



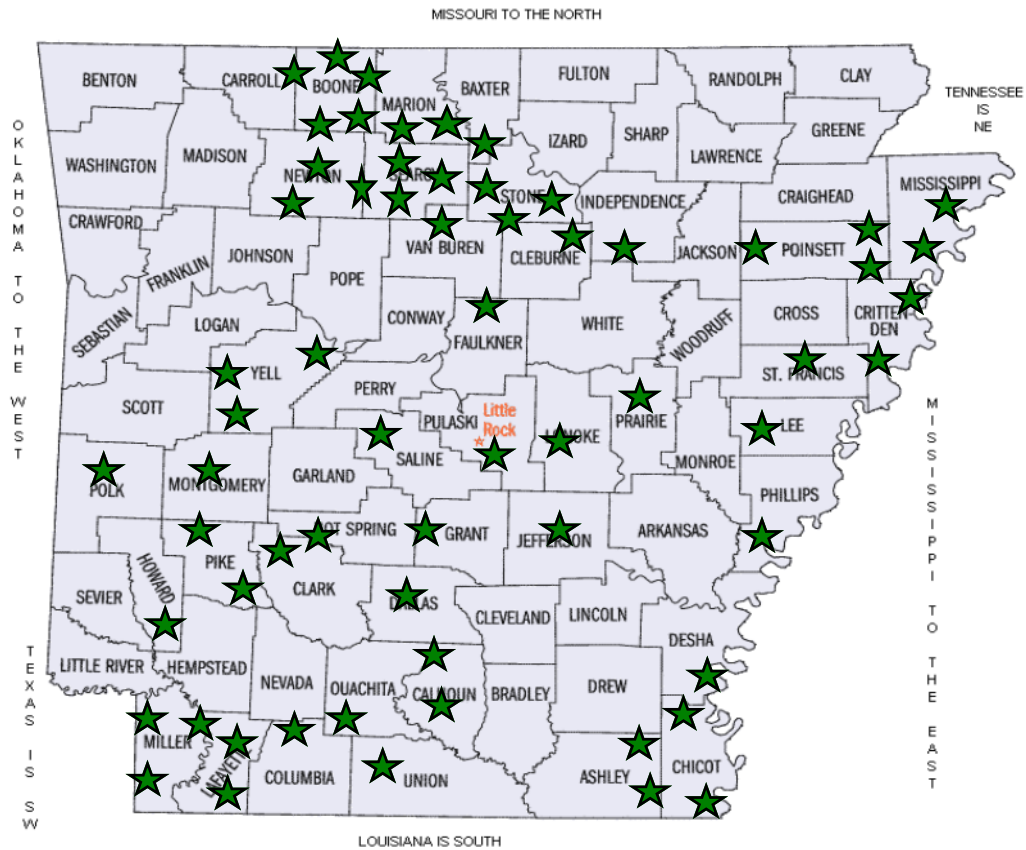
2015 Annual Report



A Dozen Years of Progress

www.thenewrural.org

Where we are



RCA Chapter

Acorn	Dermott	Genoa Central	Mineral Springs	Shirley
Alpena	Des Arc	Guy-Perkins	Montrose	Smackover
Alzheimer-Dollarway	Diamond City	Hampton	Mt. Judea	Stephens
Arkansas City	Doddridge	Hughes	Murfreesboro	St. Joe
Bearden	Earle	Jasper	Norfork	Timbo
Bismarck	East Poinsett County	Kirby	Oden	Turrell
Bradley	Elaine	Lafayette County	Omaha	Valley Springs
Bruno-Pyatt	Eudora	Lead Hill	Osceola	Waldo
Carthage	Fairfield Bay	Leslie	Paron	Weiner
Carlisle	Flippin	Marianna	Plainview-Rover	Western Yell County
Centerpoint	Fouke	Marked Tree	Poyen	Western Grove
Concord-Ida	Fourche Valley	Marshall	Rivercrest	Wilmot
Delight	Friends of RCA	Midland	Rural Special	Witts Springs

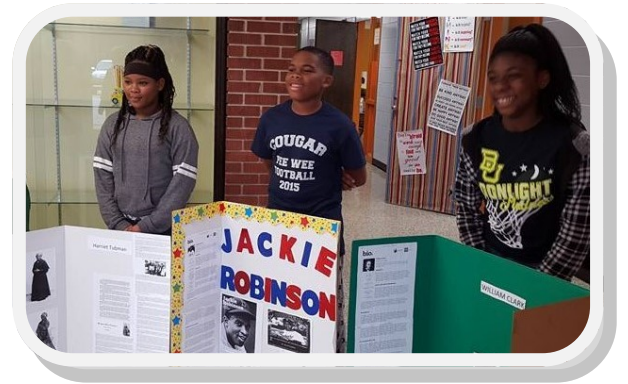
RCA Vision

Rural Community Alliance members have a vision for just and thriving rural communities that offer access to an excellent education, economic opportunity, and rewarding quality of life to all residents.

