

Regional Solutions to Rural and Urban Challenges

RPLC/CAPR Webinar

Rural Policy Learning Commons/Communauté D'Apprentissage Des Politiques Rurales
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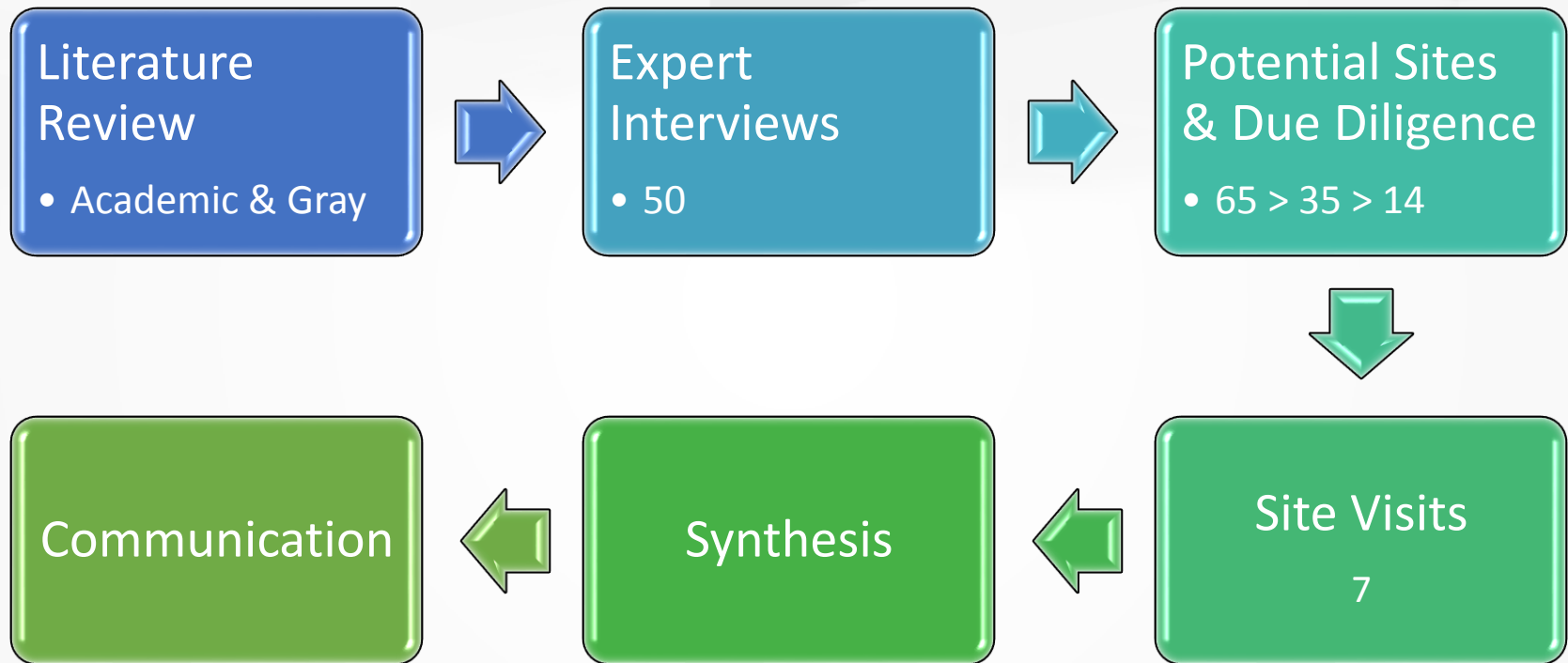
Hypothesis

- Regional collaboration and solution-seeking can be an effective way of improving social and economic opportunity and health for *all* people and *all* places within a region.

