

# Data Documentation Report

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# Evaluation of the Rural Innovation Fund

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**Evaluation of the Rural Innovation Fund**

**Prepared for**

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
Office of Policy Development and Research

**Prepared by**

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# 1. Introduction

## Program Overview

Authorized by the 2010 Consolidated Appropriations Act (PL 111–117),<sup>1</sup> the Rural Innovation Fund (RIF) program, administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), provided grant funds for tribal entities and rural organizations to create sustainable communities by addressing community poverty and concentrated housing distress in rural areas. In its single round of funding, the RIF awarded 51 grants totaling \$31,355,235 to tribal entities and rural organizations across the country.<sup>2</sup> A flexible program, the RIF notice of funding availability (NOFA) described 13 different eligible activities related to housing and economic development but did not limit grantees to those activities and in fact encouraged program innovation among applicants.

### From the Fiscal Year 2010 NOFA

“HUD expects that highly ranked projects would demonstrate high levels of ingenuity and innovation to address the identified problems and strategies that would achieve a self-sustained effort not dependent upon continued HUD resources.”

To address distress in rural areas, the RIF established three categories of funding.

1. *Comprehensive grants* (up to \$2,000,000) for projects that were broader in scope and included such activities as economic development and infrastructure for housing.
2. *Economic Development and Entrepreneurship for Federally Recognized Indian Tribes* (up to \$800,000) for business development activities by federally recognized Indian tribes.
3. *Single-Purpose Grants* (up to \$300,000) for more narrowly focused housing-related projects.

This emphasis on flexibility, innovation, and relatively large grant sizes distinguished RIF from other federal rural housing or economic development programs, such as those managed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Economic Development Administration, the Appalachian Regional Commission, the U.S. Department of the Interior, and other HUD programs. The RIF also included an emphasis on leveraging of funds and a comprehensive approach to address the economic and housing needs of rural communities.

According the Fiscal Year 2010 RIF NOFA (page 3), the RIF program was, “intended... to work in conjunction with these other resources to comprehensively address the economic and housing needs in rural areas.” In administering the RIF program, HUD promised to give “greater weight to comprehensive and coordinated proposals that utilize a broad range of funds... to carry out program activities.” The RIF was intended to be a program to provide rural grantees the

<sup>1</sup> Available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-111publ117/pdf/PLAW-111publ117.pdf> (page 52).

<sup>2</sup> This amount includes additional recaptured funds from the RHED program that were made available for award from the RIF in addition to its original \$25 million appropriation.

opportunity to innovate in the delivery of services and the design of housing and economic development programs and to offer applicants the opportunity to apply for larger grants for comprehensive projects that leveraged funds from a broad range of sources.

Created by Congress in 1998, under Public Law 105–276 (October 21, 1998) and eventually superseded by the RIF, the Rural Housing and Economic Development (RHED) program—like the RIF—aimed at supporting local innovation in rural housing and economic development by building capacity at the state and local levels. Since the program’s inception, grantees have competed for approximately \$25 million in RHED funds annually from 1999 through 2009, and 948 grants totaling approximately \$221 million have been awarded. The RHED program was the original basis for the RIF, and its influence can be seen throughout the program, particularly in the Single-Purpose grants.

Finally, for both the RIF and the RHED programs, eligible grantees included local rural nonprofit organizations, community development corporations, federally recognized Indian tribes, state housing finance agencies, and state community or economic development agencies. In addition, both the RIF and the RHED programs have focused on rural and underserved areas of America. Both programs have paid particular attention to the following five hard-to-serve, high-needs areas.

1. Native American communities.
2. The lower Mississippi Delta.<sup>3</sup>
3. Appalachian Regional Commission distressed counties.<sup>4</sup>
4. The colonias.<sup>5</sup>
5. Seasonal farmworkers.<sup>6</sup>

As part of the evaluation, the study team paid special attention to those rural and underserved areas when collecting data and presenting analyses.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> As defined in the charter of the Delta Regional Authority, the Delta region is made up of 250 counties and parishes bordering on or near the Mississippi River in eight states: Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee.

<sup>4</sup> As laid out in the federal legislation that created the Appalachian Regional Commission, Appalachia is defined as a 250,000-square-mile area that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.

