

**A GUIDE
FOR THE
DEVELOPMENT
AND
ADVOCACY OF
RURAL HEALTH POLICY**



NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

A Guide to the
Development and Advocacy
Of
Rural Health Policy

As Approved By NRHA

Rural Health Congress
January 23, 2011

And
Government Affairs Committee
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NRHA MISSION

To improve the health and well being of rural Americans and their communities through leadership in advocacy, communications, education and research.

WHAT IS POLICY VERSUS ADVOCACY

What is policy? This question has frequented any number of discussions by NRHA members over the years. The confusion seems to stem from a lack of clear understanding of the responsibilities of the Rural Health Congress, Association committees, constituency groups, councils, staff and other entities within the general membership. In an effort to reduce the confusion, this document attempts to distinguish between policy setting and advocacy.

Policy by definition is:

- A statement of principle and/or value that mandates or constrains the actions used in achieving organizational goals

In the context of the NRHA, a policy is the established thought, belief or principle of the Association regarding an issue related to rural health in the United States. Adopted policies become the standard by which the Association develops and assesses its advocacy agenda on issues that will improve the health of rural Americans. Since the NRHA represents a broad range of interests through its membership, policies adopted by it will be broad and potentially far-reaching. Policies will encompass more than “traditional healthcare” provided by physicians, hospitals, clinics, etc. NRHA policy may cover food, economic development, education, farm aid and many other issues that deal with the well-being of rural Americans – not simply their health status or the financial health of their healthcare providers. Using policies adopted by the Association, NRHA staff and members advocate for improvement in the total health of rural Americans.

Consequently it is imperative that policy positions of the Association represent the broad range of its membership. The more specific these positions, the more focused NRHA staff and members can be in their advocacy and political interventions. The broader these positions, the more flexibility NRHA staff and members have, but flexibility can limit how involved staff can be in pushing a specific advocacy position forward. Therefore carefully balanced policies must be developed by the Association through the role of its elected representatives. This is the role and responsibility of the Rural Health Congress.

Members of the Congress must discern the difference between policy-making, advocacy and implementation.

Advocacy is defined, in part, as the act of pleading for, supporting, or recommending. The content and direction of advocacy by the Association must be consistent with the policy positions adopted by the Rural Health Congress. Advocacy, however, is not the responsibility of the Congress. Advocacy is carried out by other groups within and outside the Association. Advocacy is one of the primary objectives of the NRHA. Advocacy can take the form of either actively pressing an issue or consciously choosing to take no action when an opportunity presents itself.

From the adopted policies, a specific action agenda will be developed to assist with the advocacy by the Association and its members and, ultimately, the implementation of the policy by others. The action steps will be developed by the NRHA staff and Government Affairs Committee to guide the Association staff and Association membership in efforts with the United States Congress and Federal regulatory agencies. The actions steps will also guide the grass-roots efforts of state associations, offices of rural health and all association members.

NRHA, the organization and its individual members, are the voice of rural health. Coordination and focus of this voice is accomplished through the Government Affairs Committee. Through its leadership, the agreed-upon action steps are disseminated to the grass roots members, NRHA staff represents the Association to the legislative and regulatory bodies, and the policies that are approved become known. It is through these efforts that the policies become part of legislation (or not) and part of the regulatory framework (or not) of the country.

Although implementation is not the responsibility of the Association, the Association actively monitors the implementation of laws and regulations regarding rural health issues.

THE RURAL HEALTH CONGRESS

The Rural Health Congress is established by the By-Laws of the National Rural Health Association (NRHA) that govern its organization, functions and operations. The By-Laws state, “the Rural Health Congress shall determine the Association’s positions regarding public policy.”

As stated in the By-Laws the purposes of the NRHA are:

- to identify and represent the health and health care needs and views of rural America;
- to increase understanding of the distinctive features of health and health care delivery in small towns and rural areas;
- to provide a multi-sector forum for the exchange and distribution of ideas, information, research, and methods relative to the improvement of rural health;
- to build coalitions for addressing rural concerns;
- to develop and promote solutions to rural health care problems; and
- to otherwise represent the interests of the membership of the Association

The Rural Health Congress is charged with developing and approving public policy positions that will assist the Association in accomplishing these purposes.

The Congress is formed from the elected representatives of the various Constituency Groups and Councils along with the Officers, the five most recent Past Presidents of the NRHA, and the elected Chair and vice Chair of the Congress. By convening with this representation, the Congress comes together to create and approve the public policies related to rural health in America. This policy is then used by the Government Affairs Committee, staff and Association members to advance rural health for all persons. This is a monumental and critical role that should not be taken lightly by the members of the Congress.

The By-Laws state, in part, relative to the Congress that

- “The Rural Health Congress shall function according to procedures and structures as shall from time to time be recommended by its members and approved by the Board of Trustees.”
- “Any Association member may bring a position for consideration of the Rural Health Congress by submitting it to his or her primary constituency group or council for consideration.”
- “Positions on public policy approved by the Rural Health Congress are official Association positions unless overturned by the Board of Trustees by a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote.”

