



# **RURAL ALLIANCE STRATEGIC PLAN 2017–2020**

**December 2016**

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1/25/2017

## STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS OVERVIEW

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The Rural Alliance for College Success first convened in July 2010 in Spokane. The motivation for bringing small, isolated rural districts together was to make sure geography did not determine our students' postsecondary opportunities.

Realizing that many entities are focused on giving all children a good future, the 35 founding districts invited community colleges, universities, and a diversity of nonprofit organizations to combine efforts with us.

Together we defined priorities and designed solutions to the obstacles rural students face in accessing equitable college and career access. The projects we initiated include strengthening academic readiness in the core curriculum, increasing 21st century skills through social and emotional learning, and deepening engagement through personalized learning and improved guidance.

Together, we built a sense of collegiality that has drawn new members into the Rural Alliance. Today we represent 66 districts, 46,000 students, 15 colleges and universities, and nonprofits engaged in a continuum of services from early birth to adulthood.

In June of 2016, with the shared leadership of several rural district superintendents, the Mary Walker School District, initiated a strategic planning process for the Rural Alliance. A small number of district superintendents met over the course of several Sunday evening and Monday morning meetings, for six months.

This team of eastern Washington rural school district superintendents developed the strategies, milestones, deliverables, logic model, and process to obtain stakeholder feedback. The present work on this strategic plan is born of our sense of the Rural Alliance's potential to persist and reduce gaps in achievement and opportunity. We seek a delineated plan that sets a course for capacity building and work that maintains its energetic and inclusive grassroots nature.

This strategic planning process took place as follows:

- **June 26–27, 2016:** Developed overview, mission, values, and initial SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis.
- **August 21–22, 2016:** Revisited mission and values, developed vision, completed SWOT (External opportunities and threats), converted and prioritized weaknesses and threats; and consolidated SWOT analysis information and prioritized strategies.
- **August through September 2016:** Developed strategies and milestones
- **September 19, 2016:** Superintendents edited and fine-tuned strategies, major milestones, and deliverables.
- **September through October 2016:** Obtained and incorporated stakeholder input and continued draft Strategic Plan edits.
- **October 9–10, 2016, Rural Alliance Conference:** Obtained Rural Alliance partnership strategic plan input via conference survey.

- **November 2, 2016:** Incorporated subgroup edits based on Survey feedback and conference evaluations, incorporated stakeholder input and final document edits.
- **December 5, 2016:** Drafted Team Strategic Plan approval and next steps.
- **January 29–30, 2017:** Share final Strategic Plan with partners at the Rural Alliance Conference.
- **December 2017:** Superintendent drafting team will review the Rural Alliance’s progress on the Strategic Plan.

# THE RURAL ALLIANCE

## MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

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### Mission

Partnering to increase options and opportunities for rural students,  
Families, and communities.

### Vision

Success for every rural student, family, and community.

### Values

Student-Centered  
Relationship-Based  
Equitable  
Innovative  
Inclusive

### Our Approach to the Work...

- **Focused:** Develop projects and advocate for policies that clearly support post-secondary success for all students, their families and communities.
- **Connected:** View early childhood, PK–12, and postsecondary education and opportunities as interdependent partners in preparing children and young adults to participate in community, economic, and civic life.
- **Accountable:** Commitment to results. Provide demonstrable evidence of student access and success as a result of rural program, policy and activity support.
- **Collective impact:** Bring key stakeholders together to reduce the opportunity gap for rural students and develop comprehensive solutions to rural issues.
- **Scale:** Replicate high-impact work region-wide.

## Rural Alliance Strategies

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- Strategy 1:** Continue to develop a collective voice for the Rural Alliance
- Strategy 2:** Continue to attract and build strong human capital to the Rural Alliance
- Strategy 3:** Research, implement, and sustain innovative solutions for rural challenges
- Strategy 4:** Continue to develop and nurture strong social capital
- Strategy 5:** Build an innovative structure to develop organizational capacity in the Rural Alliance

The Rural Alliance will continue to engage in projects and activities that serve and advocate for rural students, districts, and communities in ways that ensure the Rural Alliance's vision of, *Success for every rural student, family, and community* is realized.