<sup>5</sup> Section 916 of the National Affordable Housing Act of 1990 defines a *colonia* (in part) as a community in the state of Arizona, California, New Mexico, or Texas; within 150 miles of the United States–Mexico border; and determined to be a colonia on the basis of objective criteria, including lack of a potable water supply, lack of adequate sewage systems, and lack of decent, safe, and sanitary housing. The RHED program used a similar definition in its NOFA.

<sup>6</sup> As defined in the NOFA (page 6) a *seasonal farmworker* is “a farm employee of an owner, tenant, labor contractor, or other operator raising or harvesting agricultural or aquacultural commodities, or a worker who, in the employment of a farm operator, engages in handling, planting, drying, packing, grading, storing, delivering to storage or market, or carrying to market agricultural or aquacultural commodities produced by the operator. Seasonal farmworkers are those farm employees who typically do not have a constant year-round salary.”

<sup>7</sup> The RHED program included farmworker organizations as a separate category for a number of years. Farmworker organizations were also technically eligible organizations under the RIF NOFA, but the team was unable to identify any farmworker organizations among the RIF grant recipients.

## Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

Overall, the purpose of this evaluation is to explore how the larger grant amounts available through the RIF affected program activities, effects, and outcomes compared with the RHED. Of particular interest is the amount of resources leveraged from the RIF relative to the resources leveraged by the RHED, the source of those leveraged funds, and the effect of the enhanced resources on the capacity of grantees to affect their community.<sup>8</sup>

To address those questions, table 1 outlines the six primary activity types described in the statement of work (SOW) that HUD requested that the evaluation use. Grantees have used funds from both programs for a wide variety of housing-related, economic development, and infrastructure improvement activities, including acquisition, planning, construction, housing counseling, revolving loan funds, enterprise startups, and infrastructure construction. The study team used the activities outlined in the table to guide the research in the hope that the team could draw reasonably comparable conclusions about the impact of higher levels of funding and leveraging on rural housing and economic development.

**Table 1: RIF/RHED Activity Types**

Project Type	Housing	Business Development	Infrastructure
<b>Direct production</b>	Housing development and rehabilitation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Specific business enterprise startup</li> <li>2. Commercial real estate or infrastructure development to facilitate business activity</li> </ol>	Direct development of infrastructure improvements
<b>Lending and investing</b>	Loans to homeowners or multifamily rental projects	Loans to business owners	NA

NA = not applicable. RHED = Rural Housing and Economic Development. RIF = Rural Innovation Fund.

## Limitations of the Evaluation

The study team finalized data collection protocols after lengthy discussions among HUD staff, members of the study team, and representatives of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) during the formal OMB review and approval process. One notable discussion point focused on the issue of potential recall bias. With respect to that matter, both HUD and the study team concurred that it could be a problem when conducting telephone interviews and site visit discussions; thus, they put several procedures in place to address their concern. They put in place “filter” procedures to limit telephone respondents to only individuals who had worked directly on a grant, whether a RIF or a RHED project. In addition, the purposive sample for the RHED interviews was limited to 2005 through 2009. In practice, that was not a significant issue; many RIF grantees were still completing their projects at the time of the data collection. In addition,

<sup>8</sup> Because the RIF was authorized in 2010 and many grantees have not completed their projects, only a limited time series is available to evaluate the effect of those program changes on the few grantees that received larger grants.

many of the available RHED respondents were selected from the last few years of the program, minimizing the impact of recall bias. A review of the completed telephone interviews shows only a small proportion of responses such as “I don’t know” or “I am not sure.”

Limitations existed in the type and extent of evaluative data that the study team could obtain. The primary factors affecting data collection were—

- At the time of the study team’s data collection, the amount and availability of data that the team could draw from the administrative files of the RHED grantees were limited.
- A high attrition rate among the RHED grantee cohort made drawing a random sample from that cohort impossible. Attempts to locate former RHED grantees indicated that as many as 40 percent of those grantees were not available or willing to participate in telephone interviews.
- The relatively short time from the RIF grant awards and actual activity start dates to the time of the evaluation resulted in an inability to estimate impacts. Another consequence was a lack of complete quarterly performance reports available for review. At the time of this evaluation, many of the grant projects were just at completion or were still not complete. Also, the timeframe did not allow for a valid assessment of some initiatives—for example, whether the economic development projects would become self-sustaining.

