



Rural Community College Initiative

An Introduction to
**Strategies for Rural Development
and Increased Access to Education**
A Toolkit for Rural Community Colleges

Developed by

MDC, Inc.
P.O. Box 17268
Chapel Hill, NC 27516-7268
Phone (919) 968-4531 • Fax (919) 929-8557
www.mdcinc.org/rcci.html

and

Video Dialog Inc.
6011 Fayetteville Road
Suite 104-B
Durham, NC 27713
Phone (919) 544-9323 • Fax (919) 597-0039
www.videodialog.com

About the Rural Community College Initiative

The Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI) is a national demonstration that helps community colleges in economically distressed regions move their people and communities toward prosperity. It supports aggressive and creative efforts to increase jobs, income, and access to education in rural communities.

The RCCI aims to strengthen rural community colleges, enhancing their capacity to provide economic leadership for their regions and serve as agents for community development. The Initiative is helping reduce the isolation of rural colleges by building a national network of diverse colleges with common challenges. It is also working to increase state and national support for rural community colleges.

The RCCI is a partnership among the 24 participating community colleges, MDC, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), and the Ford Foundation. Two divisions of the Ford Foundation — “Asset Building and Community Development” and “Education, Media, Arts and Culture” — have made a 10-year commitment to the program. The Initiative is managed by MDC. AACC is conducting documentation and assessment of RCCI, and Video Dialog Inc. is providing video documentation and related media services.

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In an effort to assist as many rural communities as possible with developing their economies and increasing access to education, we encourage you to share this and other RCCI publications with your colleagues. Permission is granted to disseminate this Toolkit or any of the video or printed pieces therein through reproduction or broadcast, provided that no-cost dissemination is intended and that the Rural Community College Initiative is cited and given credit for the work. Please be aware that duplicating VHS videotapes results in degraded quality; we suggest making copies only from your original set, or purchasing new copies at cost. If closed-circuit, cable, or broadcast distribution is desired, please contact VDI to acquire a broadcast-quality Beta-format tape.

For more information on the substance of this introduction or of the Toolkit, please contact Sarah Rubin of MDC at (919) 968-4531 or srubin@mdcinc.org. To order a Toolkit or additional copies of this introduction or any other Toolkit pieces, please contact Linda McKinnie of MDC at (919) 968-4531 or lmckinni@mdcinc.org.

An Introduction to

Strategies for Rural Development and Increased Access to Education

A Toolkit for Rural Community Colleges

Purpose

This toolkit is a resource to guide rural community colleges, in partnership with their communities, in creating effective strategies for economic development and educational access. For colleges participating in the RCCI, it offers both resources for strengthening the process of institutional and community development and new programmatic ideas. For other rural community colleges and rural development organizations searching for ways to build their economies and work with their communities, the toolkit’s resources and ideas will help meet those needs.

Toolkit Contents

This toolkit consists of a set of videos and print materials that: (1) provide an introduction to the RCCI and review the *processes* used in the RCCI and (2) profile examples of *effective strategies* for developing the economy and increasing access to education. Video 1 and its related publications provide the overview, and Videos 2 and 3 and their related publications are the process resources; these resources can be found in the “Introduction and Process Resources” container. Examples of effective strategies are profiled in videos 4 through 9 and in the *Effective Strategies Notebook*; these resources can be found in the “Effective Strategies” container.

Each container includes a full-color single sheet that describes its contents. In the “Introduction and Process Resources” container, you will also find publications to aid in your use of this toolkit. The first is this *Introduction*. The second is *Video Summaries and Questions for Discussion*, which for each video: suggests audiences and uses; provides a summary; provides a more detailed description; and provides questions for discussion to aid presenters and lecturers.

Introduction to the RCCI

The Rural Community College Initiative is a national demonstration that helps community colleges in economically distressed regions move their people and communities toward prosperity. The Initiative is committed to the belief that rural people and places matter, and it supports aggressive and creative efforts to increase jobs, income, and access to education in rural communities. The introductory resources explain how rural community colleges — whether or not they participate in the RCCI — are uniquely positioned to enhance economic and educational opportunities in their regions.

