



Synthesis of Stakeholder and Expert Interviews

During the period February to May 2019 a series of telephone interviews were conducted with stakeholder and experts with the aim of:

- Affirming (or otherwise) the value and relevance of the project in the research, policy, and practice arenas;
- Obtaining perspectives on the framing of the project and any elements to be included or considered;
- Inviting recommendations on examples of regional efforts, other people to interview, additional literature to be reviewed, and potential venues for disseminating the project's findings; and
- Raising awareness of the project.

The stakeholders and experts interviewed were diverse in background and perspective, and their insights ranged from the broadly philosophical to the very practical. They are listed at the end of this paper. The discussions are organized into the following set of themes that informed the crafting of the selection criteria for regional efforts to be investigated and the design of the fieldwork protocols.

1. The critical role of intermediaries

Two main types of organizations have relevance for catalyzing and managing rural-urban interactions:

- **Regional development organizations**, which are structures for local governmental planning, resource allocation, program implementation, and service delivery across multiple counties, cities, and municipalities. Some are exclusively governmental, others are public-private partnerships. Some of these organizations may be entirely urban/metropolitan-focused but may offer lessons on effective approaches to multi-sectoral and multi-jurisdictional collaboration. Others span both metropolitan and rural counties and it was suggested that such regional organizations bring professional capacity and greater participation in beneficial funding programs (usually Federal) to rural counties, and generally reduce wasteful and disruptive internal competition within a region.
- **Nonprofit regional community and economic development organizations**, which include sector-specific research, advocacy, and programmatic agencies, community development financial institutions, community foundations, and public-private-nonprofit partnerships. Some of these are multi-state in scope, some mainly rural, but all are regional by design and by approach. They are distinguished by their trust networks and relationships, their power to convene and to broker agreements between conflicting interests, and their ability to combine deep local knowledge (boots on the ground) and broad regional and strategic perspectives.

2. The imperative for rural-urban interaction

- Agglomeration economics drives the prevailing view that rural communities will only survive and prosper if they develop and strengthen their connections with metropolitan centers. Such connections may be transportation-related, such as commuting patterns or easy access to airports, they may be value chains for the conversion of raw materials to final products, or broadband-enabled communications for commerce, education, and health.



- In turn, there is an increasing focus on the role of small metropolitan and micropolitan centers as hubs for investment with the expectation that there will be positive spillover effects into the surrounding rural hinterlands.

3. The conditions for regionalism

- Regional approaches can flourish only through building relationships and common interests over time. They require a clear vision and the capacity to coordinate, convene, and facilitate. Whatever the structure of the regional organization, rural interests need to be firmly embedded and not added as an afterthought. This requires leadership that sends a clear message about the importance of regionalism and operationalizes it through hiring, resource allocation, and program priority decisions. Unless rural areas know where they are going, they will be subsumed by urban strategies.
- Strong and well-resourced intermediaries can foster relationship-building and provide much-needed capacity across their regions, but often where the need is greatest and the local capacity is weakest, intermediaries, if they exist at all, have only limited resources to achieve regional impact.
- Although there may be technical and legal challenges and high transaction costs for local communities to engage in regional collaboration, these need not be unsurmountable, provided that political and social differences can be set aside, and broadly acceptable approaches negotiated. This highlights the importance of forging relationships and building social capital.
- Regionalism can be primarily transactional to deal with a specific issue or opportunity, but to be effective and sustainable it also must be long-term and strategic.

4. Regional interaction and collaboration can take many forms

- Collaboration can relate to health or economic development or watershed planning or to any issue that requires regional solutions.
- Collaboration can involve planning, regulatory action, public or private investment choices, or along value chains.
- Although there are examples of regional activities that go back decades, most of those discussed are relatively new with outcomes not yet clear.

5. Regional equity must be intentional

- Some question whether regionalism has any relevance for achieving societal goals such as equity (whether regional, racial, or economic opportunity) suggesting that it is more appropriate for tackling such issues as infrastructure or economic development. Others suggest that inequities are an inevitable outcome of prevailing market forces and policies and can only be overcome and addressed through intentional design, policy, and practice.
- A concern was how native communities fit into the regionalism frame. Tribes, it was reported, often find collaboration challenging, both because of the press of poverty and health issues, particularly on the rural reservations, and of unresolved hostility between tribes and state governments on matters of sovereignty. However, new generations now bridging urban and rural experiences are open to broader, systemic approaches, including collaboration with those who have access to resources and technical expertise.
- Intentionality was a consistent theme. Leaving things to chance or to evolve will not be in the interests of rural communities, poorer neighborhoods, or people of color. Effective regionalism will not happen without intentionality. The unanswered question is whether intentionally



incorporating voices and concerns of rural, low-income, and minority people and communities into regionalism will achieve the desired outcomes.

