

OUR YEAR OF IMPACT IN RURAL NEW YORK

2014-2015 Annual Report
Of the
New York State Rural Housing Coalition, Inc.



*Thriving rural communities in New York
It's possible...*

The New York State Rural Housing Coalition, Inc. completed technical assistance and capacity building activities primarily in support of housing agencies serving rural New York State. In the 2014-2015 program years these services were provided through contracts with the New York State Homes and Community Renewal and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development under a sub-contract with the Housing Assistance Council in Washington, DC. These services provide capacity building to enable local housing agencies with governance concerns, needs assessments, program and project development, financial capacity and accountability, and reporting requirements.

Capacity Building Activities

The capacity building activities of the Coalition generally fall into two distinct categories- Technical assistance and Training. Technical assistance includes one-on-one guidance to non-profit housing agencies, local municipalities and others interested in the vitality and affordability of New York's rural communities. Training events include statewide gatherings such as our annual multi-day training conference, which is held in a different location in the state each year, as well as regionally-focused trainings including part-day and full-day workshop sessions.

To the greatest extent possible, the Coalition provides capacity building services under our contracts with state and federal agencies. When those resources are not available, we provide capacity building services under consulting contracts for an hourly fee.

- **Technical Assistance:** A major portion of the Coalition's work involves answering questions- putting questions into context, fitting the questions into one or more regulatory frameworks, identifying what related questions might then arise, and then beginning to offer some answers. Technical assistance can be provided remotely by way of phone calls or emails, or most effectively in person and on site. Technical assistance typically is quite focused on a particular issue, idea, or program. When the same or similar issues pop up frequently, the Coalition makes an effort to address the questions in a group training, to increase the efficiency of our delivery mechanism.

During the 2014-2015 program year, the Coalition provided a variety of onsite and remote technical assistance, including orientation for new Executive Directors of Rural Preservation Companies; Executive Director retreats; assessments of project sites; review of draft grant application language; assistance with Grants Gateway; budget and pro forma analysis; and staffing and recruitment.

- **Training:** In 2014, the Coalition hosted the 35th statewide training conference at the Lake Ontario Conference Center in Oswego.

This new harbor front function center was constructed with NY state assistance as a community revitalization project, and amply demonstrated how unusual projects can be the cornerstone of community revitalization efforts. The 2014 conference was split into a number of topical training tracks, with subject matter including the single family home ownership programs of USDA; rural broadband access; replacement of dilapidated mobile homes; and developing housing above retail space in Main Street buildings. Our keynote presenter was Mr. Chris Estes, President/CEO of the National Housing Conference in Washington, DC. The other prime speaker was Darryl Towns, Commissioner of the New York State Homes and Community Renewal. Overall, the 2014 conference drew 154 attendees.

Where appropriate, Coalition staff provides board training on issues such as organizational management, succession planning, board recruitment and development, and roles and responsibilities of nonprofit boards. During the report period, we provided

We also conduct an annual training series where local housing agencies learn from their peers. These trainings are held regionally and the agenda varies depending on which local issues are most pressing. The peer to peer trainings were held in May and June of 2015 in Rochester (at the Pathstone headquarters), Albany (at the Capital District Community Loan Fund), Watertown (at Neighbors of Watertown), and Binghamton (at the Harry L Senior Apartments). Peer topics varied from partnering options with Habitat for Humanity affiliates, to securing project funding from the Consolidated Funding Application process.

During this program year, the Coalition closed out our most recent Rural Community Development Initiative contract with the US Department of Agriculture that worked with a targeted group of nonprofit housing agencies to build their capacity to take on new multi-family affordable rental housing projects. This matching grant made it possible to provide intensive training and technical assistance services to agencies that had no history of the development process with their current staff, positioning them to undertake development projects in the future.

Funding

The Rural Housing Coalition relies on a diverse body of funding for its existence. We receive funding from a contract from NYS HCR for capacity building services for Rural Preservation Companies, from HUD for review of operations of CHDOs, from various entities for consulting services, and from a variety of donors, including:

- Sponsors and underwriters of the annual conference make this event possible. Sponsorship levels range from a \$75 business card advertiser level to \$5000 for major sponsorship. Most of our sponsors support at the \$1000-2500 levels. Significant supporters of the 2014 conference were: Federal Home Loan Bank of NY; Ulster Savings Bank; National Development Council; RUPCo; Kinderhook Development; NYS Rural Rental Housing Association; Cannon, Heyman, and Weiss, and Oswego County Tourism.
- Grant requests. During the program year, the Coalition requested grant funds from a number of regional philanthropies. Grants were secured from TD Bank, Berkshire Bank, First Niagara, Community Foundation for South Central New York, Kinderhook Bank, and the John Ben Snow Foundation. These grants totaling more than \$14,000 enable the Coalition to increase the level of services that we provide to rural New York's communities.
- Donors to our annual appeal. The annual appeal generates over \$6,000 per year in unrestricted support.
- Donors to our Gofundme account. This site generates small gifts from individuals.

The financial records of the Coalition are audited by Toski & Company, of Williamsville, NY.

Board of Directors

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Staffing

The Coalition underwent a significant staffing change during this year with the retirement of long-time Executive Director Blair Sebastian at the end of May, 2015. Blair had led the Coalition for nearly 19 years. He continues to work with us in a part-time consulting capacity. The Coalition continues to operate with a professional staff of two, Lorraine Wynne and Colin McKnight, supplemented by a team of consultants and volunteer support.

Consulting

Our highly qualified consulting team includes Nancy Berkowitz, Kathy Dorgan, John Grover, Michelle DeGarmo, Gary Hallock, and others. We have used various consultants on assignments as subcontractors to our prime contract, and we have also signed on as subcontractors to proposed projects when our consultants have bid as prime contractors on projects.

Connectivity

The Coalition continues to publish a monthly e-newsletter, *Rural Delivery*, to keep our members and friends informed of important issues affecting rural community development efforts in New York. This publication connects with over 200 agencies per month, providing information on funding programs and deadlines, proposed regulatory changes, profiles of successful projects and programs, career opportunities, and discussion of policy issues.

The Coalition maintains a site on the internet at www.ruralhousing.org. This site contains late breaking news, an archive of past issues of *Rural Delivery*, and links to related content. The site also contains a Career Opportunities page to allow our members a platform on the web to recruit new talent in to our industry. We make posting access to this service available for free to our members.

The Coalition also maintains a Facebook page, to allow greater immediacy in the delivery of critical information.

Our GoFundMe page was developed this year in conjunction with our annual appeal. The site has provided additional exposure for the Coalition.

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