The project team believes that the finalized project design was largely validated by the data collection phase of the project. The design of the data collection protocols enabled the team to obtain significant amounts of qualitative data from the grantees. That data has enabled the team to effectively evaluate a program that attempted to promote flexibility, innovation, and diversity in project designs.

## Research Objectives

This section summarizes the core research questions that the study team addressed in this project. The team based those objectives on the original contract and arrived at them through numerous discussions with HUD staff. The research questions were refined through communication with RHED/RIF program office staff, internal and external stakeholders, Office of Policy Development and Research staff, and multiple documents submitted during the evaluation by the study team.

### Focus of the Evaluation: Research Questions

Following are the three core research questions for this evaluation, as stipulated by HUD in its original Request for Proposals, along with the approach to operationalizing these questions based on the study team’s knowledge of the subject and preliminary research.

#### **1. What types of projects do the RIF and the RHED fund, and who uses these programs?**

In describing the RIF and RIF-funded activities, the study team developed a framework for comparison between the programs based on the six activity types taken from the SOW and listed in table 1. Other information, such as organization status and size (when available) and participation in multiple programs, was included as well.

**2. How effective are leveraging requirements, and how successful are grantees at leveraging additional funding?**

Because of the paucity of resources available, rural housing and economic development organizations rely on the leveraging of funding and other resources to achieve their goals.<sup>9</sup> The Comprehensive grants available under the RIF program differ from the ones under the RHED in the maximum grant size, and those larger grants could have affected grantee leveraging and outputs in a number of ways. For example, the larger grant amounts could affect leveraging effectiveness by allowing grantees to undertake projects with significantly less leveraged funding or by stimulating additional leveraging for larger overall projects.

**3. What is the impact of larger grants through the RIF relative to project activities and outcomes, compared with the RHED?**

The larger maximum grant amount in the RIF could have many effects, such as providing economies of scale, thereby allowing more efficient production of housing and economic development outputs. Other effects could include attracting new partners, prompting new project cash flow approaches, changing grantees' approaches to leveraging funds, and expanding the range and size of project activities and outcomes. Most of those effects are related to grantee capacity and the way a grant award enhances that capacity.<sup>10</sup>

## Overview of Study Design

To successfully address the research questions, the evaluation focused on all 51 funded RIF projects and 2 separate samples of RHED projects. The project team engaged in the following project activities.

- Conducted a series of meetings with rural housing and economic development stakeholders—including one focus group—and gathered information on potential data collection and rural development issues.<sup>11</sup>
- Reviewed existing RIF and RHED program files, including RHED administrative files, to identify and describe program activities. That file review was supplemented by conversations with the RHED/RIF program staff and information available from other federal reports.
- Built a comprehensive database of RIF and RHED program data with the information extracted from the program files and other documentation provided by the program offices.

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<sup>9</sup> For simplicity, this evaluation defines *leveraging* as any project funds acquired in addition to the base grant award that are accompanied by a signed letter of commitment from the partnering organization. Although that simple definition raises a number of issues, discussions with various rural housing and economic development stakeholders led the study team to believe that it is the best definition for facilitating reliable data collection and comparability across grantees.

<sup>10</sup> Although capacity is a complex concept, the evaluation largely approached it by focusing on two aspects: administrative capacity and technical capacity.

<sup>11</sup> Those stakeholders include representatives of other federal programs with missions similar to those of the RIF and RHED, local and regional economic development entities, and nonprofit advocacy groups with a history of working effectively in rural communities. A list is included in table 2.

- Conducted an environmental scan of other rural housing programs and rural economic development programs that grantees can use to meet housing and development objectives similar to the RIF.<sup>12</sup>
- Gathered information from RIF and RHED award recipient project managers—and other appropriate local officials—through 76 semi-structured telephone interviews with all RIF grantees and a purposive sample of RHED grantees.

The goal was to compare the experiences of the grantees, particularly in the areas of leveraging, capacity building, and community effect. Interview topics included program effectiveness, program challenges, approaches to leveraging or blending funds, alternate sources of funding, whether RIF/RHED filled any unique project financing gaps, and outcomes and benefits.

