



Rural Center

Partnership of the Center for Rural Virginia and the Council for Rural Virginia

2018-2019

Center for Rural Virginia Annual Report

Our Mission

The Center is a partnership of the Center for Rural Virginia, a Virginia legislative entity advocating for rural policy, and the Council for Rural Virginia, an entity organized by federal statute that is a conduit for building rural capacity by facilitating the collaboration and creation of coalitions of the key economic regions and sectors of the Commonwealth.

Our History

Created by the General Assembly in 2004, the Center for Rural Virginia works to advance economic development, job creation, workforce development, education, infrastructure, healthcare and other vital initiatives for the prosperity of rural Virginia.

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Dear Friends,

The 2018-2019 operating year of the Center for Rural Virginia experienced tremendous success in new partnerships and innovative initiatives for rural Virginia. Over the last year, the Center launched new programs while continuing to foster relationships with new and existing partners, all contributing to accomplishing the Center's mission of building rural capacity by facilitating the collaboration and creation of coalitions.

Aligned with assisting rural areas achieve prosperity, the Center for Rural Virginia continues to focus on key advocacy areas, including: broadband and infrastructure, rural economic development, leadership and community capacity, education and workforce development, access to rural housing, entrepreneurship and small business, and regional assets and opportunities. Reflecting these initiatives, the Center serves as an advocate, facilitator, and producer of projects, programs, and collaborative initiatives to enhance rural prosperity. Highlights of the last operational year include: The Governor's Summit on Rural Prosperity, the Virginia General Assembly Rural Caucus weekly meetings during the legislative session which the executive director serves as staff for, The Rural Caucus Reception, an area meeting in Hanover County that highlighted workforce development efforts in partnership with the Governor's Chief Workforce Advisor; as well as engaging in many other partnerships and collaborative efforts.

Through these and other partnerships and innovative projects, the Center continues its efforts to ensure rural prosperity for all areas of the Commonwealth. Fueled by collaborative efforts between the Center and partners, rural communities are experiencing success through increased partnerships, entrepreneurship, and innovation in various sector drawn to the scenic beauty, quality of life, and skilled workforce that employers desire for their companies and employees.

You will find a detailed summary of the Center's activities throughout the previous year enclosed in this report. It has been an incredible honor to work with the wonderful people of rural Virginia as we travel to rural communities throughout our Commonwealth. It is the dedication and hard work of our board members that make the impact of the Center for Rural Virginia possible. I look forward to another incredible year of excitement in our rural communities, and will continue to advocate, promote and enhance rural Virginia.

Best regards,

Kristie Helmick Proctor

Organizational Structure

Executive Director

The 2018-2019 operational year of the Center for Rural Virginia was the first full year for the new Executive Director, Kristie Proctor. Through nearly two years with the organization, Mrs. Proctor has taken the opportunity to build new partnerships and sponsorships to expand programming at the Center, while performing other organizational maintenance tasks, such as reviewing the organization's structure, bylaws, collective services agreement, operational practices, and other guiding documentation.

Collective Services Agreement

The Center for Rural Virginia currently operates in a collaborative partnership with the Council for Rural Virginia through a collective services agreement as the Virginia Rural Center. The two organizations operate independently, but share an executive director and operate in conjunction to fulfill their joint mission of economic prosperity for rural communities throughout Virginia.

The Center for Rural Virginia is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization established by the Virginia General Assembly in 2004. The creation of the Center was a recommendation of the Rural Prosperity Commission, created by the General Assembly in 2000. The goal of the Commission was "Prosperity for all Virginians". The 18-member Commission was instructed by the General Assembly to "undertake a detailed analysis of rural Virginia economies and recommend flexible but targeted state policies which, combined with local efforts, will help foster sustainable economic growth in Virginia's rural areas."

The final report of the Rural Prosperity Commission was issued in December 2001 and featured specific policy recommendations, including the creation of the Center for Rural Virginia to address the obstacles and capitalize on the many opportunities of Rural Virginia. In 2004, founding board members Senator Frank Ruff and Delegate Steve Landes, sponsored the enabling legislation, creating the Center.

The 21-member board of the Center for Rural Virginia works in partnership with the 21-member board of the Council for Rural Virginia. The Council is associated with the National Rural Development Partnership, created out of the 2002 Farm Bill.

The Council is a member of Partners for Rural America, whose mission is to support the efforts of its member State Rural Development Councils (SRDC's), which are uniquely positioned:

- To expand economic and social opportunities for America's rural communities and their residents;
- To promote equal treatment of rural America by government agencies and the private sector;
- To provide a collective voice for rural America.

