are achieving their goals.

Program Expansion

One of the goals in the second funding cycle was to expand the RCCI program in the Southern region. There were several factors that influenced this decision. First, the Regional Rural Development Centers – the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (NCRCRD) and the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) – developed new materials and techniques and streamlined existing materials to engaging both community colleges and land-grant universities in the process. There was a need to test and refine these materials and processes in a more or less controlled environment before they were made available to the targeted audience of higher education institutions.

Secondly, the SRDC felt that it was important to realize a geographic expansion of the program in the Southern region in order to further solidify its acceptance by the land-grant university system. While land-grant administrators of the states containing Phase 1 schools were excited about the process, it was felt that universities from other states in the region looked at the program as a more or less localized phenomenon. Therefore, the SRDC, with substantial input from the RCCI Advisory Council, selected North Florida Community College in Madison and the Louisiana Community and Technical College System headquartered in Baton Rouge as expansion teams. This increased the number of Southern states participating in the program to five states and established the RCCI as a regional initiative in the South.

Finally, there was interest in the program from entities that had not previously participated in the RCCI program and could not be taken under consideration as formal expansion teams due to the limited resources of the program. In the South, the Texas Rural Community College Network, a collaborative of 19 Texas community colleges that have been designated as “rural” by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, fell into this category. While three of the “member” schools have participated in the RCCI program (Southwest Texas Junior College, Coastal Bend College and Howard College), the remainder discovered the tremendous success that implementation of the RCCI could have for a college. This resulted in a high level of interest on the part of the colleges to explore the feasibility of implementing the program in their service areas. Since the TRCCN colleges felt that implementation of the RCCI was crucial to their future missions, they have allocated internal and sought extramural resources to accomplish the program.

Competitive Grants Program

While the SRDC did provide a level of base funding for each college team that participated in the program, it felt that there was a need to provide a small amount of additional seed funding to deserving teams that could be used to initiate community development strategies that were conceived in the community planning processes that are a foundation of the RCCI program. These grants were awarded on a competitive basis, with team-submitted proposals being evaluated by an independent review panel. The awardees and their projects included:

Coastal Bend College – *Moving Up The PACE (Parent And Child Enrichment)*

This program focused on adult literacy and workforce development skills for single mothers as well as a preschool child enrichment program for their children. This program has been presented twice in the past year and plans are being made to offer it for a third time.

Howard College – *I CAN, TOO!*

This program allowed junior high students to shadow community college students in a successful effort to let children know that a college education was not out of their reach, regardless of their socio-economic status.

Carteret Community College – *Carteret Catch*

Seed money was provided for the development of a locally harvested seafood branding program. Funds were used for a field trip to New England so that local fishermen could learn about similar programs, to develop a logo and promotional website and to create a non-profit organization that will regulate the branding program.

Piedmont Community College – *Heritage Tourism Trail*

Funds were used to develop maps and promotional materials for several heritage tourism attractions located in the college’s service area. While this concept will serve to increase tourism traffic from outside the service area, another goal is to inform the local people of their community’s assets.

East Central Community College – *Making Money Work For You*

This financial literacy program is targeted to junior high and high school students as well as adults and provides educational tools and strategies that will enable participants to effectively manage their financial situation.

Western Carolina Partnership – *Qualla-T Customer Service and Hospitality Training*

This program focuses on providing customer service and hospitality training to front line workers of locally owned businesses within the Qualla Boundary of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

RCCI Institutes

There were two RCCI Institutes held under this round of Ford Foundation funding. Each of these institutes centered on the three RCCI tenets and involved all Phase 1 and Phase 2 schools. While these institutes were primarily coordinated by the SRDC, involvement from the NCRCD, the community colleges and the land-grant university coaches were crucial to their success.

The first institute of the funding cycle was held April 6-10, 2004, at the Scarritt-Bennett Center in Nashville, Tenn. Over one hundred professionals participated in the conference and represented twenty-four community colleges and twelve land-grant universities. All colleges provided overviews regarding their progress in the RCCI process and several made indepth presentations. These presentations, coupled with the programmatic presentations made by Extension faculty participating in the RCCI program, gave participants a tremendous wealth of knowledge from which to draw from RCCI-related programming efforts.