- ***Video 1 — RCCI Philosophy: Community Colleges as Catalysts for Rural Development.*** This video explains how strong, focused, rural community colleges can provide economic and education leadership for their regions and serve as agents for community development. The video is a concise overview of the RCCI and its twin objectives of building regional economies and increasing access to education. [14 minutes]
- ***Rural Community College Initiative: Transforming Rural Economies and the Prospects of Their People.*** This brochure provides a brief overview of the RCCI, maps the participating community colleges, and highlights examples of initiatives at RCCI sites.
- ***Expanding Economic and Educational Opportunity in Distressed Rural Areas: A Conceptual Framework for the Rural Community College Initiative.*** This publication presents the vision for RCCI, developed at the outset of the Initiative and revised to reflect experiences at the demonstration sites.
- ***AACC Project Briefs: Rural Access, Rural Economic Development, Rural Team Building, and Rural Development.*** These four reports analyze the efforts of the nine initial RCCI sites to expand educational access, catalyze rural economic development, provide leadership through a team representative of the community, and motivate institutional and community development.

Process Resources

The Rural Community College Initiative uses college/community teams to develop and initiate strategic plans for moving their regions forward. The college brings together leaders from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors who analyze the region, craft a vision for the future, and set in motion strategies to achieve their goals. The process of team-building and strategic planning used in RCCI is equally applicable to other rural colleges and community development initiatives.

Moving from Vision to Action — Strategic Planning

- ***Video 2 — Moving from Vision to Action.*** *Moving from Vision to Action* is the RCCI's strategic planning process, an effective method for community analysis, visioning, goal-setting, and strategy implementation. When used with the *Moving from Vision to Action* workbook, this instructional video guides community colleges and their partners through a step-by-step process to develop strategies to build their regional economies and increase access to education. [1 hour, 15 minutes]
- ***Moving from Vision to Action: A Planning Guide for the Rural Community College Initiative.*** This workbook details the step-by-step process outlined in the video and provides worksheets with examples for the planning process.

- ***Guiding Questions for Data Collection and Analysis.*** This guidebook explains the process of gathering and analyzing data on current community conditions, an integral part of the strategic planning process.

Building Effective Teams

- ***Videos 3A, 3B, 3C — Building Effective Teams.*** The RCCI operates through community-wide collaboration: The community college forms the hub of the team, and leaders from local communities, businesses, and schools all work together. This guide, *Building Effective Teams*, outlines techniques for identifying, recruiting, and developing a dynamic, motivated team. The video draws on the experiences of presidents, team leaders, and team members from several of the 24 RCCI colleges. This resource is divided onto three videotapes:
 - Video 3A: *Introduction, Why Teams?, and Who’s on the Team?* [20 minutes]
 - Video 3B: *What the Team Does and How the Team Works* [20 minutes]
 - Video 3C: *Challenges and Dealing with Them and Closing Comments* [20 minutes]

Profiles of Effective Strategies

The Rural Community College Initiative stresses economic development and access to education as concurrent goals because both are needed to have an impact on poverty in distressed rural regions. Instead of requiring colleges to use a standard set of strategies to address regional challenges, the Initiative motivates college/community teams to be innovative in developing local solutions. While strategies that have proved effective in one community may not be exactly replicable in another, those strategies may provide food for thought and bring about new ideas.

The toolkit’s *Effective Strategies* component is divided into six subjects — fundamental components of rural development:

- *Developing the Regional Economy;*
- *Supporting Small Business and Entrepreneurship;*
- *Developing the Workforce;*
- *Developing Telecommunications and Distance Learning;*
- *Improving Access to Education;* and
- *Harnessing the Power of Culture.*

A video and a chapter in the *Effective Strategies Notebook* are dedicated to each of the six subjects. The videos feature interviews both with people participating in the profiled programs and with nationally recognized experts in the subject areas. The notebook profiles feature the history of each program and include contact information. For a list of the programs profiled, see *Appendix A* at the end of this introduction.

