

# OREGON GEAR UP & FORD FAMILY FOUNDATION COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY PROJECT

## 2025 EVALUATION REPORT

In December 2024, Oregon GEAR UP secured funding from The Ford Family Foundation to design, implement, and evaluate a collaborative project for interested GEAR UP school districts. As part of this initiative, interested districts formed teams composed of the district superintendent, a higher education partner, and/or a workforce partner to develop and implement two collaborative projects in their communities. Four school districts (Lincoln County, Klamath County, Mapleton, and Prospect) decided to participate.

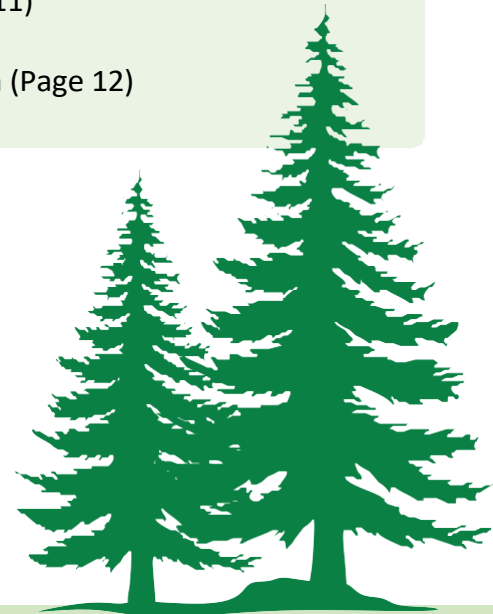
Teams attended the Rural Summit for Cradle to Career Success in Anchorage, Alaska, spring 2025 before beginning the development of both a small and large project intended to serve their community and school. Each team's projects funded through The Ford Family Foundation were created with the intention of helping rural students prepare for their futures.

Oregon GEAR UP retained Metis Associates to conduct an evaluation designed to document the initiative's successful practices, challenges and lessons learned and assess its impact on students, schools, and the greater community.

Data for the evaluation of this initiative was obtained from conference feedback forms, end-of-year team reflection surveys, observations of virtual learning communities, and focus groups with team members.

### REPORT ORGANIZATION

- Findings at a Glance (Page 2)
- Project Overview (Page 3)
- Individual Team Profiles
  - ◊ Team Prospect (Page 4)
  - ◊ Team Lincoln (Page 5)
  - ◊ Team Mapleton (Page 6)
  - ◊ Team Klamath (Page 7)
- Rural Summit Impact (Pages 8-9)
- End-of-Project Team Reflections (Pages 10-11)
- Conclusion (Page 12)



# FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

**The Ford Family Foundation initiative created sustainable community partnerships in participating districts.** Teams established "clear, replicable roadmaps for future implementation" through their collaborative planning processes. This initiative revealed significant community support for rural student success and created lasting partnerships between schools, healthcare systems, higher education, and community organizations.

**According to stakeholders, the initiative resulted in increased student engagement and opportunities, in some cases far surpassing initial expectations.** Projects provided meaningful experiences for students that connected them to their communities. Students across all projects gained valuable skills, career exposure, and sense of purpose in contributing to and/or being involved with their rural communities.



*I actually got to know the students who were involved on a different level... outside of my office.*

*Everyone is committed to student success and developing future leaders.*

— Team Members



## **Team members gained valuable knowledge and connections during the Rural Summit:**

- **100%** rated overall summit quality as "excellent" or "good"
- **92%** reported the Summit increased their knowledge for supporting rural youth
- **92%** gained practical strategies to implement for youth upward mobility



## **Teams reported positive impacts, including unexpected benefits, and indicated they plan to sustain the projects moving forward:**

- **100%** of respondents agreed the project creation process gave them insights into making a meaningful difference
- **100%** of teams were aligned in their goals and intent for their projects
- **88%** reported their projects had positive unexpected impacts
- **100%** of teams intend for their projects to continue in the future



