

# **Confronting Educational Barriers to Rural Adults: A 13-State Survey**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this report is to summarize a 13-state survey on educational barriers confronting rural adults, actions needed to provide adequate educational opportunities for rural adults, and public policies needed to reduce barriers to education and/or improve educational opportunities for rural adults. Separate papers on the three major foci have been prepared and presented elsewhere (Easton, 1988, 1989a, 1989b).*

## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Participants in the National Invitational Meeting on Rural Postsecondary Education, held in 1981, focused on the varied needs of their students and called for individual attention to their unique situations (Rural Postsecondary Education, 1981). Despite their individuality, however, rural citizens were seen as sharing the common difficulty of securing access to postsecondary education programs suited to their needs. As recently as 1985, Barker found information on adult education programs for rural Americans to be "both incomplete and inadequate" (p. 4).

McCannon (1983) noted that rural adults are "participating in educational programs at rates that are increasing faster than they are for their urban counterparts" (p. 15). He cited data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (Kay, 1982) that showed that 27.6 percent of participants in adult education in 1981 were residents of rural communities. He pointed out that the rural population of the United States increased by 13 percent between 1975 and 1981, but that participation in adult education by rural residents increased by over 34 percent during the same period. Urban residents increased their participation in adult education by only 21 percent between 1975 and 1981 (p. 15).

McCannon stated that significant barriers prevent more adults from attending educational programs. He

reviewed several studies on barriers to adult education and concluded:

There seems to be a general consensus among studies cited here that rural adult learners do experience significant barriers. The foremost barriers are distance and lack of prior educational attainment and available counseling services. Lack of family support and financial assistance are other barriers that rural learners face (1983, p. 21).

McCannon also stated that there were regional differences among rural areas in the United States and differences in problems and needs. Low population density, he observed, is common to all rural areas. Of rural adult learners, their educational needs, and the barriers to education that confront them, McCannon said:

... rural adult learners look like, act like, and learn like urban adult learners. The certified public accountant, the teacher, the electrician, the nurse, and the engineer in a small town must meet the same type of continuing education requirements for occupational recertification as their urban counterparts.

The artist, the poet, the writer, and the actor create their works just as their urban counterparts do. Likewise, both the rural casual learner and the degree seeker embark on their educational journey with the same hopes, expectations, and fears as urban residents. So, there are little or no differences. Rural learners have a quest for knowledge, too—only the location of their residence differs. For some, the difference in residence can be a limiting factor. Resources, jobs, and educational services are fewer. But, for those who exhibit the characteristics of independence and self-direction, their residential status opens up a world of independent learning. (1983, p. 17)

Cross and McCartan (1984) identified three kinds of barriers to adult education:

*Situational barriers* are those arising from one's situation in life at a given time. Lack of time because of responsibilities on the job or at home, for example, deters large numbers of potential learners aged 25 to 45. Lack of money deters young people and other low-income individuals; lack of child care deters young parents.

*Institutional barriers* consist of all those practices and procedures that exclude or discourage working adults from participating in educational activities—inconvenient schedules or locations, full-time fees for part-time study, inappropriate courses of study, for example.

*Dispositional barriers* relate to people's attitudes and perceptions of themselves as learners. Many older citizens, for example, feel that they are too old to learn. Adults with poor educational backgrounds frequently lack interest in learning or confidence in their ability to learn. (p. 37)

In another study, McCannon (1985) surveyed adults enrolled in five higher education institutions in rural settings in Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin. He found that distance, costs, time, and self-confidence were greater obstacles to women than to men and that conflicts with jobs and lack of desired

courses were more frequently cited as obstacles by men. Both men and women considered the need for financial aid, information, and time off from work as important factors affecting their participation in higher education. More women than men expressed the need for babysitting services, family support, and increased self-confidence. The respondents indicated a preference for late afternoon and evening courses, weekend courses, and "clustered" courses (courses in a program during a concentrated time once a week).

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) stated that informational and psychosocial barriers are "less obvious and in some ways more fundamental in accounting for participation or lack of participation" (p. 137) in adult education than other types of barriers. They cited Johnstone and Rivera's 1965 study, *Volunteers for Learning*, as evidence that knowledge of adult education resources varies with socioeconomic status and community size, low socioeconomic status and residence in rural areas being associated with lack of information. Darkenwald and Merriam also observed in the literature a link between psychosocial barriers, which were defined as "individually held beliefs, values, attitudes, or perceptions that inhibit participation in organized learning activities" (p. 137), and low socioeconomic status.