- ***Video 4 and Notebook Section A — Developing the Regional Economy.*** Rural people deserve opportunities to participate in America’s prosperity, but their communities face tough challenges, from limited employment opportunities to rapid growth that threatens to overwhelm traditional culture. *Developing the Regional*

Economy illustrates how college/community initiatives can overcome those challenges by working regionally instead of just locally and by building upon an area's strengths. [Video — 30 minutes]

- **Video 5 and Notebook Section B — Supporting Small Business and Entrepreneurship.** Small and locally grown businesses are an important component of developing a region's economy, especially in rural areas where big industries are sparse or nonexistent. Community colleges can play a major role both in nurturing entrepreneurs and in assisting small business owners. *Supporting Small Business and Entrepreneurship* shows that, whether it's re-creating an entrepreneurship curriculum to reflect local culture and values or building a business loan fund from scratch, creativity is key. [Video — 29 minutes]
- **Video 6 and Notebook Section C — Developing the Workforce.** Most community colleges engage in some level of workforce education — a great challenge in rural areas where industry, job opportunities, and resources are scarce. *Developing the Workforce* shows how colleges — from those just expanding their missions to include workforce training to those with award-winning programs — are collaborating with businesses and support services to improve opportunities for people in their regions. [Video — 34 minutes]
- **Video 7 and Notebook Section D — Developing Telecommunications and Distance Learning.** Because rural community colleges often serve large geographic areas with sparse population, distance learning can be an effective tool. Community colleges can be catalysts to bring telecommunications to rural areas, serving their own students and the people, schools, and businesses of the region. The video provides an introduction to the opportunities and challenges facing rural community colleges in taking advantage of today's technology, while the notebook section offers a range of examples. [Video — 35 minutes]
- **Video 8 and Notebook Section E — Improving Access to Education.** For the RCCI, educational access is about more than an open-door policy for community colleges. *Improving Access to Education* discusses how aggressive outreach to and support for *everyone* needing education is key, as is developing partnerships with K-12 schools, universities, businesses, and support services. Innovative programs — from highly individualized instruction to family-based literacy — can help people overcome barriers to success. [Video — 30 minutes]
- **Video 9 and Notebook Section F — Harnessing the Power of Culture.** Culture affects how we learn, how we do business, and how we relate to each other, our communities, and the rest of the world. *Harnessing the Power of Culture* shows how culture can be a powerful resource for developing regional economies, increasing access to education, and stimulating interest and involvement in those efforts by a broad range of community members. [Video — 27 minutes]

Suggestions for Using the Toolkit

RCCI Colleges

Resources in the *Introduction to the RCCI* category can be used to orient or reorient any group or individual to the RCCI — new team members, new college administrators or trustees, faculty members, community groups, new partners such as K-12 schools or businesses, and the media.

The strategic planning resources found in the *Moving from Vision to Action* series can assist colleges in the continuous revision and updating of their strategic plans and programs. Economies, communities, and colleges are all dynamic, changing entities. Strategies and goals made six months ago may need adjusting, and ideas that weren't applicable then may be so now. The *Moving from Vision to Action* video and workbook can refresh a team's memory on using strategic planning to revise and update its plan.

RCCI teams can use the *Building Effective Teams* videos to get recharged, to assess their own performance, and to evaluate how well they are working together.

RCCI team members also might consider sharing both the strategic planning and team-building resources with others in their college and community. These materials can be relevant to departmental or campus-wide planning efforts, as well as community development efforts.

The profiles of effective strategies — on video and in the notebook — can give teams new and different ideas or spark more ideas applicable to their own situations. These resources can also be useful in helping to change a culture of thinking “That’s not how we do things” to “Now, there’s a good idea.”

Other Colleges and Rural Development Organizations

The toolkit as a whole is a useful primer on the interconnectedness of increasing access to education and developing the economy. It provides guidance for a community college or development organization not affiliated with the Initiative to engage in its own strategic planning and community revitalization process. The toolkit also provides a useful framework to help a college rethink its mission and the way it goes about serving its students and its community.

The strategic planning resources and team-building resources are highly instructive, step-by-step teaching tools that can be followed by any college. They are applicable to community-led initiatives as well.

The effective strategies resources provide both a framework of the *types* of initiatives important to rural development and a wealth of *profiles* of initiatives that other colleges and communities have implemented with successful results. While every strategy profiled may not fit a particular community's situation, the profiles can be informative springboards for individuals or groups to digest, process, and then use for brainstorming ideas that would fit their situation.

The strategies resources also provide another benefit for rural colleges in economically distressed areas: the opportunity to network with colleges all over the country working in similar

circumstances. Every effective strategy profile includes a contact name and phone number, and several include e-mail addresses and World Wide Web site addresses. These contacts have agreed to serve as resources and discuss their programs further and perhaps even to host visits from other colleges and community groups.