This institute also included a post-conference meeting of the tribal and native-serving colleges designed to address their particular needs related to the RCCI tenets. Another post-conference activity was a meeting of the RCCI Advisory Council, an entity composed of several land-grant university administrators and community college presidents that have advised the RRDCs throughout the RCCI process. Several Advisory Council members attended a significant portion of the Institute and witnessed the community college and land-grant university professionals working collaboratively on areas of common interest.

The second institute was held on April 3-6, 2006, at the American Airlines Training and Conference Center in Fort Worth, Texas. While the format of this institute closely resembled the one held in 2004 (including a pre-institute conference with the tribal and native-serving colleges), there were two factors that added to the institute's success. First, the Wyoming Rural Development Council sent three representatives of the Council and the University of Wyoming Extension Service to learn about the RCCI process and to determine its feasibility for implementation in Wyoming. While no formal arrangements have yet been put into place, these representatives were extremely excited about the program and felt that it was a good fit for their state.

The second factor was the attendance of the nineteen rural community colleges of the Texas Rural Community College Network. Representatives from these colleges participated in a pre-conference workshop that not only described the RCCI process and provided programmatic

information, but also served to develop a formal relationship between the network and Texas Cooperative Extension. This relationship has resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding to implement the RCCI program in all TRCCN member community colleges. This Memorandum was affirmed in a meeting of the TRCCN college presidents and the administration of Texas Cooperative Extension that was held during the institute.

Evaluations from these institutes were extremely positive and several participants commented that the institutes were a high point of the process and should be continued in the future. To this end, the SRDC has initiated discussions with the Rural Community College Alliance (RCCA) to hold an RCCI Institute in conjunction with their annual conferences. RCCA Executive Director Bill Scaggs has agreed that it would be beneficial to have representatives from RCCI schools on the conference planning committee and that they should play an integral part in furthering the goals of the RCCI program and the RCCA professional development organization.

Coaching Clinics

There were two specific activities targeted to the land-grant university based Extension Service coaches during the second funding cycle. The first was an orientation for new coaches participating in the program. This orientation was held July 12-16, 2004, at the Lied Center in Nebraska City, Neb. The workshop had 100 percent participation from the coaches working with the expansion teams and also included coaches who were not able to attend the previous year's orientation workshop.

The second activity targeted to the coaches was an Advanced Coaches Training held January 26-28, 2005 at the La Posada de Albuquerque in Albuquerque, N.M. This workshop was led by Mary Emery of the NCRCD and Ken Hubbell of Ken Hubbell and Associates and built upon the skills learned in the coaching orientation workshops. Over 20 land-grant university faculty and professional staff attended this conference and all stated that the additional skills have valuable application in their work with the colleges as well as other community-based activities in their states.

There was one additional event that occurred during this funding cycle. Mary Emery, Ken Hubbell and Priscilla Salant organized a Community Coaching Roundtable that was held on October 23-25, 2005, in Boise, Idaho. While not strictly related to the RCCI program, this conference gathered a host of professionals with community coaching experience to share ideas and develop definitions and procedures for coaching. Moreover, it offered the opportunity to form the origin of a network for the coaching technique that should prove to institutionalize this unique and effective community development tool in many organizations.

Communication

The RCCI Coordinating Staff has always felt that effective communication is a vital part of the success of the RCCI program. To this end, the Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDCs) have facilitated communication between the teams and the RRDC staff in a variety of ways.

- The monthly RCCI newsletter provides a team update, resources that can be used in the RCCI process, and extramural funding opportunities appropriate to the basic RCCI tenets.

- Monthly conference calls for the coaches and team leaders have enabled these individuals to share ideas, jointly find solutions to problems and develop a national network of professionals who are interested in collaboratively guiding the community development process.
- The RCCI website (<http://srdc.msstate.edu/rcci>) continues to be a repository for educational resources, contact information, and specific information regarding the RCCI process.

Institutionalization

The discussion of institutionalization of the RCCI process within the community college and land-grant university structures has been an important topic in this funding cycle, particularly in the Southern region. While the SRDC has pledged to support to the RCCI concept to the fullest extent possible, college and university personnel realize that the brunt of the effort must fall upon their shoulders and they have taken this charge very seriously.

