



The Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs

<http://www.iira.org/>

Located at [Western Illinois University](#), the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs is designed to improve the quality of life in rural areas by developing public-private partnerships with local agencies on small business development and community development projects in rural areas. The Institute works on projects including rural economic and community development (including value-added agriculture), health care, education, public transportation, public management policies, housing, and technology.

Rural Information Sources

<http://www.iira.org/portal/index.asp>

These links contain socioeconomic and demographic data for counties and municipalities in Illinois. The data results from queries can be copied and pasted into other documents for manipulation.

Research Publications

<http://www.iira.org/pubsnew/index.asp>

The IIRA search engine will link you to helpful publications in a wide variety of areas that affect rural life.

Outreach Program Overview

<http://www.iira.org/outreach/index.asp>

Value-Added Sustainable Development Center (VASDC)

<http://www.value-added.org/>

The VASDC assists in creating value-added ventures that benefit the economy, quality of life, and diversification of communities while preserving the integrity of the rural environment. VASDC promotes cooperative development as an important option for rural communities interested in economic growth and supports the development of sustainable systems.

Data Analysis and Technical Assistance (DATA) Center

The DATA Center consists of three service units located at the IIRA. The units are:

1. Rural Economic Technical Assistance Center (RETAC)

<http://www.iira.org/outreach/retac.asp>

The RETAC promotes economic prosperity in rural Illinois through a wide range of assistance to clients including regional planning organizations, local officials, and residents of rural communities. RETAC provides services including data analysis and retrieval, economic impact and retail sector analysis, assistance with international marketing, as well as skills and capacity building training programs for local officials, practitioners, and others involved in economic development throughout Illinois.

2. Business and Geographic Information Services (BGIS) Unit

<http://www.wiu.edu/users/miira/gis/>

The BGIS provides value-added statistical products for rural communities and regions in an effort to improve the quality of life for residents of those communities.

3. Survey and Data Analysis Unit

The Survey and Data Analysis unit provides support to IIRA and its affiliated programs/researchers with survey research and database management assistance, along with acting as point of contact for data requests from internal and external clients.

MAPPING the Future of Your Community

<http://www.iira.org/outreach/mapping/>

The MAPPING The Future Program (**M**anagement and **P**lanning **P**rograms **I**nvolving **N**onmetropolitan **G**roups) assists local officials in identifying economic development opportunities, planning for the future, and determining effective strategies to achieve economic prosperity. The MAPPING methodology was developed in order to bring a holistic integrated planning and decision-making process to rural communities. As such, the IIRA has developed three inter-related programs for rural community and economic development that utilize this unique methodology:

Peace Corps Fellows Program in Rural Community Development

<http://www.peacecorpsfellows-wiu.org/>

The Peace Corps Fellows (PCF) Program in Community Development is a two-year Master's degree opportunity for returned Peace Corps volunteers with an emphasis on rural community development. The twin goals of the program are to train the next generation of community development specialists and to assist small towns with the implementation of community development projects while enhancing local capacity and civic engagement.

Fellows earn graduate degrees in Business Administration (MBA); Economics; Geography (Rural and Regional Planning); Health Sciences (Community Health Education); Political Science (Public Administration); and Recreation, Park, and Tourism Administration. In addition to completing their respective degree requirements, all Fellows enroll in four core courses in community/economic development and participate in relevant professional conferences and workshops.

The highlight of the program is an eleven-month paid internship that Fellows serve in a rural community or local or regional agency. During the internship, they lead community development projects with the active participation of community volunteers. Fellows gain valuable professional skills while aiding local organizations in building a framework for future community and economic development. Examples of past internships and further details regarding the program are available at www.peacecorpsfellows-wiu.org.

Rural Transit Assistance Center (RTAC)

<http://www.iira.org/outreach/rtac.asp>

The RTAC delivers the state's Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP), as well as the Interagency Coordinating Committee on Transportation (ICCT) Clearinghouse. RTAC's version of RTAP is one of the most comprehensive, offering traditional services such as training, technical assistance, research, and a paratransit rodeo to managers and staff of existing rural transit agencies. RTAC also provides planning assistance via a capital needs assessment for downstate Illinois and participates in public policy bodies such as the Illinois Terrorism Task Force. The ICCT Clearinghouse assists counties in attaining public transportation grants utilizing its award-winning Transportation Coordination Primer.

Volunteer Training and Support Program (VOLTS)

<http://www.iira.org/outreach/volts/index.asp>

The Volunteer Training and Support Program provides on-site volunteer management training, technical assistance, workshops, and conferences to community and economic development practitioners, local leaders, and citizens engaged in development projects. The VOLTS program strives to increase the effectiveness of volunteer efforts that support community and economic development projects in rural Illinois communities.

Midwest Community Development Institute (CDI)

<http://www.midwestcdi.org/>

The Midwest Community Development Institute (CDI) is a comprehensive professional training

program in community and economic development designed for development professionals, community leaders, and elected officials. CDI provides hands-on practical training that can be immediately applied to improving the economy and quality of life in communities. Each CDI session lasts five days and the complete CDI program consists of attending three sessions, referred to as Year One, Year Two, and Year Three. CDI is held annually during the third week of August in Moline.