



# Regional Community Liaison Project: A Pilot Project to Address Rural Traffic Safety Issues

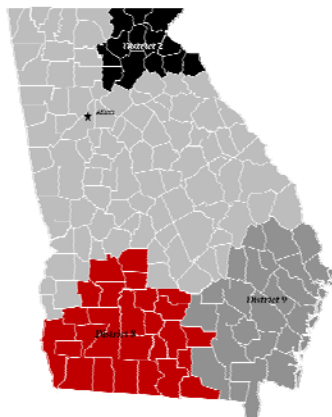
Courtnee Edgerston, B.A., Carol Cotton, Ph. D., and Stuart Fors, EdD.  
Traffic Safety Research and Evaluation Group (TSREG), College of Public Health,  
University of Georgia, 325 Ramsey Center, Athens, GA 30602, Phone: (706) 542-2804, Fax: (706) 542-4956,  
Email: cp cotton@uga.edu

**Objective:** The Regional Community Liaison facilitate collaboration and communication between community traffic safety partners to reduce highway injuries, crashes, and fatalities, and promote community level change.

**Background:** The Regional Community Liaison (RCL) project is a 4-year pilot (2005-2009) project intended to address the issue of traffic safety data collection, maintenance, and analysis at the local level in Georgia. The goal of this project is to strategically position RCLs throughout the state to: (1) act as a resource for local traffic safety professionals; (2) assist in data collection and evaluation; and (3) support funded traffic safety projects in the community.

**Methods :** Three separate regions (Districts 2, 8, and 9) were selected to participate in the RCL project, which included qualitative data collection through interviews with community stakeholders and community forums. Regional Community Liaisons were placed in treatment districts 2 and 9. No RCL was placed in District 8, which served as the control district. The Community Readiness Assessment was utilized as the template for the face-to-face interviews of stakeholders .The interviews examine the stakeholders' level of knowledge regarding traffic safety in the community, as well as identify any existing, relevant programs in place. Researchers conduct community forums with stakeholders in each region to discuss issues in traffic safety and barriers to addressing these issues. Interview scores were compared to determine each community's readiness to change, and all interviews were analyzed for common themes. A total of 116 interviews were conducted over the 4 years; only 54 interviews (27 pre and post) were analyzed. These interviews were chosen based on job type and depth of the interview. In addition, data on mortality and morbidity rates on rural Georgia roads were compiled to identify traffic safety issues.

RCL Districts in Georgia



**Results:** . The results show a significant difference between the three sets of pre- and post interview scores, by district and county. The total pre- and post scores for Districts 2 and 9 indicate a positive change after placement of the RCLs (8.742% and 4.306% respectively) while District 8 experienced negative percent change (-20.907%) (see Table 1). Districts 9 and 2 pre-interview scores of 4.770 and 4.877, respectively, indicated they were in the Stage 4, Preplanning. At the time of their post-interview, both districts had advanced to Stage 5, Preparation (Chart 1). District 8 moved from Stage 4, Preplanning, at the time of the pre-interview, to Stage 3, Vague Awareness, at the time of the post-interview. In addition to assessing community readiness to change scores, interviews were also analyzed for common themes. Interview themes revealed that a lack of adequate personnel, financial strains, and poor road conditions were mentioned frequently in pre - and post interviews. Mention of state budget cuts appeared more often in the post interviews.

District	CRA Total Scores		
	Pre-RCL Average	Post-RCL Average	Percent change
9	4.770	5.187	8.742%
8	4.037	3.193	-20.907%
2	4.877	5.087	4.306%

**Conclusion:** The results of the RCL pilot program show that the placement of RCLs had a positive impact with regard to community readiness for traffic safety implementation. Fatalities per VMT rates decreased significantly in the treatment districts during the years of RCL implementation, while fatalities per VMT rate remained stable in District 8 (see Chart 2). To insure widespread success RCLs must: 1) promote citizen involvement, 2) expand community agency partnerships, 3) increase best practices traffic safety activities, 4) increase collaboration to ensure maximum efficiency of current resources, and 5) leverage new resources in an uncertain economic time.

### Interviews responses suggest the following changes can increase the effectiveness of the RCL program:

- Increase funding and manpower
- Increase resident accessibility to traffic safety programs
- Increase resident's attention to traffic safety
- Make traffic safety a top priority among community leaders
- Foster a friendly rapport between traffic safety officials and residents