



Rural Communities Initiative Economic Development Webinars Program Descriptions

Job Creation:

- **Nick Goulette, Deputy Director, Watershed Research & Training Center, Hayfork, California**
The Watershed Research and Training Center (WRTC), a community-based nonprofit organization, was started in 1993 to promote healthy communities and sustainable forests through research, education, training, and economic development. This work centers around the belief that the relationship between local communities and the public forest must change so that the economy can rebuild itself based on an ethic of land stewardship. The Center's goal is to develop and encourage sustainable forest-based activities and a vibrant economic system for Hayfork and all of Trinity County, California. WRTC works to achieve these goals by providing training to displaced workers in assessing ecosystems, restoration projects, and business skills; providing micro-loans to entrepreneurs to market non-timber forest products, and creating a Hayfork-based GIS center and socioeconomic monitoring program.

- **Pauli Ojea, Policy Associate, Green For All, Oakland, California**
Green For All is a national organization dedicated to building an inclusive green economy strong enough to lift people out of poverty. By advocating for local, state, and federal commitment to job creation, job training, and entrepreneurial opportunities in the emerging green economy – especially for people from disadvantaged communities – Green For All fights both poverty and pollution at the same time. Green For All believes a shift to a clean, green economy can improve the health and well-being of low-income people, who suffer disproportionately from cancer, asthma and other respiratory ailments in our current pollution-based economy. Such a shift can also create and expand entrepreneurial, wealth-building opportunities for American workers who need new avenues of economic advance. Green For All works to link activists and advocates, organizations, policymakers, practitioners, and business, labor, and community leaders together in dialogue to advance the vision of a green economy that benefits all Americans; increase public awareness of potential green job opportunities; leverage best green practices and policy into model programs and legislation that can be adopted at the national, state or local level; provide technical assistance to mayors and community groups to implement local green-collar job initiatives; and build an on-line community of practice to convene thought-leaders and share leading program models, technical documents, and templates.

- **Liza Ehrlich, Director of Operations and Client Services, Parks Opportunity Program, New York and Denise Tolbert, Executive Director of Employment Contractor Services, New York City Human Resources Administration**
The Parks Opportunity Program is one of the nation's largest transitional employment programs—with approximately 3,000 trainees working in New York City's parks, playgrounds, and recreation centers. In preparation for private sector careers, Parks Opportunity Program participants gain transferable skills in fields such as security, horticulture, administration, maintenance, and customer service while receiving employment services and career counseling. The program involves six-months of training and has placed over 9,000 trainees into full-time positions since its inception in 1994.



Small Business Development and Entrepreneurship:

- **Jeff Reynolds, Program Director, Center for Rural Affairs, Rural Enterprise Assistance Project (REAP), Nebraska**

The Rural Enterprise Assistance Project (REAP) is an initiative of the Center for Rural Affairs in Nebraska. REAP offers services such as networking, business planning and management workshops, peer and direct business micro loans, and technical assistance to small business owners or potential entrepreneurs. As Nebraska's largest microenterprise (a business with five employees or less) program, REAP operates in rural areas across the state. Businesses are eligible to receive REAP's services after becoming members of a REAP association or the REAP Individual Program. To fill the gaps that exist for businesses in rural areas, REAP offers four major services: lending, training, technical assistance, and networking. Additionally, REAP operates a Women's Business Center to increase self-employment among women in Nebraska.

- **Mary Emery, Associate Director, North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, National Coalition for Rural Entrepreneurship, Iowa**

The Regional Rural Development Centers and the National Coalition for Rural Entrepreneurship have developed a learning community and dialogue around policies and practices that support entrepreneurship in Rural America. The Centers have held numerous sessions aimed at practitioners, lenders, entrepreneurs, and partners. The sessions are targeted at identifying what is working in supporting entrepreneurship as well as what needs to occur to create and sustain future entrepreneurial ventures in Rural America. The sessions encourage conversation and participants are asked to think about the 4 Ds in Appreciative Inquiry: **d**iscover what is working now, **d**ream what things would like look if improved, **d**esign strategies to reach these goals, and **d**eliver by creating action plans and follow-up. The Coalition has come up with several ideas for national public policy changes based around focusing on rural entrepreneurs, funding needs, partnerships, and follow-up activities for participants.