The teams have developed very unique and innovative methods to insure that the process and its inherent objectives remain a part of the culture of individual institutions. Specific examples include:

- A desire by the team leaders and coaches to continue the regularly scheduled conference calls and the monthly RCCI newsletter beyond the Ford Foundation funding.
- A desire for the RCCI Institute concept to continue in conjunction with the annual RCCA conference.
- A Memorandum of Understanding between the nineteen rural Texas community colleges and Texas Cooperative Extension to deliver the RCCI program and other professional development opportunities to these colleges.
- Sustainable partnerships between community colleges and land-grant universities to develop curricula, deliver educational programs and provide technical assistance in true working partnerships (specific examples include the Western Carolina Partnership and North Carolina State Extension Service; Coastal Bend College and Texas Cooperative Extension; and the Louisiana Community and Technical College System and the Louisiana State University AgCenter).
- The collaborative partnership between Howard College and Texas Cooperative Extension to jointly fund and oversee a community development position that addresses the needs of the Howard College service area.
- The involvement and collaboration of LGUs in the creation of entities such as the *Caswell County 21st Century Development Corporation* and *Carteret Catch* that will provide sustainable funding and needed assistance to address community needs.
- The desire by the Louisiana Community and Technical College System and the Louisiana State University AgCenter to implement the RCCI program on a statewide basis, primarily through resources provided by the college and the university.

Individual Team Updates

Howard College

The Howard College Team has continued its unprecedented success in the RCCI program by expanding the RCCI program to Coahoma and Forsan, the other two incorporated communities in the Howard College home county. The college is also working with Howard County and the

three towns in its boundaries to explore the feasibility of combining a number of city/county services. Howard College is also hosting the “Extraordinary Results in Ordinary Communities” conference on October 16-18, 2006, to expose participants from across the nation not only to its own successes with the RCCI program, but also to success stories from rural communities in Arkansas, Georgia, Minnesota, Mississippi and North Carolina.

Coastal Bend College

Coastal Bend College is achieving tremendous success with unique RCCI-related programs at each of its four campuses.

- The Pleasonton campus is spearheading a countywide leadership development program.
- The Kingston campus is preparing for the third edition of *Moving Up The PACE (Parent And Child Enrichment)* program.
- The Alice campus has instituted a summer program focused on youth entrepreneurship in which students develop a product concept, evaluate the market, develop production plans and produce and market their products. Students receive a profit-based stipend in the form of a gift card to a local retail establishment.
- The Beeville campus has focused on enhancing the capacity for entrepreneurship both in the college’s service area and across the state of Texas. In a partnership with Texas Cooperative Extension and support from Perkins funds, a continuing education curriculum focused on entrepreneurship has been developed and is due to be rolled out this fall.

Coastal Bend College is also an integral part of the Texas Rural Community College Network and will be a vital asset to the TRCCN colleges who seek to apply the RCCI program to their service areas.

Carteret Community College

The Carteret Community College team continues to pursue *Carteret Catch*, a locally harvested seafood branding program that seeks to add value to local catches. Great progress has been made with the program with significant achievements including:

- A field trip for local fishermen, restaurateurs and wholesalers visiting similar programs in the New England area.
- Development of a non-profit organization to regulate the program.
- Development of a website and logo for program promotion.
- Regional and national exposure that has significantly increased the visibility of the program and will hopefully make it more attractive to policy makers and funders.
- Increased involvement of other units of the college to support the program (in particular, the college’s culinary program and the Small Business Development Center).

Piedmont Community College

The Piedmont Community College team has made significant progress in reversing the declining fortunes of one of North Carolina’s poorest counties. As a 21st Century County, Caswell County and the Piedmont Community College RCCI team received substantial assistance from the North Carolina Department of Commerce in the form of a comprehensive assessment of the county’s strengths and weaknesses. As a result of this environmental scan, the RCCI team was able to

achieve real buy-in from stakeholders such as county and municipal government officials, non-profit organizations, the commercial sector and private citizens.