## **The initiative strengthened partnerships within and across rural communities:**

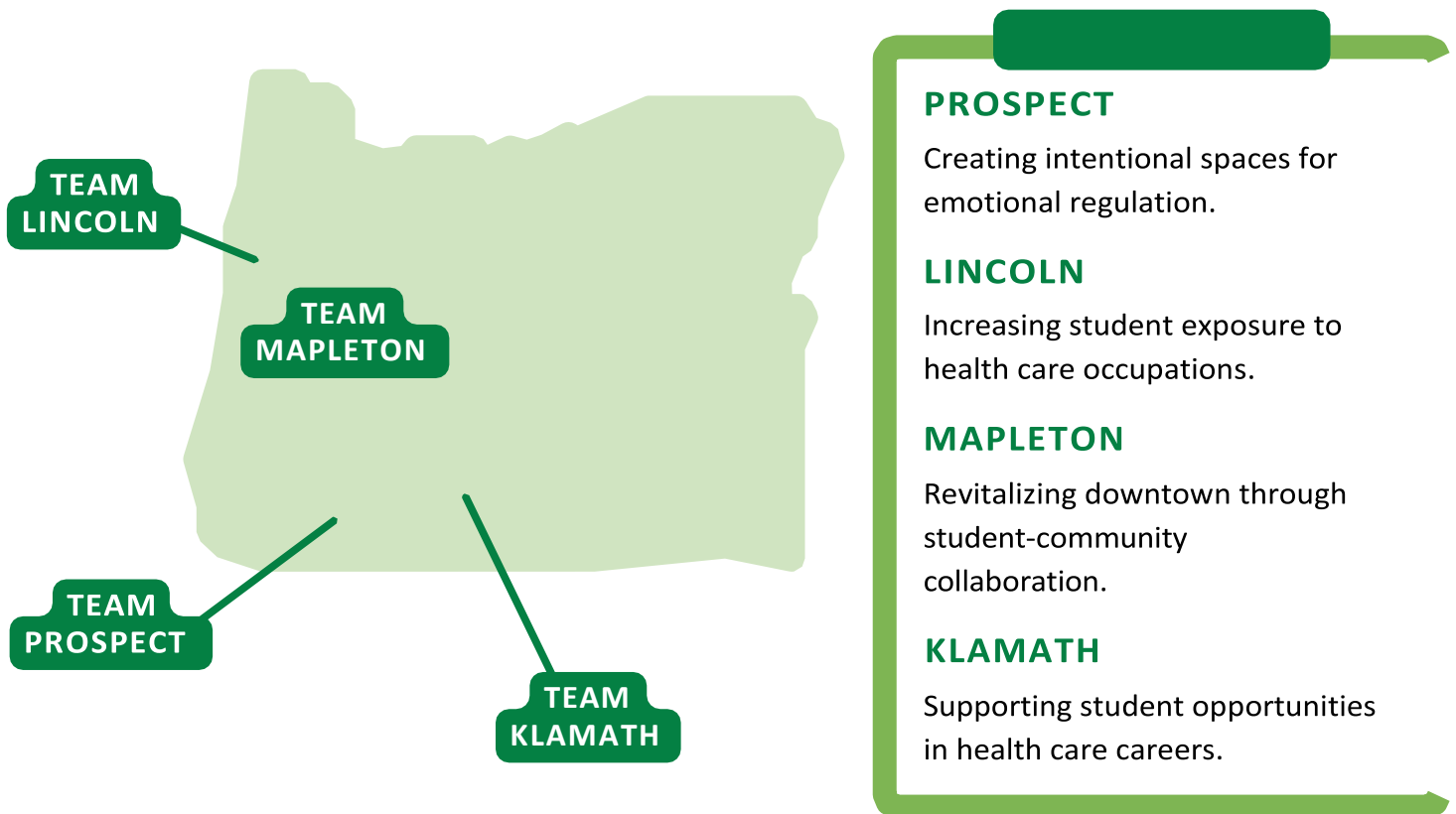
- **100%** deepened connections with their own team members
- **83%** developed or deepened connections with other GEAR UP teams and rural community leaders across the country during the Rural Summit
- **88%** reported their team members taught them things they didn't previously know
- **88%** reported their teams worked and collaborated well together

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

## FOUR TEAMS FROM RURAL COMMUNITIES ACROSS OREGON DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FORD FAMILY FOUNDATION INITIATIVE.

Lincoln County, Mapleton, Prospect, and Klamath County School Districts decided to form teams and participate in the Ford Family Foundation initiative. Teams received funding to create and implement a small project and a large project within their school(s) and community.

Each team had the autonomy to develop projects that addressed the unique needs of their district's students and communities. Prior to teams establishing and implementing their small and large projects, each team attended the Rural Summit for Cradle to Career Success in Alaska in spring 2025 to gain insight into different ways students in rural communities can be adequately and effectively supported.

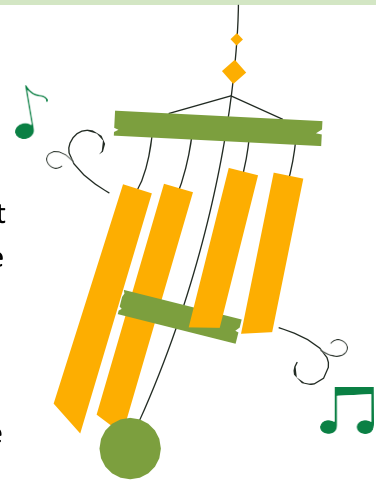


During the spring through fall semesters, cross-team meetings were held virtually hosted by Oregon GEAR UP. This professional collaborative community gave teams the space to share their progress and efforts with one another, which allowed for teams to brainstorm solutions to ongoing challenges and gain ideas from other districts.