- **Elizabeth Wilson, Senior Director, Association for Enterprise Opportunity, Virginia**

The Association for Enterprise Opportunity (AEO) is the national leadership organization and the voice of microenterprise development. By providing cutting edge training, knowledge sharing, Federal and State public policy and advocacy, and communications, AEO empowers a community of nearly 500 member organizations to be uniquely effective in serving the needs of microentrepreneurs who do not have access to traditional sources of business education or capital. In the United States, a microenterprise is usually defined as a business with five or fewer employees, small enough to require initial capital of \$35,000 or less. AEO estimates there are more than 23 million microenterprises in the U.S., representing 18% of all private U.S. employment and 87% of all businesses. Microenterprise Development is a pathway to business ownership for underserved entrepreneurs that generates income, builds assets, and supports local economies in creating employment. Most microenterprise development programs provide core services including business training and technical assistance, and access to capital. Other services may include access to markets and technology training.



Economic Development for Rural Communities:

- **Jim Richardson, Executive Director, National Rural Funders Collaborative, Texas**
The National Rural Funders Collaborative (NRFC) is a collaborative philanthropic initiative organized to expand resources for families and communities in regions of persistent poverty, especially areas where concentrations of poverty and communities of color overlap. NRFC recognizes that poverty is often a factor of race, class, culture, and power dynamics that are linked and concentrated and that the reinvention of rural economies is fundamental to eliminating rural poverty and effecting long-term transformative change in rural America. NRFC supports community-based empowerment strategies designed to transform poor rural communities and regions into healthy and viable living environments and seeks to build a movement of support and advocacy for alternative rural economies based on community assets of culture, land, and human capital and grounded in relationships and values of equity and justice.

- **Deborah M. Markley, Managing Director, Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, Nebraska**
The Center for Rural Entrepreneurship is a Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) national research and policy center. The primary goal of the Center is to be the focal point for efforts to stimulate and support private and public entrepreneurship development in communities throughout rural America. Created in 2001 with founding support from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and RUPRI, the Center is an outgrowth of the Rural Entrepreneurship Initiative (REI) supported by the Kauffman Foundation, the National Rural Development Partnership, Partners for Rural America, and the Nebraska Community Foundation. In creating the Center, founders sought the input of a group of national leaders in rural economic development policy and practice who helped articulate the mission for the Center to enable every rural resident to achieve his or her full entrepreneurial potential. This mission is achieved by collaborating with individuals and organizations engaged in the study, practice and policy of rural entrepreneurship. Working with economic development practitioners and researchers, the Center conducts practice-driven research and evaluation that serves as the basis for developing insights into model practices and other learning. The Center then shares this learning within both the practitioner and policymaker communities as a way of fostering new approaches to rural economic development.

- **Lionel J. (Bo) Beaulieu, Director, Southern Rural Development Center, Mississippi**
The Southern Rural Development Center seeks to strengthen the capacity of the region's 29 land-grant institutions to address critical contemporary rural development issues impacting the well-being of people and communities in the rural South. The goals of the center include:
 - Stimulate the formation of multi-state research teams ;
 - Coordinate the development and revision of educational materials and maintain a centralized repository of educational resources;
 - Organize and deliver high priority rural development research and educational workshops/conferences;
 - Provide leadership for the preparation of science-based rural development policy reports; and
 - Build partnerships that link the South's land-grant university system with other key entities committed to rural development activities in the region.

With critical financial support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the SRDC launched a systematic effort to hear from the people of the South. An important first step was the initiation of an information gathering phase that started in May 2006 and continued over a six-month period. With seed funding provided by the Kellogg Foundation, land-grant university teams responded to the



SRDC's call to host state-based rural development roundtables. In all, 19 sessions were successfully conducted across 14 Southern states. A diversity of voices engaged in these roundtables, including representatives from education, government, business/economic development, social services, civic, philanthropic, family/youth and faith-based sectors.