From his vantage point as dean of a rural continuing education program developed in consultation with over 40 educational service providers and over 4,000 adult learners, Treadway (1984) identified a need for institutions of higher education to relate their institutional missions to rural residents. In his 1979-82 study funded by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, he observed that, once a commitment to serve rural people and communities has been included in an institutional mission statement, there are three types of roles the institution can fulfill; they are: (a) direct provider of programs and services, (b) broker for rural communities, and (c) collaborator in jointly offering programs and services with other institutions and agencies. In addition, he elaborated upon issues for both national and state policy. Those issues included:

- \* An urban bias in the allocation of federal education dollars,
- \* A need to recognize the diversity of rural America in federal policy,
- \* A need for policy input at the federal level by rural educators,

- \* Federal initiatives to develop and use communications technology for delivering educational programs to rural residents,
- \* Federal support for the "systematic collection, compilation, and analysis of the status of participation in rural adult education" (p. 61),
- \* Regionalization of state higher education policy making and administration,
- \* Input by rural educators to state policy making,
- \* Coordination of publicly-funded institutions of higher education that serve a given rural area,
- \* Improved communications between state policy makers and rural constituents,
- \* Reciprocity between or among states for state funding of out-of-state students,
- \* Coordination of the rural development efforts of all agencies, public and private.

A team of researchers at Washington State University and the University of Idaho (McDaniel, 1986) surveyed providers of educational services for rural adults and 47 rural adult learners in Alaska, California, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming to identify barriers to education. They found a similarity of perceived barriers among providers and learners across the seven-state region. The investigators classified barriers into the following categories: (a) personal/situational, (b) psychological, (c) informational, (d) institutional, and (e) state policy barriers. That research, an undertaking of the Northwest Action Agenda project, resulted in a set of 23 recommendations addressed to state educational policy makers, educational institutions, rural communities, and rural education practitioners. The investigators surmised:

The single overriding area of agreement between educational providers and rural adult learners concerns the question of access to educational opportunities. Overwhelmingly, both groups feel that, when compared with their urban counterparts, the

rural adult learner does not have equal access to educational programs (p. 15).

The conclusion of the Northwest Action Agenda project that barriers to rural adult education were not uniform across the seven-state region is relevant to the present study, since there is an overlap in both geographic and chronological parameters between the two.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study was designed to identify educational barriers confronting rural adults, actions needed to provide adequate educational opportunities for rural adults, and public policies needed to reduce barriers to education and/or improve educational opportunities for rural adults in the states of Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. According to United States Census figures (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1983), this region comprises about 47 percent of the land area of the nation, but contained less than 9 percent of the country's population in 1980. The region had a population density of 11.9 people per square mile, compared with 64 per square mile for the United States as a whole. Survey respondents were college and university faculty and administrators, rural adult educators, legislators, rural teachers and school administrators, county extension agents, regional educational service agency (RESA) personnel, state education agency (SEA) staff, and others in the 13 states.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted by means of a three-round modified Delphi survey. The mailing list of the National Action Agenda for Postsecondary Rural Education was used to identify persons interested in education for adults in rural communities in the 13 states selected for the survey. In addition, the *County Agents Directory* was used to identify Cooperative Extension Service personnel working in rural areas of those states. The governors of the 13 states were asked to provide names and addresses of legislators serving on education-related legislative committees. Everyone on the National Action Agenda mailing list from the 13 states was invited to participate in this study. Individuals were purposively selected from the lists of county agents and

state legislators. In all, 798 persons were invited in the summer of 1986 to participate in the study.

A three-item open-ended questionnaire was used to solicit responses in the first round of the survey. Participants were asked to list three to five responses for each of the following items: (a) barriers to education that exist for rural adults, (b) actions that are needed to provide adequate educational opportunities for rural adults, and (c) public policies that are needed to reduce barriers to education and/or improve educational opportunities for rural adults. A total of 217 completed questionnaires was returned. Responses to the first two items were used to generate a 203-item questionnaire on barriers to education and actions required to provide adequate educational opportunities for rural adults for the second round of the modified Delphi survey. Of the 203 items on the questionnaire, 78 dealt with perceived barriers, 125 with proposed actions to overcome them. Responses to the third item were used to derive 89 public policy statements to be evaluated by participants in the third round of the study.

