

乡村教育 促进会  **RURAL CHINA**
EDUCATION FOUNDATION
education for rural transformation

annual report 2007 & 2008

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About RCEF

The Rural China Education Foundation (RCEF) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization registered in the United States, working to improve education in rural China.

Mission

To promote education for people in rural China that empowers them to improve their own lives and communities.

Vision

We aim to strengthen the long-term development of rural populations in China by improving the quality and relevance of education that rural students receive. We believe rural children should develop skills and confidence from their education that will help them deal with real-world problems, deepen their understanding of social issues, and prepare them to make positive changes for themselves and their local communities.

Foreword

Dear Friends,

We are pleased to present to you the Annual Report 2007- 2008 of the Rural China Education Foundation. 2007 and 2008 were intense and dynamic years! We took our first steps in running full-time programs in rural China. Several staff members were hired on the ground in China, we were awarded two substantial grants, and year-round partnerships were started with several pilot schools. Though these were just the first steps in a long journey, we have learned more about what it will take in the future to advance quality education in rural schools year-round.

As the Chinese government's policy of free tuition reached almost every rural school by 2007, the new frontier for educational improvement is in ensuring quality curriculum and teaching methods. RCEF is at the forefront of this movement, working directly with rural teachers to experiment with new approaches. This work required RCEF to begin to transition from a wholly volunteer run organization to one with full-time staff and year-round programs. We could not have engaged in this evolution without the steadfast support and hard work of RCEF's volunteers, who continue to maintain many important roles in the organization.

We would like to express our appreciation to all the rural schools, volunteers, advisors, consultants, and donors who have contributed to RCEF in different ways over 2007 and 2008. We look forward to a year of further deepening and growth in 2009 as we continue to develop high quality education in rural China.



*Sincerely,
Diane Geng & Sara Lam
Co-Executive Directors*

History

The trajectory of RCEF's growth corresponds to three phases: **Exploration, Incubation, and Harvesting**. In 2007 and 2008, we moved from the "Exploration" phase into "Incubation." By 2011, we plan to reach the "Harvesting" stage – dissemination of results and training to reach more schools.

Exploration

RCEF was born in the fall of 2004 when a group of young overseas Chinese came together because of their common interest in supporting rural education in China. At the time, RCEF actions were driven by the limited resources we had rather than the needs of rural education because we were still very unfamiliar with rural issues. Co-founders Wei Ji Ma, Diane Geng, and Sara Lam had access to networks of Chinese university students, a small amount of funding, and connections to some villages through our partner organization in China. From this, our first program was the Summer Volunteer Program, which brought 16 overseas Chinese volunteers to rural China to run summer camps for children.

From 2005 to 2007, RCEF started a number of new programs such as supporting rural education projects of small grassroots organizations and setting up several rural schools and community libraries. These programs were mainly started in response to the needs and requests of rural schools and to opportunities to collaborate with other organizations which had the capacity we lacked to work directly in the field. During this period, we learned a lot about the problems and needs in rural education through conversations with local people and the experiences of implementing our projects. We started to develop consensus within RCEF about the mission and priorities of our organization in the face of these problems and needs.

Summary of Activities

2007

In 2007, RCEF greatly expanded the scale and scope of its programs. RCEF's first full-time staff were hired to run year-round operations in China. This was made possible by a \$90,000 Echoing Green Fellowship awarded to Diane Geng and Sara Lam, who became RCEF's Executive Directors. The Tiger Woods Foundation also awarded RCEF a \$50,000 grant to support the Yinjialin Community School, Innovation Grants Program, and Libraries & Reading Program. The Summer Volunteer Program expanded to around seventy volunteers and nine teaching sites while committee volunteers numbered about eighty at the end of 2007. In September 2007, RCEF began pilot partnerships with four schools to experiment with in-depth education reform year-round.

Incubation

Towards the end of 2006, we saw that we were nearing the limit of what we could accomplish as a volunteer-run organization. In 2007, Diane Geng and Sara Lam decided to work on RCEF as full-time staff and successfully applied for the prestigious Echoing Green Fellowship in 2007 to launch RCEF's year round operations. RCEF piloted partnerships with four schools to try to improve teaching methods.

Based on these experiences, we refined our

strategy for selecting a long-term partner. We chose to focus on Guan Ai Primary School in Shanxi Province because it has the strongest local leadership, government support, and teaching team. All RCEF staff members are now based at Guan Ai School, and it is the laboratory in which we will incubate our methods. We estimate that three years will be spent in incubation (2008-2011), followed by full-scale efforts to "harvest" and disseminate our results to reach more schools throughout China.