Each team's projects and impact of the initiative are described in more detail in the following pages.

## CREATING INTENTIONAL SPACES FOR EMOTIONAL REGULATION

District leadership identified emotional regulation as a key challenge for Prospect students. In response, the district has shifted toward approaches that emphasize engagement, understanding, and restorative practices, rather than shaming or punitive responses, when students experience strong emotional reactions. To address students' need for support in navigating and regulating their emotions, the Prospect team focused its efforts on establishing safe, calming spaces where students can decompress during the school day.



### SMALL PROJECT

- Students created wind chimes to hang from the old growth Douglas Fir trees on campus alongside outdoor seating with lights and music.
- As a result of this project, another designated space in the school was developed with flexible seating and decompressing stations to aid in student emotional regulation. The chime garden was set up right outside this classroom to give students an additional space to have flexible seating and emotionally regulate.

### LARGE PROJECT

- A new parking space and sidewalks in the front of the school were added. Students developed and engineered two entryway spaces with new low impact plants, rock, and flexible seating.
- This community service-learning project provided a space for students and community members to connect with one another at the entrance of the school.

## IMPACT

These projects provided students with unique opportunities to give back to their schools and communities through service learning while also developing important social-emotional skills. As emphasized by the superintendent, students gained experience in respectful problem-solving and effective collaboration—critical skills to build before entering the workforce.



## INCREASING STUDENT EXPOSURE TO HEALTH CARE OCCUPATIONS

The Lincoln County projects addressed the district's need for Career and Technical Education (CTE) in health care occupations. Each project focused on providing students attending Lincoln County schools with valuable experiences while learning about the medical field and providing a good understanding of how to pursue a career in health care.

### SMALL PROJECT

- ♦ High school students attended a panel presented by individuals with different positions within the health field (from the Samaritan system and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians). Students gained insights into how different medical professionals reached their current positions.
- ♦ Students participated in hands-on learning opportunities at Oregon Coast Community College (OCCC).

### LARGE PROJECT

- ♦ Partnerships were developed with health teachers across the district and the Oregon Area Health Education Center. Teachers participated in learning opportunities and students attended hands-on workshops to learn directly from health care and medical professionals.
- ♦ Students attended a field trip to the Oregon State Hospital Museum to learn about the history of mental health treatment and care in Oregon. There are plans to take students to a local hospital in Lincoln County to tour the facilities, labs, and observe a medical procedure.

### IMPACT

According to team members, students developed a stronger understanding of how to pursue and take actionable steps toward careers in the medical field through direct interactions and hands-on experiences with health care professionals. The planning and collaboration required to design and implement each project also established a clear and replicable roadmap for future implementation. For instance, OCCC plans to host more panel presentations for other career fields using the format and lessons learned through this initiative. Through the partnerships and systems created for both projects, the district is positioned to continue offering high-quality, impactful opportunities in the health care field with even greater effectiveness.

# TEAM MAPLETON

## REVITALIZING DOWNTOWN THROUGH STUDENT AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Downtown Mapleton does not currently have many opportunities for students to work in the local community once they graduate. As part of this initiative, the Mapleton team wanted to bring the school and community together to collaborate and share ideas on how to give new life to downtown Mapleton.



### SMALL PROJECT

- An initial “Imagine Your Dream Mapleton” meeting to brainstorm ideas for revitalizing downtown Mapleton was held with community members and staff, along with support from Mapleton student leaders.
- Ideas developed at this meeting were grouped by themes and topics by project leaders. Mapleton student leaders took community input back to their peers to brainstorm, plan, and devise strategies and efforts to revitalize downtown.

### LARGE PROJECT

- A second meeting was held to further discuss and narrow down ideas for the town of Mapleton that were developed in the first meeting.
- Plans were being finalized to fund equipment and supplies for the creation of a student space.

### IMPACT

As highlighted by team members, providing a space for community members to gather and share their ideas with one another built more trust with the school district, sense of agency, and a greater sense of community in Mapleton. Through these efforts, long-term partnerships are being developed and the process of revitalizing the town has begun. Mapleton locals are feeling more positively about the outlook for the community as a result of fostering these conversations.



## SUPPORTING STUDENT INTEREST IN AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR HEALTH OCCUPATIONS

Similar to Lincoln County, the Klamath County team identified a need to expand access for students in rural and smaller schools to CTE instructors and exposure to career pathways in the medical field. In response, Klamath County schools partnered with Sky Lakes Medical Center to provide students with valuable opportunities to earn both high school and college credit while exploring a range of careers in health care.