- Conducted 15 site visits to a purposive sample of RIF and RHED grantee projects across the six activity types listed in table 1. The purpose of those visits was to examine first-hand the outputs that the projects provided for their communities and to identify any outcomes or effects from RIF projects that are observable on site but not necessarily captured by HUD’s administrative data or reporting.

## 2. Data Sources and Collection

This section describes the data sources and collection methods the study team used during this evaluation. It is arranged by the data collection activity.

### Data Source: Preliminary Data Collection

During the initial orientation meeting and subsequent discussions with HUD staff, the study team and HUD agreed that including a preliminary data collection task in the RIF Evaluation would be beneficial. Based on subsequent discussions, the study team proposed a preliminary data collection effort with two facets: stakeholder interviews and preliminary site visits. The primary objective of that effort was to obtain informed input on the proposed activities from rural housing and economic development stakeholders and project officers with direct knowledge of the RIF and Rural Housing and Economic Development programs. The study team was particularly interested in learning more about the leveraging and capacity-building activities of rural development organizations.

Table 2 shows what stakeholder organizations the study team consulted, the date each was contacted, and the method of communication. The team selected those stakeholders purposively as a result of discussions with HUD staff and suggestions from the stakeholders. The purpose of the meetings was to understand rural development research more fully and to discuss best practices in measurement and data collection. Documentation of those meetings, including discussion guides and notes, can be found in volume II, the appendixes to the main report.

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<sup>12</sup> The results of that scan were included in the Final Data Documentation Report tendered on December 4, 2015.

**Table 2: Stakeholder Meetings**

Organization	Date	Method
Housing Assistance Council	January 17, 2014	In-person meeting
Treasury/community development financial institutions	January 29, 2014	Conference call
USDA—Rural Development	January 29, 2014	In-person meeting
NeighborWorks® Rural Initiative	February 4, 2014	Conference call
USDA—Economic Research Service	February 6, 2014	Conference call
Housing Assistance Council Annual Conference	December 21, 2014	Focus groups

The second aspect of the preliminary data collection included organizing four preliminary site visits. Table 3 shows the final sites the study team selected in collaboration with HUD staff and the RIF and RHED program office staff. Following, in order of importance, are the criteria that the team used to select the grantees. The team limited evaluation to only those grantees that had received a RIF grant. The team then focused on selecting organizations that had participated in both programs and that represented the five underserved areas described previously. Finally, the study team attempted to select grantees who had received multiple awards, which likely gave them the most experience with both programs. Following are the criteria for the preliminary site visits.

1. RIF grantee.
2. Participated in both RIF and RHED programs.
3. Included all three types of RIF grantees (Comprehensive, Indian Economic Development and Entrepreneurship [IEDE], and Single-Purpose).
4. Included grantees from all four underserved communities (see Section 1).
5. Received multiple awards.

**Table 3: Preliminary Site Visits**

Grantee	State	Award (\$)	Underserved Area	RIF Grant Type	Number of RHED Grants	Date of Visit
Housing Development Alliance	KY	300,000	Appalachia	Single-Purpose	4	March 17–19, 2014
Nogales Community Development Corporation	AZ	1,999,177	Colonias	Comprehensive	3	April 7–10, 2014
Macon Ridge Community Development Corporation	LA	300,000	Mississippi Delta	Single-Purpose	4	March 24–27, 2014
Karuk Tribe of California	CA	392,266	Tribal	Indian Economic Development and Entrepreneurship	4	March 31–April 2, 2014

RHED = Rural Housing and Economic Development. RIF = Rural Innovation Fund.

Again, the main purpose of the preliminary data collection was to better understand how rural development organizations approached leveraging and capacity building and to pretest and refine the data collection instruments during the early stages of the project. The site visits also assisted the evaluation team in identifying appropriate and realistic data collection options for the

different types of RIF/RHED grants based on the earlier stakeholder discussions. As such, the data requirements were different from those for the main selection of site visits, and the primary data collection tools were the discussion guides and the notes based on the free-ranging discussions during onsite meetings with stakeholders and grantees. All data collected during that stage of the evaluation were integrated into the larger database compiled for the project and included in the general analysis where appropriate. The appendixes in volume II include reports of the preliminary site visits and summaries of the stakeholder meetings, both of which were also submitted to HUD earlier in the evaluation. Volume II also includes field notes of the visits, focus group materials, site visit protocols, and discussion guide templates.