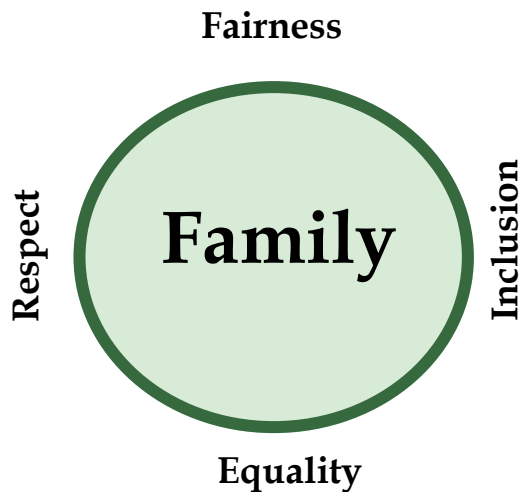


RCA Mission

The mission of Rural Community Alliance is to empower low-income rural communities to effect change by creating opportunities in education, economic development, and youth empowerment to improve quality of life and place.



RCA Moral Center



RCA Core Values

Low-wealth
Rural
Communities

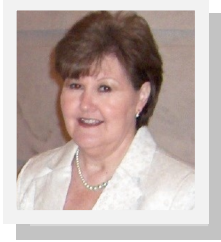
- ◆ Education
- ◆ Justice
- ◆ Opportunity
- ◆ Economic Empowerment

RCA Theory of Change

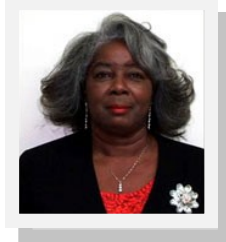
RCA members believe change happens through informed and organized residents defining the change they want, building collective power, and taking action to improve their lives. We work to bring about change in communities with a process that starts with assessment and visioning, then strategic planning and implementation--all led and controlled by the grassroots. RCA staff supports community members with information, resources, and training.

RCA Organizational Structure

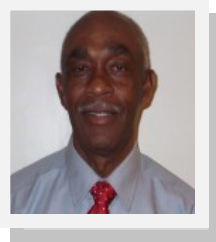
RCA Board



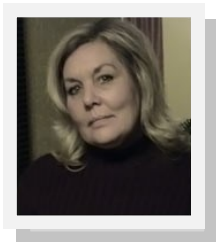
Lavina Grandon, President



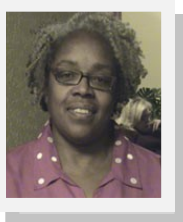
Erma Brown, Vice President



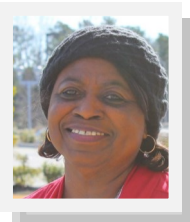
Andrew Taylor, Secretary



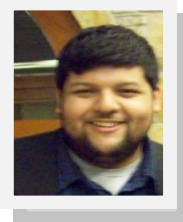
Kerry Cunningham, Treasurer



Dorothy Singleton



Mattie Allison



Aris Ortiz, Jr.

Staff

Candace Williams, Executive Director
Renee Carr, Chief Financial Officer
Lavina Grandon, Policy and Education Director
Dorothy Singleton, Delta Regional Director
Matt Grandon, Ozarks Regional Director
Tanya Broadnax, Southeast Regional Director
Penny Harris, Southwest Regional Director
Alenora Williams, Elaine-Marvell Project Manager



65 Chapter Leaders

2,021 Members

What Chapters Do

RCA chapters are self-governing local organizations which agree to “act locally and think statewide.” They determine their own structure, procedures, and set of local issues. They are led by a volunteer Chapter Leader, who serves as the contact between members and RCA leadership and staff. RCA staff provides information, resources, and training to local groups. Members are asked to work collectively with other RCA members around the state on issues that will benefit low-wealth rural communities as a whole.

RCA Education Advocacy

Rural Community Alliance members believe the best place for a child to be educated is a small community school close to home. We believe that public education affords the most opportunity for the education of all children in the most equitable manner. We believe that it is every person's responsibility to contribute to an effective and efficient system of public education so that our democracy may prosper and our children may have bright futures.