The second-round questionnaire was mailed to the 217 first-round respondents in March 1987. Participants were asked to evaluate 78 statements of educational barriers by indicating the extent of their agreement with them on a five-point Likert-type scale. In addition, they were asked to rate the desirability of 125 actions proposed to provide adequate educational opportunities for rural adults on another five-point scale. One hundred ninety-six completed questionnaires were returned. The third-round survey was mailed to all first-round participants in June 1987. In this round, panelists were asked to evaluate the importance and the feasibility of 89 public policy proposals aimed at overcoming educational barriers encountered by rural adults. Once again, five-point Likert-type scales were employed. Respondents to the final round numbered 175. Chi square analyses were conducted to determine if there were significant differences (.05 level) in the respondents' perceptions associated with either the participants' geographic location within the 13 state region of the study or their differing roles in rural education.

## SUMMARY OF THE DATA

There were 196 participants in the second round of the survey. The composition of the respondent group is presented in Table 1. Those participants' perceptions of educational barriers and of the desirability of suggested actions to provide educational opportunities will be summarized under the two headings immediately following.

### **Educational Barriers**

Panelists identified 78 perceived barriers to education for rural adults in the first round of the survey. A majority of respondents confirmed 47 of those barriers by indicating their agreement with them on the second-round questionnaire. Ten of the barriers were validated by at least 75 percent of the respondents. Those barriers are listed below with the percent of the respondents who answered either "strongly agree" or "agree" shown in parentheses:

Sparse population combined with diverse educational needs (91.7%).

Distance of rural adults from college campuses (90.3%).

Excessive demands on time due to distance from educational programs (79.2%).

Fear of entering or reentering the educational process (78.1%).

Lack of career and educational counseling services for rural adults (76.5%).

Budgetary constraints of educational institutions (83.2%).

High cost of delivering adult education to rural communities (79.6%).

Difficulty (near impossibility) of completing a degree program in a rural community (74.5%).

Lack of federal and state funds in support of rural adult education (79.1%).

Lack of public financing for rural adult education (78.1%).

The 156 chi square analyses conducted on the responses to the 78 barrier statements yielded 17 significant chi square values. Eleven of those were associated with the respondents' geographic location, six with the differing roles of the panelists in rural education. However, only two of the significant differences in perception of educational barriers were in conjunction with the 10 barriers listed above.

*Table 1*  
**Participants in the Second Round of the Modified Delphi Survey**

Roles	Number of Participants Geographic Regions			Total
	Plains States	Mountain States	Northwest Coast States	
Legislators	1	2		3
Adult Educators	2	8	3	13
College/University	21	31	23	75
Cooperative Extension	13	20	12	45
Rural Educators	2	10		12
RESA Personnel		9	2	11
SEA Personnel	2	10	4	16
Others	6	11	4	21
Total	47	101	48	196

“Budgetary constraints of educational institutions” were regarded as a barrier to educational opportunity by 83 percent of all respondents, including all of the legislators and over 90 percent of the college and university personnel and RSEA staff members, but only 50 percent of the rural teachers and administrators were in accord. Over 80 percent of the participants from the Mountain and Northwest Coast states validated the “high cost of delivering adult education to rural communities” as a barrier, but only 64 percent of those from the Plains states agreed.

***Actions to Provide Educational Opportunities***

Survey participants evaluated the desirability of 125 steps that could be taken to provide adequate educational opportunities for rural adults. They used a five-point Likert-type scale. At least 50 percent of the respondents affirmed the desirability of 111 of the 125 actions listed on the questionnaire. To highlight the results of this portion of the study, 20 of the proposed actions that were considered desirable by 85 percent or more of the panelists are listed below with the percent of respondents who chose either “highly desirable” or “desirable” shown in parentheses:

Incorporate adult education into mission statements of colleges and universities (88.3%).

Increase commitment to adult literacy (88.3%).

Offer courses for rural adults long enough for them to develop a favorable reputation in rural communities (86.7%).

Obtain reciprocal agreements among colleges and universities within a state or within an interstate region to accept course work offered by each other in rural communities (93.4%).

Make public school buildings available for adult education (93.4%).

Develop interagency cooperation in providing programs for rural adult learners (92.9%).

Increase networking among rural school districts, governmental agencies, and community organizations (90.8%).

Work with existing community groups to develop educational opportunities for rural adults (89.3%).

Increase cooperation among colleges and universities and reduce concern for “territorial rights” (88.8%).

Improve communication between postsecondary and K-12 educators (85.7%).

Design educational offerings to meet local needs (94.9%).

Develop college and university outreach programs (92.3%).