RCEF's founding Board of Directors at the first Summer Volunteer Program in 2005.

FROM LEFT: Alex Wong, Sara Lam, Diane Geng, and Wei Ji Ma.

2008

Based on its experiences with the four pilot schools, RCEF refined its strategy for selecting a long-term experimental site and chose to focus on one primary school in Shanxi Province with the strongest leadership and local teaching team. For the first time, the Summer Volunteer Program was held entirely in one rural county, with training based at RCEF's headquarters school and summer camps organized in surrounding villages. This allowed more rural teachers to join, making up more than half of all the participants. RCEF also received a grant from the Chen Yet-Sen Family Foundation to create a website for rural teachers to share experiences and teaching strategies. Finally, RCEF successfully organized its first rural teacher professional development training, preparing the entire teaching staffs of two schools for a more purposeful, student-centered school year.

Programs

Integrative Rural Education Program

This is RCEF's core program. Its goal is to influence and support rural principals and teachers to reform education in their schools so that it prepares students to improve their lives and communities. We partner with progressively minded principals who have the will but need assistance with methods and resources to reform their schools. We provide comprehensive support from management to teaching. Our pilot sites in 2007 and 2008 included two primary schools, one junior middle school, and one community school for adults and children. The experience working in these sites taught us valuable lessons about the ingredients for successful reforms.

Our partner schools in 2007-2008 were:

Fuxin School, Anhui Province

Fuxin School served middle school students from grades seven through nine. RCEF supported stipends for five teachers at the school who worked to develop student-centered teaching methods and innovative curriculum.

Yinjialin Community School, Shandong Province

The Yinjialin Community School piloted non-formal education for children and youth in a village near Jinan, the capital of Shandong Province. RCEF sponsored a weekend education program there for elementary school students. We also supported teachers to develop a computer skills class for students who dropped out of formal education after middle school.

Dadong & Laohuo Primary Schools, Guizhou Province

Dadong and Laohuo Primary Schools are located in a remote and mountainous area of Congjiang, Guizhou Province. RCEF sponsored stipends for teachers to develop teaching methods and curriculum suited to the needs of the students, many of whom were ethnic minorities and would not advance past middle school.

Guan Ai Primary School, Shanxi Province

Guan Ai Primary School is located in a rural village in Shanxi Province in the central western part of China. It is a privately managed non-profit boarding school. RCEF partnered with the school on hardware improvements, curriculum innovations, and school management.

Lessons Learned

Integrative approach

Our initial focus was only on improving the quality of teaching methods and curriculum in our pilot schools. However, it became clear that these schools also needed reforms in many other areas in order to support teaching reforms. For example, teachers needed to feel more stable in their jobs. Crumbling and overcrowded buildings posed basic safety hazards and physically limited what teachers and students could do. Principals needed to be effective managers and visionary leaders to initiate and sustain reform in the school culture over time. In response to obstacles like these, we broadened the scope of our work to encompass whole-school reforms. This includes support in hardware, management, professional development, teacher salaries, and networking. The holistic orientation is reflected in the program name "Integrative Rural Education Program."

Nurturing Local Talent

Our original plan was to focus on recruiting and training recent university graduates to move to our schools and help to lead teaching reform. However, after spending time in our rural partner schools and then interviewing many applicants from universities, we found that most college graduates lack both practical teaching experience and knowledge of education theory and techniques. They would not be able to provide expert support to local teachers, many of whom are already more experienced than them.

At the same time, we found that there was a talent pool of people from the villages around our school who had years of local teaching experience or were graduates from the teacher training academies in the local area. After graduation, they worked in rural schools around their own hometowns. These locals have an advantage over outsiders in understanding local children and society, and are more likely to stay in local education for a long time. With professional development support, they can become effective role models and mentors for other rural teachers. Thus, we decided to turn our focus to recruiting and developing more locally-sourced teachers.

Environmental Factors

Various external factors also influenced the success of our partner schools in 2007 and 2008. Each school had many positive and innovative attributes but also faced unique external problems that affected their ability to operate and in some cases, survive. These included the local government's political attitude toward the school, support of parents, and social and economic conditions in the surrounding community. Witnessing how these environmental factors affected our partner schools helped us to refine our process and criteria for evaluating and cooperating with future partner schools.