The Congress will determine a set of policy positions which, upon ratification, are adopted as the Association’s policy positions on a broad spectrum of rural health issues. Policies are determined through a process that includes consideration of policy proposals developed through discussion of issues, submission of policy papers and briefs that outline the issues, and, finally, adoption of the policies as the official positions of the Association.

This document provides the framework for the development, distribution and retention of the policy positions as well as the functioning of the Congress and Government Affairs Committee.

OVERVIEW OF NRHA POLICY DETERMINATION PROCESS

Since decisions of the Congress represent the official policy positions of the NRHA, the deliberation process is intended to present an opportunity for full, open and thorough discussion of any and all possible considerations relative to the issue being considered. The process by design allows as much time and deliberation as necessary to successfully conclude with a decision. The process is also designed to present an open and “safe” forum for any NRHA member to actively and honestly present perspectives and opinions in order that the discussion is thorough and complete.

The function of the Congress is to debate, discuss and approve public policy positions. These positions are documented in the approved policy papers and policy briefs. *The Congress function is not simply to “approve papers and briefs”.*

Given the varied membership of the NRHA, it is possible that some individual members may disagree with a specific finding, paper, position, or recommendation. But since the process is designed to allow each member or perspective to be fully represented and participate, the expectation is that all members will acknowledge the final decision. Upon conclusion of the deliberative process and decision by the Congress, members of the Congress and the Association should support the position of the Association to all others outside the Association.

Generally the Congress considers potential policy positions developed in the form of policy papers or policy briefs. These are usually developed or processed through a constituency group or council and presented to the Congress. However potential positions may develop from broad-based discussions of the Congress, suggestions of NRHA staff, Government Affairs Committee, Board of Trustees or various originating sources.

Any NRHA member may bring a potential policy position before the Congress. However, since the NRHA is organized around constituency groups (CG) and councils, Association members must coordinate potential positions through the CG or council most applicable to the position. When a CG or council receives a proposal for a policy position from an NRHA member, it must consider the proposal and report its recommendations to the Congress. There may be situations or positions that may involve several constituency groups or councils. In these situations the Chair of the Congress or the Board of Trustees may organize and appoint a multi-faceted group to develop and present the proposed position. If an Association member is unable to obtain consideration by a constituency group or council of a proposed position, the member should contact the Chair of the Congress or NRHA staff for direction.

Without regard to the originating source, the potential position must come through a process to be considered by the Congress at a regularly scheduled meeting.

There may be occasions when a potential position must be considered quickly because a need arises from pending legislative or regulatory initiatives or other reason. These situations may be handled by the Rapid Response Team.

An in-depth description of the functionality of the Congress and more specific aspects of the development and retention process are presented elsewhere in this document.

POLICY PAPERS

Policy papers present an in-depth assessment of an issue, with background information, current status, effects, and proposed interventions. Policy papers are used to describe a new issue or discuss a longer-term vision for rural health care and the Association's role in advocacy on that issue. In addition, Policy Papers will include general or specific recommendations for action by the Association relative to the position.

Policy papers are generally numerous pages in length, depending upon the depth of the development of the issue and subsequent action sections. The document when considered in its entirety must fully explain the issue, the relevance to rural health, why the NRHA must take position and what actions are necessary to advocate for the cause. The particular issue is examined in detail, including the background of the issue, its parameters, and data and research that explains the development of the issue and its effects. The paper also presents the development of a proposal for intervention and change as well as specific recommendations.

There is not a specific format of a policy paper. The format may be determined by the author(s), subsequent to additional feedback from presentation to the Congress. An important consideration in the format and development of a paper is to consider how the paper will be used once adopted. The Government Affairs Committee and NRHA staff must have the background and specificity to be able to use the paper to advocate for the recommended policy. The paper will be available to national and state government leaders and legislators, professional associations and advocacy groups, and the public. Readers should be able to readily understand both the issue and the policy recommendations.

There are certain elements that should be included in a policy paper.

- Statement of the Issue
- Analysis of current relevant national and/or state policy
- Analysis of current NRHA policy positions relevant to the issue
- Analysis of relevant data that supports the position
- Policy recommendations, generally in the form of suggested actions

Each element is critical to the development of the issue in a logical and comprehensive manner; each element is also critical to the presentation of the case to be made for a position to be adopted and taken by the Association. Each of these elements should be developed in sufficient detail to allow an individual unfamiliar with the issue to fully comprehend and understand the issue and recommendations.

Elements should also include citations in text for data, other works, studies, papers, and a list of references at the end as available and as appropriate. All citations and references to any work, source of data, or information should be done in AMA style.

