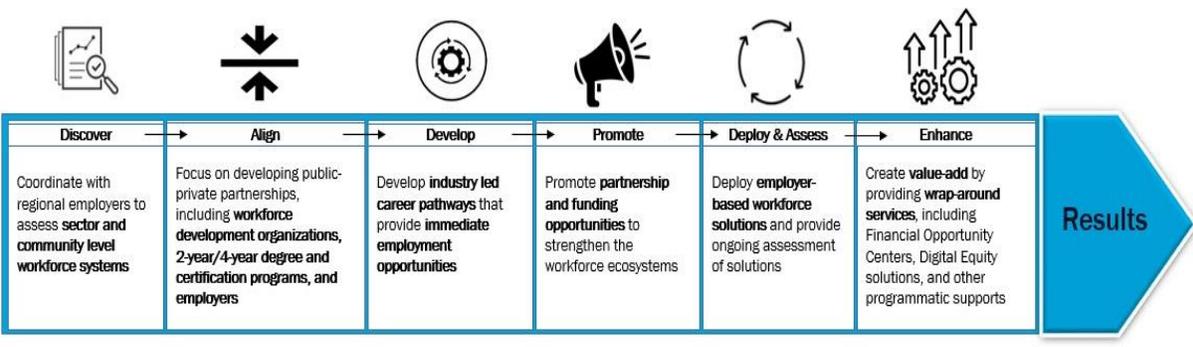


## Rural Works

Rural Works is a national community of practice that seeks to scale localized solutions that ensure **stronger connections between training providers and industry**, **strengthen the pathways that lead to industry-recognized credentials and livable wage employment** for rural workers, and **highlight the innovation of rural markets to problem solve and foster a 21st century economy**.



Rural Works identified opportunities around this framework to...

- ✓ coordinate key partnerships between post-secondary institutions,
- ✓ serve organizations (public & private),
- ✓ identify employer champions in rural communities around the country

...to build stronger coordination within rural ecosystems that can better leverage philanthropic and federal resources to connect the rural learner to in-demand trainings. This coordination has proven successful in achieving livable wage employment and developing highly skilled talent pool for rural employers to retain, grow, or invest in their communities.

Rural Works was highly successful in leveraging additional dollars and outcomes by investing in partnerships as opposed to backbone institutions. Aligning systems led to the following outputs for local collaboratives:

# RURAL WORKS

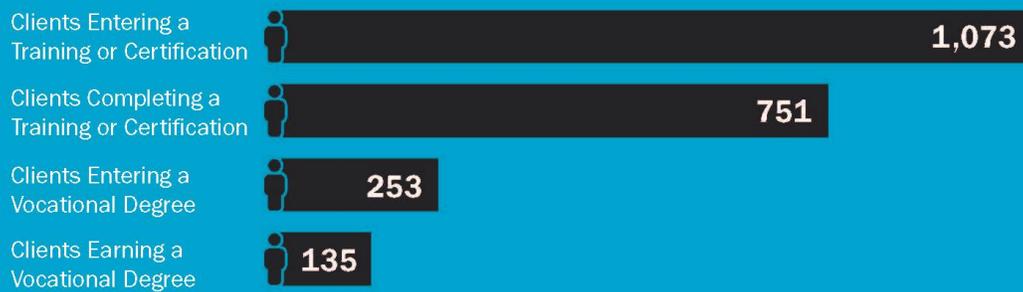
## 2020 Year End Report

Clients Served <b>5,667</b>	Workforce Service Benefits <b>1,291</b>	Partner Leverage <b>\$7,424,455</b>
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### Engaged



### Training & Education



### Employment



## Growth in Workforce Services, Education, and Employment

Rural Works proposed serving 4,000 skill seekers with workforce services over three years and saw scale rather quickly once systems were able to align – so much so that our proposed goal was achieved in Year One of programing. What was an initial investment into 10 workforce serving organizations to serve 11 rural regions became a broader coalition that included 37 post-secondary partnerships, 36 community-based organizations, 13 workforce investment boards, and 145 employer champions to train and employ rural job seekers. In total, they served 5,667 clients with workforce services; attached 1,291 people to social service supports in pursuit of a credential or a job; and, leveraged Ascendium Education Group’s \$1.3M investment over three years with \$7.4M in just one year. By aligning systems, Rural Works was able to attract further investment into local rural collaboratives from national investors.

## Leveraging For Opportunity – Digital Inclusion During A Time of Crisis

Markle Foundation recently launched the Rework America Alliance. Seeking rural inclusion, Markle began looking for a rural workforce funding collaborative that could host and support the deployment of their tools to rural populations that intersect with BIPOC (black, indigenous, and people of color) communities. The Rework America Alliance is an unprecedented nationwide collaboration to enable unemployed and low wage workers to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis stronger. The Alliance aims to help millions of workers, regardless of formal education, move into desirable jobs in the digital economy by accelerating the development of an effective system of training aligned to jobs in demand.

