

Rural People, Rural Policy

Regional Rural Policy Network Component Description

Overview

Rural People, Rural Policy is a multi-year national initiative that energizes and equips rural organizations and networks to shape policy that will improve the vitality of rural communities and the lives of their residents. One of the primary components of Rural People, Rural Policy is *Regional Rural Policy Networks*. The goal of establishing these Networks is to develop the knowledge, capacity, strategic direction, and action of a critical mass of organizations that seek to improve policy that affects people and places in rural America.

What is a Regional Rural Policy Network – and Why?

Regional Rural Policy Networks are a set of selected organizations from four specific geographic regions and one “at-large” region in the United States. Network organizations will engage in a multi-year process that will develop their strategies, skills, and efforts to improve the impact of public and private policy on rural people and rural places.

Starting in 2006, the Rural People, Rural Policy Initiative will recruit a *cohort* of five organizations from each region to take part in Rural People, Rural Policy. For the ensuing four years, Rural People, Rural Policy will recruit an additional annual cohort of five organizations from each region. By the fifth year of the Initiative (2011), each region will have a core group of 25 organizations equipped and actively working to improve rural policy.

Over time, Network organizations may work in many ways and on many levels to change policy that is important to them. They may work individually, and also collectively with their colleague Networks member organizations, and with a wider range of organizations in their region, across regions, and/or nationally. Likewise, they may focus their efforts on local, statewide, regional, national, or international policy. Finally, they may specialize in one area of policy or take on a range of policy topics.

Networks are meant to grow beyond the roster of the selected organizations over time, creating their own pull and energy as they build momentum and experience. In this way, they will form a solid base for a rural policy network that will live well beyond the life of the Rural People, Rural Policy Initiative.

Who may apply to participate in a Regional Rural Policy Network?

Any *nonprofit* organization that seeks to improve policy that affects rural people and rural places may apply to participate in a Regional Rural Policy Network. This includes organizations working in economic development, education, community philanthropy, health, or other issues critical to rural vitality.

Organizations that seek to participate may be anywhere on a spectrum from small to large, focused on one community or across states, targeted on a single issue or a wide range of issues, or young and learning to highly experienced.

Once chosen, Networks organizations must commit to participate in all required Initiative activities throughout the remaining years of the Initiative, which currently is expected to continue through 2012.

What are the Regions?

Four Regional Rural Policy Networks will be based in specific regions where the W.K. Kellogg Foundation has invested considerable resources in recent years. These four regions are:

- **Central Appalachia**: West Virginia, Appalachian counties of Kentucky, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia
- **Mid South**: Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi
- **Midwest/Great Plains**: Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana
- **Southwest**: New Mexico, Arizona

Organizations, that are not in the states mentioned above but consider themselves very connected to one of these regions, may make a case to be included in that Network.

In addition, we are considering organizing **one At-Large Network** to include up to five organizations that meet all the criteria for participation but are from outside the four specified geographic regions. The Participation Request Statement of these organizations will demonstrate that they are doing work where there would be mutually beneficial opportunities for all participants, just as all applications will be looked at.

What are the requirements and expectations of the Regional Rural Policy Networks?

Each Network organization will participate in a program that will simultaneously strengthen its organizational and communication capacity, hone its policy development skills and rural development knowledge, and build its connections to other organizations, rural experts, policymakers, and resource organizations across the country. Over the course of the Initiative, each region's cohort class of organizations will work together to develop policy priorities and activities, and each cohort class will also connect to the policy work of cohort classes from prior and succeeding years in the region.

Here is a set of requirements for and expectations of participating organizations:

- ***Network Peer-Learning Sessions. Year One of Participation***
In its first year of cohort participation, two lead participants from each Regional Rural Policy Network organization must engage in three week-long Network Peer-Learning Sessions that will include the participants from every region selected that year. **The first Network Peer-Learning Session for the 2006 Cohort will take place May 8-12, 2006.** If you apply this year, please check your calendars for this week SHOULD you be selected to participate.
- ***Network Regional Activity. Year One of Participation***
Regional Network organizations will engage in capacity building and regional convening and action between Network Peer-Learning Sessions in their first year of participation.
- ***Organizational and Regional Networks Policy Action. Ongoing***
Regional Networks and individual participating organizations will identify rural policy priorities and take action related to each priority throughout the multi-year course of their participation in the Initiative.