POLICY BRIEFS

In contrast to the policy papers, the policy brief provides a short new or updated synopsis of a position. The issue may be one for which the Association may have previously established a position or it may be a new issue or position that does not require an extensive policy paper. It may also be an issue on which there already exists general agreement or understanding but the Association needs to recommend a new, different or updated position.

The policy brief is presented, along with information on the Association's previously adopted position or new information, for background reference to the full Congress for review. Policy briefs are generally limited to two pages in length and very specific to an issue or policy. Assuming the topic is well known or from previously established position, extensive background is not required. If upon consideration of the proposed policy brief, the Congress believes a more complete analysis is required, the potential position may be referred back to the constituency group or council for the development of a policy paper.

A policy brief should include references to existing NRHA policy positions or papers and contain the three sections described below.

- I. Introduction - A concise overview of the policy issue (legislative or regulatory) as well as background relating why this is important to rural health should be provided. Information should include background on any relevant legislation, regulation or policy, how it has been implemented, initial successes and/or problems that have arisen as a result or failures that need to be addressed.
- II. Data - Summarize relevant data that supports the need for a change in policy or position by using charts, graphs, and statistical information when possible. Data should be concise and include only that necessary to support the position and convey the need for change to the Congress and the users of the position following approval.
- III. Policy Recommendations and Justification - Policy recommendations should be extremely precise and short. The recommendation should generally be in the form of an action step. Explain why each of the policy recommendations is necessary to improve current policy or initiate new policy.

FUNCTIONING OF THE CONGRESS

The following constitutes the guidelines for the operation of the Congress activities.

Organization and Membership of the Congress:

The Congress is organized according to the By-Laws of the NRHA. Membership is as follows:

- Elected Chair and representatives of each constituency group and council, except as substitution of a council chair as allowed by the By-Laws
- Chair of the Congress
- Vice-Chair of the Congress (who also serves as the Chair of the Government Affairs Committee)
- Members of the Board of Trustees
- Five (5) most recent past presidents of NRHA (not including the Immediate Past President who is a member of the Board of Trustees).

The term of each member of the Rural Health Congress is set according to the By-Laws. Each member of the Congress has one vote in decisions of the Congress. Voting by proxy is not allowed.

The Chair of the Congress is elected from the Congress membership every two years at the fall meeting of the Congress. The Vice-Chair is also elected from the membership of the Congress, but it is the policy of the Congress that the individual elected also be a member of the Government Affairs Committee (GAC). The Vice-Chair is elected for a two-year term at the Government Affairs Committee meeting held in conjunction with the Policy Institute. Following the Vice-Chair election by the GAC, the election must be confirmed by the Rural Health Congress. The two-year term of the Vice-Chair runs concurrently with the term of the United States Congress.

The Congress Chair conducts the meetings. In the Chair's absence, the Vice-Chair conducts the meetings.

If at any time a Congress member believes he or she is unable to continue serving on the Congress, he or she may submit a written resignation letter to their respective constituency group or council Chair, the Chair of the Congress and NRHA staff. Replacement will be handled according to the By-Laws.

Ad hoc or special committees can be appointed by the Congress Chair. Although any NRHA member may be appointed to a committee and have voting privileges in the committee's deliberations, committee members who are not Congress members shall not have voting privileges in matters coming before the Congress. The Congress Chair or a committee may invite non-NRHA members to participate in committee deliberations to provide needed expertise; they will have no vote in either the committee or the Congress.

Meetings:

According to the By-Laws, the Congress is required to have three (3) face-to-face meetings during the year. They are specified as follows:

- In conjunction with the Policy Institute
- In conjunction with the Annual Conference
- In the fall on a date set by the Congress

In addition to the required face-to-face meetings, the Congress may meet at any other time during the year at the call of the Chair of the Congress. These meetings may be conducted by conference call or other electronic means (otherwise referred to as “electronic meeting”) that allows full participation by all Congress members. Electronic meetings will carry the same weight as face-to-face meetings.

At least two (2) electronic meetings will be held between the face-to-face meetings, unless determined otherwise by the Congress. Dates will be determined by the Chair, in coordination with NRHA staff.

Normally at least 30 days notice will be given for all meetings. However, in the event a called meeting is required to deliberate an immediate need, a notice of an electronic meeting may be made at least 15 days in advance.

Conduct of the meetings will be according to Robert’s Rules of Order. A quorum (a majority of the current Congress members) shall be required in order to take a vote on a proposed official policy position of the NRHA. The vote of the majority of Congress members in attendance at a given meeting (including electronic meetings) at which a quorum exists shall constitute official action by the Congress. Voting may be by email or other electronic means during electronic meetings. Electronic voting will be conducted in a manner determined by the Chair of the Congress in coordination with NRHA staff.

The Congress Chair, in coordination with NRHA staff, will establish the agenda for each meeting. Congress members will be provided an opportunity to modify the agenda.

NRHA staff will maintain written minutes of each meeting. The minutes will be provided to Congress members prior to the next subsequent meeting during which the minutes will be approved by the Congress. Suggested changes to the draft minutes and subsequent approval may be by electronic means.