The Alliance will focus on enabling unemployed and low wage workers to move to better jobs in this digital economy by providing products and services that enable these organizations to understand the most in-demand jobs and connect adults to effective, rapid, and affordable training and career coaching to prepare them for these jobs. In addition, The Alliance will work with employers to hire and advance workers who may not have the degrees or experience that would traditionally be required, and to enable the creation of more desirable positions. Together, the Rework America Alliance aims to achieve impact at the scale and speed this crisis requires to help workers transition to in-demand jobs in the digital economy.”

**To learn more, visit:** <https://markle.org/alliance>

Rural Works, created an opportunity for a rural collaborative to participate in an unprecedented, nationwide collaborative. After formalizing a local partnership in up-state New York which included Pathstone Corporation (Work-Serving Organization), the Finger Lakes Workforce Development Board (Public Work-Serving Organization), Board of Cooperative Education Services (Training Provider), and 18 employer champions – Rural Works was able to quickly implement the deployment strategy from Markle Foundation and the Rework America Alliance. Markle, making an investment in both Rural Works and the local collaborative, hopes to create a strong regional model that could be replicated in other rural places. Rural Works and Pathstone are one of only five initial deployment partners and the only rural partnership within the Rework America Alliance. An investable, local, rural collaborative with fiduciary and programmatic

support from an intermediary, like Rural Works, helped to make this an easily investable opportunity for the Alliance to be inclusive of rural digital supports during times of crisis, now and in the future.



**Collaborative**

PathStone Corporation, in coordination with the Career Pathways Collaborative, is delivering high quality upskilling programming to job seekers in upstate New York. Through strategic partnerships, PathStone builds and implements short- and long-term trainings with post-secondary partners and On-the-Job Trainings with employers to enable individuals to enter and advance on in demand career paths and promotes advancement and retention for incumbent workers to help them continue to move from low-income to middle-income brackets.

- Target Populations**
- ✓ Justice Involved Individuals
  - ✓ Immigrant Communities/ESL Families
  - ✓ Rural Seniors
  - ✓ Opportunity Youth
  - ✓ Farmworkers

- Key Sectors**
- ✓ Healthcare
  - ✓ Manufacturing
  - ✓ Customer Service
  - ✓ Agricultural Upgrades
  - ✓ Agriculture

**Rochester, New York** - The Finger Lakes Collaborative works across a wide rural geography in upstate New York, with satellite programs from Western New York to the Mid-Hudson and Long Island Regions, with sister programs in Pennsylvania and Ohio.



## Leveraging For Opportunity – Adjudicated Youth & Opportunity Youth

Some rural populations are more vulnerable than others and require multiple coordinated systems to achieve success. In the rural Mississippi Delta, the Rural Works collaborative anchors a partnership with The Aspen Forum for Community Solutions – Opportunity Youth. The collaborative, utilizing a racial equity lens, focuses on youth and young adults who have also been touched by the justice system. Using their Rural Works collaborative as a “hub” they have created multiple spokes where they layer in non-traditional partners to support impact at scale for this hard to train and employ population. These partners include policing agencies, youth court, drug court, and community-based organizations that offer expungement, mental health case management, and mentoring. Using a rapid reattachment model back to education and employment – this collaborative goes that extra mile to ensure that education and workforce systems make a further equity reach to end the criminalization of poverty and the high recidivism rate seen in rural places that intersect with BIPOC communities. Because of this, Aspen has leveraged their work with an additional \$50,000 planning grant to expand services to a wider geography.

**For more details, visit:** <https://aspencommunitysolutions.org/greenville-mississippi/>

The Mississippi Delta Rural Works collaborative also was able to build out strong pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship opportunities for disconnected youth (ages 16-24). Recognizing that Opportunity Youth often come with multiple barriers to complete long-term credentials and degrees – the collaborative, with support from Schultz Family Foundation, created short-term trainings that can quickly take skill seekers through training, apprenticeship, and employment because of the aligned systems. With a quicker pathway, barriers such as time, cost, and life interference eased for Opportunity Youth while at the same time the resources required to lift Opportunity Youth lessened for the partners that serve them.

One example is the collaborative’s Smart Start program which helps youth and young adults with literacy and numeracy issues rapidly skill up while continuing through a 6-12 week vocational pathway in an electrical lineman program. The pathway design is focused on employer-drafted trainings and is transferable to other sectors that are in high demand in the region such as manufacturing, maritime, and construction. This model design highlights rural innovation and reduces the resources and time it takes for both community-based organizations and participants to achieve success in a dedicated pathway. This pathway provides adult basic education at the same time as a vocational training, reducing the time it takes to skill up to earn a credential. Furthermore, this pathway includes an industry support component, which offers job fairs before completion of a credential so that participants can transition seamlessly into the workforce. The model was so successful that it was recently featured by Schultz Family Foundation and Nation Swell as a rural best practice.

