Rural Revival

BRIDGES Rural College Transformation Insights

Design Insights – an Education Design Lab publication series
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About Education Design Lab and Design Insights Publication Series

The Education Design Lab (Lab) is a national nonprofit that co-designs, prototypes, and tests education-to-workforce models through a human-centered design process focused on understanding learners’ experiences, addressing equity gaps in higher education, and connecting learners to economic mobility. The Lab believes human-centered design allows colleges and universities to map and galvanize their existing strengths to meet the needs of the learners they serve. The Lab’s process also shows higher education leaders how to consider the needs of employers, using the curriculum and program design as a gateway to make skills more visible to learners and employers alike.

Design Insights is a publication series designed to share insights from initiatives led and supported by the Lab as part of the Learner Revolution, which is about changing the future of learning and work in response to the needs of learners, workers, and the evolving labor market. The future of education, training, and work lies with new majority learner-earners, who include parent learners, students of color, first-generation students, low-income students, and communities long underinvested in, around whom the Lab is orienting our work through our Learner Engagement Framework.

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Introduction

In 2020, as the world entered the COVID-19 pandemic, five rural colleges committed to a three-year project with the hope of building their capacity and extending their reach throughout their rural service areas. BRIDGES Rural — an acronym for Building Rural Innovation, Designing Educational Strategies (BRIDGES) — started with a question: **How might we strengthen the capacity of rural community colleges to serve as critical economic growth engines for their learners and communities?**

With the support of Ascendium Education Group, these institutions engaged in a human-centered design process with the Education Design Lab to design and pilot innovative pathways, community partnerships, and learner-focused support services. Each institution also received an incentive grant that aided them in the initial launch of their initiatives.

Often rural is defined as non-metro, or simply what is left after defining what is urban and suburban. Framing rural areas this way assumes they are dependent on their urban or suburban counterparts and results in rural voices and perspectives being misreported or missing and left out of critical conversations. BRIDGES centered rural spaces and the experiences of rural colleges. If there is one theme that unites all of the colleges’ work, it is that the spaces where rural learners live are deeply connected to who they are and what they need from higher education.

The institutions’ journeys are unique, each tailored to the fabric of their own villages, hamlets, and townships. But their transformations uphold the value of human-centered design in rural spaces.

This brief spotlights two kinds of insights from our BRIDGES Rural initiative: Our overarching design insights (listed at right), as well as the transformation insights each institution experienced as they listened deeply and designed for learners in the furthest reaches of their service areas.

The stories of transformation that each institution experienced uphold the principle value of human-centered design, as they listened deeply, engaged multiple stakeholders, and designed with learners in the furthest reaches of their service areas.

At the Education Design Lab, these are some of the design insights we practice:

- Remember, change is constant.
- Never failure, always learning.
- Relationships move at the speed of trust.
- What you pay attention to grows.
- There is always enough time for the right work.

Each of the colleges in BRIDGES first cohort exemplified these beliefs as they engaged in the design process.

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1 Adrienne Maree Arown, Emergent Strategy (Chicago: AK Press, 2017), 42.
The Lab’s approach to human- and equity-centered design used throughout BRIDGES Rural consisted of three modes of design: Understand, Ideate, and Prototype. Design teams focused on learners’ experiences and equitable systems change as they collaborated with their communities across these modes of design, leading to the launch of experimental pilots on each campus that they continue to iterate on and scale.
How might we strengthen the capacity of rural community colleges to serve as critical economic growth engines for their learners and communities?
College of Eastern Idaho