All Congress meetings are open to any NRHA member. However, attendance by non-Congress members at electronic meetings may be limited in number.

Attendance:

Attendance by roll call, or other means, will be taken at each meeting. Attendance records will be maintained by the Chair of the Congress with the assistance of NRHA staff.

Since the value of the Congress is enhanced by active participation by the wide range of experience and knowledge of the members, attendance at Congress meetings is expected of all elected Congress members. Attendance requirements, stipulated in the By-Laws, are summarized below along with implementation processes.

- A member may be granted an excused absence by contacting their constituency group or council Chair before the meeting or in extenuating circumstances as soon as possible thereafter. The constituency group or council Chair shall notify the Congress Chair or the NRHA staff regarding the status of the absence: excused or unexcused.
- After a member misses one meeting unexcused, the constituency group or council Chair shall contact the member to determine the reason(s) for missing the meeting and shall determine if the member is able to fulfill his or her elected role. The constituency group or council Chair shall

inform the member that if he or she wishes to remain on the Congress and a second meeting is missed unexcused during his or her current term, the constituency group or council Chair has the obligation to appoint a replacement. If the Congress member feels he or she is unable to fulfill the attendance obligation, the constituency group or council Chair should be notified in writing.

- After a member misses a second meeting unexcused or notifies the constituency group or council Chair of inability to continue as a Congress member, the constituency group or council Chair shall appoint a person to replace that Congress member. That appointee shall serve for the remainder of the position's current term, at which time a new Congress member shall be elected to fill the position. If the constituency group or council Chair fails to appoint a replacement prior to the next meeting of the Congress, the Congress Chair, after consulting with the constituency group or council Chair and Executive Committee, may appoint a replacement member.

A Congress member or constituency group or council Chair may verify the standing of attendance by contacting the Congress Chair or NRHA staff.

DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL OF POLICY POSITIONS

A potential policy for consideration may come to the Congress in a number of ways. Proposals may come from:

- A constituency group or council
- The NRHA Board of Trustees
- The Government Affairs Committee
- An individual NRHA member
- A committee authorized by the Congress
- Discussion at a Congress meeting.

Although any NRHA member may propose a potential policy for consideration, each such potential policy should originate with or be reviewed by a constituency group or council. If an individual member is unable to garner the support of a constituency group or council, the member may contact the Congress Chair or NRHA staff for assistance. The Congress Chair may designate potential policies to a constituency group or council for development. In addition, the Congress Chair may appoint ad hoc committees to develop potential policies that impact multiple constituency groups or councils. Congress members who are not constituency group or council representatives (NRHA officers and past presidents) may also propose potential policies.

Except for proposals originating from Congress discussions, a proposal for a potential policy should be submitted in writing to the Congress Chair and NRHA staff. The proposal should include a brief outline including at least:

- the need for the policy,
- the applicability to rural health,
- why no existing NRHA policy covers the topic,
- the constituency group or council responsible for development or review of the policy,
- whether it will be developed as a policy paper or a policy brief,
- the member who will lead the development and presentation,
- other members who will assist in the development,
- evidence that a constituency group or council chair consents and accepts responsibility for the development of the policy or that the CG or council has agreed to review policy as it is developed and provide its recommendations to the Congress,
- and the timing of the development.

Each potential policy in development must be assigned to a constituency group chair, council chair, NRHA officer, past president, Congress committee chair, or their respective designee. This person otherwise known as the “lead” for the policy will be responsible for coordinating and shepherding the potential policy through the development and approval process, including assurance that the content meets the standards set by the Congress. The responsibility of the lead person includes monitoring the progress of the development of the paper or brief, coordination with the Congress Chair and NRHA staff, dissemination of the information and drafts of the paper or brief to members of the working group and any others that may have input in the drafting process.

Following submission of a potential policy proposal, the Congress Chair, in coordination with the NRHA staff, lead person and others as may be appropriate will determine the estimated schedule for presentation to the Congress, validate the proposal as a policy paper or policy brief, and discuss other attributes of the development process with the lead person.

The Congress Chair, in coordination with NRHA staff, will maintain a master listing of all potential policies under consideration. The Congress Chair, in coordination with NRHA staff and the lead person, will be in charge of scheduling potential policies for consideration. The master listing will be provided to any Congress member upon request and may be posted on the NRHA web site as determined appropriate by the Congress and NRHA staff.

One or more members of the Congress or other members of the Association will develop each potential policy paper or policy brief. The lead person will be responsible for coordinating the efforts of the individuals working on the paper and be responsible for organizing the presentation to the Congress at a scheduled meeting. It is a task that requires serious commitment and effort – this effort develops rural health policy for the United States. It is the lead person’s responsibility to facilitate work with others, address the steps of the process and complete all tasks in a timely manner.