Objectives

- Identify and curate examples of policy and practice that:
 - Demonstrate boundary-crossing, multi-sector solutions to regional challenges
 - Intentionally advance equity of opportunity, health, and well-being in a region
- Use learning and insights to inform policy, practice, and research

Process



Selection Criteria

Threshold Criteria

- Rural-Urban Linkage?
- Equity?
- Collaboration?
- Multi-Sector?

Diversity Criteria

- Geography
- Collaboration Structure
- Issue Areas
- Impacted Populations

Sites



- 1 Craft 3 (WA & OR)
- 2 Sustainable Northwest (WA & OR)
- 3. Sacramento Area Council of Governments (CA)
- 4. Partnership for San Joaquin Valley (CA)
- 5. Amarillo Area Foundation (TX)
- 6. Initiative Foundations, Growth & Justice (MN)
- 7. Land of Sky Council of Governments (NC)

Case Studies

1	Craft3	WA & OR	CDFI	Multiple urban, rural, and tribal locations across two states.	Balanced rural-urban loan portfolio, 8 subregional offices, mixed place-based and sector-based, equity and tribal initiatives, triple bottom line
2	Sustainable Northwest	WA & OR	Nonprofit	Primarily forestlands in two states	Conflict resolution, technical assistance, advocacy: economy & environment; sustainable forestry and value chains; collaboratives
3	Sacramento Area COG/RUCS	CA	COG	6 counties around Sacramento	Rural-Urban Connections Strategy (RUCS) – rural outreach/policy strategy and GIS/analytical tools – rural integration into metro planning
4	Partnership for San Joaquin Valley	CA	Public-private partnership	8 counties in central California	Governor-initiated, broad-based state and local partnerships across multiple sectors and issues, intentional equity focus
5	Amarillo Area Foundation	TX	Community foundation	26 counties in Texas Panhandle centered on Amarillo	Community foundation plus three banks, social services agency – early stage regional efforts newly linked to public agencies to create entrepreneurship system
6	Minnesota	MN	Statewide system	Statewide system of regional organizations and investments	Six regional foundations (Initiative Foundations) plus nine regional development commissions plus statewide structures plus Growth & Justice nonprofit
7	Land of Sky COG/WestNGN	NC	COG, partnership	4 counties in western North Carolina around Asheville	West Next Generation Network, a public-private-university initiative to bring broadband to rural mountainous counties

Insights

- Nature of rural-urban connections
- Policy and political context
- Equity
- Collaboration
- Regional innovation

Nature of Rural-Urban Connections

- Take many forms
 - Supply chains, ecosystem services, provision of materials/natural resources, commuting patterns, urban expansion, collective identities
- Support for econometric models that show
 - Benefits of rural-urban interactions favor urban centers
- Rural contributions ‘hidden in plain sight’
 - Unrecognized, undervalued, unmonetized
- Rural-urban compact, once strong now frayed
 - Rural-urban divide, zero-sum arguments
 - Way forward – everyone benefits if both urban and rural are doing well: balanced investments

Policy and Political Context

- Power Disparities
 - Are real...but can be addressed by consolidating voices to combat regional power differences and by focusing on regional issues that are common to rural and urban and require statewide action
- Political and Cultural Divides
 - Polarization everywhere makes regional collaboration harder...but “checking partisanship at the door” has been an effective strategy in some regions to address political and cultural divides

Policy and Political Context *contd.*

- Investment Flows
 - “Hostage-taking” has replaced “horse-trading” which makes negotiations over resource allocation more difficult. Highlighting the contribution of rural economies to the overall economy can lead to shifts in public investments
- Institution Building
 - Concerted efforts through public and philanthropic policy and investment in some states have created an environment for building and sustaining regional institutions and capacity
 - But policies and regulations can also inhibit collaboration and actions

