## Communities in Rural America: Current Realities and Emerging Strategies
Lionel J. Beaulieu and Glenn D. Israel

BEHAVIOR OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter and completing the online learning activities, students should be able to

1. Explain and justify the use of the concept—typology.

2. Prepare a list of five beliefs that people may have about why living in rural areas is utopia.

3. Prepare a short essay about rural and urban population trends in the United States since 1950.

4. Prepare a chart or graph describing overall population trends in the reader's home county since 1950.

5. Prepare a table or chart describing major changes in the composition of the workforce by major industries in a state since 1970.

6. Explain why self-employment is a growing trend in rural America.

7. Prepare a short essay about why poverty is increasing in rural America.

8. Select at least one of the strategies that the authors suggest for achieving vitality in rural America, and work with a group of three classmates to prepare a presentation for a group of rural leaders.

Hierarchy

LARK

Learning
And
Repeated
Knowledge
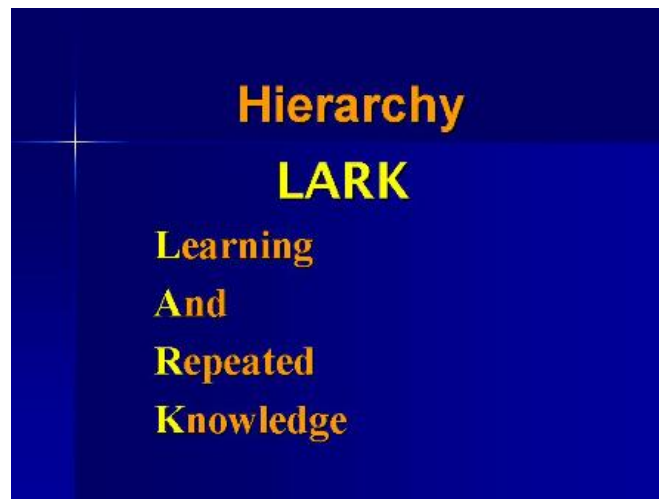
LARK Activity 11.1

True False and Multiple Choice Questions:

1.   Most people believe that residents of rural areas live there willingly, even though rural communities face many difficult challenges.
      True* False

2.   Classical sociologists believed that rural people lived in peaceful and cohesive communities.
      True * False

3.   A typology of rural communities should include:
      a.   a specific geographical area.
      b.   recent and reliable data about the area.
      c.   the potential to use data to analyze the area.
      d.   all of the above.*
      e.   none of the above.

4.   The population of most rural counties in the U.S. is increasing. True, False*

5.   The population of most rural counties in the U.S. is getting older. True*, False

6.   The population of most rural counties in the U.S. is getting more diverse. True* False

7.   The income of most people in rural counties is increasing. True, False*

8.   The belief that in an image of rural America as a haven for agriculture and low skilled manufacturing is no longer true. True*, False

9.   Service sector jobs are increasing in rural America. True*, False

10.   Non-farm jobs have increased by nearly 60 percent since 1990 in rural America. True,* False

SOAR Activity 11.1

Preparing short essays on strategies that might help rural communities enhance economic development

Step 1.   Divide the class into small groups of 4 to 5 persons per group.

Step 2.   Have each group select one of the strategies that might help rural communities enhance economic development.

Step 3.   Write an essay of 500 words or less describing the pros and cons of the strategy you select.

Step 4. Share your essay with other groups and your instructor.
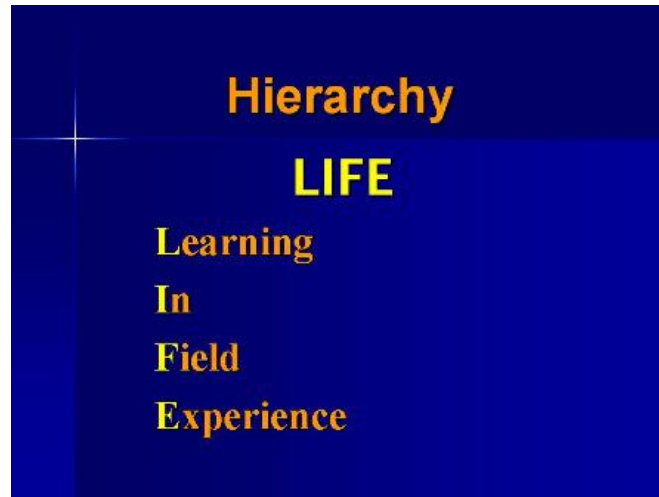
LIFE Activity 11.1

A Service Learning Activity

Prepare and present a PowerPoint presentation describing a few economic development strategies that isolated rural communities might use to create jobs and enhance economic development through the Internet and Advanced Technology (See the Case Study in Chapter 15.)