Upon completion of the development of a policy paper or policy brief, the paper or brief must be provided in draft form (electronically in Word) to the Congress Chair and NRHA staff. The Congress Chair and NRHA staff will determine if the content and format are consistent with the proposal and approve the paper or brief for presentation to the Congress. Upon approval, the paper or brief will be placed on the agenda for the next Congress meeting. If in the opinion of the Congress Chair or NRHA staff the paper or brief does not meet the standards set forth, the paper or brief may be returned to the lead person for further development before being placed on the Congress agenda.

In an effort to move potential policies more quickly through the process, papers or briefs may be presented at an electronic meeting. Any constituency Chair, council Chair, Congress Chair, Congress Vice-Chair, officer or past president may request that a specific paper or brief be presented and considered at a face-to-face meeting rather than at an electronic meeting. Such a request must be made in writing to the Congress Chair or NRHA staff. The final decision will be at the discretion of the Congress Chair.

In order to facilitate the distribution and presentation of potential positions, NRHA staff will enable the electronic distribution and approval of draft papers and briefs. The distribution will include at least:

- Distribution of draft (already in prescribed format and content as described for policy paper or policy brief) to an electronic bulletin board. At posting, all Congress members are notified of its posting. Drafts should be formatted with font size no smaller than 12 point. The document must be submitted in electronic form (Word) to the Congress Chair and NRHA staff
- Feed-back, corrections or other comments should be made electronically to the author and available to all Congress members. *This evaluation and feedback by Congress members to the author and lead is an essential part of a Congress member’s responsibility.*
- Within 30 days (initial period) after posting, members must have comments & suggested changes to the paper posted.

Discussion and consideration may be made at either a face-to-face meeting or electronic meeting as described below, or at a combination thereof.

Electronic meeting:

Unless approved otherwise by the Congress with regard to a specific paper or brief, the schedule for consideration of draft papers or briefs at electronic meetings will include a two-step process for approval:

- After the initial 30-day period (described above), the Congress Chair schedules the paper for the “first reading” on the electronic meeting. During this meeting the Congress will provide feedback through discussion to the author.
- Following the first reading, the author must “re-post” the paper within 30 days of the electronic meeting with recommended changes – this posting should constitute the final paper or brief.
- At least 30 days (second period) following the “re-posting” the final vote on the paper will be taken using electronic voting or a roll call voice vote during an electronic meeting. Approval of the paper by electronic voting (majority of Congress members present at the meeting voting in the affirmative constitutes approval – a Congress quorum is required for the vote to be valid).
- If the paper or brief is accepted, the paper becomes NRHA policy, subject to action by the Board of Trustees. If the paper fails approval, the Congress Chair, in coordination with the respective CG or council Chair, lead person, NRHA staff or others as appropriate, will determine the necessity of presentation at the next meeting or other course of action that may be prudent on a case-by-case basis.

Voting during or resulting from electronic meetings may be by email or other electronic means. Electronic voting will be conducted in a manner determined by the Chair of the Congress in coordination with NRHA staff.

Face-to-Face meeting:

Consideration of draft papers or briefs at face-to-face meetings will follow a similar track as the electronic meeting process. However since feedback and discussion can be more effective in these meetings, the Congress may approve the paper or brief on the first reading. If approval is not provided, the author must make the suggested changes and re-post according to the electronic meeting guidelines. The paper or brief may then move into the electronic meeting schedule, at the discretion of the Congress Chair in coordination with the author, lead person and NRHA staff. In order to be considered at a face-to-face meeting, the paper or brief must have been available through the electronic posting at least 30 days prior to the meeting.

Papers or briefs are expected to be completed (approved) within six (6) months of original posting.

Presentation to Congress

Each paper or brief must be presented to the Congress by the author or lead person at a Congress meeting. The presentation to the Congress may seem like a daunting experience but, in reality, it is only verbalizing what will be in the paper as it has been developed. It is talking through the proposed policy

and proposed actions. The presentation is also designed to solicit feedback from the varied perspectives represented by the diverse membership of the association through their elected representatives. It is intended to be a constructive process so that the final paper will, in fact, reflect a policy or position that all members of the association can support.

The presentation may involve a number of steps:

- Explanation of the purpose of the paper,
- Identification of the need,
- Explanation of the process of the development of the paper (including a report of review by the relevant CG or council, if the paper was not developed by that group),
- Description of the findings, including facts, data, etc.
- Relationship, if any, to existing NRHA policies,
- Explanation of the conclusions drawn as a result of the paper, and
- Description of the proposed recommendations and actions.

Following the presentation and discussion the Congress may decide upon a number of possible actions. The Congress may

- accept the paper as presented and adopt it by vote, or
- suggest areas for further research, detail, inclusion, or perspective, or
- suggest additional or alternative recommendations or proposals, or
- suggest additional considerations or perspectives to be considered by the author(s), or
- recommend specific items or actions in order for the paper to be accepted.