Summer Volunteer Program

The Summer Volunteer Program is an opportunity for volunteers from around the world to join with rural teachers to put on summer camps for village children. During the summer break, rural children spend most of their time watching TV and there are few, if any, organized activities. Summer camps can play a key role in helping to enrich children's summer experience and expose them to subjects that their schools usually don't teach, such as Art, Drama, and Community Research.

2007 Summer Volunteer Program

The 2007 Volunteer Program was the third annual program organized by RCEF. Fifty-five volunteers participated in the program, selected out of 314 applicants. They came from a wide range of backgrounds and countries including China (mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan), Singapore, USA, Canada, Holland, UK, and France.

Nine teams of volunteers taught in Hebei, Shandong, Shaanxi, Shanxi, and Henan Provinces. Almost all the teaching sites were located at or near to previous volunteer teaching sites. In addition, 14 local teachers from the different teaching sites attended the training to prepare with the volunteers. All the volunteers began their online training and project preparation in April and then met in Beijing in mid-July for a five day mandatory training. After the training, volunteers taught for two weeks and then returned to Beijing for two days to share and reflect on their experiences.



Results

RCEF volunteer Jikky Lam stayed in China after the Summer Volunteer Program to conduct a half-year research internship with RCEF. As a student of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology at Leiden University in the Netherlands, her job was to evaluate the program by returning to village schools and interviewing the students, teachers, and villagers about the program. In total, Jikky visited four sites in Shandong, Henan, Hebei, and Shaanxi. Methods used include in-depth interviews with teachers, questionnaires and group interviews with students, and class observations. Here are some excerpts from her report:

Teachers

“The rural teachers welcomed us to go back for more summer programs or long-term projects. They said they felt cared about and respected, and were inspired by the enthusiasm, passion and hard work of the volunteers during those two weeks. Teachers said that by attending the training and observing how the volunteers taught, they learned new ways of teaching which they could put into practice after the summer. It was a big help for them to actually see others teaching, instead of being lectured to about new ways of teaching without knowing what these looked like in reality. A few teachers had attended teacher trainings organized by their local education bureaus before. However, they did not find them effective because they were top-down and unrelated to their own classrooms. They also saw students grow and develop themselves throughout the program due to non-traditional subjects such as Theatre, Speaking Class and Community Research.”

FACING PAGE:

LEFT: Students playing "the volcano will explode" in theatre class.

RIGHT: Using natural materials for art.



THIS PAGE:

LEFT: Learning the rural folk art of paper cutting.

RIGHT: A student's "dinosaur" creation.



“I learned that if you are alone, it takes more time and energy to finish a task compared to doing things together with others; more people are stronger than one. It is the same as playing basketball, you have to work together, pass the ball on to others if you want to win; you can’t do it by yourself. We can learn from the volunteers as well; they come from different countries and have different backgrounds, but they are also able to work together and listen to each other.”

*- Student, Runzhen Township Primary School,
Chunhua County, Shaanxi Province*

Students

“The students also expressed hope that the volunteers would return to teach them again so that they could learn more knowledge from outside their textbooks and engage in activities that are fun and educational at the same time. Students pointed out that as a result of the program, they feel more confident and courageous in public speaking, learned to work together with peers, experienced the joy of learning, valued health and hygiene more, and were given the opportunity to express themselves.

The Community Research class was especially memorable for students. Many said they liked to go outside to learn about their own community and to observe and ask questions about real world issues instead of sitting passively in the classroom. By participating in Community Research, they not only gained more confidence to talk to strangers, but also experienced what it was like to be part of a team.

Some students saw the volunteers as their examples and said that they also want to go to college or contribute to the development of society when they are older. They felt respected by the volunteers and perceived the summer program as something that broadened their horizon and gave them the chance to learn about themselves.”

2008 Summer Volunteer Program

RCEF's fourth annual Summer Volunteer Program ran from July 13-31, 2008. All teaching sites were concentrated in one county of Shanxi Province rather than scattered in different provinces as in past years. This allowed RCEF to increase its support to volunteers during the program and quickly address problems that volunteers encountered while teaching. The training and teaching occurred in three villages surrounding RCEF's headquarters school, Guan Ai Primary School in Shanxi Province. These sites were chosen so that volunteers could get to know some of the rural teachers whom RCEF works with year-round.