Conclusion

We hope that this toolkit will assist rural community colleges, in partnership with their communities, to create effective strategies for economic development and educational access — a process that will put their regions and their people on the road to economic renewal.

The RCCI challenges colleges to think broadly about their potential as catalysts for regional development. It does not impose a particular set of programs or strategies to solve regional problems; rather, it fosters a climate of innovation that will spark local solutions. Our hope is that these resources and this sample of programs will be useful in the planning process and as models for replication and that they will also generate new thinking and lead to new and better programs that can be shared. Please share with us your successes, and we will distribute them in upcoming revisions.

MDC thanks the institutions that provided information on the programs and systems described in the toolkit and for agreeing to respond to toolkit users' requests for additional information.

Appendix A

Profiles of Effective Strategies

Subject	Program	On Video	In Workbook
<i>Developing the Regional Economy</i>			
	HandMade in America	X	X
	Northern Initiatives	X	X
	Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACEnet)		X
	Manufacturing Technology Center of Southwest Virginia		X
	Metalworking Connection		X
	The Wood Center		X
<i>Supporting Small Business and Entrepreneurship</i>			
	Business and Industry Technical Assistance Center (BITAC), Hazard Community College	X	X
	Professional Crafts Program/REAL Enterprises, Haywood Community College	X	X
	Tribal Business Assistance Center and American Indian Entrepreneurship Curriculum, Salish Kootenai College	X	X
	The Lakota Fund		X
	Microenterprise Loan Program, Southeastern Community College (NC)		X
	Pine Mountain Community Development Corporation, Southeast Community College (KY)		X
	Small Business Development Center, Fort Belknap College		X
<i>Developing the Workforce</i>			
	Business and Industry Training, Southwest Texas Junior College	X	X
	JobLink Career Center, Southeastern Community College (NC)	X	X
	Aspire Program, Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College		X
	Baldor Electric Workforce Training Program, East Mississippi Community College		X
	CIBA/Alabama Southern Chemical Process Technology Partnership, Alabama Southern Community College		X
	Gearing Up		X
	Human Resources Development (HRD), NC Department of Community Colleges		X
	HRD-Plus, Wilkes Community College		X
	Life Employment Development Department, Linn-Benton Community College		X
	New Options for Women, Blue Ridge Community College		X
	One-Stop Career Center, Northeast Mississippi Community College		X

<i>Developing Telecommunications and Distance Learning</i>			
	Southwest Texas' Distance Learning Network, Southwest Texas Junior College	X	X
	Regional High Technology Development Center/HIT-IT, Haywood Community College	X	X
	Center for Rural Development		X
	Community Link, Southwestern Community College (NC)		X
	Garrett Rural Information Cooperative, Garrett Community College		X
	Lincoln Trail Televillage		X
<i>Improving Access to Education</i>			
	Center for Family and Community Development, Fort Peck Community College	X	X
	Developmental Studies Program, Alabama Southern Community College	X	X
	Community College-Secondary School Partnership, Tillamook Bay Community College		X
	Department of Family Resources, Linn-Benton Community College		X
	National Writing Project		X
	New Century Scholars Program, Southwestern Community College (NC)		X
	Student Health Clinic and Wellness Center, Prestonsburg Community College		X
<i>Harnessing the Power of Culture</i>			
	Hill Country Heritage, Rural Action and Hocking College	X	X
	The Puente Project, College of the Sequoias	X	X
	Alaska Village Initiatives		X
	Cornerstones Community Partnerships		X
	Ganados Del Valle		X
	Master of Arts in Lakota Leadership, Oglala Lakota College		X
	Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians		X
	Penn Center		X

Thoughts on Rural Development

During RCCI's first three years of implementation, members of community college teams asked many questions about economic development — what it meant in their particular situation, how to think about opportunities for economic development. Access to education was the “business” of their colleges (and most RCCI colleges have broadened and deepened their commitment to access), but economic development was sometimes new territory. They knew that without creating more opportunities for people to earn a livelihood, the college would simply educate people to leave the region.