## **Data Source: Administrative Program Files**

As part of the evaluation, the study team completed a review and inventory of the administrative files of all 51 RIF grants and of a randomly selected sample of RHED grants. Both program offices also provided various additional aggregated administrative data on their grantees, which the team incorporated into the evaluation as applicable. Those two program file reviews represented the bulk of the information the team used to create a database for the descriptive and leveraging analyses presented later in the report. The program file review was very different for each program, as will be described in detail.

Notably, the file review for RIF grantees was more in depth than for RHED grantees for several reasons, most of which came from what the team learned during the initial program file examination. First, because the RIF program is the focus of this evaluation, the team naturally gathered more information on those grantees. Second, for the RIF program, the team was able to examine the files for all 51 grant recipients from a single grant competition and did not need to make allowances for variance across NOFA formats. Finally, the program office was able to make digital copies of the program files available for all three categories of grantees: Comprehensive, IEDE, and Single-Purpose. Having digital copies ensured that most of the material was in a similar format, which eased the collection and recording of data. The RIF program office was also able to provide some quarterly performance reports and other post-application documents from the RIF grantees, allowing the team to confirm some application numbers and gather more data on the grantees. From those files, the team was able to review the grantees' original applications and collect the data used in the descriptive and comparative analyses.

The RHED program file review consisted almost exclusively of application files submitted by the grantees. The initial reconnaissance showed that many program files contain additional reports, amendments, and other information but that the information is not consistent across grantees or over time. The grant applications were the *only* documents consistently available during the 1999-through-2009 timeframe and reliably provided by all grantees. In the team's opinion, the application files originally submitted by the RHED grantees represent the only consistent and reliable data sources from those files.

In addition, the RHED files were available only in hard copy and had to be reviewed at the program offices at HUD headquarters with the assistance of RHED staff. Instead of reviewing all 948 RHED program files, the team decided to randomly select a representative sample of the files across all 11 years of the program. The evaluation team executed the random identification

using Microsoft Excel’s RAND function (an imperfect but sufficient random number generator) to randomly select the sample after stratifying the grantees by year to ensure the selection of a similar ratio of projects per year for the sample. The team eventually selected 152 grants, approximately 16 percent of the total RHED grants. Table 4 lists the number of grants pulled for the RHED program file review.

**Table 4: RHED Program File Selection**

	Year											Total
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	
Grants awarded	92	103	111	101	87	103	102	53	56	59	81	948
Grants selected	15	16	18	16	14	16	16	8	9	9	13	152

RHED = Rural Housing and Economic Development.

Unfortunately, given the age of the RHED program and the nature of the files, several files were missing during the review. Despite multiple trips to the HUD office, the team was unable to locate 11 RHED files of the 152 randomly identified, 7.2 percent of the total. The study team decided not to replace those files and executed the file review using 141 RHED projects. A list of the projects selected and the missing projects are included in the zipped files accompanying this report. The zip files also include the RHED program data collection tool, the spreadsheet used to organize and record the information extracted from the RHED program files.

### **Data Source: Structured Telephone Interviews**

Another major source of data for this project was the structured telephone interviews that the study team conducted with local RIF and RHED project managers. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was conducted by a trained team member following a structured interview document, approved by HUD, that contained both closed- and open-ended questions. Those interview documents for the RIF and RHED interviews are included in the appendixes.

The study team intended to conduct interviews with all 51 RIF grant administrators and a purposive sample of RHED grant administrators but was able to eventually conduct interviews with only 44 of the RIF grantees, an 83.6-percent response rate. Of those grantees that the team was unable to interview, one individual provided a response on behalf of 4 grantees, 4 other grantees did not respond to requests for an interview, and 3 had either returned the grant funds or had gone out of business. A spreadsheet detailing the dates and responses of the RIF interviews accompanies this report. The team was unable to contact the following four agencies.

- Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Housing and Community Development Corporation.
- Organized Village of Kake.
- Southeastern Kentucky Economic Development Corporation.
- Pilgrim Rest Community Development Agency.