Building Community Trust

College Spotlight

College of Eastern Idaho (CEI) is Idaho’s newest comprehensive community college. As one of only four community colleges in Idaho, CEI’s service area covers nine counties — rural and remote areas spanning 19,332 square miles, roughly the size of New Hampshire and Vermont combined. The college serves close to 3,000 learners with fewer than 20 percent of those learners attending full time. CEI also serves as a training hub for local workforce needs and community services. Through interviews and surveys of learners and community members during the BRIDGES Understand phase, CEI learned many people in more rural parts of its service area were not aware of the college’s presence in their communities or the support that it could offer them. As a result, CEI has focused its pilot on building trust, awareness, and connection to opportunities across the region.
As a new community college, College of Eastern Idaho sought to broaden their reach into smaller rural subregions, or micro-communities, bringing new training and opportunities into communities that had little access to post-high school educational programs. The optimistic college was met with enthusiasm for their presence, but skepticism about opportunities offered in their communities. In Idaho, counties may vote to officially join their predetermined community college district. Being part of the district means citizens pay an additional tax to support the college’s efforts in their communities, so it was critical that CEI had community buy-in. Previous attempts to expand the school’s reach were challenging. With BRIDGES, CEI intentionally sought to deeply understand the people and the needs in these micro-communities and focused on building community trust. During their Understand phase, CEI sought to deeply listen to the community and involve them in the design process and chose to focus on the town of Driggs. The team hosted a gallery walk in the Teton Valley Business Center and invited those in the community to help them as they began ideating on possible opportunities to bring to the area. CEI learned the community was worried about rising housing costs, finding skilled employees for jobs in construction, and supporting English language learners.

As a result of their findings, CEI committed to being visible and present in Teton Valley and the other remote areas of their service region. With “The high schools in the remote communities might have sent two or three students to events in larger cities, but when we go to them, 30 students get to participate. It is impactful to be able to give these students opportunities where they live and connect them with local employers.”

“How can we take this process that we have learned through the Education Design Lab [and] take it to the next level ourselves and be able to ask those same questions, then create that value in our rural communities?”

**College of Eastern Idaho**

Design Insight: Relationships move at the speed of trust.
a portion of their grant funds, CEI invested in a Jeep and branded it to reflect the rugged nature and terrain of the area. This vehicle is used to increase visibility and connect learners with services on-site in their communities. Learn to more about this initiative here: Video podcast: A branded Jeep? ... and more community college marketing tips from College of Eastern Idaho.

CEI also hosted a two-day Construction Combine in Teton County in April 2022. This event, supported and sponsored by local community members, CEI faculty/staff, and local contractors, attracted over 30 participants.

In fall 2022, CEI offered their first ESL (English as Second Language) course in the Teton Valley and were overwhelmed by the interest from the growing Hispanic community. CEI had to offer additional sections of the course to meet community needs.

In spring 2023, CEI took the Construction Combine to another micro-community within their service region. The Construction Combine in Salmon tailored offerings to better meet the specific construction needs in that community, and brought together local community groups, including contractors, school personnel, businesses, and nonprofit organizations. The team is continuing to think about how to fund and host other combines focused on different industries that support the economic needs of individual communities.

This is a powerful example of what it can look like when an institution takes time to establish a meaningful connection with their communities. College of Eastern Idaho designed their services with the community and saw real, powerful change because of it. CEI connected local employers with potential employees, and developed relationships that will “serve as a critical economic growth engines for their learners” throughout the region.
College of Eastern Idaho

Transformation Insights

Stay committed to the design process.

The CEI team remains committed to building favor and follow-through as they continue to work with all rural and remote communities within their service area. They will continue using human-centered design to reach the micro-communities around them, which inspired the college to join the Lab’s Community College Growth Engine as part of Cohort 3.

Listen to communities.

CEI had been previously unsuccessful in their attempts to expand into other satellite areas. In Teton Valley, they listened to that community, gained its trust, and designed with community members.

Push existing solutions with creative applications.

Construction combines were a successful strategy for connecting construction workers with employers. But construction isn’t always the need of CEI’s smaller communities. CEI used the successful model of the construction combine and started expanding into other fields.

Driggs, one of the small rural communities in CEI’s service area, may not seem a likely candidate for IT combines and pathways to work. CEI, however, knows this is one of the few areas that has fiber optic cable running through it, and IT makes a lot of sense for this small area.

Co-design with the community.

CEI made sure that the communities they are serving were part of their design process and seen as equal partners in increasing the economic mobility of the area. They built community buy-in into their new programs by bringing hands-on training and learning opportunities directly to their remote and rural service areas. These opportunities reflected the needs of the community and presented an opportunity to invite community members to see the collaboration and the impact in person.

“We reflected deeply about what the needs of the rural college students really are.”
Eastern Maine Community College

The Spirit of the Pilot

COLLEGE SPOTLIGHT
Eastern Maine Community College’s (EMCC) main campus is located on 72 acres in Bangor and serves a large geographical area that reaches all the way to Maine’s east coast and includes two additional campuses in its service region. Eastern Maine serves a total learner population of over 2,000 and also offers residential campus housing. As a rural college, EMCC joined BRIDGES to, as they say, “put the community back in community college.”
We embrace our geography and what makes us unique.