Meeting with small school representatives to craft Act 60 relief



Focus group training for ForwARd Arkansas stakeholder input



Funding for local place-based education projects



Advocating for public education



Step Up for Public Schools walks



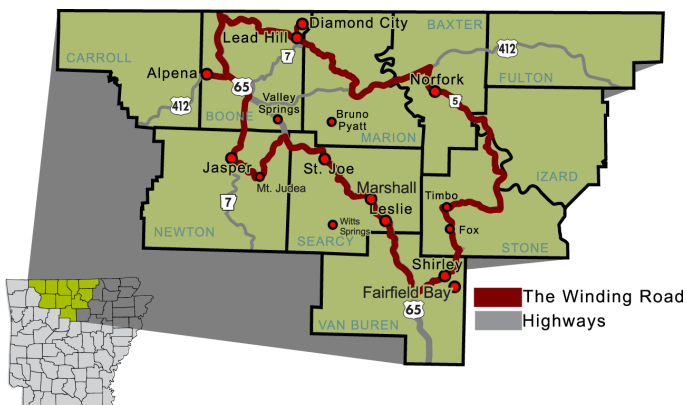
Testifying for Act 60 waiver

RCA Regional Revitalization Networks

Rural Community Alliance members recognize that in order to save their rural communities and make them more prosperous places to live and work they must pursue new economic development options and think about economic development in new and innovative ways.

In 2008, RCA began helping communities with grass-roots led holistic strategic planning and revitalization projects. Some of those projects have grown into targeted, themed economic development efforts, while others have become part of larger networks.

Almost half of RCA chapters are carrying out some level of community revitalization. In North Central Arkansas, 16 communities collaborate in the Ozark Byways revitalization network with a parent website, linked community websites, regional events, and a regional magazine. Delta Highways revitalization network serves small communities in Drew, Desha, Ashley, and Chicot Counties, and a new network called Jewel of the Red River is being formed in Southwest Arkansas. The networks combine opportunities for training, organizing, and marketing of member communities. More information can be found at www.ozarkbyways.com and www.deltahighways.org.



Jewel of the Red River

RCA Policy Development

In addition to working at the local level for better schools and more prosperous communities, RCA members collectively identify policies that will benefit rural Arkansas, and then they advocate for those policies on the state and local level.

In 2015, RCA members successfully advocated for a waiver from consolidation for small schools that are academically and fiscally sound and for pilot Schools of Agriculture. They were part of the coalition that turned back charter school legislation that would have removed 26 schools from local control into an "Achievement School District" to be run by charter companies. They also defeated a bill that would have seized public school property deemed "unused" or "underused" and turned it over to charter schools.



Youth Development

RCA practices an intergenerational model of organizing, believing that youth have an important voice and role to play in strengthening our schools and our communities. RCA youth take part in community revitalization projects and advocacy efforts. They attend conferences and make their voices heard on issues of concern.

Examples of youth involvement include participation in the Jefferson County Parent Summit, a youth internship, youth presentations at the RCA Member Conference, youth involvement in the Elaine Fish Hook Theater Project, Grants in Place funding for local youth-led place based education projects, and community service by youth in Paron, Dermott, Doddridge, and other chapters around the state.



Summer Conference 2015, Eudora, AR: Celebrating the Work in Our Communities 2.0

Each year RCA members gather from around the state to celebrate successes, share ideas, and plan for future work. In 2015 the annual member conference was held at the J. Austin White Cultural Center in Eudora, in Southeast Arkansas. The conference was a continuation of the discussion begun in Leslie the year before about how we can revitalize our communities and support our schools. More than 100 participants separated into regional groups to plan collective work. Members reaffirmed their commitment to building regional networks of small rural communities for planning, promotion, and economic development. The group was entertained by a group of young step-dancers from Eudora.





2015 Events



RCA staff and chapter leaders conducted more than 20 focus groups to provide rural stakeholder input for the ForwARd vision for P-16 public education.



RCA members look on as Governor Asa Hutchinson signs the Act 60 waiver bill into law.



Rural Community Alliance Executive Director Candace Williams testifies in favor of the Act 60 waiver.



RCA's friend Mara Tieken published her book *Why Rural Schools Matter*, based on case studies of RCA chapter communities Delight and Earle.



Ozark Byways Buy-Days continues to be a wildly popular regional event among RCA chapters in North Central Arkansas, drawing people from all over the area and from neighboring states.



Hughes RCA members made a valiant effort to save their school and should have been eligible for an Act 60 waiver, but the Arkansas Department of Education and the State Board would have none of it.



RCA communities continue to stand for public education with our annual Step Up for Public Schools walks.



RCA partnered with Rural Schools Collaborative to fund Grants in Place youth led place based education projects on topics such as the effects of clear cutting on local ecology, community history, an employability seminar, a community garden, and more.