Perhaps the most significant result of these partnerships has been the formation of the Caswell County 21st Century Development Corporation, a non-profit organization dedicated to the social and economic development of Caswell County. While the non-profit is currently seeking sustainable funding, the fact that it has been formed and has remained active for several months demonstrates the success of the RCCI process and the dedication and innovativeness of the PCC team.

Louisiana Community and Technical College System

The LCTCS has experienced several setbacks since beginning its participation in the RCCI program. While Louisiana Delta Community College was originally chosen to participate in the program, a large turnover in the college administration postponed its participation and eventually caused the college to drop out of the process. After meeting with the system's administrative staff, plans were developed to explore other opportunities with Louisiana colleges and it seemed that significant progress was going to be made. However, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck the Louisiana coast shortly after that conversation and the entire system became concerned with rebuilding itself and its communities.

However, the LCTCS has not lost interest in the program. The fact that the SRDC initiated conversations with the community college system and Louisiana State University has resulted in the formation of a strong relationship between these entities. Furthermore, Jerry Pinsel (LCTCS Vice-President) has indicated that while their partnership with LSU has been built on information technology and distance learning in the past, the catastrophic events that have rocked the state and the inherent capacity of the LSU AgCenter seem to indicate that the partnership's future focus should be on community development and how the colleges could influence that development. LCTCS and LSU are currently exploring the possibility of hosting a mini-RCCI Institute for Louisiana in Fall 2006 or Spring 2007 to implement a statewide program that would involve all rural Louisiana community and technical colleges.

North Florida Community College

North Florida Community College is implementing the RCCI program in two counties of its five-county service area. In Madison County, the RCCI team has partnered with the local economic development corporation and other public and private entities to effect equitable economic development and civic engagement in an economy and civic structure that has been declining over the past few years. The Suwanee County effort has been focused on increasing the access to the college's educational programs, particularly for high school students. The college has established a partnership with the local school district and is currently undertaking several strategies designed to keep high school students in school and on track for a college education, whether it be academic or vocational/technical.

East Central Community College

East Central Community College is one of the best examples of a college team that has utilized the concepts inherent in the RCCI program to influence its entire operation. A prime example of this is the relationship that has formed between the college and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw

Indians (MBCI). This partnership started with the college's delivery of basic education programs (GED, adult literacy and English as a Second Language) and has progressed into a comprehensive program that not only offers these basic-education courses, but also offers occupational-specific workforce development short courses for resort jobs such as housekeeping, food service and security; Associate of Applied Science degrees in hotel/restaurant management and industrial maintenance; and an Associate of Arts degree that is transferable to a four-year college or university.

As the program was expanding, MBCI Chief Phillip Martin saw the advantage of being able to host educational offerings onsite at the reservation. In an agreement established with ECCC President Phil Sutphin, the MBCI offered ECCC the unlimited use of 10,000 square feet of floor space in the Choctaw Technology Park to provide space for classrooms and labs to teach required courses. ECCC Team Leader Roger Whitlock described it well when he said the RCCI process has initiated programs that will allow ECCC to serve people in places with opportunities that were never available before.

Western Carolina Partnership

The Western Carolina Partnership continues to build on its extremely successful *Qualla-T* program, which is designed to improve the economic position of businesses located in the Qualla Boundary of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. The Partnership's "Front Line/Bottom Line" training focuses on front line service and retail workers and is becoming increasingly popular among all businesses in the boundary. To increase the effectiveness of the program, the team is preparing to offer this course to other parts of the colleges' seven-county service area. While this effort has received substantial support from the Cherokee Preservation Foundation, the team knew that this support was mainly for program development and they are currently exploring the possibility of sustained funding.

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that the RCCI program has been implemented in a very effective way in the Southern region. The previous pages have only provided an overview of the tremendous success that has been realized and the great potential that still exists. However, it should be clear that seeds have been planted for future collaborative growth between the land-grant universities and community colleges and that the SRDC will continue to support this growth to the fullest possible extent. This program has provided an avenue that has allowed strong, working relationships to be built between the community colleges and land-grant university system – relationships that will be sustained over time. The staff of the Southern Rural Development Center would like to thank the Ford Foundation for its unwavering support over the past four years and wishes to express its belief that this program has made a tremendous difference in the lives of rural citizens of the Southern region.