Honestly, our first pilot project was pretty dismal — we started with 11 and 3 completed. That was our Opportunity-Ready program embedded in an experience called Destination You, and really this was a result of continuing to do the same thing we had always done even though we said we were doing something different.

During the BRIDGES Understand phase, EMCC learned some of the most rural parts of its service area were experiencing unemployment rates of over 40 percent. To solve the problem, their goal was to design flexible pathways leading to career outcomes that have value for learners individually, resulting in community-wide economic growth.

Destination You, a free, eight-week course, was designed for the under- and unemployed people in the community with the hopes of connecting potential employees to employers and establishing career pathways.

Destination You tested the EMCC team’s flexibility and determination, a testimony to the difficulty of change work. The first Destination You cohort had recruitment and attrition challenges, with only three of the 11 learners completing with credentials equivalent to three college credits. Facilitators were difficult to retain, especially in some of the more remote areas. In addition, significant turnover at the college resulted in the loss of several team members.

The team realized the pilot was designed based on untested assumptions about learners. Seeing the need for intentional and direct feedback, EMCC intentionally paused to listen. They internalized the feedback.
from learners and community partners, and opened
themselves up to having some difficult conversations.
As a result, Destination You changed. The concepts
and student supports it offered became a part of the
Opportunity Ready curriculum, and EMCC decided to
focus on the launch of a facilitator training course to
better meet the wants and needs of their students.

Eighteen new facilitators were recruited from rural
spaces throughout their service area. They added a
self-assessment element, virtual office hours, and
common work sessions. By using feedback from all
stakeholders, the reach of the program grew into
more pathways to employment with new partners in
new areas, including the Wabanaki Public Health and
Wellness Center, ecotourism, and culinary employers.

The team at EMCC embraced the power of iteration
and design intuitively and committed to keep
having the hard conversations to ensure the needs
of learners and the community are being met.

“We really needed to refocus our work in the
Katahdin region, which is one of the rural
outposts of our campus with both a great
need and an area with great opportunity.”
Listen to stakeholders.

Early in the design process, the team started to hear that the non-credit side of the college often felt less valued than the credit side. The team listened to those experiences from their own internal stakeholders and started to intentionally design solutions that were equitable for both the credit and noncredit programs. Today, EMCC continues to live and function with the one college model.

Embrace process as product.

EMCC embraced the messy front-end of design and made space for critical redesign. By focusing on the solution they were building for the under- and unemployed people of their communities, EMCC was able to create (and recreate) a solution that not only responded to learner and partner feedback, but was built intentionally for future adaptations and redesign.

Use a community sustainable approach.

Destination You uses a community sustainable approach. EMCC is working with one of the largest employers focused on ecotourism in the Katahdin region to redesign their outdoor education pathways for year-round employment. In the spring of 2023, they launched their first culinary bootcamp to meet the needs of the upcoming tourist season.

Be passionate about the problem, not the solution.

The EMCC team showed incredible resilience during the change process. But their stubbornness was focused on their commitment to solving the problem, not the solution they were testing. They held onto the desire to affect unemployment, and that determination continues to propel them forward.

“It’s not about you, it’s about the people you are building solutions for.”

Eastern Maine Community College

Transformation Insights

“It’s not about you, it’s about the people you are building solutions for.”
Finger Lakes Community College

Small, Intentional Reaches

COLLEGE SPOTLIGHT
Finger Lakes Community College (FLCC) serves diverse communities within the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York. In addition to their main Canandaigua campus, FLCC provides studying and training opportunities at three campus centers. In total, FLCC enrolls an average of 5,000 learners each year. As they learned more about the many different rural micro-communities in their service region, the FLCC team saw the need to connect more deeply with people in these areas. With these goals in mind, the team designed GRIT, a 16-week, place-based certificate program focused on providing competency-based training for in-demand, middle-skills jobs.
“What made FLCC stick out was the fact that they had these success coaches, and that it was 100% online on my own time because those are major enticing factors for me, and just the fact that I could have someone hold my hand, from afar, of course, through the whole process, and a lot of flexibility.” —GRIT learner

“We knew we had to reach everyone in our service area. Some of the Hamlets just have a couple hundred people living there. For us that meant going into each area and finding interested learners and then putting together a cohort, connecting those learners to each other and providing access where there was none before.”