Nearly 600 people shared their perspectives on the most significant rural development issues impacting their states – issues they felt deserved serious attention by the region's 29 land-grant universities. These included ideas on the research, technical assistance and outreach education efforts that these institutions should address over the next five years. Three issues emerged time and time again as being critical priorities to the well-being of rural people and communities. These key priorities were:

1. Fostering Civic-Minded Communities.
2. Building Economically Vibrant Communities.
3. Enhancing Opportunities in Distressed and Low-Wealth Communities.

Developing Local/Regional Business Clusters:

- **Sally Cutler, Executive Director, North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board, Wisconsin**

The North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board (NCWWDB) is a public/private partnership between government and business that plans, administers, and coordinates Workforce Investment Act (WIA) employment and training programs for adults and youth in the North Central Wisconsin counties of Adams, Forest, Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Oneida, Portage, Vilas, and Wood. This region is known as Workforce Development Area (WDA) 6. The Workforce Development Board (WDB) has two separate functions working within the same structure. Those functions include:

- The broader Workforce Investment System operated through the Wisconsin Job Centers located throughout our nine-county area and providing specific WIA oversight responsibility; and
- The WDB's own organizational goals and strategies. In addition to the goals outlined in the local five year WIA Plan the WDB establishes its own strategic goals and objectives each year.

- **Jerry Conover, Director, Indiana Business Research Center**

The Indiana Business Research Center (IBRC) is an extensive resource for data and analysis of economic and demographic information needed by business, government, and nonprofit organizations in Indiana and throughout the United States. Established in 1925, the Indiana Business Research Center is an integral unit in the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University. The IBRC provides and interprets the economic information needed by the state's business, government, and nonprofit organizations, as well as users of such information throughout the nation. The IBRC maintains databases on numerous topics such as income, employment, taxes, sectors of the economy, education, demographics, and a host of other economic indicators for the nation, states, and local areas. In addition, the Center conducts original research to generate needed information when existing data are not available or sufficient.



- **Christina Sklarz-Libby, Program Manager, Maine’s North Star Alliance Initiative, WIRED Grantee**

Recognizing the realities of the changing regional economy of Coastal Maine, Governor John Elias Baldacci established Maine’s North Star Alliance Initiative in 2006. The North Star Alliance Initiative, NSAI, is a revolutionary industry-led collaborative, synthesizing business, R&D, education, workforce, and economic development resources to re-skill a workforce and launch a new regional economy in coastal Maine. Referred to as the “Four Pillars of Economic Development”, the strategy focuses on building capacity and addressing gaps in Workforce Development, Research and Development, Outreach and Market Development, and Capitalization and Infrastructure Development.

The targeted industry sectors of Maine’s North Star Alliance include a vast range of enterprises that make up or support the marine trades and those that utilize advanced composite materials, including boat building, marine/waterfront infrastructure, marine service and repair, building products, sporting goods, and ballistic armor. These industries represent the majority of the economic base of Maine’s midcoast region.

The Initiative strategically partners with three major industry associations. These are the Maine Composites Alliance, Maine Built Boats Inc., and the Maine Marine Trade Association. Additional partners include the University of Maine, the Maine Community College System, the Maine Technology Institute, the Maine Community Foundation, local and regional Workforce Investment Boats, regional economic development districts, the Governor’s Office, and the State Departments of Labor, Economic and Community Development, and Education. Maine’s North Star Alliance Initiative will serve the eight counties that comprise Maine’s coastal region (York, Cumberland, Sagadahoc, Lincoln, Knox, Hancock, Waldo, and Washington) as well as the additional four counties most affected by the impending closure of the Brunswick Naval Air Station: Androscoggin, Kennebec, Penobscot, and Piscataquis. This region also encompasses the four local areas authorized under the Workforce Investment Act and comprises 12 of Maine’s 16 counties. The Initiative will address needs identified by targeted industries located within this region that are critical to their growth and expansion. A collaborative effort of this size and scope has never been attempted in Maine before.

