



INVESTING IN RURAL RECOVERY: KEY FINDINGS AROUND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

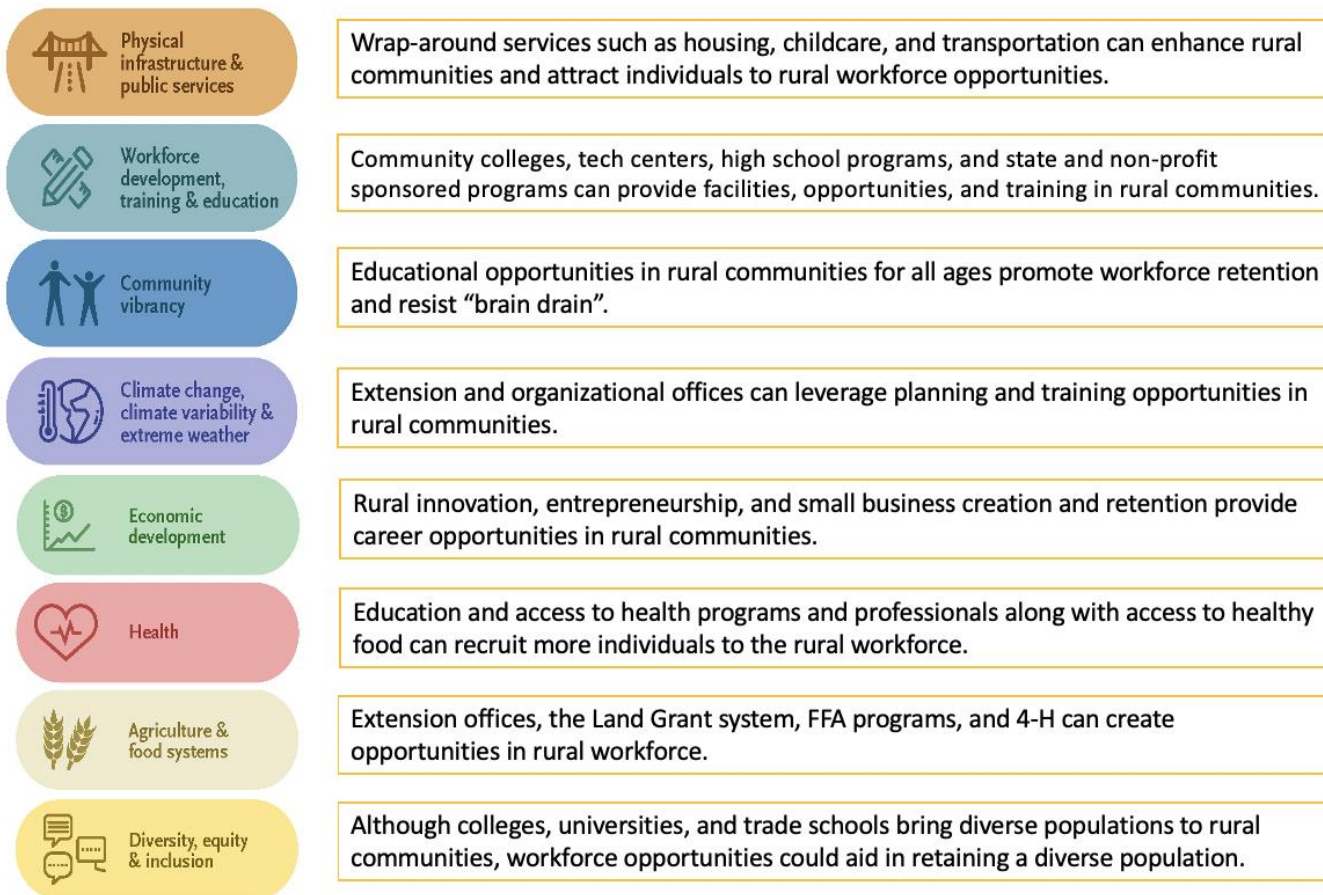
The overarching purpose of this initiative was to identify the critical investments needed for building capacity and improving quality of life in rural America. This was accomplished by combining an online stakeholder survey with virtual listening sessions. This report is focused on findings from the national data surrounding workforce development.

Summary Survey Findings

Selecting National Topics

The initial survey that shaped the subsequent listening sessions focused on eight topical areas that often impact rural recovery. These are depicted in the image to the right. As respondents weighed in on these important issues, several cross-cutting themes emerged, one of which was the significant need for workforce development training, and education. The image on the next page provides a brief snapshot of those connections. Given the interconnectedness between community capitals, especially human, social, built, and financial capital, workforce development was chosen as one of the areas to explore more deeply in one of the four national listening sessions, which was held on April 19, 2022.





Findings across Topics Related to Workforce Development

Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth-focused organizations, community colleges, and vocational schools can serve as a pathway into enhancing rural workforce development • Community colleges, universities, trade schools, Extension • Interest in equity to ensure high quality of life • Work ethic, human capital, access to labor
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population decline/brain drain of youth from rural areas • Lack of broadband and supportive infrastructure for remote work • Poverty, low educational attainment, substance abuse • Resources for rural school districts • Lack of skilled and motivated workforce
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating mentor/apprenticeship opportunities • Developing more opportunities in the trades • Linking local training to local needs in each rural community • Meeting basic needs such as transportation, housing, and broadband that enable rural workforce to be successful • Training and certificate programs, including Entrepreneurship training

Recommendations for Future Investments from the Listening Session:

Economic Links and Supportive Services

- Create remote work opportunities and prepare the workforce for these opportunities.
- Increase the income for those working in rural areas and create workspace for remote workers
- Create affordable childcare with flexible work hours to accommodate childcare/family obligations
- Create life-long career paths instead of just “jobs” in rural communities and accommodate apprenticeships
- Understand the future of workforce: supporting employers and employees, connecting with businesses, identifying emerging industries
- Build supportive infrastructure for effective workforce participation including housing, child and adult care, broadband, transportation, healthcare, and health insurance.
- Expand and emphasize community colleges and trade school options

“Rural communities tend to have a responsive business community that is willing to engage in workforce development, mentorship, and internships. Many have access to a community college and/or technical trade school that can easily be approached and tends to be responsive to specific training needs, certifications, and credentials.”