Rural Community Alliance partnered with local chapters in our Partnership Giving initiative, providing nearly \$10,000 in funding to carry out projects that benefit schools and communities.



RCA staff attended the national Opportunity to Learn Summit as part of our collaboration with national groups that seek social, racial, economic, and education justice.

RCA Chapters

Rural Community Alliance has 2,021 members in 65 chapters throughout the state of Arkansas. Chapters are self-governing entities which are encouraged to “act locally but think state-wide.” Thus, each chapter is expected to carry out local advocacy and capacity building efforts in their school and community while participating in state, regional, and national activities that will benefit rural communities, students, and schools. Each chapter is led by a volunteer chapter leader, who is also part of the Rural Community Alliance Policy Council. Following is a list of Rural Community Alliance chapters and some of their activities in 2015.

Acorn: Chapter since 2006, 9 members, volunteered at school, attended school board meetings, contacted legislators

Alpena: Chapter since 2005, 44 members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, volunteered with historic restoration, volunteered with community cleanup; sponsored, Christmas Parade, Run for the Gravy, and Smokin’ the Pass BBQ contest, attended city council meetings, attended school board meetings, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, participated in Ozark Byways planning and events, two Grants in Place projects (right, Grants in Place mural project) www.alpenapass.org



Alzheimer-Dollarway: Chapter since 2006, 27 members, attended RCA conference, volunteered at school, attended school board meetings, contacted legislators, hosted legislators at event, volunteered at community events, hosted community events, ran candidate for school board, produced Jefferson County Parent Summit, summer learning camp, added new members, participated in parent engagement group , submitted newspaper articles, held ForwARd focus group

Arkansas City: Chapter since 2012, 29 members, volunteered at community events, member of Delta Highways revitalization network , community food pantry, community website arkansascityusa.com, attended city council meetings, submitted articles to newspaper

Bearden: Chapter since 2009, 22 members, volunteered at school, attended school board meetings

Bismarck: Chapter since 2008, 17 members, volunteered at school, participated in merchants group, volunteered at community events, attended school board meetings, historic preservation activity, community festival, contacted legislators, community food pantry

Bradley: Chapter since 2005, 84 members, attended RCA conference, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, contacted legislators, participated in school board election, attended school board meetings, community website, community Facebook page, submitted articles for newspaper, added new members, participated in Step Up for Public Schools

Bruno-Pyatt: Chapter since 2005, 42 members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community event, attended school board meetings, produced heritage festival, participated in Ozark Byways planning and events, contacted legislators, added new members, Grants in Place project, held ForwARd focus group

Carthage: Chapter since 2006, 5 members, volunteered at community events, attended City Council meetings, participated in economic development

Carlisle: Chapter since 2005, 16 members, volunteered at school, attended school board meetings, volunteered at community events, contacted legislators, held ForwARd focus group

Centerpoint: Chapter since 2006, 7 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school

Concord-Ida: Chapter since 2012, 8 members, volunteered at school, attended school board meeting, participated in school board election, participated in education event, volunteered at community event, contacted legislators

Delight: Chapter since 2005, 113 members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, produced 6th annual music festival, served on revitalization focus groups, annual Christmas parade, attended school board meetings, submitted newspaper articles, city beautification, attended RCA conference, repurposed former school building for community purposes, added new members, contacted legislators, Partnership Giving project

Dermott: Chapter since 2008, 99 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, attended national OTL Summit, parent engagement group, volunteered at school, organized community events, produced Crawfish Festival, city beautification, attended Chamber of Commerce meetings, attended city council meetings, attended school board meetings, submitted newspaper articles, contacted legislators, in Delta Highways network, held teacher appreciation event, website www.dermott.org, community Facebook page, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, Grants in Place project

Des Arc: Chapter since 2005, 20 members, held ForwARd focus group, contacted legislators, attended school board meetings, volunteered at community events

Diamond City: Chapter since 2006, 11 members, attended City Council meetings, attended Chamber of Commerce meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, produced festivals, contacted legislators, received grants, participated in community foundation and Lakeshore Districts economic development network, participated in Ozark Byways planning and events, held veterans celebrations, participated in Partnership Giving initiative, added new members www.diamondcityar.org

Doddridge: Chapter since 2012, 101 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, volunteered at community event, attended school board meetings, community beautification, attended OTL Summit, contacted legislators, developed museum and historic site, held back-to-school event, participated in merchants group, youth book give-away, community Facebook page (**right, Doddridge Community Council partners with RCA to restore historic post office**)



Earle: Chapter since 2009, 6 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, participated in community event, participated in historic preservation, contacted legislators, held education event, submitted newspaper articles

East Poinsett County: Chapter since 2009, 16 members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events