- **Susan Swanton, Executive Director, Maine Marine Trades Association**

The Maine Marine Trade Association (MMTA) was incorporated as a not-for-profit trade association in 1966. In its early years the Association was run completely by volunteers. Today, more than 40 years from the Association’s creation that tradition of strong volunteer participation continues with support and guidance provided by an all-volunteer Board of Directors. MMTA members are welcomed and encouraged to participate on the Association’s standing and special committees as their schedules permit. MMTA’s 200 member firms are served by a small professional staff that includes a full time Executive Director and an Office Administrator and an Industry/Education Liaison.

The mission of the MMTA is to promote growth, prosperity, and cooperation within the marine industry in Maine; to encourage and publicize educational opportunities leading to and furthering careers in the marine trades; and to encourage and assist in the development of best practices in the marine industry with a focus on the environment, and health and safety.



Partnering with Education and Economic Development Stakeholders:

- **Diana Hinton-Noel, Director- Rural/Economic Development, National Conference of State Legislatures, Washington, District of Columbia**
The National Conference of State Legislatures was founded in 1975 with the conviction that legislative service is one of democracy's worthiest pursuits. NCSL is a bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of the nation's 50 states, its commonwealths and territories. NCSL provides research, technical assistance and opportunities for policymakers to exchange ideas on the most pressing state issues. NCSL is a respected advocate for the interests of state governments before Congress and federal agencies.
- **Karen R. Elzey, Vice President & Executive Director, Institute for a Competitive Workforce, U.S. Chamber of Commerce**
The Institute for a Competitive Workforce (ICW) is the education and workforce nonpartisan, non-profit, 501(c)3 affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. ICW promotes the rigorous educational standards and effective job training systems needed to preserve the strength of America's greatest economic resource, its workforce.

Through its events, publications, and policy initiatives—and drawing upon the Chamber's extensive network of three million members—ICW connects the best minds in American business with the most innovative thinkers in American education, helping them work together to ensure the nation's continued prosperity.

- **Jennifer Hilmer Capece, American Association of Community Colleges Center for Workforce and Economic Development**
The Center for Workforce and Economic Development, organized within the AACC Office of Economic Development, brings together community colleges, offices of economic development, workforce boards, labor market entities, and other community organizations to improve the economic prosperity of business, workers, and communities. The Center provides technical assistance on collaborative practices, labor market analysis, and performance analysis in order to promote more integrated and interactive practices.

Mission: Build community college capacity to better align priorities, strategies, and resources with those of workforce and economic development partners in response to regional labor market needs.

Goals: (1) Improved economic prosperity of workers, business, and communities; (2) Increased use of best practices as common practices; and (3) Enhanced community college leadership role in building and sustaining high quality programs and services supportive of regional economic growth strategies.

Job Creation Strategies for Rural America:

- **Eva Greenwalt, Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development (CTED), Community Jobs Initiative, Washington**
The Community Jobs Initiative is part of Washington State's WorkFirst program, designed to help low-income families prepare for and begin to work. The aim of the Community Jobs Initiative is to create publicly funded jobs that provide experience and skills development for WorkFirst parents. The initiative is a 40 hour per week activity that supplies parents with full-time, paid, transitional employment. When the program began in 1997, it aimed to create jobs at community-based nonprofit organizations located within areas of need. Agencies were contacted, sent an RFP, and



those interested were screened and chosen to serve as contractors for Community Jobs. Contractors play an important role within their communities, as they establish worksites and ensure that participants receive proper training, skills-development, support, and supervision. The program has proven successful among rural and Tribal communities that are typically isolated both economically and geographically.

- **Liza Ehrlich, Director of Operations and Client Services, Parks Opportunity Program, New York**
- **Denise Tolbert, Executive Director of Employment Contractor Services, New York City Human Resources Administration**

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