Involve rural adults in planning educational programs (88.8%).

Develop institutional arrangements to maximize the applicability of off-campus courses to on-campus degree programs (88.3%).

Conduct assessments of the needs of rural adult learners (86.2%).

Develop curriculums that can be delivered to rural adults via telecommunications (86.2%).

Combine high tech delivery systems with outreach efforts by "live" faculty (90.3%).

Develop information networks to inform rural adults of educational resources and financial assistance that are available to them (92.9%).

Identify funding sources to support rural adult education (90.8%).

Inform legislators of the educational needs of rural adults (90.8%).

Explain the educational needs of rural adults and justify programs for meeting them to educational policy makers (85.2%).

Create new kinds of scholarships to assist non-traditional students, including part-time and non-degree students (88.3%).

Offer incentives to college and university faculty to provide extension classes for rural adult learners (86.2%).

Identify educational resources presently available in rural areas (89.3%).

Develop positive attitudes toward lifelong learning among junior and senior high school students (90.3%).

Of the 250 chi square analyses performed to identify any significant differences among the respondent groups in their perception of the desirability of the proposed actions, 29 yielded statistically-significant chi square values. Thirteen of the significant chi square values were associated with the geographic location of the respondents, 16 with the panelists' differing rural education roles.

Eight statistically significant differences of opinion were connected with the 20 statements listed previously; however, only one was large enough to be of much practical value. At least 90 percent of respondents in each role category thought that developing "interagency cooperation in providing programs for rural adult learners" was desirable, but only one of the three legislators participating in the second round of the survey agreed.

### ***Policies Proposed to Improve Access to Education***

In the third round of the survey, participants were asked to rate the importance and the feasibility of 89 public policy statements that had been generated in the first round. One hundred seventy-five respondents who had participated in at least one of the previous two rounds returned third-round questionnaires. The composition of this respondent group is reported in Table 2.

Of the 89 public policy statements, 22 were judged either "important" or "most important" by at least 75 percent of the respondents. Fourteen policies that were considered important by at least 75 percent of the respondents and feasible by at least 50 percent are listed below with the percent of the participants who rated the policy either "probably feasible" or "definitely feasible" shown in parentheses:

Policy to encourage lifelong learning (70.9%).

State commitment to adult basic education (69.7%).

*Table 2*  
**Participants in the Third Round of the Modified Delphi Survey**

Roles	Number of Participants Geographic Regions			Total
	Plains States	Mountain States	Northwest Coast States	
Legislators	2	2		4
Adult Educators	1	3	3	7
College/University	19	30	18	67
Cooperative Extension	12	16	10	38
Rural Educators	4	10		14
RESA Personnel		7	3	10
SEA Personnel	2	11	4	17
Others	6	9	3	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>175</b>

Provide rent-free space in public educational facilities for adult basic education programs (66.9%).

Reciprocity among colleges and universities serving rural areas so that credits may be easily transferred and applied to degree programs (66.3%).

Federal and state commitments to adult literacy programs (64.6%).

Federal and state support for student loans and work-study programs for college-bound adult learners (63.4%).

On-the-job training for welfare recipients (62.9%).

Coordinate educational programs for adults with current and projected demand for job skills (62.9%).

Support creation of networks of electronically-linked colleges and universities within and among states that would offer joint programs for rural adults (59.4%).

School board policies or state legislation making public school buildings available for adult education programs free of charge (57.7%).

Support for state, regional or national consortia for satellite programs (57.1%).

Recognition at the highest levels of federal and state governments that rural adults are an important resource and that educational programs are necessary for developing that resource to fulfill its potential (56.6%).

Reverse current public assistance policy that penalizes adults on AFDC who wish to obtain further education (55.4%).

Removal from public assistance programs of provisions that penalize adults for enrolling in educational programs (52.0%).

Some policies, however, that were judged to be important were considered feasible by less than 50 percent of the survey participants. Eight of the 22 policies that were evaluated as "important" or "most important" by at least 75 percent of the participants were identified as "probably feasible" or "definitely feasible"

by less than 50 percent of the respondents. Those policies are listed below with the percent of respondents who found the "probably feasible" or "definitely feasible" shown in parentheses:

Re-allocation of funds from obsolete rural education programs to new programs that meet current needs (46.3%).

State subsidies for educational services in sparsely-populated areas (45.7%).

Equal educational opportunity for all residents of a state (45.7%).

Alternatives to enrollment-driven funding formulas for educational programs that serve rural adults (42.9%).

