



Rural Center

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

2020-2021

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,

I am pleased to report that The Center for Rural Virginia (The Center) made great strides to advance rural Virginia and address concerns that have challenged our rural communities. While we did make great success, it would be remiss if we didn't recognize that the Center was presented with challenges in the 2020-2021 operating year that are due to the continued implications brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Center was proud to officially launch the Virginia Rural Leadership Institute (VRLI) in 2021. The mission of VRLI is to retain, attract, and develop rural Virginians into innovative and civic minded leaders who build strong local and regional communities and bring prosperity across the rural areas in the Commonwealth. VRLI was originally born as a mechanism to address the declining populations happening in many communities throughout rural Virginia. There are countless stakeholders throughout the Commonwealth who have recognized the need for capacity building and leadership development, but The Center decided to step up and take on this challenge. The Center and countless stakeholders view VRLI as part of the overall solution to retaining and attracting leaders in our rural areas.

The Center fundraised throughout 2020 and into 2021 from mostly private sector dollars to establish VRLI and hire the appropriate staff to facilitate the program. The VRLI curriculum is a three-part approach, including leadership skill building, understanding rural issues and the completion of a community impact project. After a rigorous hiring process, in July 2021 the Center retained a contractor who will serve as the Program Director of VRLI and point of contact for the program.

In addition to the creation and launch of VRLI, The Center has continued focusing on its role to serve as a facilitator, educator, advocate and producer of programs and collaborative initiatives to promote economic prosperity in rural Virginia. The Center has prioritized their focus on broadband deployment to our unserved areas, rural economic development, education, access to rural housing, entrepreneurship and small business, agriculture, and regional opportunities.

To accomplish its mission, The Center continued existing efforts, as well as took on new initiatives and programs to promote rural prosperity across the Commonwealth. The Center was pleased to host the "Governor's Summit on Rural Prosperity" in a face-to-face format at Longwood University in Farmville, VA. Governor Northam served as the keynote speaker and several members of his Cabinet participated in the Summit

Highlights of the past year include: The 2021 Governor's Summit on Rural Prosperity, the Virginia General Assembly Rural Caucus virtual meeting during the 2021 legislative session which the executive director served as staff for and participation in the 2021 virtual Local Government Day (which took the place of our traditional face-to-face Rural Caucus Reception). Additionally, The Center launched the Virginia Rural Leadership Institute, the first and only program in the Commonwealth focused entirely on retaining and attracting leaders in rural Virginia.

Enclosed in this report, you will find a detailed summary of the Center's activities throughout this operating year. It has been a great honor to work and meet with many of you as I traveled in-person and virtually around the state visiting rural communities throughout Virginia. 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 year of innovation, collaboration, and new initiatives to promote and enhance rural Virginia.

Best regards,

Kristie Helmick Proctor

Organizational Structure

Executive Director

The 2020-2021 operational year of the Center for Rural Virginia was the third full year for the Executive Director, Kristie Proctor. Mrs. Proctor has been with the Center for nearly four years and has taken the opportunity to build new partnerships and sponsorships to strengthen visibility and programming at the Center. The Executive Director continues to perform other organizational maintenance tasks, such as reviewing the organization's structure, bylaws, collective services agreement, operational practices, and other guiding documentation.

Statement on Organizational Implications of COVID-19

The Center for Rural Virginia has kept safety as a priority throughout the pandemic. Ensuring that our staff, Board members and stakeholders remain healthy is our priority.

Annual Summit on Rural Prosperity

The Center was pleased to host a face-to-face/hybrid format for the annual 2021 Governor's Summit on Rural Prosperity, which was held November 2- 4, 2021 at Longwood University in Farmville, VA. The Center for Rural Virginia co-hosted this event with the Governor's office and was proud to offer attendees the option to attend in person or virtually. It was more costly to host this annual event than in previous years with the increase in catering costs and The Center essentially running two separate events at the same time.

We were pleased to have over 200 attendees join us for the 2021 Rural Summit. Governor Northam and many members of his Administration were able to participate, and it was a huge success. Additionally, Lt. Governor-Elect Winsome Sears was able to join the event virtually and spoke to attendees.

Board Meetings

We gathered virtually for the April 2021 Board meeting, however beginning with the July 2021 Board meeting we adopted a hybrid model, allowing Board members to attend either face to face or virtually via ZOOM.

Collective Services Agreement

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 Center 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 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 Board at the Council for Rural Virginia. The Council is associated with the National Rural Development Partnership, created out of the 2002 Farm Bill.