Elaine: Chapter since 2006, 58 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, attended school board meetings, participated in school board election, produced arts festival and community theater performance, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, participated in Step-Up for Public Schools, participated in Good to Great pre-K project, contacted legislators, wrote grants, community website www.elainear.org, community Facebook page, attended city council meetings, submitted articles for newspaper, started youth theater group, participated in Delta Highways revitalization network



Eudora: Chapter since 2005, 90 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, city beautification, parent engagement group, community literacy project, participated in AR-GLR webinars, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, held summer festival, contacted legislators, held back-to-school event, summer feeding/learning program, after-school tutoring, member of Delta Highways revitalization network, Step Up for Public Schools walk (**right**)

Fairfield Bay: Chapter since 2014, 31 members, participated in Ozark Byways revitalization network, produced community events, community website visitfairfieldbay.com, attended city council meetings, added new members, literacy project (**right, local Rotary Club does literacy project with Shirley students**)

Flippin: Chapter since 2011, 5 members, attended school board meetings, contacted legislators, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, participated in Arkansas Grade-Level Reading Campaign, participated in GLR Attendance Works project, added new members

Fouke: Chapter since 2012, 15 members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, attended school board meetings, participated in school board election, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, participated in education event, community website, community Facebook page, attended city council meetings, community festival, contacted legislators

Fourche Valley: Chapter since 2009, 53 members, organized alumni reunion, volunteered at community events, raised money for community projects, attended school board meetings, contacted legislators, community Facebook page

Friends of RCA: Chapter since 2005, 73 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, provided technical assistance, contacted legislators

Genoa Central: Chapter since 2006, 15 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, helped with a tutoring program

Guy-Perkins: Chapter since 2009, 7 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school

Hampton: Chapter since 2005, 6 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, volunteered at community events, attended legislative committee hearings

Hughes: Chapter since 2014, 35 members, added new members, sent members to RCA conference, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, attended school board meetings, held education event, volunteered at school, organized a community event, conducted a community improvement project, attended city council meetings, helped with tutoring program, summer learning camp, submitted newspaper articles (**right, Hughes community members board bus to fight for their school**)



Jasper: Emerging chapter, 2 members, participated in Ozark Byways regional network and events, community website www.theozarkmountains.com, held community festivals and events

Kirby: Chapter since 2014, 32 members, volunteered at school, attended school board meetings, participated in school board election, volunteered at community event, participated in community revitalization, community Facebook page, community festival, contacted legislators, worked to increase school enrollment

Lafayette County: Chapter since 2012, 22 members, added new members, volunteered at community events, volunteered at school, participated in school board election, participated in education event, contacted legislators, participated in economic development activities, Partnership Giving project

Lead Hill: Chapter since 2006, 20 members, added new members, attended school board meetings, attended Chamber of Commerce meetings, attended city council meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, attended RCA summer conference, participated in Lakeshore Districts economic development campaign, volunteered at community events, Lead Hill 4th of July Celebration and Parade, held veterans' event, participated in Ozark Byways regional planning and events, Facebook page, submitted newspaper articles, Step Up for Public Schools walk, helped with tutoring program, hosted legislators www.leadhill.org (**Lead Hill does Step Up for Public Schools with Senator Scott Flippo**)



Leslie: Chapter since 2006, 55 members, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, attended school board meetings, participated in revitalization project, added new businesses, participated in Searcy County Chamber of Commerce, volunteered at community events, regular music performances at OHAC, Farmers Market, Fishing Derby, Homecoming, West Fest, Sugarplum Festival, city-wide cleanup, attended city council meetings, Merchants Association, on arts tour, Facebook page, city-wide rummage sale, lawn mower races, annual Mountain Man Rendezvous, Ancestor Fair, participated in Ozark Byways regional network planning and events, www.lesliearkansas.org

Marianna: Chapter since 2005, 43 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, contacted legislators, attended RCA conference, ForwARd focus group, youth development program

Marshall: Chapter since 2013, 33 members, participated in Ozark Byways regional network planning and events, participated in Searcy County Chamber of Commerce, attended Chamber of Commerce meetings, held community events, volunteered at school, Facebook page, www.marshallar.org

Marked Tree: Chapter since 2009, 4 members, volunteered at school

Midland: Emerging chapter, 2 members

Montrose: Chapter since 2013, 3 members, attended city council meetings, community festival, contacted legislators, historic preservation

Mineral Springs: Chapter since 2009, 5 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, participated in school board election

Mt. Judea: Chapter since 2011, 42 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, participated in Ozark Byways planning and events, summer learning camp, Mt. Judea Area Alliance, Christmas parade, Dolly Parton Imagination Library, applied for grant, produced heritage festival, www.mtjudea.org, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, participated in Partnership Giving initiative