In addition, several RIF organizations returned their grant, as listed below. Although the team interviewed those entities, understandably little data were collected.

- Midwest Minnesota Community Development Corporation.
- Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation.
- Purchase Area Development District, Inc. (Housing Corporation).<sup>13</sup>

Finally, the RIF grantee Young Adult Development in Action, Inc., went out of business after receiving their grant. The accompanying files included audio recordings of the interviews as well as completed documents for the interviews conducted.

The RHED interviews were much more difficult to conduct. Two primary data collection issues had to be addressed with the RHED telephone interviews. First, the study team required a sampling procedure to select the organizations to interview. Second, given that RHED has been operating since 1999, many staff members and even entire organizations were not available to interview. The team was particularly concerned about the likelihood of collecting useful information through telephone interviews from older RHED grantees and feared that a purely random sample of grantees would produce too many grantees that were no longer in existence or had not participated in the program for several years. Missing and nonresponsive grantees were a problem even in the smaller cohort of much more recent RIF grantees. Too many unavailable grantees or grantees whose projects were too far in the past would have significantly increased the cost of data collection efforts. In addition, having to replace many missing randomly selected grantees in the sample would have eliminated the effectiveness of a random sample.

For those reasons, the study team believed that the more efficient method was to start with a purposive sample of RHED grant administrators to interview by telephone. The team therefore developed a series of criteria for selecting a purposive sample of RHED grants that would provide the best opportunity to contact administrators with useful insight. Those selection criteria emphasized recent grantee organizations with multiple RHED awards that covered all four disadvantaged areas that RHED serves. The criteria are similar to those for the preliminary site visits, as described previously. Following these criteria, the team selected 35 grantees to interview.<sup>14</sup> The grantees selected for telephone interviews were selected accordingly.

- Received an RHED grant after 2005 (310 grantees).
- Received multiple RHED awards (141 unique repeat RHED grantees).
- Did *not* receive a RIF grant (118 unique repeat grantees).
- Includes similar numbers as the four disadvantaged communities.

In addition, for the RHED telephone interviews, the study team was required to collect contact information and staffing information from public sources. Given the age of the projects, the RHED program office was not able to provide contact information for all the selected grantees. The study team attempted to locate that information using other sources, including Internet searches and other program files. Eventually, the team identified contact information for 95 of the 118 RHED grantees identified using the purposive sample criteria listed previously. Of those

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<sup>13</sup> Purchase Area Development District, Inc., returned a *portion* of their grant. The other two organizations returned their full grant.

<sup>14</sup> This number is fewer RHED interviews than would be ideal for the evaluation, but final numbers depended on staff availability and organizational permanence. Many organizations were unavailable or had no staff with knowledge of the previous RHED grants.

95 grantees, the team completed interviews with 35 grantees, for a 36.8 percent response rate. Obviously, that small sample makes directly comparing the data from the RHED interviews and the RIF interviews impossible; however, the open-ended questions and other data collected were valuable nonetheless.

Finally, the study team used a consistent contact procedure across both sets of structured interviews. After an initial e-mail to all grantees from HUD program offices to introduce the team, the interviewers scheduled and conducted the interviews directly with the grantees and indicated their responses using the RIF and RHED telephone survey instruments. Those documents are included in the appendixes.

### Data Source: Site Visits

To examine some of the more detailed and nuanced issues that the team covered in the telephone interviews, the study team also conducted 11 primary site visits to grantees. Those visits were in addition to the four preliminary site visits described in section 2. The intent was to understand some of the more qualitative outcomes that those projects have had in their communities and to identify any outcomes or effects from RIF projects that are observable on site but not currently captured by HUD’s administrative data or reporting.

The study team conducted each site visit using a standard protocol. Two senior members of the team—Rich Hilton and James Hedrick—oversaw the data collection and reporting for all site visits. Those individuals were responsible for documenting and reviewing all discussions or interviews, coordinating onsite visits, and ensuring that data were collected consistently. In addition, because Hilton and Hedrick, the Co-Principal Investigators, could not possibly make all 15 site visits (including the preliminary site visits) and complete them on time, the team had to identify and train a site visit team. The study team also determined that, given travel budgetary constraints, sending employees and consultants who were located near some of the selected sites would be most cost effective. All team members who completed site visits were familiar with the data collection protocols, had experience in conducting those types of visits, and attended a training held on November 14, 2014.