--Survey respondent

Research

- Investigate childcare: affordability, flexibility of employers, quality afterschool care
- Identify skills and training needed to be successful in the rural workforce (on all levels)
- Understand the role of mental health in rural workforce participation
- Quantify barriers to living wages for careers in rural communities
- Inspect quality and availability of telehealth, in-person providers, and health insurance from rural employers
- Identify capacity and economic drivers of workforce in rural communities as well as items that youth value to keep them in rural communities (such as wrap-around services)
- Inventory technical support available for rural workforce development and address gaps

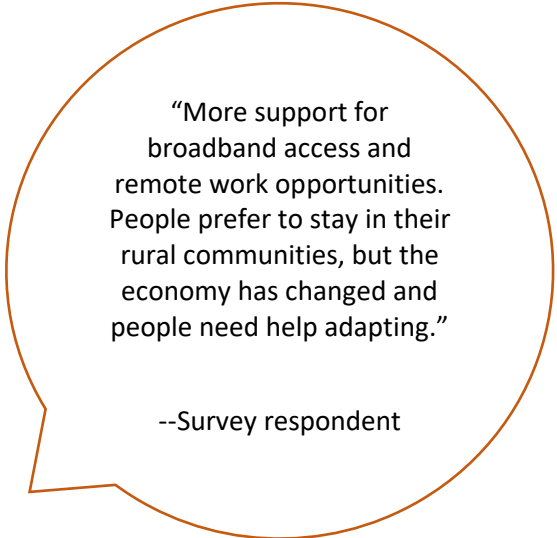
Extension

- Accommodate small businesses and entrepreneurs learning from each other on handling workforce shortages and staffing concerns
- Provide evidence-based training in remote work, leadership, entrepreneurship, tools of innovation for workforce, and augmented/virtual reality
- Provide work-ready skills for youth, displaced workers, past offenders, retirement-age individuals
- Offer micro-credentials, leadership training, apprenticeships, and other non-degree certifications

- Collaborate with and leverage existing educational outlets (local schools, Extension, adult education)
- Foster partnerships with businesses to develop curriculum for middle/high school students to prepare them for the workforce
- Provide knowledge on grants – knowing how, where, and when to apply for funding
- Explore and incorporate cultural awareness into the workforce in rural communities
- Offer remote work as an option for rural residents (broadband, hubs for workspace)
- Create opportunities for youth in communities without an Extension presence
- Develop a sense of place

Intersections with Equity and Sustainability

- Build culturally competent rural communities that welcome BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) residents
- Create paths to careers and offer training for people with criminal records to enter the workforce
- Include individuals with disabilities
- Construct pathways for youth/young adults new to workforce into rural opportunities
- Improve telemedicine for rural communities
- Lessen systematic gaps in types of entrepreneurs who are left out of Extension
- Reach minority residents in rural communities
- Guide rural communities on shifting to climate resiliency and its link to remote work
- Shift from resource extraction to climate-resilient economies
- Train youth on climate resiliency, employers developing climate-related programs to support sustainability
- Create sustainable bio-energy production
- Some industries may be shifting due to changing climate – how will rural areas be impacted?



“More support for broadband access and remote work opportunities. People prefer to stay in their rural communities, but the economy has changed and people need help adapting.”

--Survey respondent

Roles for the Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDCs)

The listening sessions were intended to inform a broad range of rural development partners, including leaders with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Land-Grant Universities, among others. Given their focus on building capacity across organizational and state lines, the RRDCs may play several roles in advancing the strategic advancements addressed in this report. These include the following themes:



Reaching across 1862, 1890, and 1994 Land-Grant University systems to collaborate on priority issues.



Conducting, translating, and disseminating research through journal articles, special issues, briefs, and presentations.



Scaling Extension outreach through curriculum development, training, gauging impacts, and showcasing promising practices.



Helping to acquire and leverage funding for research, Extension, and scholarship.



Actively encouraging the integration of research and Extension on key issue areas.



Facilitating workshops, listening sessions, and dialogues for innovative problem solving.



Convening researchers, Extension practitioners, and rural development stakeholders on high priority issues.



Building and coordinating multi-state teams.

Methods and Participants

The stakeholder survey was conducted in fall 2021. There were 680 participants who completed the questionnaire at least through the rankings, and 28% of them were from the North Central Region. Participants included people from Land-Grant Universities, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and businesses.

Building from the stakeholder survey, the listening sessions held in spring 2022 focused on identifying what is needed to fill the gaps between assets and opportunities. Facilitated dialogue with interactive technologies asked participants to think about extension/education, research, and other investments. Each of the four Regional Rural Development Centers hosted two listening session – one on a national topic and one regional session. This report covers the North Central Region session.

Notes

Information in this report is from the “Stakeholder Survey on Priorities and Capacities for Rural Community, Economic, and Workforce Development” conducted through the Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDCs).

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For More Information

Explore the findings related to this project more closely via our interactive data dashboard: <https://bit.ly/RuralRecoveryDashboard>

Learn more about the Regional Rural Development Centers by visiting: <https://www.usu.edu/rrdc/>

