

BRIDGES: Building Rural Innovation, Designing Educational Strategies

How might we strengthen the capacity of rural community colleges to serve as critical economic growth engines for their learners and communities?

The Opportunity

Rural communities across the US are as **diverse** as the geographies they represent, yet overall, rural learners experience disparities at each stage of the education-to-workforce pipeline relative to their urban and suburban peers. This results in lower postsecondary **educational attainment**, **persistent poverty**, and **declines in employment** for prime working-age adults across many rural areas.

Through BRIDGES, the Education Design Lab will lead a cohort of 5 rural community colleges to build their capacity to respond to their regional labor markets and to enable greater economic agility for their learners and communities. The Lab will select the institutions through a national, invite-only RFP process in fall 2020.

Design Challenge Process

Through a structured design-and-build process, participating colleges will produce pilots to catalyze economic opportunity and improve outcomes for rural learners and their communities. Along the way, these institutions will gain experience in human-centered design and innovation strategies. The Lab team will lead the cohort through targeted research, ideation, prototyping, and launch phases, focusing on rich iteration and pressure testing against impact, learner and faculty buy-in, and connection to potential scaling partners.

The Lab will provide a guided, immersive cohort experience that will include: design process facilitation, bi-weekly coaching, leadership and expertise in developing education-to-workforce models, workshops and convenings, and access to industry and subject matter experts.

Want to learn more about BRIDGES? We'd love to hear from you! Reach out to us at BRIDGErural@eddesignlab.org and follow along on social media [@eddesignlab](https://twitter.com/eddesignlab) and [#BridgeRural](https://twitter.com/BridgeRural).

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Impact

The publishing of learnings and prototypes from BRIDGES will inform future investment in rural education-to-workforce approaches and will offer the field of rural community colleges actionable models and practices.

The BRIDGES Design Challenge will:

- produce and share outcomes-focused prototypes and pilot designs ready for launch at rural community colleges.
- build core innovation capacities of participating institutions.
- disseminate new knowledge and thought leadership on rural learners' goals, challenges, and experiences.
- establish lasting infrastructure for effective regional collaboration