“Billboards. Radio. TV. Email. Newspapers. College advertisements exist in all of these spaces as a main avenue for recruitment. But, all of these tools become less accessible in rural areas. FLCC has a service area of 3,000 square miles. Here, billboards are for trees. Radio signals get lost. The Internet is less reliable.

FLCC’s Growing Rural Infrastructure Together (GRIT) model launched in January 2022 with a cohort of new learners and incumbent workers. The model was co-designed to address a shortage of credentialed workers in the growing advanced manufacturing industry. The cohort met in three different locations throughout the area, and also included a completely

Finger Lakes Community College

Design Insight: There is always enough time to do the right work.

CARVING OUT ACCESS FOR RURAL SPACES

Billboards. Radio. TV. Email. Newspapers. College advertisements exist in all of these spaces as a main avenue for recruitment. But, all of these tools become less accessible in rural areas. FLCC has a service area of 3,000 square miles. Here, billboards are for trees. Radio signals get lost. The Internet is less reliable.

When many institutions were facing low enrollment numbers in the semester following COVID-19, FLCC sought to understand the new challenges learners faced. Using insights from their surveys and gallery walk, the FLCC team designed two prototypes: Learn Anywhere and Who Is My person? Through Who Is My Person?, learners had access to one person to help them with anything they may need during their program. Learn Anywhere encouraged students that whether in person, online, or hybrid, FLCC’s programs had the flexibility to meet their needs. This shift toward flexible modality and a consistent person to support the learner demonstrated FLCC’s commitment to making their institutions learner-centered.

FLCC’s Growing Rural Infrastructure Together (GRIT) model launched in January 2022 with a cohort of new learners and incumbent workers. The model was co-designed to address a shortage of credentialed workers in the growing advanced manufacturing industry. The cohort met in three different locations throughout the area, and also included a completely
remote option. The instructor taught remotely and each GRIT site was gifted with technologies that ensured the learners could access the content and the instructor from a space closer to where they live and work. In addition, the participants received their own coach, who attended class with one of the place-based cohorts every week, to help them through the program. The pilot was so successful that FLCC has implemented the coaching model for every program throughout the entirety of the institution.

When launching GRIT with the BRIDGES project, FLCC’s outreach intentionally focused on micro-communities. Instead of hoping for more home campus engagements from students, FLCC’s goal was to engage students in many localized centers across their area. The GRIT team defined “success” with a deep understanding of what rural community college means. It isn’t a classroom full of students, it is a few students who are connected through a network in spaces where opportunities did not exist before. FLCC remains focused on those small reaches, individualized to the community and the learner, as a powerful mode of economic mobility in their most rural areas.

“It snows a lot here in the winter, the roads are pretty beat up because of the winters here. What does that do to a person’s commute?”
Finger Lakes Community College
Transformation Insights

It isn't most students. It is each student.

FLCC took a highly individualized approach throughout the program. During the recruitment phase, FLCC conducted information sessions on career exploration in a variety of formats (e.g., one-on-one, Webex, in-person meet and greets, etc.). This personalized approach had a strong result: three-quarters of learners who attended an information session registered for the program.

Remote options and localized centers are crucial for rural micro-communities.

The average learner reported a commute of 28.5 minutes. But during winter months, what was once a 20-minute drive to campus becomes a two-hour drive through snow, hills, wind, and ice. Learners talked about the snow and the roads being in poor condition. Local centers reduced that commute time and provided learners with a smaller and local cohort which increased their sense of belonging as an FLCC learner.

Keep asking for feedback.

FLCC is committed to getting feedback from students. This was an early insight for the team that stuck. When the team heard students felt the material was rushed, the team implemented time with professors outside of class and created space to provide feedback in class. These small tweaks add up to a powerful learner experience.