Together, the Center for Rural Virginia and the Council for Rural Virginia work with federal, state and local policymakers and regulators as well private sector stakeholders to improve economic opportunities and preserve the quality of life throughout rural Virginia.

Institutional Partners

In addition to the support of the Virginia General Assembly and the Governor's Office, the Virginia Rural Center enjoys partnerships with two other entities that make the daily operations of the Center for Rural Virginia and the Council for Rural Virginia efficient, effective and successful.

The first is the Department of Housing and Community Development. DHCD provides office space and back office assistance that enhances the productivity, accessibility to stakeholders in the Capital region and partnership opportunities that enrich the work the Center is able to conduct.

The second is the Edward Via School of Osteopathic Medicine in Blacksburg. The Virginia Rural Center's partnership with VCOM, through the Council for Rural Virginia, provides assets and operational efficiencies that greatly enhance the cost-effective operation for both entities of the Virginia Rural Center.

Project Overview & Status Updates

During the 2018-2019 operating year of the Virginia Rural Center, the collective organization and its individual entities entered several projects, partnerships, and initiatives that will enhance the Center's profile and work in rural communities throughout the Commonwealth.

2019 Governor's Summit on Rural Prosperity

Continuing the Center's partnership with the Governor's office, the *Governor's Summit on Rural Prosperity, hosted by the Virginia Rural Center*, was held in September 2019 at The Inn at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. The annual event significantly contributes to building the Rural Center's profile and accomplishing its mission. The event brought together administration officials, members of the Virginia General Assembly, local government representatives, private business leaders and other stakeholders committed to rural prosperity across Virginia. The overall theme of the event featured innovative rural partnerships with focused topics including small business development and entrepreneurship, agricultural partnerships, the Rural Virginia Initiative, community revitalization, leadership development in rural areas, and effective broadband partnerships. Addressing these topics, the event featured numerous speakers and panelists, including:

- Governor Ralph Northam spoke on his administration's efforts to place rural Virginia at the forefront of his administration's priorities. Governor Northam celebrated Virginia's top ranking as a state in which to do business, citing rural development is key to retaining that ranking moving forward through promoting small business development in rural areas.
 - Panel on Rural Small Business Development, moderated by Delegate Danny Marshall
 - Panelists included: Nicole Riley, Virginia State Director of the National Federation of Independent Businesses, Jody Keenan State Director of Virginia Small Business Development Centers, Ron Norris, Owner of Norris Built, and Barry Ryan, Vice President at the North Carolina Rural Center.
 - According to the panel of experts, rural Virginia's greatest asset when it comes to growing business in the Commonwealth is that businesses want to be located in small communities because people want to live in small, rural communities and benefit from the quality of life rural Virginia offers.
 - Panel on Agricultural Partnerships, moderated by The Honorable Bettina Ring, Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry
 - Panelists included Alan Grant, Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech, Moir Beamer, CEO at the Virginia Produce Company, Senator Ben Chafin, and Whitney Bonham, Economic Developer in Washington County.
 - Panel topics included how Virginia Tech continues to serve the land grant mission through Virginia Cooperative Extension, reducing barriers in food safety to allow more small farmers in Virginia access to larger markets, and the ongoing decline in the Virginia dairy industry and how Washington County, as well as Commonwealth of Virginia is working to address the industry's decline
 - Summit attendees took a "field trip" to the nearby Alphin Stuart Livestock arena, where practical demonstrations and tours were organized by Virginia Cooperative Extension in conjunction with the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. The demonstrations included:
 - Agricultural drone demonstration on monitoring harmful algae blooms hosted by the Virginia Tech Department of Plant Pathology, Physiology, and Weed Science
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- Animal agricultural wearable technology to monitor animal health and production hosted by the Department of Animal and Poultry Sciences
- Precision agricultural technology demonstration on modern efficiencies in agriculture hosted by faculty from Virginia Tech's Kentland Farm
- Cyril Clarke, Executive Vice President and Provost at Virginia Tech, welcomed summit attendees to Virginia Tech, explaining Virginia Tech's commitment to serving rural areas of the Commonwealth
- Brian Ball, Secretary of Commerce and Trade spoke on recent successes in rural Virginia, as well as Governor Northam's continued commitment to broadband expansion, citing additional success stories around the Commonwealth
- Josh Saks, Deputy Secretary of Natural Resources, shared more of Governor Northam's priorities in the National Resources space, citing rural development can be achieved through celebrating and preserving natural resources in rural areas
- President Brian Hemphill of Radford University discussed ongoing efforts by Radford University to modernize the post-secondary educational system and serve rural Virginians through online education platforms. Additionally, President Hemphill shared updates from Radford's efforts to combat cyber security issues across the Commonwealth through training the next generation of cyber security leaders
- Panel on Effective Broadband Partnerships, moderated by Courtney Dozier, Chief Deputy at the Department of Housing and Community Development
 - Featured panelists included: Evan Feinman, Chief Broadband Advisor to the Governor, Ray LaMura, President of VCTA-The Broadband Association of Virginia, Andrew Vehorn, Director of Legislative Affairs at Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives, Tamarah Holmes, Virginia Appalachian Regional Commission Program Manager, and Eric Workman, County Administrator of Bland County