- ***Annual National Rural Assembly. Every Year beginning in 2007***
Every organization that participates in a Network cohort will attend every *Annual National Rural Assembly* after they become participants. The Annual National Rural Assembly will include all Network organizations from across the cohort class years and a wide host of other rural policy actors from across the country.
- ***Networking, Helping, Tracking and Reporting Progress. Ongoing***
All participating Network organizations must agree to share their knowledge and learning with other participants; to work with the Initiative resource and management team to develop and offer progress reports; to produce activity profiles, session presentations and other helpful information as needed; and to adhere to instructions related to travel and logistics *in a timely manner*.
- ***Committed, Consistent Participation. Ongoing***
Rural People, Rural Policy is an initiative that will build over time. Thus, it requires the consistent attention of people who can make decisions and take action in their organizations. Participating Network organizations must commit the participation of the *same* lead staff or board members from the organization throughout the course of the Initiative.

What are the benefits of participating in a Regional Rural Policy Network?

Organizations selected to participate in Regional Rural Policy Networks will receive resources and benefits to spark their policy learning and ignite action:

- ***Network Peer-Learning Sessions. Year One of Participation***
In its first year of cohort participation, two lead participants from each Regional Rural Policy Network organization will engage in three week-long Network peer-learning and capacity-building sessions that will include the participants from every region selected that year. Before setting the agenda for these sessions, session designers will consult with each Network organization to discover their policy experience, priorities, and capacity, as well as their learning interests and needs. Participants will prepare for these sessions by completing assignments, readings, and presentations in advance. All onsite expenses for the participation of two people per organization will be covered for these sessions; one or two more may attend from each organization at the organization's expense if facilities and space permit.
- ***Annual National Rural Assembly. Every Year***
Once selected, every organization that participates in a Network cohort will also be expected to participate in every ensuing *Annual National Rural Assembly* over the course of the Initiative. The Rural Assembly will be the annual *rural gathering place* that brings together all Network organizations from across the cohort class years, with a wide range of rural policy actors from across the country, to examine rural issues and create helpful connections and ideas that will help improve rural-relevant policy across the nation.
- ***Organization Participation Grant. Year one of the Initiative; these will be five-year grants***
Each selected Network organization during the first year will receive a grant commitment from WKKF totaling \$100,000 over five years. The grants may be used to support Initiative activities, including staffing, travel to the three year-one Network Peer-Learning Sessions and regional network meetings, and the local and regional policy action that flows from the Initiative.

o **Technical Assistance Pool. Year One of Participation**

Each Regional Rural Policy Network will receive a pool of technical assistance funds (estimated at \$15,000 per Network) during its first year. Together, each Network's organizations will construct a plan on how to allocate these funds for individual and/or collective policy-focused efforts between Network Peer-Learning Sessions. As needed, national Initiative managers will work with each Network to revise and finalize their plans, to identify and access resource experts who can provide relevant technical assistance, or to provide technical assistance themselves.

o **Regional Coordinator. Throughout Initiative**

A region-based regional coordinator will be assigned to each Regional Rural Policy Network to help coordinate and manage their Network's efforts over the course of the Initiative. We will be working with the Networks to figure this out.

o **Rural Resource and Action Networks. Ongoing**

In the course of the Initiative activities, Network participants will engage with people and organizations in their region and across the country, including community-based groups, local and topical experts and organizations, researchers, communication professionals, policymakers, and policy innovators. The Initiative will develop a variety of methods to build connections among these people, and to make their tools and ideas readily available to all.

How can an organization apply to be in a Regional Rural Policy Network?

First, visit the WKKF Web site (www.wkkf.org/rprp) and please read the information provided about Rural People, Rural Policy. If you are applying online, there are detailed guides to help you through the Foundation's online Grant Application. Also, if you are applying online, you must attach a word document (no more than ten (10) pages) which is a narrative addressing a set of questions that are available under Participant Request Statement.

If you are applying by using a hard copy, the form will be available at the Regional Information Meetings, printable from the website, or, requested through mail or email.

Here are some important dates for this process:

- **January 9, 2006: Materials available on the WKKF website (www.wkkf.org/rprp)**
- **February 20, 2006: Deadline for Grant Application which includes a narrative no more than 10 pages in response to the questions of the Participation Request Statement.**

Following this deadline, WKKF will review the proposals. If we should need further information, we will get in touch with you. There will be no announcement of any initial cuts or semi-finalists during this period. Please be advised that should your organization not be selected, we will be unable to provide individual feedback. Visit the WKKF website for a list of reasons that organizations were not selected. And, remember, if you are not selected for 2006, there will be opportunities in 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010.

- **March 24, 2006: Regional Rural Policy Networks 2006 Cohort Organizations announced.**
- **May 8-12, 2006: Regional Rural Policy Network Peer-Learning Session #1.**
When you apply with your proposal, please check your availability for these dates should you be selected.