RAPID RESPONSE TEAM

There are situations which call for a rapid decision on policy positions related to proposed legislation, regulation, or other quickly developing situations. In these cases, the Association must make a determination quickly and respond. For situations like these, the Association has established a Rapid Response Team (RRT).

Members of the RRT include the Officers of the Association, the Chair of the Rural Health Congress, the Chair of the Government Affairs Committee and Chairs of any Constituency Groups or Councils for which the issue at hand would be applicable or appropriate. The RRT may also include any other member of the Congress or Association as may be helpful to obtain the most complete and representative input into the decision at hand. The RRT is coordinated by the Congress Chair and NRHA staff with consultation conducted in a manner appropriate under the circumstances.

Actions and positions of the RRT shall be documented in such a way that they may convey the nature of the issue, position and action taken. Actions and positions of the RRT shall be presented at the next subsequent meeting of the Board of Trustees and Congress. If the action taken by the RRT constitutes establishment of a new Association policy, it must be reviewed in the manner described in the Bylaws for review of policies adopted by the Executive Committee. The Board and Congress shall determine if further action or approval is necessary. Thereby, the actions of the RRT become positions approved by the Congress.

RETENTION OF POLICY POSITIONS

Unless revoked or otherwise determined to be inactive, policy positions approved by the Congress shall remain active positions of the NRHA.

Within seven years of the approval of a policy paper or a policy brief, that paper or brief will automatically undergo a two-part review consisting of the following:

1. The paper or brief will be referred to the constituency group or council that submitted the original policy position for recommendation to the Congress as to relevancy, updating needs, or archiving. In consultation with NRHA staff, the constituency group or council shall make a recommendation to the Congress regarding the disposition of the policy or brief.
2. The Congress will then consider the recommendation of the constituency group or council and make a decision regarding the final disposition of the paper or brief.

If the Congress determines the paper or brief should not remain in the active listing of the Association, it will no longer be considered an official current position of the NRHA and will be removed from the active listing. In order to preserve the history of the NRHA, all policies will be archived. Archival means kept on file, indexed but separate from all current, active policies. Archived papers or briefs may be reinstated to active status after updating as necessary and subject to the process for position approval of the Congress.

RESOURCES

A significant amount of resources are available to assist authors of policy papers and policy briefs. These resources can be used for data, discussion, vetting potential issues and positions, formatting questions, presentation, etc. A few of these are:

1. Current policy papers and briefs that are available on the NRHA website
2. Fellow members of the NRHA and Congress
3. Fellow members of the constituency group
4. Government Affairs Committee members
5. NRHA staff
6. Members of the Research and Education Constituency Group
7. Past authors of papers
8. NRHA By-Laws
9. Office of Rural Health Policy at www.ruralhealth.hrsa.gov
10. Rural Assistance Center at www.raconline.org
9. Rural Policy Research Institute at www.rupri.org

The NRHA process is a team effort, with members working with and supporting members. Authors should consider the Congress a deliberative body and another source of input into the content of papers. Members of the Congress will offer feedback and suggestions on the organization as well as the content of papers presented to the Congress for consideration.

DISTRIBUTION AND ADVOCACY OF POLICY POSITIONS

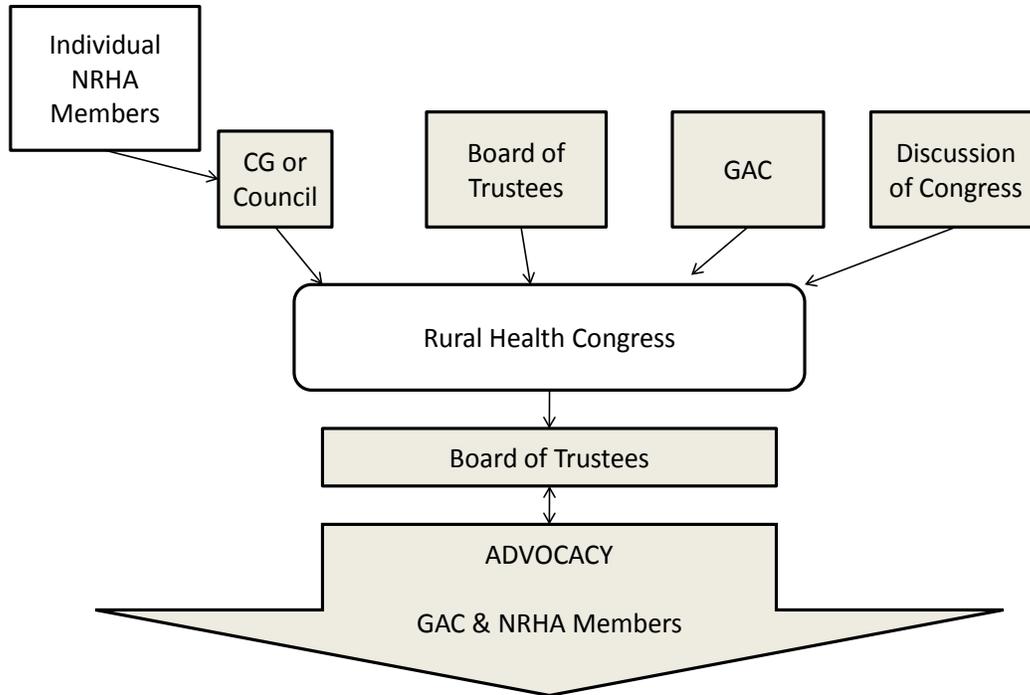
Following the approval of policy papers or policy briefs by the Congress, the paper or brief shall be reported to the NRHA Board of Trustees by the Congress Chair at the Board's next regularly scheduled meeting for their ratification or rejection. Any paper or brief may be rejected upon a vote of 2/3 of the Board of Trustees. Upon adoption of a policy paper or a policy brief, the Association staff will determine the appropriate means to distribute and utilize the papers. Papers may be posted on the Association's web page and thus available to all members as well as the public.

