



2018 Rural Counts Advocacy Priorities

The Rural Center's advocacy platform, ***Rural Counts: 10 Strategies for Rural North Carolina's Future***, presents a framework for creating a stronger rural economy in the context of a rapidly changing state. We have spent the past year on the road, visiting each of the 80 counties we serve to hear the local nuances of these statewide challenges. These conversations have shown us that, while we need to work collaboratively on all ten strategies, three areas rise to the top for immediate action. The Rural Center will concentrate its advocacy efforts in 2018 on the following solutions for broadband, health care, and entrepreneurship.

Expand Accessible, Affordable High-Speed Broadband

- Implement a state-level grants program to spark competition and innovation in deploying broadband to the last mile.
- Create a state-level "dig once" policy to cut costs and increase efficiency in laying broadband infrastructure.
- Fund scalable programs to close the homework gap for students who need access to internet to complete their assignments and prepare for the future.
- Launch an internet adoption initiative that offers incentives for low-cost options in underserved areas, funds digital literacy programs, and explores a subsidy program for low-income households.

Stabilize and Transform Rural Health

- Close the health insurance coverage gap in North Carolina.
- Explore broad-based solutions for the opioid crisis that address both prevention and treatment.
- Expand efforts to recruit and retain health care providers in underserved rural areas of the state.
- Implement the telehealth recommendations made by DHHS to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services.

Invest in Stronger Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Systems

- Support long-term disaster recovery through improving small business support and strategic planning.
- Balance state efforts at recruiting new firms with an added emphasis on supporting entrepreneurs and retaining existing firms.
- Target technical assistance for rural communities nurturing small business development and downtown revitalization.

In addition to these top priorities, the Rural Center will continue to work collaboratively with its state and local partners on policies to support all 10 Rural Counts strategies.