Murfreesboro: Emerging chapter, 3 members

Norfolk: Chapter since 2011, 6 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, Pioneer Days festival, participated in Ozark Byways planning and events, linked to Ozark Byways website

Oden: Chapter since 2005, 24 members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, attended school board meetings, participated in education event, historic preservation, Facebook page, community beautification, community festival, contacted legislators, submitted articles for newspaper

Omaha: Chapter since 2009, 5 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school

Osceola: Chapter since 2009, 9 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events

Paron: Chapter since 2006, 16 members, added new members, attended school board meetings, participated in school election, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, hosted Paron Pride day, Hosted Mayfest, maintained community center, volunteered at community events, attended RCA Conference, Fall Fest, youth engagement, Facebook page
(Paron Community members get grant to help preserve former high school as community center)



Plainview-Rover: Chapter since 2005, 58 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, volunteered at community events, attended rural education conference, hosted fall festival, participated in merchants group, attended city council meetings, attended RCA conference, Farm to School grant and project

Poyen: Chapter since 2005, 13 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, Step Up for Public Schools walk

Rivercrest: Chapter since 2009, 8 members, volunteered at school

Rural Special: Chapter since 2005, 115 members, added new members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, participated in school election, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, contacted legislators, submitted newspaper articles, gave testimony before legislative committee, school foundation, Ozark Byways revitalization project, YouTube.com/FoxArkansas, volunteered at community events, Fox Fun Fest, Veterans Day event, attended RCA conference, attended Arkansas Grade-Level Reading events, on AR-GLR steering committee, linked to Ozark Byways website, volunteered at community event, historic preservation, community Facebook page, community beautification, submitted articles for newspaper, grant for school and community improvement, Grants in Place project, ForwARd Arkansas focus group, Dolly Parton Imagination Library

Shirley: Chapter since 2013, 22 members, held annual Shirley Homecoming, attended city council meetings, participated in Ozark Byways regional network, produced Halloween and Christmas events with gifts and treats for children, staffed Shirley Museum, www.shirleyarkansas.org, volunteered at school, attended school board meetings, participated in school board election, participated in education event, historic preservation, community beautification, contacted legislators, submitted articles for newspaper, participated in Ozark Byways revitalization network

Smackover: Chapter since 2007, 13 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events

Stephens: Chapter since 2009, 6 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, volunteered at community events, participated in school board election, participated in education event, historic preservation, community revitalization, attended city council meetings, contacted legislators, attended RCA summer conference

St. Joe: Chapter since 2009, 41 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, volunteered at community events, restoring historic railroad depot, Searcy County Rural Help Center, attended city council meetings, city clean-up, participated in Ozark Byways regional network planning and events, held events to raise money for community projects, added new members, www.stjoearkansas.org

Timbo: Chapter since 2007, 8 members, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, submitted articles for newspaper, participated in Ozark Byways regional revitalization network, hosted alumni reunion, volunteered/hosted community event, school improvement project, historic preservation

Turrell: Chapter since 2006, 17 members

Valley Springs: Chapter since 2005, 135 members, added new members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, contacted legislators, Valley Springs School and Community Foundation, participated in Ozark Byways regional network planning and events, attended RCA conference, maintained children's book exchange, bought bicycles for attendance incentive at school, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, ForwARd focus group, participated in Partnership Giving project www.valleyspringsar.org

Waldo: Chapter since 2012, 22 members, added new members, attended city council meetings, volunteered at community events, attended school board meetings, contacted legislators, submitted articles for newspapers, contacted legislators, Partnership Giving project, helped with tutoring program

Weiner: Chapter since 2010, 36 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, worked to keep school campuses open, maintained Friends of Weiner School District Facebook page, contacted legislators, developed legislation to suspend Act 60 consolidations, attended RCA summer conference, ForwARd Arkansas focus group, two Grants in Place projects

Western Yell County: Chapter since 2012, 42 members, attended city council meetings, attended school board meetings, attended Chamber of Commerce meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, contacted legislators, community revitalization

Western Grove: Chapter since 2014, 7 members

Wilmot: Chapter since 2014, 11 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, attended school board meetings, worked to keep school open, volunteered at community event, attended city council meetings, contacted legislators, participated in regional revitalization network, organized community events, sports and reading literacy grant, participated in economic development event

Witts Springs: Chapter since 2014, 30 members, volunteered at community events, community festival, community Facebook page, participated in Ozark Byways revitalization network, community improvement grant, historic preservation, farmers market www.wittssprings.com (Witts Springs Pedestal Rock 40 bicycle ride into the Ozark National Forest)



RCA Accomplishments

Below is a partial list of accomplishments of RCA members and their allies since the organization was formed in 2003.