State commitment to support lifelong learning for all persons (42.3%).

Subsidies to rural continuing education courses so that courses need not be self-supporting (41.1%).

Adequate funding for rural libraries and media resource centers (38.3%).

Increased funding for adult education in rural areas (35.4%).

Of the 356 chi square tests of independence that were conducted on responses to the third-round questionnaire, 44 yielded statistically significant chi square values. Only four of the significant chi square values were associated with the importance or feasibility of the 22 highly valued policy statements reported here.

There was a high level of support among all participants for the policy "state commitment to adult basic education," but 100 percent of the Northwest Coast residents rated it as "important" or "most important" compared to about 85 percent of other respondents. Only 69 percent of Mountain states' participants rated the statement, "Federal and state support for student loans and work-study programs for college-bound adult learners," important compared to 89 percent and 93 percent of Plains and Northwest Coast states' respondents, respectively. "Adequate funding for rural libraries and media resource centers" received

a favorable importance rating from about three-fourths of all respondents, but only one-fourth of the legislators in the survey were in accord with the majority. Sixty-five percent of the respondents from the Plains regarded a policy of "equal educational opportunity for all residents of a state" as feasible, but only 41 percent of the Mountain states and 34 percent of the Northwest Coast states' respondents concurred.

## CONCLUSIONS

Three conclusions were drawn from this study. First, there was broad agreement on the existence of educational barriers among the respondents across the 13-state region and across categories based on the roles they played in rural education. Further, a majority of the panelists in this study agreed on the desirability of a wide range of actions that would occur at all levels of the educational system in order to provide adequate educational opportunities for rural adults in the 13-state region. Finally, there was a broad base of agreement among the participants on policies aimed at improving access to education for rural adults.

## DISCUSSION

The participants in this modified Delphi survey were to a great extent self-selected. The fact that 196 of the 217 first-round respondents chose to answer a 203 item questionnaire in the second round and that 175 of them answered another 89-item survey in the third round demonstrated a commitment to the process and suggested a high degree of involvement with the subject matter of the study, education for rural adults. Nevertheless, the participants represented only themselves. Generalization from this sample is not recommended.

### **Confirmation of Educational Barriers**

The barriers identified and validated in the 13-state region represented those types of barriers described in previous research (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Cross & McCartan, 1984; McDaniel, 1986). Twenty-two of the 47 validated barriers were classified as institutional barriers while 13 of them were categorized as personal/situational barriers. Twelve of the validated barriers were grouped under the headings of psychological, informational, or political barriers.

### **Approaches to Opening Educational Access**

Participants in this study appear to have agreed with Treadway (1984) in his call for institutional reforms aimed at opening access to educational programs to rural residents. The results of this investigation suggest the efficacy of state and/or regional efforts to ameliorate the inequality of educational opportunity perceived by knowledgeable persons.

The respondents in this study saw stronger commitments and more favorable arrangements as ways for postsecondary education to be extended to more rural adults. Community colleges and land grant universities were identified as institutions that should have specific missions to educate rural adults.

The participants seemed to view interagency and interinstitutional coordination as an especially important area for action, judging by the number of measures generated and validated under this category. The message was "loud and clear:" Colleges, universities, school districts, government agencies, and community organizations should work together to serve the educational needs of rural adults without regard for state lines or service area boundaries. Respondents indicated that rural citizens should be given access to educational programs from all available sources through lifelong learning centers, public school systems, colleges, or other brokers, such as educational cooperatives. The emphasis emerging from this portion of the study was on empowering and, perhaps, compelling existing agencies and institutions to serve rural adults. The participants preferred to do that through a decentralized system, rather than a more centralized one. A proposal to place responsibility for coordinating rural adult education in a state at a single university was rejected by a majority of respondents. Also, there was little support for the creation of additional layers of bureaucracy at the state level. Although one-half of the participants thought state policy-making boards for rural education would be desirable, only thirty percent thought establishing rural adult education districts with local trustees was a good idea.

Another major area of concern was the curriculum available to rural adults. The participants indicated overwhelmingly that offerings should be based on the documented needs of rural adult learners. For participants in this study, the needs of rural adults were diverse—ranging from adult basic education in the three R's to vocational education and college degree programs. The respondents emphasized flexibility (short courses, competency-based education, distance edu-

cation, on-the-job training, and individualization) in programming for rural adults.