**Table 5: Site Visit Team**

Personnel	Position	Location
Richard Hilton	Co-Principal Investigator	Bethesda, MD
James Hedrick	Co-Principal Investigator	Bethesda, MD
Chuck Hanson	Project Director	Bethesda, MD
Lindley Higgins	Senior analyst	Bethesda, MD
Wayne Mundy	Senior analyst	Nome, AK
Alex Thackeray	Senior analyst	Denver, CO
Shireen Riazi-Kermani	Senior analyst	Bethesda, MD
Doray Sitko	Senior analyst	Austin, TX
Mark Stewart	Senior analyst	Bethesda, MD

Information-gathering activities for each site visit included the following.

- Discussions with grantees to obtain background data on funding options that may have been available to the applying entity.
- Physical observation (when appropriate) of the structure funded through the RIF grant, which was used to place the funded projects in a community context.
- Discussions with representatives of other programs or entities whose programs were associated or partnered with the RIF/RHED project. Discussions focused on how the partnership originated and how effective the representatives view the program integration.
- Discussions with local entity staff on the availability of quantifiable output and outcome data, the sources for these data, and an assessment of the reliability and consistency of the data.
- Discussions with individuals associated with the original application regarding the applicability of RIF/RHED to current local conditions.

Two members of the site visit team conducted each 2- to 3-day visit. To document each site visit, the team used a standard site visit report template that was approved by HUD as part of the data collection and analysis plan and the OMB clearance process. The study team produced an internal site visit report for each primary site visit.

The study team selected sites purposively within the framework of the six RIF activity types identified in table 1, using a set of selection criteria approved by HUD and OMB. The positive criteria focus on selecting grantees who received larger grants and ensuring that at least one-half the sites selected were tribal grantees (a requirement of the contract). In addition, the team was constrained by the contract's travel budget. As stated previously, two people conducted each site visit, and sending them to remote locations increased costs. When possible, the team attempted to avoid selecting particularly remote locations. For example, the Village of Atmautluak in Alaska was a RIF IEDE recipient; however, it is approximately 4 hours west of Anchorage, Alaska, by plane and inaccessible by car. Selecting the Village of Atmautluak as a site visit location would have been exceptionally expensive even though it satisfied the other selection criteria. The selection criteria and constraints are listed below. Table 6 combines the preliminary site visits with a list of the evaluation's primary site visit locations.

**Table 6: Site Visit Locations**

Grantee	State	Award (\$)	Underserved Area	RIF Grant Type	RHED Grants	Date of Visit	Site Visit Team
<b>Preliminary site visits</b>							
Housing Development Alliance (Hazard—Perry County)	KY	300,000	Appalachia	Single-Purpose	4	March 17–19, 2014	James Hedrick and Rich Hilton
Nogales Community Development Co.	AZ	1,999,177	Colonias	Comprehensive	3	April 7–10, 2014	James Hedrick and Rich Hilton
Macon Ridge Community Development Co.	LA	300,000	Mississippi Delta	Single-Purpose	4	March 24–27, 2014	James Hedrick and Lindley Higgins
Karuk Tribe of California	CA	392,266	Tribal	Indian Economic Development and Entrepreneurship	1	March 31, 2014–April 2, 2014	James Hedrick and Chuck Hanson
<b>Primary site visits</b>							
Chippewa Cree Tribe	MT	2,000,000	Tribal	Comprehensive	—	February 3–4, 2015	Rich Hilton and Wayne Mundy
Oglala Sioux Housing Authority	SD	2,000,000	Tribal	Comprehensive	6	March 9–10, 2015	James Hedrick and Lindley Higgins
San Felipe Pueblo Housing Authority	NM	1,660,000	Tribal	Comprehensive	—	January 16–17, 2015	Rich Hilton and Shireen Riazi-Kermani
Keweenaw Bay Indian Community	MI	800,000	Tribal	Indian Economic Development and Entrepreneurship	3	December 3–5, 2014	James Hedrick and Lindley Higgins
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma	OK	776,294	Tribal	Indian Economic Development and Entrepreneurship	3	November 24–25, 2014	Rich Hilton and Doray Sitko
Organized Village of Kake	AK	567,908	Tribal	Indian Economic Development and Entrepreneurship	—	December 2–3, 2014	Rich Hilton and Wayne Mundy
Taos Pueblo	NM	799,997	Tribal	Indian Economic Development and Entrepreneurship	—	March 30–31, 2015	James Hedrick and Alex Thackeray
Community Students Learning Center	MS	1,974,462	Mississippi Delta	Comprehensive	—	December 11–12, 2014	James Hedrick and Lindley Higgins
PathStone Corp.	PR	2,000,000	Rural community	Comprehensive	—	November 18–21, 2014	James Hedrick and Mark Stewart
Portable Practical Educational Preparation	AZ	1,557,840	Rural community	Comprehensive	4	November 18–21, 2014	Alex Thackeray and Lindley Higgins
Southern Bancorp Community Partners	AR	1,998,621	Rural community	Comprehensive	—	December 8–9, 2014	James Hedrick and Lindley Higgins