Equity

- Regional context matters in the way equity is defined. Can be geographic, income, gender, class as well as race.
- Diversity-Equity-Inclusion (DEI) requirements by federal agencies and foundations drive a new focus on equity
- Intentionally targeted programs can overcome specific inequities such as access to business capital and assistance and digital divide, as well as for specific communities such as Indian Country
- Demographic changes necessitate capacity building for welcoming new immigrants and assisting process of community acceptance and integration
- Equity promoted by giving voice to groups and communities who could not otherwise participate in decision-making

Collaboration

- Different Degrees of Formality
 - Highly evolved statewide and multi-state alliances,
 - Incented and encouraged by funders,
 - Built-in to the institutional design, or
 - Informal
- Role of Soft Power
 - Regional organizations rarely have coercion or taxation powers; must rely on education, persuasion, cooperation, advocacy to get things done
 - Lack of resources and capacity creates challenges for implementation, but evidence of the launch of new initiatives and organizations, negotiation of agreements on contentious issues, influencing flows of resources into and across the region

Regional Innovation

- Regional Ecosystems
 - Developing institutions and systems that work collaboratively and consistently to coordinate and pool resources and expertise on multiple issues across a region.
- Agents for Transformation and Reinvention
 - Helping regions and communities tackle major economic and structural changes – agriculture, natural resources, urban development, new economic opportunities, new populations

Regional Innovation *contd.*

- Integration of Community and Economic Development
 - Working on multiple, inter-related issues – housing, childcare, healthcare, workforce preparation, transportation, air and water quality...
- Rural Economic Centers
 - Focusing investments in stronger, assets-focused communities as place-based efforts to stabilize rural regions.

Principles

- A deep **understanding of context** is an essential condition for effective regional collaboration and decision-making. Requires trusted institutions with deep roots and analytical capacity.
- **Making the case** means addressing the “hidden in plain sight” problem: a lack of awareness of the contributions that rural economies and communities make to the overall regional economy.
- Facilitating conversations across regions and between communities and interests builds the foundation for regional collaboration. Must extend beyond seeking public input to active engagement in setting priorities and driving change.

Principles *contd.*

- **Mapping regional ecosystems** – affordable housing, childcare, healthcare, workforce development, transportation, air quality, and broadband are all interdependent and essential to creating and sustaining healthy economies and communities.
- Each topic is the focus of distinct systems and networks of policy advocates, service delivery agencies, funding sources, research specialists, and political constituencies. At a regional level, the aim must be to connect these systems and networks together into regional ecosystems.

Principles *contd.*

- **Mobilizing resources** – multi-year public (federal and state) and philanthropic funding for creating and sustaining an infrastructure of regional development organizations and regional foundations -- regional ecosystems.
- **Amplifying Voice** Adopting strong regional structures and systems provides venues for communities and interests to be at the table when priorities are being set and decisions made.
- Improving social and economic opportunity and health for *all* people and *all* places within a region requires intentionality in striving for equity in terms of geography, race and ethnicity, gender, income, and class as an integral part of regional solution-seeking.

Recommendations for...

Regional Development Organizations

- Change federal funding requirements to enable RDOs better serve needs and interests of rural communities, facilitate inclusive planning processes, and enhance technical capacities

State Governments

- Review best practices to support regional solutions, including devolution of functions to regional development organizations, funding support for planning, collaboration, and providing venues for sharing ideas, cross-sector collaboration

Community Development Financial Institutions

- Review legislation and regulation to stimulate bank investment in rural; CDFIs and rural markets, provide incentives for CDFIs, banks to join collaborative efforts with public, private, philanthropic, nonprofit, educational institutions to strengthen rural;-urban connections.

Philanthropy

- Review regulatory context for community and regional foundations to encourage them to take leadership roles in regional collaboratives and ecosystems; invite philanthropy to make 3-5-year commitments to support/expand regional ecosystems that enhance social and economic opportunity and health for all.

Higher Education

- Develop a program of academic research and extension engagement on valuing rural contributions, regional-scale engagement strategies, strengthening cross-functional ecosystems, integrating intentional equity into regional policymaking and resource allocations

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