The Executive Director actively participates in Partners for Rural America (PRA), and the Council is a member of this organization. PRA's mission is to support the efforts of its member State Rural Development Councils (SRDC's), which are uniquely positioned:

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

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 continues to enjoy 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 Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). This agency provides office space to the Executive Director and VRLI's Program Director. Additionally, DHCD provides back-office support and assistance that enhances the productivity and accessibility at The Virginia Rural Center.

The second is Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. The Virginia Rural Center's partnership with VCE, 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. Virginia Tech serves as the payroll agent to the Executive Director.

Annual Sponsors

The Center for Rural Virginia is fortunate to have numerous organizational sponsors committed to the Center's mission and rural prosperity. The financial support from these organizations is critical to the success of the Virginia Rural Center.

These sponsors include (in alphabetical order):

- Appalachian Power
- AT&T
- Century Link
- Dominion Energy
- Farm Bureau of Virginia
- Farm Credit
- James River Air Conditioning Company
- Letterpress Communications
- Longwood University
- Old Dominion Electric Cooperative
- The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development
- The Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission
- Southside Electric Cooperative
- Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project
- Virginia Community Capital
- Virginia Innovation Partnership Authority
- Virginia Resources Authority
- We Work for Health

Project Overview & Status Updates

We are pleased to share an update on the Center's projects. During the 2020-2021 operating year, the collective organization and its individual entities entered into several projects and partnerships with the overall mission of enhancing rural Virginia.

2021 Governor's Summit on Rural Prosperity

The Center was pleased to continue its partnership with the Governor's office and present the *2021 Governor's Summit on Rural Prosperity*, hosted by the Virginia Rural Center. The event was hosted at Longwood University in Farmville, VA. For the first time ever, we hosted this event in a hybrid format, allowing attendees to join us either virtually or in person. Additionally, to address safety concerns, we provided masks and hand sanitizer to attendees who joined us face to face.

This 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 multi day event focused on economic development, community vibrancy, connectivity, rural health and more and featured experts from across the Commonwealth. Governor Northam served as the keynote speaker and highlighted that Virginia is leading the way in broadband partnerships and is poised to become the first large state in the union with universal coverage in 2024. Governor Northam spoke at the summit and said "Broadband is like electrification was in the 1900's, it's a necessity".

Lt. Gov.-Elect Winsome Sears participated virtually while traversing the Commonwealth, reinforcing her commitment to rural Virginia.

Highlights included a sneak peek of the 2022-2026 Virginia Rural Health Plan and Data Commons which will be unveiled next month, updates on the U.S. Census and regional economic development opportunity, panels on regional entrepreneurship and successful broadband partnerships and an interactive tour of community revitalization projects in Farmville.

Key speakers included:

- Governor Ralph Northam
- Northam's Chief Broadband Advisor, Evan Feinman
- Lt. Governor- Elect Winsome Sears
- House Delegate and Chair of the Virginia Rural Center, Roslyn Tyler
- Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, Bettina Ring
- Deputy Secretary of Commerce and Trade, Cassidy Rasnick
- Senator and Chair of Virginia's Broadband Advisory Council, Jennifer Boysko
- Senator Monty Mason
- Senator Frank Ruff
- Senator Mark Peake
- CEO & President of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership Stephen Moret
- Mayor of Farmville, David Whitus

Virginia General Assembly's Rural Caucus

The Virginia Rural Center (VRC) organized and staffed a virtual meeting of the Virginia General Assembly's Rural Caucus during the 2021 General Assembly session.

Due to the virtual format of the 2021 session, VRC decided to host Rural Caucus through a virtual platform. In previous years, the Rural Caucus meetings have been held weekly, but VRC did not see that being realistic schedule for a short and mostly virtual session.

The special guests for the 2021 Rural Caucus meeting were The Honorable Brian Ball, Virginia's Secretary of Commerce & Trade, and Evan Feinman, The Governor's Chief Broadband Advisor.

The Rural Caucus provided an opportunity for legislators and stakeholders to learn about legislation and initiatives impacting rural areas of the State. At the Rural Caucus meeting, legislators heard from stakeholders and cabinet members about legislation and its potential effect on rural Virginia.

This meeting was a great opportunity to share information, learn, and collaborate to increase prosperity across rural Virginia.