# STRATEGY 1: CONTINUE TO DEVELOP A COLLECTIVE VOICE FOR THE RURAL ALLIANCE

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## Summary

The Rural Alliance is a grassroots collaboration of rural school districts, community colleges, universities, and other partners committed to ensure success for every rural student, family, and community. This strategy seeks to demonstrate how the Rural Alliance will build capacity in the collective voice of rural school districts.

## Major Milestones/Deliverables

- 1.1 Build recognition for the skills, knowledge, and disposition of rural students, families, communities, and school and district staff.
  - Deliverable: Develop effective strategies and practices to communicate the Rural Alliance mission, vision, strategies and projects in support of rural students and districts. (Tell our own story) (Spring/summer 2017)
    - Develop a Rural Alliance list serve for Rural Alliance updates (i.e. conference notifications, project or funding opportunities, etc.)
  - Deliverable: Disseminate work and best practices. (Ongoing)
    - Post on the website personalized district articles on Rural Alliance projects, collaborations and success stories.
    - Post on the Rural Alliance website descriptive research briefs. (Ongoing)
    - Publish research on Rural Alliance projects and activities. (Ongoing)
  
- 1.2 Establish and increase information and resource sharing capacity within the Rural Alliance.
  - Deliverable: Develop Rural Alliance website to serve as a stronger more relevant communication tool to disseminate rural best practices, projects, research, events, and supports for rural school districts, students, families and communities. (June 2017)
  - Deliverable: Develop a plan for realistic human capital and financially sustainable ongoing website support. (March 2017)
  
- 1.3 Develop a policy voice for rural districts, schools, and communities.
  - Deliverable: Coordinate the Rural Alliance policy voice with other entities to influence policy on ample funding and equitable opportunities for rural students and districts. (Fall 2016 and ongoing)
  - Deliverable: Address pressure regarding rural district consolidation/elimination.
  - Deliverable: Influence practice and policy within rural districts and schools.

## STRATEGY 2: CONTINUE TO ATTRACT AND BUILD STRONG HUMAN CAPITAL TO THE RURAL ALLIANCE

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### Summary

The capacity of any organization or group is in large part impacted by its human capital. Human capital is represented not just by the number of people in an organization but also by the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that each of those individuals bring to the work or task at hand. The Rural Alliance will work to increase individual and collective capacity via professional growth and job satisfaction opportunities. The Rural Alliance also seeks to increase and diversify the already strong human capital found in its partners. Sustaining strong human capital is essential to ensuring opportunities and success for rural students and their communities.

Note: For all deliverables, an asterisk (\*) denotes a potential **new** projects.

### Major Milestones/Deliverables

2.1 Increase Rural Alliance partnerships with and participation of other entities with similar or complementary missions and interest to serve rural students and communities.

- Deliverable: Continue active outreach to rural superintendents. (Ongoing)
- Deliverable: Sustain and expand partnerships across and beyond Washington state to include but not be limited to:
  - Early learning partners
  - Health care partners
  - Private universities
  - Non-profits
  - Rural schools and district staff
  - Career, regional economic agencies, trades, and business partners
- Deliverable: Create an urgency to make the Rural Alliance a part of every partner district's culture.

2.2 Build Rural Alliance capacity by developing services that add value to rural district Rural Alliance partners.

- Deliverable: Establish a process/mechanism for sharing resources and the concept of economy of scale.
  - \*Develop an Information Clearinghouse for educators (part of website)
  - \*Develop various venues for sharing district work and best practices
  - \*Explore and coordinate the development of a Teacher Leader Cohort tasked with developing teacher leaders

- Deliverable: Develop programs that provide professional growth and job satisfaction for principals and instructional staff.
- Deliverable: \*Coordinate the provision of summer institutes with self-directed topics for teachers/practitioners (i.e. Summit Summer Basecamp, July 2017).