List of Interviewees

Jesse Abrams	Assistant Professor, Natural Resource Policy & Sustainability	University of Georgia, Athens, GA
MarySue Barrett	President	Metropolitan Planning Council, Chicago, IL
David Brown	Professor Emeritus, Development Sociology	Cornell University, Ithaca, NY
William (Bill) Bynum	CEO	HOPE Enterprise Corporation/Credit Union, Jackson, MS
Clark Casteel	President & CEO	Danville Regional Foundation, Danville, VA
Matthew Chase	Executive Director	National Association of Counties, Washington DC
Dante Chinni	Research Professor/Project Director, American Communities Project	George Washington University School of Media & Public Affairs, Washington DC
Daniel Cooper	Director of Research	Metropolitan Planning Council, Chicago, IL
Chrystal Cornelius	Executive Director	First Nations Oweesta Corporation, Longmont, CO
Alicia Cramer	Senior Vice President	U.S. Endowment for Forestry & Communities, Greenville, SC
Ray Daffner	Principal	Strategic Advisory & Investment Services, Waterford, VA
Mike Dickerson	Manager, Innovation & Evaluation Center	Craft3, Astoria, WA
Matthew Dolge	Executive Director	Piedmont Triad Regional Council, Kernersville, NC
Richard Feiock	Professor, Askew School of Public Administration & Policy	Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL
Richard Florida	Professor, Rotman School of Management	University of Toronto, Toronto, ON
Grace Fricks	President & CEO	ACE, Cleveland, GA
Stephan Goetz	Professor & Director, North East Regional Center for Rural Development	Penn State University, State College, PA
Jason Gray	Senior Fellow, Research & Policy	North Carolina Rural Center, Raleigh, NC
Stephanie Gutierrez	Co-Founder	Hope Nation Consulting, St. Louis, MO
Seana Hasson	Senior Director, Research, Analytics & Insights	YMCA of the USA, Chicago, IL
Lynn Hunter	Director, Regional Strategies & Networks	Philanthropy Northwest, Seattle, WA



Erin Kelly	Associate Professor, Forestry Policy, Economics, & Administration	Humboldt State University, Arcata, CA
Whitney Kimball-Coe	Director, National Programs	Center for Rural Strategies, Knoxville, TN
Jane Leonard	President	Growth & Justice, St. Paul, MN
Daniel Lichter	Professor & Director, Institute for the Social Sciences	Cornell University, Ithaca, NY
Amy Liu	Vice President & Director, Metropolitan Policy Program	Brookings Institution, Washington DC
Lizzy Mattiuzzi	Senior Researcher	Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, CA
Christiana McFarland	Research Director, Center for City Solutions	National League of Cities, Washington DC
Lisa Mensah	President & CEO	Opportunity Finance Network, Washington DC
Mark Partridge	Professor, Swank Chair in Rural-Urban Policy	The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH
Ines Polonius	CEO	Communities Unlimited, Fayetteville, AR
Ray Rasker	Executive Director	Headwaters Economics, Bozeman, MT
Harry Rhodes	Former Executive Director	Growing Home, Chicago, IL
Rob Riley	President	Northern Forest Center, Concord, NH
Michele Stumpf	Executive Director	Mobile United, Mobile, AL
Brett Schwartz	Associate Director	National Association of Development Organizations, Washington DC
Carl Seip	Vice President, Communications & External Affairs	Craft3, Seattle, WA
Joe Short	Vice President	Northern Forest Center, Concord, NH
Karl Stauber	Former President & CEO	Danville Regional Foundation, Danville, VA
Soma Stout	Vice President	Institute for Healthcare Improvement, Boston, MA
Janet Topolsky	Executive Director, Community Strategies Group	Aspen Institute, Washington DC
Mildred Warner	Professor, City & Regional Planning	Cornell University, Ithaca, NY
Bruce Weber	Professor Emeritus, Applied Economics	Oregon State University, Corvallis OR
Shannon Welch	Project Director, 100 Million Healthier Lives	Institute for Healthcare Improvement, Boston, MA
Leslie Wollack	Executive Director	National Association of Regional Councils, Washington DC
Ashley Zuelke	Senior Director for Research & Programs	Rural Community Assistance Program, Denver, CO





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