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Step 1.   Divide the class into small groups of 4 to 5 persons per group.

Step 2.   Have each group select one of the strategies that might help rural communities enhance economic development.

Step 3.   Each is to prepare a PowerPoint presentation to present to a group of community leaders in a community organization. (See Guidelines for preparing effective PowerPoint presentations.)

Step 4.   Share your PowerPoint presentation with other classmates and your instructor.

Step 5.   Arrange a date and make you PowerPoint presentation to the group of rural leaders, being sure to engage them in dialogue.

Step 6.   Share outcomes with other classmates and your instructor.

LIFE Activity 11.2

**Exploring Issues of Rural Communities in Your State:
Important Information about Hosting a Community Roundtable
as a Service Learning Project**

By Lionel J. Beaulieu

Overview

A number of important issues and strategies were delineated by Beaulieu and Israel in their chapter on "Communities in Rural America: Current Realities, Emerging Strategies."   Your instructor will assign you to a team made up of 4-6 students. Each team will be invited to reach out to local leaders and citizens for the purpose of capturing their thoughts and perceptions about rural communities in their state. The intent will be to gain insights from a group of local people about the key issues impacting rural areas of their state and seeking their input on strategies that might help rural communities remain strong and vibrant in the years ahead.

Why a Community Roundtable?

Rural communities across the state are facing some important challenges in their quest to remain strong and vibrant. Certainly, some are outside the capacity of rural communities to control. But many others can be successfully tackled when local people and organizations work in partnership on the high priority issues they share in common.

The question is this: "What are the crucial rural issues in your state that deserve serious attention in the months and years ahead?" One of the important avenues available for gaining important insights on these issues is through a "roundtable." The roundtable represents an ideal mechanism for discussing, digesting, debating, and deliberating on the challenges and opportunities existing (or emerging) in rural communities of your state.

Who Should I Say Is Hosting the Rural Development Roundtable?
The roundtable is being hosted by a team of college students at (Name of College or University) who are enrolled in a course titled (_Name of Course___). This roundtable is part of our effort to put into practice what we are learning in our course, including trying to get a better understanding of the issues that are vital to the well-being of rural people and communities in the state.

Who Should Our Team Invite to the Roundtable?

In order to ensure that the thoughts and views of the diversity of people and organizations are heard, the roundtable should involve a good mix of individuals and organizations from across the community. These include representatives from the following type of organizations:
- Local government agency representatives
- Legislative representatives
- Business leaders
- Education representatives (K-12, community colleges, and/or four-year colleges/universities)
- Faith community
- Social service organizations
- Civic and other community improvement organizations
- Community-minded nonprofit or grassroots organizations
- Foundation/philanthropic organizations
- Family and youth serving organizations

How Will the Information Gathered at the Roundtable Get Used?
The information being generated from this roundtable will be incorporated into a report we are preparing for our college course on (Name of Course). We want to determine whether the key issues that you believe are impacting rural areas of our state today are in line with those highlighted in a chapter we are reading titled "Communities in Rural America: Current Realities, Emerging Strategies."
How Do We Conduct the Community Roundtable Session?

As a team, develop a list of local people or organizational representatives from a specific community in the area that you would like to invite to your roundtable session. (Note: Your course instructor may provide you with the name of a community in order to avoid having different teams hosting roundtable sessions in the same community). As was mentioned earlier, you will want to have a variety of individuals or organizations at the roundtable so that different perspectives are likely to be represented in the roundtable. Once you have agreed on a list of people and/or organizations to invite, find a place and time to hold your roundtable meeting. It should be at a place that is both easy to find and at a trusted location. Some examples include a meeting room at the local library, at a community center, at a local school, or a chamber of commerce office. Set the roundtable at a time when most people are likely to attend, such as during the day or early in the evening.

Once you have a place and time determined, contact your list of invitees personally or by telephone. A good rule of thumb is to contact twice as many people as you would like at the roundtable. So, if you want 15 people in attendance, develop a list of 30 people to invite. When you contact these individuals, invite them to the roundtable meeting and let them know why you organizing this meeting (Note: It's not only about completing your

course assignment, but also about hearing what local people think about rural communities in their state). Alert them to the fact that the session will last two hours.

When setting up your roundtable meeting room, place chairs around 3 to 4 round tables (assuming you have about 12-15 people attending). The key is to divide your participants into groups of 4-5 persons per table. This set-up is likely to create an inviting environment for participants to share their thoughts about the various questions you will be asking them to discuss. The step by step process that you might follow for conducting the roundtable session is outlined in the last section of this activity.