John Provo, Director of the Office of Economic Development at Virginia Tech presented on the Rural Virginia Initiative (RVI). This initiative began in 2018 when the Virginia General Assembly asked the University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, and Virginia State University to consider the challenges and opportunities facing rural Virginia. RVI's Year One report was submitted to the legislature last fall, summarizing past research into five policy areas: Innovation and Job Creation, Education and Talent, Civic Innovation and Leadership Development, Community Economic Development and Place-making, and Healthcare and Community Well-being. You can view the full report here: <https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/2018/RD374>.

Year Two is underway. Plans include taking a comprehensive inventory of recent projects and strategic initiatives across rural Virginia undertaken by public and private 4-year institutions, as well as community colleges. This session presented an overview of more than 300 activities identified so far and discussed plans to work with community, industry, and agency partners to leverage this information into more effective and efficient efforts. Participants were asked to draw on their experience and expertise to share ideas about what success really looks like for rural Virginia and how higher education can have the greatest impact for communities and people.

- The Commonwealth Connect Coalition breakout session featured a discussion regarding a new Dominion Energy & Appalachian Power broadband pilot program. Other meeting topics included an update from the Governor's broadband team about the state broadband grant program and a chance to hear from a local leader about their experience working towards universal broadband access in their community.
- Panelists included:
 - Evan Feinman, Governor's Chief Broadband Advisor
 - Courtney Dozier, Governor Deputy Broadband Advisor
 - Ed Diggs, Rural Broadband Program Manager for Dominion Energy
 - Amanda Cox, External Affairs Manager, Appalachian Power
 - Ruby Brabo, South Region Director, National Association of Counties (NACO) and King George County Supervisor
- Panel on Community Revitalization, moderated by Delegate Chris Hurst
 - Panelists included: Shawn Utt, Town Manager of Pulaski, Cora Gnegy, Tourism Director in Giles County, Erik Johnston Director of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, and Peter D'Alema, Director of Program Management at the Virginia Resources Authority
 - Panel topics included the development and benefit of the New River Water Trail in Giles County, ongoing partnerships and efforts of revitalization in the towns and counties of the panelists regions, and programming of the Virginia Resources Authority, which offers low interest financing for municipality projects across Virginia.
- Stephen Moret, President and CEO of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, spoke on how rural Virginia should position itself for economic growth

Virginia General Assembly's Rural Caucus

The Virginia Rural Center organized and staffed weekly meetings of the Virginia General Assembly's Rural Caucus. During the 2019 General Assembly Session, the Rural Caucus met weekly to discuss legislative issues of interest to rural Virginia, as well as hear from Cabinet members, stakeholders, and others with valuable information on rural Virginia issues and legislative implications. Speakers from 2019 General Assembly Rural Caucus meetings include:

- The Honorable Brian Ball, Virginia Secretary of Commerce and Trade
 - Evan Feinman, Governor's Chief Broadband Advisor
 - The Honorable Justin Fairfax, Lt. Governor of Virginia
 - The Honorable Shannon Valentine, Virginia Secretary of Transportation
 - The Honorable Bettina Ring, Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry
 - The Honorable Matthew Strickler, Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources
 - The Honorable Dr. Megan Healy, Chief Workforce Development Advisor to the Governor
 - Representatives from the Coalition of Small and Rural Schools
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The Annual Rural Caucus Reception

A joint effort between the Center for Rural Virginia, the General Assembly's Rural Caucus, and the Virginia Association of Counties, the annual Rural Caucus Reception assembled nearly 200 business and government leaders from across the state, including administration officials, General Assembly members, and local elected officials. The event featured Governor Ralph Northam, a rural Virginia native, as the keynote speaker. During his remarks, Northam stressed the importance of broadband expansion efforts in Virginia. To accomplish this, Northam articulated his goal of making Virginia the most business-friendly state in the country, a mission which will include boosting economic growth across the entire Commonwealth, including rural Virginia. In addition to Northam, Lt. Governor of Virginia Justin Fairfax and Joseph Mengedoth, Associate Regional Economist, Federal Reserve Bank gave brief remarks.