RCCI colleges are located in some of the most economically distressed regions of the country. Some in the past had a natural resource-based economy dominated by agriculture, timber, or the boom-bust cycles of mining, oil, or gas. These industries remain important, but they provide fewer and fewer jobs. Other rural areas — especially in the South — built their mid-20th-century economies on the recruitment of textile, apparel, and other low-wage, low-skill manufacturing industries. With industrial modernization and foreign competition, those jobs are disappearing rapidly. In some communities, including many Indian reservations, there have never been private sector jobs, and government is the main employer.

In the American economy, economic development is by nature a private sector activity; most jobs, income, and wealth are created by businesses. But there are important roles for public agencies and private, nonprofit organizations — including community colleges — in planning for and coordinating economic development, building the foundation for economic development, and ensuring that rising prosperity benefits lower-income, lower-wealth residents.

The public and nonprofit sectors can help build a solid foundation for rural prosperity today and in the future by managing six “building blocks.” Together, these six building blocks form the foundation for healthy communities and strong rural economies, and the six blocks are interdependent. For instance, strong businesses provide the tax base to support strong schools and community services, which in turn create the foundation for a stronger economy.

Collectively, the pieces of this toolkit offer ideas for communities in developing all six building blocks of rural development:

- ***Business development*** — provide programs and services to enhance the productivity and competitiveness of existing businesses and to help new businesses start up. Business development is addressed by the videos and notebook chapters on *Developing the Regional Economy*, *Supporting Small Business and Entrepreneurship*, and *Harnessing the Power of Culture*.
- ***Workforce development*** — support education and training to ensure a top-notch workforce. Workforce development is addressed in *Developing the Workforce*, *Improving Access to Education*, and *Harnessing the Power of Culture*.

- ***Physical infrastructure*** — build and maintain traditional infrastructure (roads and bridges, water and sewer); also meet emerging needs such as telecommunications, air travel, and solid waste disposal. Aspects of physical infrastructure development are addressed in *Developing Telecommunications and Distance Learning*.
- ***Social infrastructure*** — ensure adequate housing, health care, child care, social services, and income support. Aspects of social infrastructure development are addressed in *Developing the Workforce* and *Improving Access to Education*.
- ***Heritage preservation*** — protect the unique character of rural communities including the natural, cultural, historic, and built environments. Heritage preservation examples are included in *Developing the Regional Economy*, *Supporting Small Business and Entrepreneurship*, and *Harnessing the Power of Culture*.
- ***Civic infrastructure*** — ensure open, competent, and accessible government; deepen the leadership pool; and promote participation in civic affairs by all sectors of the population. Building civic infrastructure is what RCCI is all about. All of the process resources address aspects of this building block.

Additional Publications and Videos

Here are some of the print and video materials that have grown from the RCCI experience. Many are available free of charge by downloading from the Web site. Others may be purchased for nominal fees to cover production and shipping and handling. To order, please contact MDC at (919) 968-4531. Unless otherwise stated, publications said to be available online can be found at the RCCI web site, www.mdcinc.org/rcci.html. All online publications are available for download free of charge.

RCCI Rooster – The RCCI Newsletter

The *RCCI Rooster* is a periodic newsletter covering the RCCI initiative and reporting on its development and results. Copies may be viewed, printed, or downloaded in PDF format from this Web site. To subscribe, send your name and mailing address to *RCCI Rooster* Editor Sam Scott at sscott@mdcinc.org or call him at (919) 968-4531.

Print/Video Packages

Stimulating Rural Economies: An Innovative Case Competition Model. A print and video package on an economic development Case Competition held at Southwest Texas Junior College, Uvalde, TX, on March 28, 1998. This was the first-ever Case Competition hosted by a community college and the first-ever on developing a regional economy. \$25

Moving Mountains Economic Summit. A teleconference on community and regional development and revitalization with case studies presented on Tupelo, MS; the Upper Peninsula of Michigan; and Chattanooga, TN. The summit was sponsored by Mountain Empire Community College, Big Stone Gap, VA, on November 19, 1999. Speakers included Vaughn Grisham, Director of the McLean Institute for Community Development, and Professor of Sociology at the University of Mississippi; Richard Anderson, President of I-Point, Marquette, MI; Josh Gage, Director of Sustainable Community Initiatives, Chattanooga State Technical Community College; and Jim Catanzaro, President of Chattanooga State Technical Community College. \$25

An Introduction to Economic Development in Indian Country. A seminar on tribal economies and nation building as tools for supporting economic development. Held in Albuquerque, NM, September 1999. Presenters included Perry Horse, MDC, Inc.; Gerald Sherman of Four Times Foundation; Sherry Salway Black of First Nations Development Institute; and Stephen Cornell of the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development.

