

The logo features a black silhouette of the state of Michigan on the left. To its right, the words "MICHIGAN", "RURAL", and "NETWORK" are stacked vertically in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The text has a subtle drop shadow effect.

**MICHIGAN  
RURAL  
NETWORK**

Policy Agenda  
2010

## Rural Legislative Policy Agenda Summary

One of the primary purposes of the Michigan Rural Network (MRN) is to support efforts that will enhance programs and services that have a positive impact on the quality of life in Michigan's rural communities. Towards this end, MRN has developed the following short-term objectives:

- Ensure that rural communities obtain funding pursuant to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) for programs and services.
- Work collaboratively to prepare grant proposals / applications to assist participating MRN members in seeking funding for identified priority programs and develop rural capacity.
- Work with Michigan legislators to develop a Michigan Rural Caucus in both the House and Senate and develop a process to inform and influence the Michigan Legislature on the needs and issues of rural communities in Michigan.
- Respond through education and possible advocacy activities to proposed changes in state and federal legislation, or administrative rules, which may have an impact on rural Michigan communities.

\*\*The following topics are not in any particular order of importance.

\*\*The following policy agenda is by no means exhaustive and will likely evolve as issues change throughout the state. As such, MRN will provide an updated version of its policy agenda as conditions change.

## **1. Access to Broadband**

MRN has determined that increased access to broadband Internet services is critical for improving education and increasing economic opportunities in rural Michigan. Preliminary funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) went largely unawarded and, as a result, a second round of funding will be available sometime in early 2010. In order to improve the chance of funding for rural Michigan, it is essential that a cohesive statewide plan be in place. MRN will serve as a collaborative member in this process and will work with legislators to ensure that adequate attention is being paid to this issue at the state level.

MRN advocates that funds—including, but not limited to ARRA funds—be used to:

- Provide a reliable and affordable high-speed digital infrastructure for all of rural Michigan that is necessary to promote education and entrepreneurship while supporting agriculture and small business development.
- Increase public access to broadband by expanding infrastructure in local libraries, public schools and other public facilities throughout rural Michigan.

## 2. Education

MRN understands the importance of improving education in small and rural communities. As such we advocate for programs and services that will increase preparedness for post-secondary education and prepare students for success in a competitive labor market. To that end MRN has agreed to:

- Support advocacy efforts to improve schools and quality of education in rural Michigan.
- Advocate for Increased access to broadband in rural schools.
- Advocate for sufficient funding for K-12 and post-secondary education to help students in rural communities participate in Michigan's Transition to a Knowledge-Based Economy.
- Encourage local initiatives that coordinate and consolidate services as deemed necessary to enhance viability and success of school districts located in rural and small communities while maintaining the integrity of the school systems already in place.

### **3. Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation**

MRN supports the efforts of the State of Michigan to encourage the development of renewable energy sources, to reduce overall energy consumption and reduce dependency on imported foreign energy resources. MRN believes that the development of renewable energy can be an integral part of a rural economic development strategy. In addition, it is anticipated that federal funding through the ARRA Program will be available to invest in renewable energy projects. Towards this end, MRN will advocate that these funds be used to:

#### Renewable Energy

- Invest in different types of renewable energy projects in rural communities that will result in a variety of power generation sources resulting in the diversification of the energy-generating portfolio in Michigan.
- Promote renewable energy development that supports local small business development and entrepreneurship and not just to increase tax revenue for local governments.

#### Energy Conservation

- Promote energy efficient housing for low income households.
- Promote energy conservation and efficiency in rural communities.

#### **4. Health**

MRN has determined that the Michigan Center for Rural Health (MCRH) provides and coordinates a number of essential services to rural communities, including:

- Providing continuing education via video-broadcasting to health care providers
- Collecting and disseminating information concerning rural health issues
- Providing grant writing assistance and support for the development of rural health services
- Operating a comprehensive recruitment and retention program of health care providers
- Acting as an advocate between state and federal agencies and rural communities.

MRN feels that MCRH's rural health activities are critically needed and supports advocacy efforts to maintain these vital programs and services.

## 5. Infrastructure and Transportation

MRN has determined that infrastructure and transportation improvements are essential to enhancing the economic viability of rural communities. In addition, it is anticipated that federal funding through the ARRA Program will be available to increase infrastructure and transportation improvements in Michigan. Towards this end MRN will advocate for a fair allocation of funding for rural Michigan and that these funds are used to:

- Fund projects that have had local community involvement in planning and development of proposed projects
- Provide for the repair and upkeep of existing infrastructure before expanding road infrastructure
- Fund projects that promote regional transportation and land use plans that better connect rural communities and urban centers
- Fund projects that promote walkable communities and bike paths that connect to neighboring communities
- Encourage intensive development to be directed into urban centers
- Fund Amtrak service to link rural and urban communities
- Expand intercity passenger rail service and support recreational train services for rural cultural economic development (sightseeing, fall color tours, ski and snowmobile trains, etc.)
- Fund rural transit and para-transit services

## **6. Cultural Economic Development**

MRN has determined that enhancing the use of Michigan's cultural and recreational resources is a viable strategy to increase tourism and small business development in order to provide an economic benefit to Michigan communities. Therefore, MRN supports efforts of the state to incorporate cultural economic development into its established economic development programs and policies. Further, MRN encourages the State to seek opportunities to support rural communities.

## **7. Agri-Tourism/Enviro-tourism**

MRN has identified the promotion of farm markets, Agri-tourism and Environmental Tourism operations as a way of supporting increased economic activity in the state of Michigan. Therefore MRN supports the development of farm market Generally Accepted Agricultural Management Practices (GAAMPs) that are currently being prepared by Michigan Department of Agriculture. MRN also supports the development of legislation that would define rules of operation and provide protections for the Agri-tourism industry.

## 8. Housing

MRN has determined that there is an unmet need for decent affordable housing for very-low to low-income families in rural Michigan communities. MRN has agreed to provide input to MSHDA on its annual draft allocation plan for low income housing tax credits and other proposed housing programs to enhance program effectiveness for rural communities. MRN urges housing program investments in rural communities that:

- Support projects that are smaller in size (number of units and scale) to match context of community and compatibility with existing housing. This also includes advocating for higher per unit subsidies to make units affordable for very-low income families.
- Encourage preservation of existing housing as a priority
- Promote revitalization of main street areas through mixed-used development and work
- Increase availability of funding and programs that help increase energy efficiency of housing, conserve precious energy resources and enhance housing affordability for low-income households.
- Educate stakeholders and lawmakers on emerging issues.

Contact:

Mitchell B. Whitaker

Coordinator

Michigan Rural Network

Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency

Cell: (231) 330-4961

Office: (231) 947-3780

Fax: (231) 947-4935

[www.miruralnetwork.org](http://www.miruralnetwork.org)

Facebook: Michigan Rural Network

Twitter: miruralnetwork

*Partner Organizations:*

*Athens Area Community Foundation*

*Barry County Community Foundation*

*Community Economic Development Association of Michigan*

*City of Ithaca*

*Dwelling Place of Grand Rapids*

*Eastern UP Michigan! Works Agency*

*Great Lakes Capital Fund*

*Michigan Community Action Agency Association*

*Michigan Association of Planning*

*Michigan Center for Rural Health*

*Michigan Environmental Council*

*Michigan Farm Bureau*

*Michigan Small & Rural School Association*

*Michigan State Housing Development Authority*

*Rural Partners of Michigan*