

# Workforce Development, Training, and Education

National Listening Session  
Debrief of USDA NIFA Market Opportunities Team





# WHAT 1-2 WORDS COME TO MIND WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT RURAL RESILIENCE?

*Responses from the Workforce Development Listening Session*

- Jobs and collaboration
- Challenging
- Social organization
- Sustainable
- Distribution, access
- Community leadership
- Innovation
- Collaboration
- Creative people
- Talent
- Desire
- Culture
- Opportunities
- Community ownership
- Growth Mindset
- Creative and innovative
- Vision
- Adaptability
- Retention
- Vibrancy despite challenges
- Capacity and Co-Production
- Unique



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# CROSS-CUTTING THEMES IN QUALITATIVE DATA ON WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

## Assets

- Youth-focused organizations
- Community colleges and vocational schools
- Colleges, universities, trade schools, Extension
- Interest in equity to ensure high quality of life
- Work ethic, human capital, access to labor

## Challenges

- Population decline/brain drain of youth
- Lack of broadband for remote work
- Poverty, low educational attainment, substance abuse
- Resources for rural school districts
- Lack of skilled and motivated workforce

## Opportunities

- Mentor/apprenticeship opportunities
- Develop more opportunities in the trades
- Link local training to local needs
- Transportation, housing, and broadband needs
- Training/certificate programs
- Entrepreneurship training

# LISTENING SESSION RAPID FINDINGS: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- **Remote work:** creating opportunities, preparing the workforce for it, increasing the income for those working in rural areas, creating workspace for remote workers
- **Childcare:** affordable cost, flexible work hours to accommodate childcare/family obligations
- **Creating career paths** instead of just “jobs”: creating pathways for a life-long career in rural communities, creating capacity and funding for apprenticeships
- **Understanding the future of workforce:** supporting employers and employees, connecting with businesses, identifying emerging industries
- **Supportive infrastructure** for effective workforce participation includes housing, care (elder and child), broadband, transportation, healthcare and health insurance, developing a sense of place
- Identifying and quantifying needs and **economic drivers** of rural communities through collaboration with state/local groups

# LISTENING SESSION RAPID FINDINGS: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

## Research

- Evidence-based training in remote work, entrepreneurship, tools of innovation for workforce, augmented/virtual reality
- Childcare: affordability, flexibility of employers, quality afterschool care
- Identifying skills and training needed to be successful in the rural workforce (on all levels)
- Understanding the role of mental health in rural workforce participation
- Quantifying barriers to living wages for careers in rural communities
- Identifying capacity and economic drivers of workforce in rural communities
- Identifying and expanding on items that youth value to keep them in rural communities, wrap-around services
- Expanding and emphasizing of community colleges and trade school options, leadership training
- Exploring and incorporating cultural awareness into the workforce in rural communities
- Quality and availability of telehealth, in-person providers, and health insurance from rural employers



# LISTENING SESSION RAPID FINDINGS: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

## Extension, Outreach, and Education

- Collaboration with and leveraging existing educational outlets (local schools, Extension, adult education)
- Broadband access and expansion
- Remote work as an option for rural residents (broadband, hubs for workspace)
- Work-ready skills for youth, displaced workers, past offenders, retirement-age individuals
- Opportunities for youth in communities without an Extension presence
- Developing sense of place
- Fostering partnerships with businesses to develop curriculum for middle/high school students to prepare them for the workforce
- Small businesses and entrepreneurs learning from each other on handling workforce shortages and staffing concerns
- Inventory technical support available for rural workforce development and address gaps
- Grants – knowing how, where, and when to apply for funding
- Micro-credentials, leadership training, apprenticeships, and other non-degree certifications



# LISTENING SESSION RAPID FINDINGS

## Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

- Culturally competent rural communities that welcome BIPOC residents
- Workforce with criminal records need to have paths into careers and be given training to enter the workforce
- Individuals with disabilities
- Youth/young adults new to workforce need pathways into rural opportunities
- Improving telemedicine for rural communities
- Systematic gaps in types of entrepreneurs who are left out of Extension
- Need to reach minority residents in rural communities

## Climate Resiliency and Sustainability

- Guidance for rural communities on shifting to climate resiliency and its link to remote work
- Shifting from resource extraction to climate resilient economies
- Training for youth related to climate resiliency, employers developing climate-related programs to support sustainability
- Sustainable bio-energy production
- Some industries may be shifting due to changing climate – how will rural areas be impacted?



# LISTENING SESSION RAPID FINDINGS

## What is one thing you heard that is exciting going forward?

- Emphasis on care giving (**child**/elder/other)
- Barrier reduction
- Remote work options
- Exposing youth to opportunities that exist in their towns
- Comparative advantage of rural vs. urban
- Connection between workforce and infrastructure
- Culturally competent behavioral health
- Broadband
- Community resiliency training

## Who still needs to be brought to the table?

- K-12/youth
- BIPoC small business owners
- Community leaders and residents
- Employers and private industries
- Aging workforce through flexible work
- Displaced workers
- NGO's working with different populations
- Communities without Extension programs
- Individual with criminal/drug records
- Dept. of Children and Family Services
- Mental Health specialists