INCREASE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT & ECONOMIC MOBILITY IN SELECT ARKANSAS COMMUNITIES

The Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation’s support of place-based community change initiatives in several Arkansas communities is undergirded by a belief in Arkansans ability to work together and find sustainable strategies to improve their communities. WRF supports the Rural Community Alliance (RCA), a statewide organization working in rural Arkansas counties on community revitalization, youth development, and education equity.

RCA has 52 chapters statewide, with over 1,300 members

Our ultimate goal is to move from being among the nation’s bottom five in economic and education indicators to becoming one of the nation’s highest-ranking states in measures of family and child well-being. To accomplish this, WRF has adopted four strategic plan goals:

- Reduce the number of families living below 200 percent of the federal poverty line.
- Increase high school, vocational, and college graduation rates in the state.
- Increase educational attainment and economic mobility in select communities in Arkansas.
- Build Arkansas nonprofit infrastructure.

WRF Funding to RCA to date

- ACRE Rural Community Revitalization Project — $165,000 in 2008
- Formula Fairness Campaign — $26,600 in 2010
- Resident-Focused Community Development — $75,000 in 2011
- Community Theater as Economic Development (Elaine) — $10,000 in 2012
WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED

- Rural community organizing requires skilled grassroots leadership
- Rural communities need to be networked and aligned for strength in numbers (i.e., The Opportunity to Learn Campaign)
- Rural communities need allies at the state and national levels

CHALLENGES

- Rural community populations are declining, affecting representation and funding
- Community leadership capacity in rural communities is limited

WHAT’S NEXT

- Continue to build RCA’s capacity to organize rural communities
- Encourage improved provision of capacity building services through strategic conversations with providers
- Encourage the increased availability of funding through the Why Arkansas? Campaign for Resources and Recognition