“You can design the most perfect pie in the sky, but if it doesn't work for students, they won't enroll.”
Washington State Community College

Empathy Driven Design

COLLEGE SPOTLIGHT
Washington State Community College (WSCC) is a two-year college in the mid-Ohio Valley located on the Ohio and West Virginia border in Marietta, Ohio. Serving over 2,500 students, WSCC offers more than 40 certificate and associate degree programs to help learners transition from high school to college, as well as those impacted by the ever-changing economy. The college has a large number of students who are part of Ohio’s College Credit Plus program, which provides free college courses to high school students.
“I had a moment with the Lab when we were talking about human-centered design and meeting our learners where they are. That is like DEI on steroids. We aren’t thinking about people as groups. We are thinking about people as individuals. With this divisive climate we are in, I don’t see how anyone could argue with putting learners at the center of what we do and who we serve.”

Washington State Community College

Design Insight: What you pay attention to grows.

**TAKING CARE OF CARETAKER LEARNERS**

For many new majority learners, an unexpected bill, a broken-down vehicle, or a last-minute shift change that leads to failing a class can make graduation seem impossible. Even more, parents and caretakers who enroll in college have to weigh the priorities of their family’s time and money, and may find themselves having to stop everything to tend to their loved ones. These learners, especially, need empathy, flexibility, and to feel a sense of belonging and community with other caretakers. WSCC committed their work to design with and for these determined learners.

The team at WSCC designed Strive for Five with a focus on learners interested in manufacturing. Learners were assigned a support coach and were asked to check in with them (virtually or in-person) and received a $50 gas card each time they met with their coach. WSCC did not see the volume of student engagement that they had hoped, and iterated on the design of their pilot to increase learner engagement — a true testament to their commitment to solving for this specific demographic of learners.
In spring 2023, WSCC once again iterated on their initial idea and launched the Evening EdVantage program. The new design built upon the previous work of supporting learners also serving as caretakers by adding in-demand, shorter-term pathways in which learners could earn a short-term credential within eight to 16 weeks. To further support these learners enrolling in these programs, WSCC made sure the learners qualified for free tuition in their first two courses and ensured learners had a consistent course schedule on Tuesday or Thursday evenings. In addition, learners had access to free childcare and were guaranteed an evening/online path to completion.

Washington State Community College continues listening and growing in their understanding of the needs of parent learners and caretaker. Designing with empathy and intentionally focusing on a sense of belonging empowers these learners and, by extension, their families, making WSCC a college where parent learners belong.
Human-centered design is apolitical.

New education policies are in the news every day. In the middle of the bi-partisan struggle, WSCC focused not on politics, but instead, on the real lived experiences of learners in their community.

Engaging small businesses is critical.

46.8% of the workforce in the United States is in small businesses. While small businesses may not have the capacity to enter into paid internships with a school or even offer many employment opportunities, it is important to find a way to center these voices. WSCC continued to engage their local employers in the process. One employer expressed a concern on the length of an upskilling initiative, so WSCC faculty worked with the employer to create the Four Fridays to a Credential program. The current workers come to WSCC and earn a credential in advanced manufacturing in four weeks. This credential can then be articulated into credit for those who are interested in continuing at WSCC.

What you pay attention to grows!

Historically, WSCC struggled to align with a diverse group of community business owners and employers. At times it felt that the same employer partners were the only voice in the room and WSCC recognized the need to become more intentional in their employer outreach. They started redesigning their communication and partnership strategies and engaged senior leadership and their elected board members in the prioritization of monthly new employer outreach campaigns that brought a new group of employers to the table.
RURAL REVIVAL: ZANE STATE COLLEGE

Zane State College

Keeping It Local

COLLEGE SPOTLIGHT
Zane State College (ZSC) has served Zanesville, Ohio, and the mid-Ohio Valley for over 50 years. With a total enrollment of just over 2,000, Zane State serves a large number of students through Ohio’s College Credit Plus program, which provides free college courses to high school students.
Through the Lab’s work with BRIDGES, teams have learned that rural learners truly love where they live. In rural communities, there are deep generational roots that reach back to the founding of the country. People in rural communities have a deep love of place, and they are committed to staying in the area to grow their own families. The communities Zane State serves love their roots and want to be able to stay local.

During their Understand phase, ZSC learned that the two perceived obstacles to enrolling were work obligations and a misunderstanding of how current programs aligned to the type of careers they were seeking. Students, ZSC employees, and community members all shared concerns about poverty, lack of local job opportunities, increases in substance use and abuse, and an aging infrastructure that may not withstand the dramatic changes of a post-pandemic world.

