

# 35th Annual Rural Community Economic Development Conference

## Converting Opportunities into Trends

### Agenda



#### Tuesday, February 27, 2024

6:30-8:30 pm **Registration**

7:00-9:00 pm **Networking Reception**

#### Wednesday, February 28, 2024

8:00-9:00 am **Registration**

9:00-10:15 am **Overcoming Challenges Facing Rural Illinois**

Moderator: Christopher Merrett, Director, Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA)

"Welcoming Remarks"  
Guiyou Huang, Western Illinois University

"Revitalizing Rural Illinois: Using Opportunities to Overcome Challenges"  
Hon. Juliana Stratton, Lt. Governor, State of Illinois

"Reimagining Rural: Connecting the Dots with a Rural Framework"  
Bonita Robertson-Hardy, Aspen Institute

"Keeping Good Jobs and Sustaining Local Economies"  
Steve Storkan, Employee Ownership Expansion Network

10:15-10:30 am **Break**

10:30-Noon **Capturing Potential Opportunities for Rural**

Moderator: Norman Walzer, Director Emeritus, Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA)

"Declines in Local Newspapers: New Alternatives"  
Timothy Franklin, Northwestern University Medill

"Swimming Upstream: Appraising the Role of Placemaking in Building Stronger Communities"  
Zachary Benedict, MKM Architecture and Design

"Rural Partners Update"  
Brian Moody

12:10-1:30 pm **Lunch and Networking**

12:30-1:20 pm **Annual Meeting of Rural Partners®**

1:30-2:15 pm **II. Finding Strategies That Work**

(Sessions Repeat 2:30-3:15 PM)

"Revitalizing Small Towns Through Private Investment & Nonprofit Partnership"  
Cindy Frisina, Heartland Development Partners, Inc

"Keeping Good Jobs and Sustaining Local Economies - An Employee Ownership Case Study"  
Steve Storkan, Employee Ownership Expansion Network

"Measuring What Matters: Applying a Rural Prosperity Framework to Your Region"  
Bonita Robertson-Hardy, Aspen Institute

"Worker Cooperatives: A Viable Business Succession Plan to Sustain Rural Communities"  
Stacy Mullinex, Iowa Center for Employee Ownership

"Inclusive Placemaking: Redefining Community Development through Group Actualization"  
Zachary Benedict, MKM Architecture and Design

"Amid Expanding Local News Deserts, There Are Oases of Hope"  
Timothy Franklin, Northwestern University Medill  
Lynne Campbell, Macomb Community Brief

3:15-3:45 pm **Networking Break**

3:45-4:30 pm **III. Success Stories with Outcomes**

(Sessions Repeat 4:45-5:30 PM)

"Making Housing Available in Small Towns: Marion, Illinois"  
Cody Moake, Marion, Illinois  
Nic Nelson, Jacob and Klein, Ltd.

"Illinois Farm Bureau - Rural Development Grant Program Elevates Key Priorities"  
Brenda Matherly, Illinois Farm Bureau  
Ryan Tate, Illinois Farm Bureau

"Strengthening Entrepreneur Ecosystems to Foster Economic Development"  
Samira Cook Gaines, Rising Tide Capital

"Revitalizing Rural Towns: A TIF-Fueled Transformation"  
Elizabeth Pratt, Royal Super Mart  
Mary Lanham, Village of Sheffield, Illinois

"The Long, Windy Road to Improving Small Towns"  
Kelly Giovanine, Durand Charm  
Sheila Hoffman, Durand Village Board

"Corn Belt Ports Partnership"  
Bob Sinkler, Corn Belts Ports

5:30-7:00 pm **Networking Hour**

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**Thursday, February 29, 2024**

8:30-10:00 am **IV. Workshops on Innovative Approaches and Practices**

(Sessions Repeat 10:30-noon)

10:00-10:30 am **Break**

“Redeveloping Communities Through Historic Preservation”  
Quinn Adamowski, Landmarks, Illinois

“Designing and Implementing Recruitment and Welcoming Strategies”

Briana Broberg, Welcoming America  
Samantha Evans, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis  
Celeste Koppe, West Central Initiative

“Resources and Funding for Rural Projects”  
(First Session)

“Funding for Main Street Revitalization Projects in Rural Communities”  
Dori Bigler, City of Anna, Illinois  
Alyson Grady, Illinois Department of Commerce  
Mike McKee, USDA Rural Development  
John Paris, Illinois Department of Transportation  
Jennifer Olson, City of Marion, Illinois  
Mary Warren, USDA Rural Development

(Second Session)

“Funding for Water and Wastewater Projects in Rural Communities”  
Mike McKee, USDA Rural Development  
Wendy Bell, Illinois Department of Commerce  
Nidhan Singh, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency  
Nick Roederer, Raymond James, Illinois Rural Water Association  
Brock Teichmiller, Rural Community Assistance Partnership

“Rural Prosperity Through Renewable Energy”  
Ky Ajayi, Straight Up Solar  
David Loomis, Strategic Economic Research, LLC  
Lisa Merrifield, University of Illinois Extension  
Amanda Pankau, Prairie Rivers Network  
Scott Tess, City of Urbana, Illinois

“The Broadband Boom: How Your Community Can Make the Most of Statewide Internet Expansion”  
Matt Schmidt, Office of Illinois Broadband

12:00 Noon **IIRA Conference Adjourns**

12:30 pm **PCED Exam** (for those previously approved)