RHED = Rural Housing and Economic Development. RIF = Rural Innovation Fund.

Following are the criteria for the primary site visits.

- Eight of the site visits were required to be tribal grantees.
- Recipients of larger grants were preferred, specifically IEDE and Comprehensive grants.
- When possible, the team avoided extremely remote sites that would strain the travel budget.

### 3. List and Description of Zipped Files

Table 7 lists data files and summary tables with their associated file names.

**Table 7: Associated Files and Descriptions**

<b>File Description</b>	<b>File Name(s)</b>
<b>Program file review</b>	
Randomly selected RHED files and analysis	RHED file data_wDictionary
Rural Housing and Economic Development program data collection tool	RHED Data Collection Tool
Missing and found RHED program files	Missing Files_8-11-2014 Missing_Files_Found_JH_7-9-2014 RHED_Missing File list_6-18-2014
RIF Program file review	RIF Applicants_wDictionary
<b>RIF interviews</b>	
Listing of RIF interview dates and interviewer(s)	RIF Interviews - Date and Interviewer
RIF survey responses	RIF Telephone Survey Data Dictionary
Final, OMB-approved instrument	RIF-Eval_OMBClearance_RIF-Survey-Instrument_Final
All recordings and notes from interviews conducted by Rich Hilton	FOLDER: Rich Hilton Interviews
All recordings and notes from interviews conducted by James Hedrick	FOLDER: James Hedrick Interviews
<b>RHED interviews</b>	
Final, OMB-approved instrument	RIF-Eval_OMBClearance_RHED-Survey-Instrument_1.5.2015
Final RHED telephone interview sample	RHED_Telephone_Survey_Sample_Final
RHED telephone interview results	RHED Telephone Survey Data Dictionary
<b>Stakeholder focus group materials</b>	
Protocols for stakeholder focus groups	Focus Group Protocols_Draft
Flier for stakeholder focus group convening	RIF Evaluation_Focus Group Title-Description_11-18-2014
Stakeholder focus group presentation	RIF Focus Group_HAC-Con_12-2-2014_Draft
Summaries from stakeholder focus groups	Stakeholder Meeting Summaries
<b>Preliminary site visits</b>	
Protocol for preliminary site visits	Prelim_Site Visit Protocol_3.16.2014
Instrument for preliminary site visits	Prelim_Site-Visit_Discussion-Guide

<b>File Description</b>	<b>File Name(s)</b>
Template for site visit discussion	Template_PrelimSiteVisitDiscussionGuide
Preliminary site visit report	RIF Evaluation_PreliminarySiteVisitReport-Updated_5-24-2014
Notes and photographs from each of the preliminary site visits	FOLDER: Field Notes – Preliminary Site Visits
<b>Primary site visits</b>	
Site visit training guide for onsite personnel	RIF Evaluation_SiteVisitTrainingGuide_11-12-2014
Final, edited site visit reports from each site	FOLDER: Final Site Visit Reports
<b>Environmental scan</b>	
Results of environmental scan of relevant federal programs, conducted at project start	Program-Inventory-Final

OMB = Office of Management and Budget. RHED = Rural Housing and Economic Development. RIF = Rural Innovation Fund.

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