Positions are used by NRHA staff and members to advocate to federal and state policymakers. NRHA staff can only speak for the Association on issues that are addressed in these policy positions. The NRHA Government Affairs Staff is employed for the main purpose of taking the policy positions of the Association and presenting it to policymakers. The NRHA staff may distribute papers to the members of Congress and their staff, members of the Administration and regulatory agencies, and other professional organizations and associations as appropriate. NRHA members may also obtain copies of the papers from the web site or from the NRHA staff for distribution, research or other appropriate uses including legislative and regulatory advocacy. Members who utilize and/or distribute Association papers should inform the NRHA staff so that a record may be maintained.

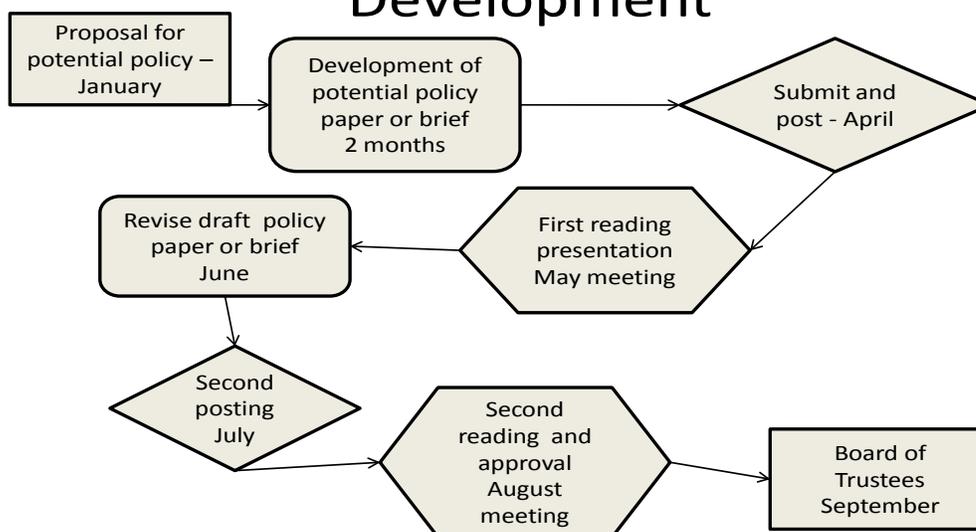
Association papers may also be used in discussions with other professional organizations and associations, particularly relating to the development of policies or positions by those organizations as they relate to rural health policy, legislation or regulations.

Policy papers and policy briefs represent official NRHA positions and should be represented as such, without interpretation or projection.

Flow of Policy Development and Advocacy



Sample Time Line of Policy Development



GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE (GAC)

Background:

The Government Affairs Committee (GAC) is a standing committee of the NRHA as defined in the By-Laws. The purpose of the GAC is to:

- provide guidance and recommendations to the Board of Trustees on advocacy priorities within the policies of the Association as set by the Rural Health Congress and Board of Trustees;
- educate and inform policymakers about advocacy priorities as recommended by the GAC and approved by the Board of Trustees;
- report on its activities at each meeting of the Rural Health Congress;
- make recommendations to the Rural Health Congress on issues requiring their review and approval;
- provide expertise to staff on legislative and regulatory issues; and
- ensure the Association's guiding principles and mission are promoted through its advocacy program.

Organization and Membership:

The Government Affairs Committee shall consist of up to twenty-four (24) members including:

- one representative from each constituency group and council,
- the Chair and Vice Chair of the Rural Health Congress, and
- the balance consisting of at-large members.

As with all Association Committees, the GAC membership must include at least 2 members of the Board of Trustees.