Preparing Your Team's Roundtable Report

Once you have completed you information gathering activity, your team will be required to prepare a report (8-10 pages, double-spaced in length) that showcases the information you have collected. Specifically, your paper should cover the following:

1. Describe when and where your roundtable took place and briefly identify the group of people who took part in your roundtable session. In particular, discuss their racial or ethnic characteristics, their approximate age ranges, and their gender. Furthermore, indicate the different areas of interest these individuals tended to represent. For example, were some business leaders, local government representatives, nonprofit organization leaders, representatives of low-wealth individuals and/or neighborhoods, civic association leaders, youth, and so on. The key is to document the diversity of people that you engaged in your team project.

2. Identify and describe what your participants noted were key strengths or positive features of rural areas of your state? Do their views tend to take on a "rural utopia" lens? Please explain your answer.

3. Briefly describe the variety of priority rural issues your group mentioned. Next, identify and describe the TWO issues that were most often identified by your participants. What did they feel were the important challenges associated with these two key issues? Do you feel these two issues are similar to, or different from, the ones that Beaulieu and Israel discuss in their chapter (such as the problems associated with demographic changes, economic shifts; low income, low education, and high poverty levels)?

4. What strategies or solutions did your roundtable or survey participants recommend be undertaken to tackle the TWO priorities issues? Are the strategies consistent with, or different from, those proposed in your book chapter? Explain your answers to these questions.

5. Finally, share your thoughts and reactions to this service learning activity. That is, as a team, offer your personal thoughts and reactions about the roundtable experience. Did you feel the session was a success? How did your participants react to the opportunity to discuss these issues? What did you like or dislike about your experience serving as moderator(s)? Do you feel this as a useful approach to gain insights from individuals about rural community issues in their state? How informed do you feel these individuals are about issues and challenges impacting communities in rural America and explain your answer? Offer any closing comments your team would like to offer about this service learning experience.

Major Steps for Conducting Your Community Roundtable Session

TOPIC:
How Are Rural Communities in Our State Doing? Local Residents Weigh In

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION TO THE ROUNDTABLE (5 minutes)

Moderator should welcome everyone and have each person in attendance introduce himself/herself. Then indicate why you are conducting this roundtable.

SESSION 1: What We Value About Rural Areas (20 minutes)
We would like to begin by asking you to reflect on the current state of rural communities in our state.

a. First of all, please list (without sharing with others at your table) what you feel are the 2-3 most important and positive features associated with the rural areas of our state. That is, what do you value most about our state's rural areas that you feel needs to be retained or preserved?

b. Next, share your list with other members at your table. As a table, discuss and debate the various items that have been generated by the group.

c. As a table, come to an agreement on the top 4-5 items that your group sees as positive and important features of rural areas and explain why.

d. Ask a representative of each group to briefly share the results of their table's deliberations. Write these items on a poster paper or wall pads and place on the wall of the meeting room.

SESSION 2: Priorities for Strengthening the Future of Rural Areas (40 minutes):

As you ponder the future of your state's rural areas, which of the following general topics would you (personally) identify as being of highest priority to promoting the long-term survival and strength of rural areas? That is, what *TWO* broad areas listed below would you select as being of "highest priority" for the future of rural communities in your state? (Note: Hand out a sheet that contains the list of issues).

- Economic Development (agriculture and non-agriculture)
- Financial Capital Resources
- Education
- Workforce Development
- Public Services/Public Infrastructure
- Information and Communication Technologies
- Leadership and Citizen Participation

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- Health and Nutrition
- Natural and Environmental Resources Management
- Disaster Management
- Housing
- Population Change/Migration Patterns
- Economic/Social Inequality and Poverty
- Other areas not listed above (please list:)_____

NOW . . .

a. Share your list and thoughts with members of your table. Each person should briefly share his/her list with other group members at your table.

b. As a table, come to a landing on what you feel are the TWO broad areas that should be the top priorities for rural areas in our state and explain why your group chose these priorities.

c. The moderator may ask a representative from each (or some) of the tables to share with the entire group the TOP 2 items selected by that particular group. (Note to Moderator: Make sure each group's top two issues are written on a poster board/wall pad for everyone to see).

d. Finally, as an entire group, come to a consensus on the TWO broad topics that are vital to the future vitality of rural counties/communities in your state (this can be done by vote or by group consensus).

SESSION 3: Digging Deeper into the TWO Priority Areas (40 minutes):

This third session is devoted to delving more deeply into each of the TWO rural development priority topics that the whole group selected in Roundtable Session 2. Approximately 15 minutes is being set aside to discuss each of the priority topics selected, and then 10 minutes for a brief sharing of some of the highlights of these deliberations with the entire group.