1. In consolidation controversy, reduced minimum enrollment number from 1,500 to 350 to save 175 rural school districts.
2. Education Renewal Zones to create public school/university partnerships to improve academic achievement.
3. Poverty and English Language Learner funding.
4. Funding for preschool.
5. Prevented passage of county-wide schools in 2003, 2004, and 2005.
6. Distance learning capability for every school district.
7. Helped get and preserve funding for isolated and super-isolated schools.
8. Defeated a bill that gave the State Board power to hire and fire school district superintendents.
9. Successfully promoted a law to prevent a school's being on fiscal distress due to capital improvements and extending timelines for classification and improvement.

10. Successfully promoted a law to allow freedom of choice to students whose school had been consolidated.
11. Chapters at Lead Hill, Bismark, Midland, and Western Yell County helped get their schools off fiscal distress.
12. Youth enterprise training for 30 youths, grants for 7.
13. Helped local chapters run members for school board, pass millage increases, improve school climate, start parent involvement projects, establish tutoring programs, recruit highly qualified leadership for schools.
14. Disincentived closing isolated campuses by blocking a bill to allow isolated funding to follow the student even if a campus is closed.
15. Taught financial literacy to over 2,000 rural youth and adults.
16. Participating in Opportunity to Learn Campaign
17. Participating in Formula Fairness Campaign
18. Participating in Arkansas Grade-Level Reading Campaign
19. Participating in Equal Voice for America's Families Campaign
20. Participating in Moving the Needle on Poverty Campaign
21. Passed a law to return unused buildings in consolidated school districts to the community.
22. Blocked a bill to allow the State Department of Education to close an isolated school without a vote by the local school board.
23. Held economic development town halls with Lt. Gov. Mark Darr at Leslie and Weiner.
24. Youth Empowerment Network in 15 rural communities.
25. Led a state-wide effort to save rural post offices. Established a website to educate and inform public. Secured support in the form of bills filed in Congress from Congressman Rick Crawford and Senator John Boozman.
26. Helped Elaine Community Opportunity Seekers form community development corporation and community theater.
27. Helped Valley Springs and Lead Hill/Diamond City form school and community foundations. Trained 25 community leaders in forming local foundations and endowments.
28. Leadership training for over 1,000 people. Board training and grant writing training for over 100 people.
29. Successfully promoted law extending timeline for schools on fiscal, academic, or facilities distress.
30. Chapter at Fox established school foundation, built building, and established ABC preschool.
31. Successfully promoted law for joint use of facilities by school and communities.
32. Laws strengthening parent engagement.
33. Held Jefferson County Parent Engagement Summit.
34. Developed models for parent engagement in low-income rural communities.
35. Blocked unaccountable Charter School Commission.
36. Blocked bill to divert state funds from education and other services to state highway department.
37. Revitalization projects in 26 chapters, two regional revitalization networks.
38. Set up Facebook page to call attention to Act 60 consolidations: **[Facebook.com/arkansasruralschools](https://www.facebook.com/arkansasruralschools)**.
39. Produced video series about benefits of rural schools.
40. Initiated interim study of effects of Act 60, legislation passed for waiver from consolidation for schools not in academic or fiscal distress
41. Interim study for schools of agriculture, legislation passed for pilot schools of agriculture
42. Step Up for Public Schools walks in 20 communities
43. Social media platform: 24 websites, 3 Facebook pages, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram
44. Participated in ForwARd process for preK-16 strategic plan for education.
45. 2,021 members in 65 chapters.

RCA History

Save Our Schools.

Rural Community Alliance began in 2003 as a grass-roots movement called Save Our Schools. SOS was formed by rural educators, students, and community members to resist a massive school consolidation plan that would have eliminated every Arkansas school district with fewer than 1,500 students. The statewide movement held local, regional, and state-wide rallies and led a grass-roots campaign to stop school consolidation and refocus attention on quality of education and an equitable school funding formula.



Bruno-Pyatt residents voicing their concerns at the Capitol in March 2003



RCA President Lavina Grandon speaking at a Save Our Schools rally in February 2003

Through the efforts of Save Our Schools and coalition partners, the proposed minimum enrollment number was reduced to 350, saving about 175 small rural schools. The Legislature mandated Education Renewal Zones to provide partnerships between rural schools and university education departments to improve academic outcomes. More money for high poverty and special needs money was added to the school funding formula. The state approved incentives for teachers to be employed in hard-to-staff areas. Access to preschool was greatly expanded. Distance learning technology was funded to give every school access to affordable high quality curriculum. County-wide schools bills were defeated in three successive sessions of the Legislature.