### 2.3 Increase rural superintendent professional satisfaction for increased retention.

- Deliverable: Support rural superintendents in a deliberate way:
  - Strong mentoring system for rural Superintendents
  - Establish venues and networking opportunities for rural superintendents to dialogue around rural successes, issues, and challenges
  - Crisis calling and go -to-colleagues for various topical issues
- Deliverable: While recognizing the many areas of expertise that rural superintendents bring to their districts, advocate for, support, and establish mechanisms to assist in balancing the many hats rural superintendents wear.

## STRATEGY 3: RESEARCH, IMPLEMENT AND SUSTAIN INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR RURAL CHALLENGES

### Summary

The Rural Alliance intends to sustain its strong focus and demonstrated effectiveness on its projects and activities. The Rural Alliance will sustain these innovative, effective and high quality projects. The Rural Alliance will expand to other needed projects and support the hands-on approach demonstrated by its partner school district superintendents.

Note: All deliverable targets for this strategy are fund source and project specific. Additionally, for all deliverables, an asterisk (\*) denotes a potential **new** projects.

### Major Milestones/ Deliverables

3.1 Increase student engagement and maintain high academic standards and improved student achievement for all rural students P–16.

- Deliverable: Increase the number of rural students who have access to personalized learning by sustaining and increasing the number of districts participating in the Summit Basecamp.
- Deliverable: Implement and sustain Social Emotional Learning (SEL) project.
- Deliverable: Develop the Rural Counselor Network to ensure the provision of effective guidance services.
- Deliverable: Research and develop other collaborative projects for rural districts.
- Deliverable: Initiate research and dialogue regarding incentive projects for college or career success. (December 2017)

3.2 Develop a continuum of projects and activities Pre-K–postsecondary that prepares students for career, college, and life success.

- Deliverable: Develop a Task Force to research potential preschool rural projects.
- Deliverable: Sustain, build upon, and expand the K–3 Math Project.
  - \*Middle and High school blended math project
  - Expand Intensified Algebra and Geometry
- Deliverable: Expand and enhance the College in High School Programs and offer high quality college experiences to rural students in their home high school.
- Deliverable: Develop a Task Force to research and explore rural student leadership capacity at all levels.
- Deliverable: Identify and address high school transition to college issues.
  - Develop a task force to research and explore strategies to mitigate 12th grade to college summer melt in rural districts

3.3 Explore options to develop a continuum model of coordinated services to all students P–16 and rural community residents.

- Deliverable: Initiate the conversation/dialogue of community school efforts and a continuum of lifelong coordinated services (i.e. education, mental-health, social services, health care, police, etc.). (May 2017)
- Deliverable: Establish a Continuum of Coordinated Services workgroup to:
  - Initiate exploratory research on communities that implement community schools and/or lifelong continuums of coordinated services in rural districts
  - Conduct more extensive research on communities that implement community schools and/or lifelong collaborative continuums of services
- Deliverable: Conduct site visits to communities/programs that implement community schools and/or lifelong continuums of coordinated services.
- Deliverable: Make recommendations for Rural Alliance lifelong continuums of coordinated services.

## STRATEGY 4: CONTINUE TO DEVELOP AND NURTURE STRONG SOCIAL CAPITAL

### Summary

A strength of the Rural Alliance is the longstanding strong social capital that exists across the rural school districts and its partners. Social capital is the “connections among individuals - **social** networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from”<sup>1</sup> those connections and relationships. These networks, connections, individual and collective motivations, and collaborations that *are* social capital are essential assets to building and sustaining strong communities. On behalf of rural partners, the Rural Alliance seeks to continue to invest in, diversify and sustain its partnerships.

### Major Milestones/Deliverables

4.1 Create a Rural Alliance culture where students, parents, staff and administrators can be successful.

- Deliverable: Utilize the Rural Alliance Conference to deepen partner relationships.
- Deliverable: Be intentional about Rural Alliance values and commitment to make personal connections around building relationship and partnering (especially with new rural district superintendents).
- Deliverable: Create a network of collegial support which facilitates continued opportunities for rural schools, districts, and communities to support each other.
- Deliverable: Build a partnership for research and information dissemination with the Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) and partner colleges and universities.