Each table is asked to use the following format for each "mini-roundtable" session.

- *Priority Topic 1*: _____ (list the topic) (20 minutes)

    a. What specific challenges are rural areas in your state facing right now with regard to this topic?

    b. What strategies or initiatives should be launched to help rural communities in your state as it relates to this priority topic? Try to identify strategies/initiatives that may make sense for most rural areas in your state.

- *Priority Topic 2*: _____ (list the topic) (20 minutes)

    a. What specific challenges are rural areas in your state facing right now with regard to this topic?
    b. What strategies or initiatives should be launched to help rural communities in your state as it relates to this priority topic? Again, try to identify strategies/initiatives that may make sense for most rural areas in your state.

NOW, have each team share highlights of their discussions regarding challenges and strategies for each of the two topics. Have one of your team members write this information on the poster board/wall pad.

CLOSING SESSION (15 minutes)

The moderator should ask if any of the individuals would like to share some final thoughts about the roundtable. The moderator should indicate what the class team plans to do with the information and offer final thoughts about the roundtable session. Express thanks to those who took part in the meeting.

Possible Topics by Priority Areas

(To be used by moderator, if needed, to guide Session 3 discussions)

Economic Development (agriculture and non-agriculture)
- ❑ Entrepreneurship, business start-ups, micro-enterprises
- ❑ Incubator programs
- ❑ Business retention and expansion
- ❑ Business recruitment/attraction
- ❑ Value-added processing
- ❑ Trade and market issues
- ❑ Dealing with regulations
- ❑ Globalization (economic opportunities and challenges)
- ❑ Building business networks
- ❑ Knowledge and creative economies
- ❑ Building on natural resource amenities
- ❑ Economic friendly local government policies
- ❑ Economic impact assessment

Financial Capital Resources
- ❑ Lending mechanisms for small businesses
- ❑ Micro-finance services
- ❑ Venture capital /Angel investment

Education and Workforce Development
- ❑ Mentoring/internship programs
- ❑ School-based entrepreneurship/business development initiatives
- ❑ Training for local labor market needs
- ❑ Promoting community/family involvement in schools
- ❑ School involvement in community engagement activities
- ❑ Brain drain / retaining skilled workers
- ❑ Educational status of adult workforce
- ❑ Access to jobs (job availability in or out of the county of residence)

Public Services/Public Infrastructure
- ❑ Transportation systems
- ❑ Roads/bridges
- ❑ Public safety (law enforcement, fire protection)
- ❑ Taxation issues

❑ Water/sanitation systems

Information and Communication Technologies
- ❑ E-commerce for businesses
- ❑ E-government / e-community activities
- ❑ Adoption strategies
- ❑ Community Information/Communication Technology support services for businesses, schools, health care, etc.
- ❑ Digital divide issues (areas that are unserved and underserved areas)

Leadership, Citizen Participation, Governance
- ❑ Leadership development training
- ❑ Public issue forums
- ❑ Regional alliances of rural communities
- ❑ Community collaboration strategies
- ❑ Expanding civic engagement

Health and Nutrition
- ❑ Health promotion
- ❑ Health planning
- ❑ Health quality and access
- ❑ Community access to healthy, nutritional foods

Natural and Environmental Resources Management
- ❑ Rural/urban dynamics (i.e., planning, smart growth, etc.)
- ❑ Water quality/quantity, water management
- ❑ Land use decision-making
- ❑ Sustainable agricultural practices

Disaster Management
- ❑ Vulnerability assessment (assessing groups/communities at greater risk)
- ❑ Pre-disaster preparation and planning
- ❑ Post-disaster response capability
- ❑ Volunteer emergency response teams
- ❑ Disaster education programs for citizens / community leaders
- ❑ Social, environmental, and economic impacts of disasters

Housing
- ❑ Moderate and low income housing availability
- ❑ Multi-family housing
- ❑ Housing quality
- ❑ Green construction practices

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Population Change/Migration Patterns
- ❑ Changes in age structure of the population (including working age population)
- ❑ Changing structure of the family
- ❑ Outmigration of youth
- ❑ Population diversification (growth of minority populations)
- ❑ Rapid population growth

Economic/Social Inequality and Poverty
- ❑ Race, gender, and/or cultural issues
- ❑ Income inequality
- ❑ Persistently poor rural communities
- ❑ Financial services for low-income persons

**Background Information for Students on
Conducting a Roundtable Meeting on "Rural Communities"**

What this Service Learning Activity is all About!

**SESSION 1:
Worksheet for What We Value about Rural Areas**

Your List of the Positive Features of Rural Areas of Your State	1. 2. 3.
The Top 4-5 Positive Features Agreed Upon by Members of Your Table	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.