Every year, RCEF tries to involve more rural teachers in the program but this was the first year that local teachers outnumbered the volunteers. In addition, more alumni volunteers from past summers returned than ever before. In all, 17 volunteers from around the world joined with 28 local teachers to organize summer camps in 3 villages for around 250 local children.

Before starting to teach, volunteers and rural teachers underwent four days of training. Speakers included Professor Sharon Yu of the University of California Santa Barbara and Zheng Bing, the founder of a local farmers' association which is one of the most famous in China. In the evenings, the volunteers prepared curriculum and then set off in 3 teams to teach for 12 days.



LEFT: Volunteer Karen Hong leads students through a show rehearsal.

RIGHT: The 2008 volunteers and students in Nanzheng Village.

Hometown Role Models

Volunteer Marco Flagg designed a class about role models. At first, the students in his class only named “national heroes” like Mao Zedong, Lei Feng and Zhou Enlai as role models. Marco encouraged them to also think of the people in their everyday lives. Many students then brought up their parents, teachers, classmates and other community members and pointed out their admirable qualities.

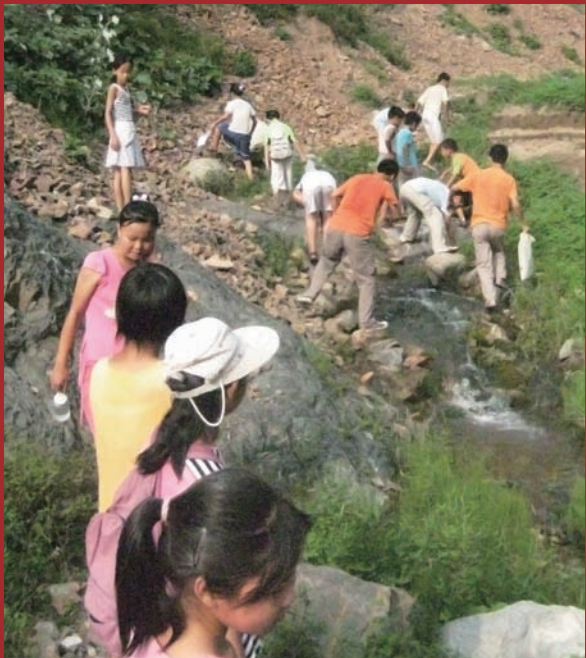
Marco then arranged for a talented local carpenter to give a talk to the students. The lesson beforehand, he taught the students how to prepare an interview using the "5 Ws" technique of asking "who, what, where, when, and why" questions.. Students worked in groups to see who could think up the most questions. When the guest finally arrived he gave a wonderful talk to the students about the value of hard work and his own life experiences. Students asked the questions they had prepared and Mr. Xue, the carpenter, answered them all with aplomb and good humor. He was clearly well received by the students. Through this exercise students learned that people to be admired aren't all in the newspapers or on TV but often much closer to home.





Student Researchers

Volunteers Sun Pengpeng and Jiang Peng led a Community Research class in which students investigated their community. Students from the older class interviewed villagers and wrote reports about (1) the history of the village wall (2) the stream in the village (3) general history of the village (4) education in the old days. Next, they researched the natural environment of the village. Annie Zhou, the volunteer who taught science, took the students out to collect plant specimens in the surrounding hills. Karen Hong, who designed the art class, taught the students to draw plants and other elements of nature they observed.



RCEF took many lessons learned from these two years of the Summer Volunteer Program to inform our strategy going forward. Though we know that the children enjoy the summer camps immensely and volunteers learn a lot as well, in the future we will take measures to increase the usefulness of the summer program for rural teachers, since they are the ones who affect the quality of rural education year-round. During two days of evaluation meeting at the end of the program, volunteers and teachers brainstormed many creative alternatives that RCEF can test out in future years.



Innovation Grants Program

The Innovation Grants Program provides small grants for projects related to rural education in line with RCEF philosophy. This fund is one of the few sources of support that citizens in China can apply to for independent projects. The goals of the program are:

- To provide financial support to rural teachers and organizations involved with rural education and community development.
- To provide a platform for discussion of ideas and exploration of methods for rural teachers and organizations involved with rural education and community development.
- To link RCEF with other similar projects and like-minded people.

Soliciting and selecting proposals

We encouraged past participants of our Summer Volunteer Program and Rural Teachers Network to apply for grants. Some of them had picked up new ideas through joining our programs and we wanted to support them in putting these ideas into action. We also spread the word through university student organizations and NGOs which focus on rural education and development, as well as relevant websites and message boards.