4.2 Partner with community colleges, universities, and others in the college readiness community.

- Deliverable: Sustain and nurture post-secondary partnerships and projects.
  - Recruit private colleges to the Rural Alliance
  - Partner with organizations dedicated to success in college ( i.e. the College Success Foundation, Rural Education Center, League of Education Voters, Road Map Project, Charter Sector, Washington Student Achievement Council, Battelle’s National Rural Network Project, others as applicable)
  - Explore opportunities to create other post-secondary partnerships and collaborative projects.

4.3 Partner with other entities with similar or complementary missions to serve rural students and communities (i.e. health care, early learning, etc.)

<sup>1</sup> Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone*

## STRATEGY 5: BUILD AN INNOVATIVE STRUCTURE TO DEVELOP ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY IN THE RURAL ALLIANCE

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### Summary

As the Rural Alliance continues to increase its partnerships and collaborative projects, it is clear that the current single district superintendent process for managing activities, meetings, and partnerships is untenable. While the Rural Alliance has started to explore governance options, it is also clear that there is a fine line/tension between maintaining the current informal and collegial relationships that have built and sustained the Rural Alliance and the development of a governance structure with dedicated staff to manage the Rural Alliance. Above all, Rural Alliance partners seek to maintain “ownership” of the Rural Alliance, sustain its strong relationships, nurture the values that built the Rural Alliance, and maintain the unique characteristics of the Rural Alliance. The Rural Alliance is a grassroots organization. The Rural Alliance seeks to establish dedicated staff to increase effectiveness and efficiency and expand opportunities.

**Note:** For all deliverables, an asterisk (\*) denotes a potential **new** projects.

### Major Milestones/Deliverables

5.1 Develop a governance structure that responds to the unique characteristics of the Rural Alliance.

- Deliverable: \*Create a shared and collegial governance structure for the Rural Alliance (distributed leadership, i.e. the SEL project).
- Deliverable: \*Determine necessary and sustainable staffing for the Rural Alliance.
- Deliverable: \*Leverage the Rural Alliance’s strong social capital, nimbleness, and agility to get things done to increase capacity and opportunities for rural students and districts.

5.2 The Alliance will explore partnerships and opportunities for sufficient and diverse funding for its projects and activities.

- Deliverable: Seek philanthropic partners.
- Deliverable: Develop a fiscal management plan for the Rural Alliance.
- Deliverable: Continue as strong stewards of funding.
- Deliverable: Explore opportunities to serve as an action research laboratory for innovative work.
- Deliverable: Disseminate information and opportunities to scale-up and/or replicate projects.

## STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Strategic Plan feedback was requested and provided by the following Stakeholders:

<p><b>School District Superintendents</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asotin: Dale Bonfield</li> <li>• Creston: Bill Wadington*</li> <li>• Curlew/Republic: John Glenewinkel</li> <li>• Lake Chelan: Barry Depaoli</li> <li>• Liberty: Kyle Rydell</li> <li>• Mabton: Minerva Morales*</li> <li>• Mary Walker: Kevin Jacka</li> <li>• Medical Lake: Tim Ames</li> <li>• Northport: Don Baribault</li> <li>• Odessa: Dan Read</li> <li>• Reardan: Marcus Morgan*</li> <li>• Tonasket: Steve McCullough</li> <li>• Valley: Kevin Foster*</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community Colleges and Universities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Colleges of Spokane: Nancy Szofan</li> <li>• CWU: Liselotte Butterfield</li> <li>• Big Bend Community College: Kara Garrett</li> <li>• Yakima Valley Community College: Thomas Ybarra</li> <li>• Eastern University: Melinda Brown</li> <li>• WSU Tri-Cities: Jessica Dempsy</li> </ul>
<p><b>Other Partners</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE): Christine Campbell</li> <li>• Hagan - Amy Bragden</li> <li>• MWSD Board - Jeff Canfield</li> <li>• Royal City - Rick Follett (Principal)</li> <li>• Rural Alliance: Jerry Dyar</li> <li>• Rural Alliance: Richard Conley</li> </ul>	<p><b>Rural Alliance Conference (October 9–10, 2016)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over 135 attendees</li> </ul>

\*Subgroup members