**Check out our program video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JG4K9HrMgMA>

# Mississippi Delta Collaborative

## Lead Partner

Washington County  
Work Ready Alliance

## Post Secondary Partner

The Capps Center

## Employer Partners

NuFarm  
Regions Bank

## Workforce Investment Board

South Delta Planning  
and Development  
District

## Collaborative

The Mississippi Delta Collaborative works with marginalized populations in one of America's most philanthropically underserved regions to assist workers in attaching to in demand post-secondary trainings backed by local employers. Key partnerships exist with the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions – Opportunity Youth and with a regional safety & justice collaborative to work with returning citizens. The Collaborative also focuses on the prime aged labor force to attract livable wage job growth to the rural Mississippi Delta.

## Target Populations

- ✓ Opportunity Youth
- ✓ Adjudicated or Justice Involved Individuals
- ✓ African American Unemployment/Underemployment

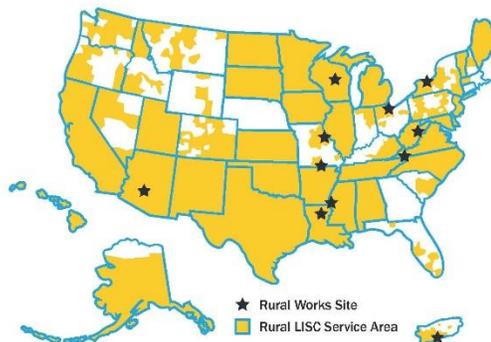


## Key Sectors

- ✓ Healthcare
- ✓ Advanced Manufacturing
- ✓ Skilled Trades



**Greenville, Mississippi** - The Mississippi Delta Collaborative services a labor market area of over six counties in the Rural Mississippi Delta with an emphasis on servicing the employers of the Greenville, Mississippi micropolitan area.



**RURAL  
LISC**

## Leveraging For Opportunity – Employer Co-Impact

Employers and corporate philanthropy are quickly recognizing the value of the Rural Works model. As more and more companies choose rural America as their home and reshore to rural places based on the availability of affordable land, affordable resources, economic incentives, and skilled labor – they are making greater investments towards co-impact in rural economies. Google is one employer who has stepped forward to further seed this work. Seeking collaboration around their network of rural data centers – Google is making a \$100,000 investment in rural places to grow the skilled talent needed to for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century work place. In Jackson County, Alabama and Mayes County, Oklahoma – Google is seeding the growth of two new Rural Works collaboratives to be responsive to their employment needs, align post-secondary systems and work serving organizations around trainings for in-demand jobs, and diversifying workforce pools by baselining and scaling underrepresented populations in the tech industry.



## What We Are Learning & Where We Are Going

The alignment of systems helped rural workforce stakeholders overcome barriers, solve for local solutions, and fund workforce development. It also made them ready to receive additional opportunities coming from philanthropy and federal sources. However, there is still much work to be done to ensure we are building responsive networks that can achieve scale in workforce development in rural places.

There is need to create stronger data share agreements to track scale at the local level. Specifically, efforts should be made to provide common vocabulary and strengthen data collection for rural workforce funding collaboratives to track outputs, outcomes, and systems change across rural workforce stakeholders (work-serving organizations, post-secondary, and employers). Currently, rural systems remain under-resourced and disjointed in their data collection efforts. Using rural post-secondary providers as local backbones, Rural LISC believes that stakeholders can further engage rural P3 partnerships to design stronger theory of change development, needs assessments, philanthropic program development, landscape scans, and communication strategies. Additionally, each rural collaborative will grow their evaluation skills to provide culturally-responsive evaluation; developmental, formative, summative evaluation; mixed-methods data collection; and, program and portfolio evaluation. We believe by layering in this technical assistance and capacity building effort into the Rural Works National Community of Practice, we can achieve a stronger and more equitable rural workforce ecosystem.

There is also a need to create a stronger sectoral initiative. In Year Two, LISC plans to launch its Rural Works framework around career pathway development that aims to connect job seekers with higher-paying jobs and advancement opportunities. Sectoral programs focus on connecting disadvantaged workers with work opportunities in specific, high-demand local industries, and are typically developed through working closely with local employers and job seekers through a series of manageable steps and successive credentials. We believe this direction will lead us to a Year Three strategy of employer engagement back into the local rural workforce ecosystem.

Finally, BIPOC communities in rural areas, much like urban centers, remain underrepresented in some of the most in demand occupations. Rural Works has spent Year One of programming baselining workforce services and employment to rural BIPOC populations and will spend Year Two in scaling up those efforts to create more equity and representation within rural workforce systems. Rural Works especially places an emphasis on migrant and ESL (English as a Second Language) families who are at the forefront of rural population growth around the country.