Print Publications

Expanding Economic and Educational Opportunity in Distressed Rural Areas: A Conceptual Framework for the Rural Community College Initiative.

Vision and experiences of the Rural Community College Initiative, a national program to help community colleges in distressed areas build a community partnership to develop and implement

effective strategies for economic development and educational access. Funded by the Ford Foundation. This paper is available online or in print. Revised May 1998. Free

Statement on Rural Community Colleges by MDC Inc. for the New Expeditions Commission. Discusses funding issues, leadership, and rural colleges' role in economic and community development. This paper is only available online. December 1998.

Rural Community Colleges: Catalysts for Economic Renewal. Provides a rationale and recommendations to state policymakers for strengthening rural community colleges and building their capacity as catalysts for economic and community development. Recommends policy options to ensure the financial viability of rural colleges, enable them to use telecommunications, and encourage economies of scale through regional collaboration. Discusses how states can use rural colleges for workforce training, technology transfer, small business development, and community leadership development. Published by Education Commission of the States. The paper is available on the ECS Center for Community College Policy website, http://www.communitycollegepolicy.org/html/policy_issues.htm. September 1998.

Texas Community Colleges: Creating Rural Prosperity. A journalistic discussion of the challenges rural community colleges face in building their economy, and how states can help. Highlights the experience of Southwest Texas Junior College. This paper is only available online. February 1997.

Rural Community Colleges and Federal Policy. This paper was circulated widely to federal policymakers and community college leaders in 1996. It discusses the strengths of rural and tribal colleges in serving their communities and providing access to education and raises several issues for federal policy, including student aid, funding for outreach and institutional capacity-building, and support for rural development. This paper is only available online. November 1996.

AACC Project Briefs

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) has documented the experiences of the RCCI's nine initial colleges to glean lessons for the Initiative's participants and for other community colleges and rural development organizations. Each Project Brief documents the approaches used by the nine initial colleges, the lessons learned, and the challenges to be addressed. Available from the AACC, One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 410, Washington, DC 20036-1176, (202) 728-0200, or <http://www.aacc.nche.edu>.

I — Access: Removing Barriers to Participation, AACC-PB-98-1. One of the RCCI's two primary goals is to increase access to education. This philosophy goes beyond an open-door policy to proactive outreach to those community members who may be reticent about or completely unfamiliar with higher education.

II — Economic Development, AACC-PB-98-2. The RCCI's second primary goal is to foster regional economic development. The participating colleges are located in distressed rural areas with multiple barriers to economic opportunity, and their development efforts extend beyond traditional workforce training or job creation activities.

III — Building Teams for Institutional and Community Change, AACC-PB-99-1. The RCCI process of increasing access to education and developing regional economies is centered on collaborative leadership. To bring about true institutional and community change, a broad-based team of college and community members — representing a diversity of experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives — is developed through a specific team-building process and leads each college's efforts.

IV — Capacity for Leading Institutional and Community Change, AACC-PB-99-3. To achieve the RCCI's goals of increasing access to education and developing the regional economy requires significant capacity for leading change. Institutional culture, leadership style, and organizational infrastructure are key factors in such a change effort.

Videos

Tips and Insights for Fund-Raising from Private Philanthropy. A teleconference designed for community colleges and their community partners. Topics include trends in philanthropic grant-making; the culture of the foundation world — how foundation staff and board members think and make decisions; capacities foundations look for in potential grantees; and ways to overcome fund-raising challenges faced by small, rural, and tribal institutions. Presenters include David L. Dodson, President, MDC, Inc.; Mark Constantine, Senior Consultant to MDC, Inc.; Salin G. Geevarghese, Director of Grant-Making for the BellSouth Foundation; and Donna Chaves, Executive Director of Native Americans in Philanthropy. September 1999.

Linking Human Development and Economic Development. An overview of a regional development project of the Northern Campus of the University of Namibia in Oshakati, Namibia. (Note: Comes in a condensed four-minute version and a 13-minute version.) October 1999.