Survey participants supported a variety of alternative methods for delivering educational programs to rural adults. It is important to note, however, that 90 percent of the respondents indicated the desirability of combining "high tech" delivery with the "high touch" of outreach by "live" instructors. In fact, those who participated in this study proposed increasing the number of instructors at remote learning sites by offering incentives to college and university faculty and by using non-college rural residents as paid or volunteer providers of educational services. In addition, participants gave strong endorsement to several measures aimed at increasing instructional support services and making better use of existing educational resources in rural communities.

Survey participants would attempt to overcome informational barriers to rural adult education by a variety of means. They said it was desirable to publicize adult education programs through brochures, newsletters, and spot announcements on radio and TV. In addition, the participants thought public relations and news media should be used to persuade rural adults that education will be beneficial to them.

It was not surprising that, having identified barriers to education for rural adults, panelists in this study recommended increased public support for adult education in rural areas. Most respondents thought that both public and private financial support should be given to rural adult education.

In the area of student services and financial assistance, participants in this study favored some changes in current practice. Most of those responding to the second-round questionnaire found scholarships for part-time and non-degree students desirable. They also recognized a need for child care and preschool programs to assist adult learners who have children. Further, the participants would like to see programs implemented to help rural adults adapt to formal educational programs.

The participants linked reforms in rural elementary and secondary schools to advances in rural adult education. They said that rural schools should develop attitudes for lifelong learning and be non-sexist in their aspirations for students. They also favored extra-curricular enrichment programs in rural high schools, but not at the expense of diminished athletic programs.

There were relatively few statistically significant differences in perception with respect to the desirability of the steps proposed to provide adequate educational opportunities for rural adults among the various sub-

groups in this study. It is not surprising that there were some differences of opinion associated with the geographic location of the panelists, given the vast expanse of the 13-state region. Although there were only a few significant differences in perceptions related to the roles respondents played in rural education, some of those differences were on fundamental issues and invite closer scrutiny.

There appear to be some issues that involve struggles over "turf." For example, on the issues of leadership in providing education for rural adults and greater support for land grant universities, college and university personnel and Cooperative Extension agents favored a leadership role and increased support for land grant universities to a much greater extent than respondents from regional and state education agencies. On the other hand, college and university people differed with rural K-12 educators, RESA staff, and SEA personnel on the proposal to allow public schools to offer postsecondary courses in communities not served by any college.

Interestingly, the three legislators who participated in the second round of the survey favored increased funding for rural adult education, greater support for land grant universities, a leadership role in rural adult education for land grant universities, subsidization of low enrollment courses in rural communities, and provision of postsecondary courses by public schools. They did not find interagency cooperation in planning programs for rural adults, state university faculty assistance in establishing community education programs, improved compensation for instructors of rural adults, or the creation of regional lifelong learning centers desirable. They seemed to think that existing institutions, with a little more help, could meet the educational needs of rural adults better than new agencies at the local level or new cooperative arrangements among established agencies could.

### **Agencies for Public Policy Deliberation**

The policy ideas that were considered both important and feasible by a majority of participants in this study would appear to form an appropriate agenda for discussion by policymakers across the 13-state region. They include proposals for consideration by both federal and state officials in the areas of education, welfare, job training and placement, and community development. It is noteworthy that a strong majority of the respondents rated "policy to encourage lifelong learning," "state commitment to adult basic education," and "federal and state commitments to adult literacy pro-

grams" as both important and feasible. Those statements simply call for governmental commitments to adult education. Participants seemed to be saying that such commitments were lacking and would be a good place to begin developing a comprehensive policy on adult education that would increase access to educational programs for all adult learners, including those who live in rural communities.

Another agenda suggested by this study consists of the policy proposals that were considered important by a majority of the respondents, but feasible by less than one-half of them. Energies might be invested in seeking ways to make more feasible ideas such as "state subsidies for educational services in sparsely-populated areas," "alternatives to enrollment-driven funding formulas for educational programs that serve rural adults," and "equal educational opportunity for all residents of a state."

The composition of this group of respondents hints at the nature of panels that might be convened to develop federal, state and regional policies aimed at reducing barriers to adult education for rural residents. Since most of the significant differences of opinion in this study were associated with the diverse roles the respondents played in the educational system, it might be useful to facilitate face-to-face deliberations among similarly comprised groups in order to develop agendas for action in each of the states and subregions represented in this study. These constituencies might also be involved in efforts to shape and influence policy at the federal level and across state lines through interstate compacts. In addition, it would seem appropriate to include rural adult learners in the policy-making process.

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