Two projects were selected in the first round, and ten were selected in the second. The selected projects represent a wide range of applicants including university students, NGO workers, rural schools and individual rural teachers.

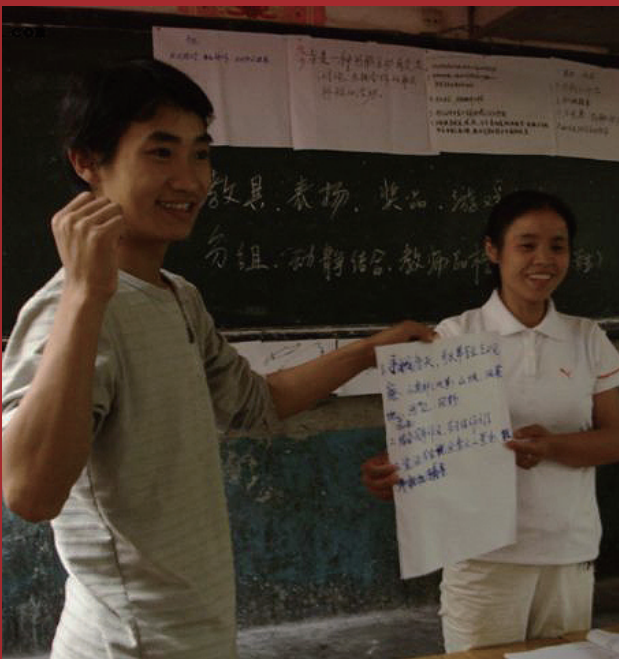
Support to grantees

Each recipient was given a grant of up to RMB 2,000. In addition, each was assigned a mentor who has expertise relevant to their particular project. For example, student organizations doing volunteer teaching were assigned former leaders of student organizations with teaching experience. One organization which was working on in-depth case studies as a form of recording student growth was assigned a doctoral student who focuses on qualitative research in rural sociology of education. The mentors communicated with the project leaders on a regular basis. They provided feedback and advice and helped to assess the effectiveness of the projects. Mentors also pointed project leaders towards useful resources, or communicated project needs to RCEF. In some cases, RCEF was able to provide further support such as consultancy and connections with teacher trainers.

Case Study: Miao Support Net

The Miao Support Net, an organization in western Hunan, received an Innovation Grant to organize a rural teacher training. The organization is completely run by local teachers, most of whom belong to the Miao ethnic group. Although the teachers are in difficult financial situations, they put in their own time and money to provide financial aid for poor students in the area. Now, they are shifting from monetary support for poor students to teacher training.

With RCEF's grant, the teachers conducted a survey of teachers' needs and organized a summer training for teachers in the area. They invited experts to present about education theory and teaching methods, and the founder shared about alternative education models he had visited in China.



LEFT: Two teachers share the results of their group discussion with the rest of the group

RIGHT: Fenghuang County Department of Teaching and Research Senior Lecturer Teng Jianbing delivering a lecture.



Libraries & Reading Program

RCEF established libraries in six rural schools and communities to foster a love of reading in rural children and support life long learning in rural areas. Volunteers taught in all these sites during the summer of 2007 and were asked to investigate the needs and feasibility of setting up libraries there. In the end, we selected only the sites where there was a strong desire and commitment to running a library. They were:

- The Peasants' Children Cultural Development Center in Miyun, Beijing
- Guan Ai Primary School in Yongji Prefecture, Shanxi Province
- Dongbaoquan Village in Yi County, Hebei Province
- Dayang Primary School in Luohe Prefecture, Henan Province
- Guo Village in Guan County, Shandong Province
- Liangtouyuan Elementary & Middle School in Luonan Prefecture, Shaanxi Province

All six villages and schools received their first shipment of books by January 2008. In five of the sites, villagers or teachers participated in selecting the books. RCEF kept in touch with the sites and made visits to some of the libraries to assess their effectiveness and provide support. In addition, after running reading programs for one semester, principals and teachers of three schools were invited to a meeting to share experiences and ideas for ways to improve the use of the libraries.

New Technological Tools

The RCEF Blog (blog.ruralchina.org) was launched in December 2007 and has grown considerably, with over 800 visitors a month. It has allowed visitors to gain a more personal insight into the day-to-day work of RCEF staff.

