



# New Perspectives, New Approaches on Rural Governance

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# Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI)

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- Provide objective information and analysis to policymakers (national, state & local) on issues that impact rural America.
- Furnish opportunities for public dialogue on these issues.
- Based at the University of Missouri.
- Online at [www.rupri.org](http://www.rupri.org)



# Why Governance?

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- Q: Why do some economically-stressed rural communities move forward when others do not?
- Particular funding program? Specific development strategy? Exceptional individual?
- A: Governance - the *ground work* that supports the *good work*.



# Rural Governance Initiative

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- *How decisions are made, who has a say.*
- Understand how rural people, institutions made decisions about their well being.
- What systems facilitate better decision-making; what systems build community?
- Not just *government*. Wide range of people, organizations and institutions; formal and informal.



# Effective Governance, local and regional context

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- *Collaboration*
- *Sustained citizen engagement*
- *Leveraging regional resources*



# Collaboration

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- Crossing sectors (public, private, and non-profit)
- Crossing political boundaries



# Sustained Citizen Engagement

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- Welcoming new voices, especially under-represented individuals and youth.
- Visioning a different future; bottom-up process



# Leveraging Regional Resources

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- Analyzing a region's competitive advantages.
- Strengthening competencies of local elected officials.
- Engaging key intermediaries, “animators.”
- Investing local capital to leverage new resources.



# Community Clustering Initiative

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- Test RGI's principles of effective governance in three multi-community regions in rural northwest (SD, WA, OR)
- Each cluster committed to tackle a specific prosperity-related problem or issue over a 10-month period.



# Community Clustering Initiative

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- Clusters must include business, gov't (inc. tribal), civic “leaders” and high school youth.
- Cluster Encourager on the ground.
- Regional Intermediary to coach.
- Limited financial support (\$18,000 per cluster).
- Using technology (esp. online conferencing) to promote learning across great distances.



# Lessons Learned So Far

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- Fierce political boundaries can exist within a single county, so begin collaboration at the sub-county level.
- Deep concern for rural youth crosses all geographic, economic and social boundaries.
- A little money isn't a little thing. Large sums create their own set of difficulties.



## More Lessons...

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- We need smarter systems for engaging and *sustaining* under-represented individuals (tribal members, youth).
- Outside intermediaries inject new energy, but their role is fragile and complex.
- Rural regions want to use technology to their advantage. Is this a leadership opportunity for rural youth?



## And More Lessons...

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- Sub-state organizations (EDDs, RDCs) rarely shift governance practices; must cross sectors, be from the ground up.
- Despite all the talk (Michael Porter et al) about understanding and acting on a region's economic competitive advantage, no such resources exist for most rural communities. *Why?*



# Bottomline

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- The *ground work* in effective governance will help hasten the *good work* of ... entrepreneurship, business retention, arts development, heritage tourism, Main Street development, etc.



*Effective Rural Governance:  
What Is It? Does It Matter?*

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Rural governance framing paper  
posted at [www.rupri.org](http://www.rupri.org)

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