Rural Workforce Development Area Meeting

Organized and hosted by the Virginia Rural Center and Megan Healy, Ph.D., Chief Workforce Development Advisor to Governor Ralph Northam, the BuildVA Workforce Development Area meeting, held at Specialty's Our Name, a metal fabrication shop in Hanover County, gathered over 50 people. At the event, state, local, and regional officials engaged in a facilitated discussion surrounding how to better promote and conduct workforce development opportunities in the Commonwealth. Conversation at the event designed to spark and continue dialogue surrounding workforce development issues ranged across multiple subject areas.

After the panel discussion, attendees participated in a walking tour of Specialty's Our Name. The family owned business provides custom metal fabrication services for businesses across the United States. The tour included commentary directly from the business owners involved in workforce development initiatives.

Partnerships and Collaborative Efforts

The Virginia Rural Center engages in numerous partnerships and collaborative efforts with other organizations. These partners, often sharing aligned missions, exponentially strengthen the Rural Center's efforts and provide a platform to elevate the Commonwealth's rural issues.

Center for Innovative Technology, Board of Directors Member

The Center for Innovative Technology, or CIT, seeks to close innovation gaps in the Commonwealth and the nation by focusing on new technologies, entrepreneurs and technology companies that make innovation happen. Appointed in September 2018, the Virginia Rural Center executive director contributes thought surrounding the equity of initiatives through the lens of rural Virginia. The CIT Board of Directors also serves as the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Investment Authority Board of Directors.

Mrs. Proctor serves as policy chair of the board, and as such holds a seat on the executive committee of CIT.

Broadband Advisory Council, Board of Directors Member

The Broadband Advisory Council was established to help determine the Commonwealth's goals for broadband and how best to achieve them. Confirmed in July 2018 by Governor Ralph Northam as a board member of the Broadband Advisory Council, the Rural Center's executive director gathers knowledge and contributes thought to further advocate for broadband expansion across the Commonwealth.

Virginia Housing Development Authority, Rural Housing Advisory Council Member

The Rural Housing Advisory Council (RHAC) is a cross-regional group that will provide guidance and expertise to VHDA regarding housing issues in rural Virginia. Beginning advisory council membership in August 2018, the Rural Center's executive director is pleased to take on this role and provide additional insight to the housing needs in rural Virginia.

Partners for Rural America, Board of Directors Member

Partners for Rural America (PRA) was founded in 1998 to support the efforts of its member State Rural Development Councils (SRDCs), which are uniquely positioned to expand economic and social opportunities for America's rural communities and their residents, promote equal treatment of rural America by government agencies and the private sector and provide a collective voice for rural America. Mrs. Proctor joined the PRA board of Directors in January 2018, the PRA Board of Directors provides a networking platform for other state rural center leaders to share successes and answer inquiries on best practices in member states.

Virginia Economic Development Partnership, Rural Think Tank Member

With membership beginning in June 2018, the Rural Think Tank, led by the Virginia Economic Development Partnership seeks to identify and address issues rural communities face in economic development. The Rural Center plays a key role in the group through contributing in-the-field knowledge and identifying opportunities in services and initiatives directed at serving rural areas of the Commonwealth.

Legislative Sportsmen Caucus, Participant

Formed in 2004, the Virginia Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus is a bipartisan, bicameral group of legislators dedicated to protecting and advancing hunting, fishing, trapping and recreational shooting in Virginia. Regular involvement by the Rural Center in the Legislative Sportsmen Caucus includes participating in and recruitment for annual sportsman caucus retreat.

Southwest Virginia Veterans Coalition, Participant

The Southwest Virginia Veterans Coalition was formed by Virginia's Secretary of Veterans Affairs, The Honorable Carlos Hopkins and regional leaders work to promote regional collaboration on issues affecting veterans in the Southwest area of the Commonwealth. As an active participant of the coalition, the Rural Center's executive director helped to recruit participants and regularly participates in dialogue.

Leadership

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Honorable Frank M. Ruff, Jr., Member, Senate of Virginia
Honorable Roslyn Tyler, Member, Virginia House of Delegates
Greg White, President & CEO, Northern Neck Electric Cooperative
Amanda Jarratt, President and CEO of Franklin Southampton Economic Development, Inc.

In partnership with

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Brian T. Warner, Rolls Royce
Carlyle Wimbish, Hickory Hill Farm

Contact Information



Kristie Helmick Proctor
Executive Director
804.512.1453

kristie.helmickproctor@cfrv.org

Richmond Location:
600 East Main St., Suite 300
Richmond, VA 23219

Blacksburg Location:
2265 Kraft Drive
Blacksburg, VA 24060

For more information, visit:
cfrv.org