The screenshot shows the homepage of 'The RCEF Blog' (The RCEF Blog 博客). The main content area features a post titled 'Last day at the SVP sites' by Diane Geng, dated July 30, 2008. The post describes the final day of SVP teaching at various sites, mentioning student performances, skits, and songs. A photograph shows a group of children and adults in a school setting. The right sidebar includes a language selection menu (English/Chinese), an 'About RCEF' section describing the foundation's mission, and a 'Recent Comments' section with several entries.

“Innovations Central,” a web application for rural teachers to share teaching strategies and lesson plans online, was designed with a generous grant from the Chen Yet-Sen Foundation. RCEF worked with ThoughtWorks Ltd., to develop the program that is aimed at creating a community of learning among rural teachers.

The screenshot shows the 'Innovations Central' web application interface. The header features the slogan '嘿!我要教!' (Hey! I want to teach!) and navigation links like '主页', '我的空间', '我的最爱', '联系我们', and '系统管理'. The main content area is titled '共享你的经验' (Share your experience) and offers options to '共享教学方法' (Share teaching methods) or '共享课堂设计' (Share classroom design). Below this, there are sections for '最近共享的教学方法' and '最近共享的课堂设计', each with a table of shared items. The table columns include '目标' (Objective), '作者' (Author), and '发布日期' (Release date). The right sidebar contains a search function with filters for '教学分类' (Teaching category), '主题' (Topic), '年级' (Grade), and '作者' (Author).

目标	作者	发布日期
• (知识) 让学生明白奥运会如何受到国际总影响 • (知识) 让学生知道奥运会相关的重大历史事件 • (能力) 让学生学会分析数据的能力	林治美	2008-09-10
• (知识) 让学生了解奥运会的基本信息 • (能力) 让学生练习从资料中获取所需信息	林治美	2008-09-10

Statement of Financial Activities 2007

For the period from January 1 to December 31, 2007 (in US\$)

REVENUES	
	Total
Individual/Small Business Contributions	\$32,753
Grants	
Tiger Woods Foundation	50,000
Greg and Liz Lutz	5,000
Do Something	2,500
Aixin Foundation	2,000
Proliteracy Worldwide	1,000
I Do Foundation	425
Other Revenues	1,036
Total Revenues	94,714

EXPENSES	
	Total
Programs	\$39,434
Salaries	2,544
General & Administrative Expenses	1,412
Total Expenses	43,390
Surplus	51,324

Finances

Statement of Financial Activities 2008

For the period from January 1 to August 31, 2008 (in US\$)

REVENUES	
	Total
Individual/Small Business Contributions	\$39,367
Grants	
Chen Yet-Sen Family Foundation Grant	5,400
Echoing Green Fellowship	45,000
Global Fund for Children	6,000
Other Revenues	4,178
Total Revenues	99,945

EXPENSES	
	Total
Programs	\$44,395
Salaries and Benefits	12,203
General & Administrative Expenses	1,556
Total Expenses	58,154
Surplus	41,791

Funding & Recognition

Echoing Green Fellowship

RCEF's Co-Executive Directors Sara Lam and Diane Geng were awarded the 2007 Echoing Green Fellowship, a competitive honor given to the "best emerging social entrepreneurs" worldwide. Echoing Green chooses fellows through a rigorous five-month application process that requires a detailed organizational plan and a series of in-person interviews by nonprofit and corporate leaders in New York City. Judges evaluate applicants' leadership and entrepreneurial skills, creativity and the potential of their ideas to deliver long-term social change. In addition to \$90,000 of seed funding over two years (2007-2009), Echoing Green provides RCEF with technical training on non-profit management.



RCEF is also grateful for generous support from the following organizations:



How You Can Help

There are many ways in which you can get involved in RCEF:

1. Apply to be a year-round committee volunteer or to join a RCEF regional chapter. You can contribute to committees or chapters from wherever you live. Application forms are on our website, **www.ruralchina.org**, and are continually accepted.
2. Make a donation to improve the quality of education in rural China. Several ways to donate are listed on our website, www.ruralchina.org.
3. Offer us feedback. Your opinion matters to us! Comments and suggestions are welcome, Please email **info@ruralchina.org**.

The Rural China Education Foundation is a 501(c)(3) public charity registered in the U.S.A. Donations in the U.S. are 100% tax-deductible. If you would like to assist RCEF by donating or volunteering, visit our website www.ruralchina.org and follow the links.

Checks made payable to “Rural China Education Foundation” can also be sent to:

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