Advocates for Community and Rural

Education (ACRE).

Following the 2003 regular and special sessions of the Arkansas Legislature (which lasted into April of 2004), rural education advocates realized that a permanent advocacy organization was needed to stand up for rural schools and students. With the help of mentors at the Rural School and Community Trust, grass-roots leaders chose a board and a name, wrote by-laws, incorporated as a nonprofit organization, and applied



for charitable 501c3 status. With a board, one part-time organizer, and some dedicated volunteers, Advocates for Community and Rural Education began organizing chapters throughout the state. Leaders were greatly assisted during this period by training and mentoring from Southern Echo of Jackson, Mississippi, and continued involvement of the Rural School and Community Trust.

Left: Since 2006 members have gathered each summer to share their stories, participate in training, and make decisions that guide the organization.

During the period from 2005 to 2009, the organization helped numerous communities fight off attempts to close their schools after they were “administratively consolidated” or annexed following the enactment of a minimum enrollment number of 350 students. It maintained a website that provided information on rural education issues and policy efforts. It published a quarterly newsletter, regular e-mail updates, and educational materials to help members understand and advocate for their issues.

Legislatively, members successfully advocated for funding for isolated and super-isolated schools and districts; school choice for students whose school was closed due to consolidation; and passage of a bill that provided for earlier notification of districts in danger of being on fiscal distress and prevented a district’s being placed on fiscal distress due to capital improvements. Their actions helped defeat a bill that would have given the State Board of Education the power to hire and fire school district superintendents. Chapters of Advocates for Community and Rural Education participated in a number of local efforts, including helping resolve a teachers strike, running candidates for school board, recruiting quality staff for their schools, running successful millage campaigns, helping their districts improve their financial situation, improving school climate, producing brochures to attract more students, initiating tutoring programs, and holding school boards accountable. From 2006 to 2009, Advocates for Community and Rural Education’s summer conference trained more than 400 participants in education advocacy and community development.



Bismarck supporters ran a successful campaign to pass a millage to get their school off of fiscal and facilities distress.

Rural Community Alliance. As more rural school districts began to be in danger of not maintaining the minimum enrollment, it gradually became clear to the ACRE board and staff that rural schools must be supported by thriving rural communities, and the loss of people and jobs must somehow be reversed to create a truly prosperous rural Arkansas. In 2008, the organization launched its Rural Community Revitalization Initiative to create a ground-up, grass-roots led revitalization process in which community members vision and plan to build on their past and their present to create a better future. In the summer of 2009, the board proposed to ACRE membership that the organization change its name to Rural Community Alliance in recognition of the growing importance of its community-based work and its overarching significance for rural families, children, and schools. A membership campaign in late 2009 increased the membership base of Rural Community Alliance to over 1,000 members in more than 45 communities.



Delight Natural Resources focus group

As RCA expanded we remained committed to our original purpose of empowering rural community members by “helping rural schools and communities survive and thrive.” We joined the Equal Voice Campaign for America’s Families, the Formula Fairness Campaign to equalize funding for Title I students, the Opportunity to Learn Campaign, and the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading to advocate for sufficient and equitable funding for education. We began forming revitalization networks to magnify the voice and influence of small rural communities. We continued to advocate for policy issues that create opportunities for rural schools and people. Entering its 13th year, RCA membership had grown to over 2,000 members in 65 chapters throughout the state.

Rural People Working Together

Education Youth Development Community Revitalization Policy Development

RURAL COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

Candace Williams, Executive Director

401 South Scott Street, Ste. 7

Little Rock, AR 72201

Phone: 870-714-0881

Fax: 866-824-9598

E-mail: williams@thenewrural.org

www.thenewrural.org

[Facebook.com/ruralcommunityalliance](https://www.facebook.com/ruralcommunityalliance)

[Youtube.com/thenewruralarkansas](https://www.youtube.com/thenewruralarkansas)

Twitter: TheNewRuralAr (not caps sensitive)

Instagram: TheNewRuralAr

www.ozarkbyways.com

www.deltahighways.org

Staff Contacts

Lavina Grandon, Policy and Education Director
870-365-6894 grandon@thenewrural.org

Matt Grandon, Ozarks Director/Web Designer
870-754-5554 ozarkbyways@gmail.com

Dorothy Singleton, Delta Region Director
870-718-3836 mizdb50@aol.com

Tanya Broadnax, Southeast Region Director
870-538-4051 broadnax@thenewrural.org

Renee Carr, Chief Financial Officer
870-615-2195 carr@thenewrural.org

Penny Harris, Southwest Region Director
903-224-5752 harris@thenewrural.org