The team designed the Earn + Learn prototype, which coupled college classes and employment to create a realistic pathway to a degree that absorbed work and employment obligations into the education experience. Knowing that rural learners face transportation obstacles, Zane State intentionally thought about the student who may not be able to afford the drive to an internship site. Students were offered a $50 gas card each week to offset travel expenses. At the end of the semester, all 12 students completed their practicum — and as of the fall of 2023, each student had either found full-time employment or had decided to
pursue a bachelor’s degree. Not only did Zane State increase completion, but they also added additional internship sites that in the past felt inaccessible due to distance and transportation costs.

The team quickly moved to start implementing the same Earn + Learn model in other fields. They were able to co-design a certificate for industrial manufacturing and make a mid-year catalog change, which was not a practice previously used at ZSC. The new personnel and passion for the work sparked boundary-pushing creativity.

Due to the shortage of workers following COVID, the employer had to pull out of the agreement because the cost of losing employee production during the program hours was too great for them to participate, and employers would not make their production numbers.

The challenge of losing a key employer did not stop the team’s commitment to solving their problem. Knowing that industrial maintenance would be in demand, Zane State switched gears and recruited new students into the program to help the employers and provide assistance for the current employees to enroll in the certificate program. The team also designed an Earn + Learn model in Phlebotomy. This work is the result of many conversations about fair wages and retention as well as the partnership formed from Zane State’s first-ever Healthcare Combine. Over 50 students from across the region came together to learn about the multiple careers that are available at hospitals. As a result of the Combine, ZSC has seen an increase in applications and admissions in all healthcare pathways and a significant increase in pay for those learners completing a Phlebotomy certificate.

In 2022, the community learned that Intel would be building three new factories in the area. When large factories move into rural spaces, the landscape changes dramatically. Not only will there be an increase in jobs through Intel, but a growing demand for more teachers, police, and healthcare workers. With this tremendous change on the horizon, Zane State’s work with the Lab has prepared them to be an innovative, flexible community leader when it comes to building new pathways that are in direct service and support of learners and employers.

“The combination of hands-on work in the classroom and field work really was the best experience I ever had in a school.”
Zane State College
Transformation Insights

Fall in love with the problem.
Zane State’s commitment to solving their problem kept them focused when obstacles arose. They continued working toward creating local opportunities for employment. When a major partner had to withdraw from the project because of an employee shortage, the team’s momentum didn’t slow down — it just shifted to other areas.

Start small.
ZSC chose the accounting program for the Earn + Learn pilot because the department had established work-based learning embedded in the curriculum and connections with local accounting firms. The incredible successes of this cohort led to buy-in with the community and within the institution. “We picked accounting purposefully because it was a small cohort and some of them already had paid internships that paid really well.”

True change work is personal.
When ZSC engaged in the human-centered design process, it forces them to listen to people most proximate to the problem and work with that population to craft a solution. Designers need to check their own biases, reframe failure as learning, and be open and trusting with their design partners. That kind of work impacts a person’s approach to solving problems, and the team at ZSC has changed how they think about their work.

Success is determined by relationships.
Relationships move at the speed of trust, and the relationships that ZSC built with communities and employers fueled their design. They reflected that the key to their progress was, “Our relationships with students, our relationships with businesses, our relationships with our own faculty and staff, relationships with the community.”
### BRIDGES Rural College Transformation Insights Summary

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<td>• Fall in love with the problem. • Start small. • True change work is personal. • Success is determined by relationships.</td>
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As the Lab continues our work with rural postsecondary leaders, we are excited to continue to test the approaches from this project with other rural and remote communities. In spring 2022, the Rural Together community of practice came together as a result of the BRIDGES work, and we are excited to continue co-leading that space with rural postsecondary practitioners.

In future endeavors, we are hoping to learn more about how data infrastructure and capacity might be strengthened at rural community colleges to create a data culture that supports decision making and sustainability. As well as, how understanding rural community ecosystems might help address questions around the value of postsecondary in communities that have longstanding distrust of higher education institutions. The Lab looks forward to working with our Rural Together community and future partners to address these topics, while continuing to highlight the innovative work happening throughout all rural communities.
Acknowledgments

We are grateful to all of the rural learners, employers, faculty, researchers, and community members across the country who have shared their experiences and perspectives with us over the past three years. Special thanks to our partners at the Ascendium Education Group for empowering us to embark on this journey.

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