Virtual Local Government Day

The Virginia Rural Center along with Virginia Association of Counties (VACO), Virginia Municipal League (VML), and the Virginia Association of Planning District Commissions (VAPDC) held a virtual Local Government Day on Thursday, January 28, 2021!

Governor Ralph Northam was the keynote speaker and legislation was discussed that would strengthen Virginia's communities. Numerous legislators were invited to join the discussion, including Center for Rural Virginia's Chair, Delegate Roslyn Tyler. There were presentations provided that delivered legislative reports on the major issues facing local government in the 2021 General Assembly Session.

This virtual event took the place of the annual Rural Caucus Reception that typically occurs in person and assembles hundreds of business and government leaders from across rural Virginia.

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.

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. Joined 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.

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. The Rural Center's executive director gathers knowledge and contributes thought to further advocate for broadband expansion across the Commonwealth.

Virginia Housing, Rural Housing Advisory Council Member

The Rural Housing Advisory Council (RHAC) is a cross-regional group that will provide guidance and expertise to Virginia Housing regarding housing issues in rural Virginia. Mrs. Proctor became a member of Virginia Housing's Rural Housing Advisory Council in August 2018 and she is pleased to take on this role and provide additional insight to the housing needs in rural Virginia.

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 weekly legislative sportsman caucus meetings and providing support for the annual sportsman caucus retreat.

Southwest Virginia Veterans Coalition, Participant

The Southwest Virginia Veterans Coalition was formed by Secretary of Veterans Affairs, The Honorable Carlos Hopkins and regional leaders 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

Board of Trustees Center for Rural Virginia

Chair, Honorable Roslyn Tyler, Member, Virginia House of Delegates
Vice-Chair, Honorable Frank M. Ruff, Jr., Member, Senate of Virginia
Honorable Les Adams, Member, Virginia House of Delegates
Honorable Brian Ball, Secretary of Commerce and Trade, Commonwealth of Virginia
Hope F. Cupit, CPA, President & CEO, Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project
Honorable Justin Fairfax, Lieutenant Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia
Honorable Wendy Gooditis, Member, Virginia House of Delegates
Patricia Harper-Tunley, Certified Travel Concierge, P.T. Enterprise LLC
Julie Hensley, President, Law Office of Julie D. Hensley
Anne Herring, Partnership Liaison Specialist, Rural Development Innovation Center, United States
Department of Agriculture
Honorable Chris Hurst, Member, Virginia House of Delegates
Brian Isringhausen, CEO, Cranemasters, Inc.
Ron Jefferson, Manager of External Affairs, Appalachian Power
Willene A. Johnson, Ph. D, Independent Consultant
Honorable Jennifer McClellan, Member, Senate of Virginia
Liz Povar, Principal Officer, The River Link Group
Eddie Ramirez, Ramirez Consulting, LLC
Honorable Bettina Ring, Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, Commonwealth of Virginia
Chris Van Vlack, Farmer, Hanging Rock Hay & Bush Hog
Lindsey Watson, Director of Government Affairs, Rappahannock Electric Cooperative

In partnership with **Board of Directors – Council for Rural Virginia**

Chair, Bryan David, Program Director, Growth and Opportunity Virginia Region 3
Vice-Chair, Dr. Edwin Jones, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech
Shannon Blevins, Associate Vice Chancellor for Economic Development and Engagement, University of Virginia's College at Wise
The Honorable Ruby Brabo, Realtor
Katie Frazier, Director, Farm Credit of the Virginias Knowledge Center
Sharon Johnson, CEO of the Shenandoah Valley Workforce Investment Board
Hugh Joyce, Owner, James River Air Conditioning
Gary Keener, Dabney S. Lancaster Community College
John A. King II, General Manager and Vice President of Sales, VA Poultry Growers Cooperative
Caroline Lane, Director of Coaching Programs, Virginia's Community Colleges
Mark Lawrence, Vice President of Governmental and External Affairs, Carilion Clinic
Patrick Mauney, Executive Director, Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission
Jay Poole, Owner, Common Sense Strategies
R. Morgan Quicke, County Administrator, Richmond County
Robin Sullenberger, Retired, Shenandoah Valley Partnership
Bill Tucker, Tucker Family Farms
Brian T. Warner, Rolls Royce
Carlyle Wimbish, Hickory Hill Farm

Contact Information



Kristie Helmick Proctor

Executive Director

804.781.4131

varuralcenter@vt.edu

600 East Main St., Suite 300

Richmond, VA 23219

For more information, visit:

www.cfrv.org