GAC members are appointed by the NRHA president. Appointments are made based on an individual's leadership abilities, interest in advocacy and policy, general willingness to participate in NRHA's government affairs related decisions and activities, and the needs of the committee to achieve geographic balance. In making these appointments, the President seeks the counsel and advice of the Chair of the GAC and the NRHA staff. Since membership of the GAC carries the expectation of actively educating and informing policymakers, it is beneficial, to the extent possible, to have broad geographic representation in order to assure policymakers from all over the country are being contacted and informed regularly by GAC members.

Members are appointed for a two year term which tracks the two year term of each session of the United States Congress. GAC members may serve for two consecutive terms and are then required to take one term off before being eligible to serve again.

The Chair of the GAC is elected from the membership of the Rural Health Congress. It is the policy of the Congress to elect an individual who is also a current member of the GAC to the position. The Chair is elected for a two year term that coincides with the United States Congressional term. The election is made at the GAC meeting held in conjunction with the Policy Institute. In accordance with the By-Laws,

the election of the GAC Chair must be confirmed by the Rural Health Congress. The GAC Chair also serves as the Vice-Chair of the Rural Health Congress.

Members of the GAC are expected to educate and inform policymakers in conjunction with the three GAC meetings held each year in Washington DC. Additional educational activities, at the state or federal level, at other times of the year is also encouraged as it may be deemed necessary by NRHA staff or GAC Chair and as may be appropriate given each GAC member's situation.

This reinforces the expectation that the GAC members are actively engaged in the policy making and advocacy process. It increases the visibility of NRHA in Washington, DC and helps to continually remind policymakers that NRHA's members are aware of their attention (or lack of attention) to rural health issues. Connecting the opportunity to educate policymakers with these meetings is economical and efficient. Each of these meetings is planned in such a manner that accommodates a formal GAC meeting as well as ample time for GAC members to meet with policymakers.

Meetings:

There are normally three (3) face-to-face meetings of the GAC per year held in Washington DC. One meeting is in conjunction with the Policy Institute. One meeting is generally during the summer. One meeting is generally in November following the national elections. All meetings, including potential electronic meetings, are at the call of the GAC Chair. GAC members are required to attend at least two face-to-face meetings each year.

All meetings are chaired by the Chair of the GAC and conducted in coordination with NRHA staff. In the absence of the Chair, the Chair will name another GAC member to lead the meeting.

A notice of meeting will be provided at least 30 days in advance of the meetings.

All GAC meetings are open to any NRHA member. However, attendance by non-Congress members at electronic meetings may be limited in number.

Functioning of the GAC:

The primary function of the GAC is to provide guidance and recommendations on advocacy priorities and educate and inform policymakers about issues related to rural health. The GAC promotes advocacy on the policy positions approved by the Rural Health Congress and Board of Trustees. In addition the GAC can make recommendations to the Rural Health Congress on issues that require their review and approval. The GAC is also available to provide expertise and guidance to NRHA staff on legislative and regulatory issues.

The GAC helps NRHA define and pursue its advocacy agenda within the policies established by the Congress and Board of Trustees. The work of the GAC provides the framework for NRHA staff to pursue its function relating to advocacy for legislation and regulation benefiting rural health and promoting the goals of the Association.

The primary document published under the purview of the GAC is the Annual Legislative and Regulatory Agenda of the NRHA (Agenda). Each year, in October, NRHA staff solicits the entire NRHA membership for changes or additions to the current Agenda. Members of the GAC are expected to review

the current Agenda and provide guidance to NRHA staff during this process. From comments received and its own recommendations the NRHA staff compiles a proposed revised Agenda. At its November meeting the GAC reviews and discusses the proposals in coordination with NRHA staff to assure that all positions included in the Agenda are current, based on approved policy positions of the NRHA and warrant the advocacy efforts of the Association in the coming year. Subsequent to the discussion and updating, the GAC approves an updated Agenda. Therefore the Agenda becomes the document that guides the GAC, NRHA staff and NRHA membership in advocacy efforts in the coming year.

The Agenda is published on the Association web site as well as in printed form for distribution at the Policy Institute and other uses.

Frequently, potential legislative or regulatory issues arise that are not addressed in the Agenda that require the advocacy of the Association. These may arise from new policy positions approved by the Rural Health Congress, the Rapid Response Team and Board of Trustees or they may arise from proposed legislation or regulation by the United States Congress and Federal agencies. The GAC Chair in coordination with NRHA staff may initiate additional meetings of the GAC by electronic means or face-to-face in order to solicit the guidance and support of GAC members.

The GAC in coordination with NRHA staff will schedule electronic meetings during the year to educate and inform the NRHA membership of the current advocacy activities of the Association. GAC members are expected to participate in these updates to stay informed of Association activities as well as promote the “grass roots” advocacy efforts of the general Association membership.

The GAC Chair, as an ex-officio member of the Board of Trustees, provides updates to the Board on the activities of the GAC including the Agenda development.

The GAC Chair, as Vice Chair of the Congress, reports to the Congress on the activities of the GAC and presents potential policy positions originating from the GAC for consideration by the Congress.