### SMALL PROJECT

- Launch of the CTE Campus at Sky Lakes Hospital: Participating students—initially 11 students from one high school in the district—enrolled in an exploratory course offering dual credit through Klamath Community College (KCC) in medical terminology. Instruction includes virtual lecture days paired with on-site observation days, during which students visit Sky Lakes Hospital to gain firsthand exposure to the health care environment.
- To foster professionalism and a sense of pride in their work, health occupations students were provided with appropriate clothing supplies and hospital ID badges.

### LARGE PROJECT

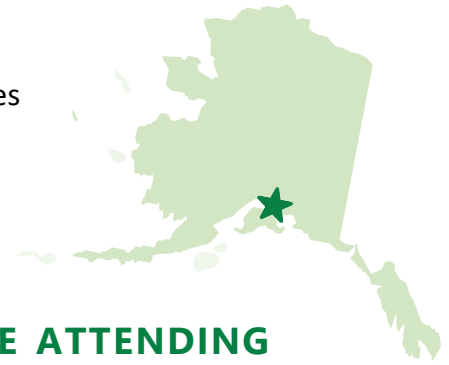
- Students were provided transportation to and from their shifts at the hospital so they could arrive on time to work and have reliable transportation back to their home school.
- The CTE Campus program is set to expand to accommodate around 200 students from 5 different schools in the county. The hospital now has 30 departments participating in the program and plans to have between 1,400 and 1,700 observations by students this year.

### IMPACT

As highlighted by team members, this initiative underscored the strong community support for educating and preparing Klamath County students to pursue careers that enable them to give back to their community. Participants also emphasized the critical need for health care professionals in rural areas, noting that programs like this create meaningful pathways for local residents to provide these essential services. Klamath County students expressed pride in working at their local hospital and contributing directly to the well-being of their community.

# IMPACT OF RURAL SUMMIT

In April 2025, the four teams attended the Rural Summit for Cradle to Career Success in Anchorage, Alaska. The summit provided opportunities to learn and share effective strategies to support rural youth on pathways from birth to career. A survey was administered to gather participants' feedback on the Summit, and twelve of the sixteen attendees (75% response rate) completed the survey.



## TEAMS FELT POSITIVELY ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE ATTENDING THE SUMMIT AND MOST LEFT WITH NEW IDEAS AND KNOWLEDGE.

As shown below, almost all respondents (92%) reported that they either “strongly agree” or “slightly agree” that the summit gave them opportunities to connect and collaborate with other leaders from rural communities, was a valuable experience, increased their knowledge for how to support pathways for success for rural youth, and provided strategies and ideas to implement to ensure youth are on the path to upward mobility.

**Figure 1: Impact of Summit on Knowledge and Collaboration**

Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements (N=12):

● Strongly agree ● Slightly agree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Slightly disagree ● Strongly disagree

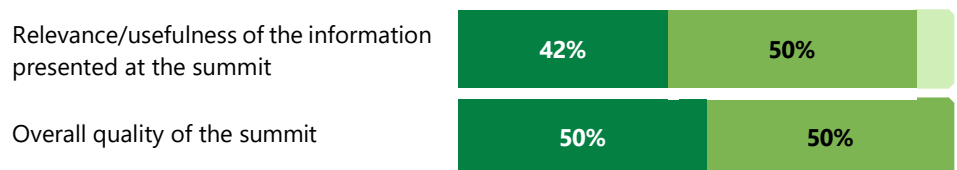


All attendees (100%) reported the overall quality of the summit as “excellent” or “good,” and almost all gave the same rating to the relevance/usefulness of the information presented (92%).

**Figure 2: Participant Satisfaction with Summit.**

Please rate the following (N=12):

● Excellent ● Good ● Fair ● Poor

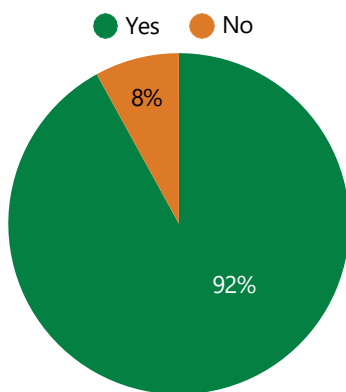


# RURAL SUMMIT FEEDBACK

As shown in the graph below, most respondents (92%) reported that the Summit provided them with knowledge that will enhance the way they do their job.

**Figure 3: Impact on Jobs**

Will the content you learned at the summit enhance the way you do your job in any way (N=12)?



*The Summit opened our eyes to so many connections. We knew we had a need, but we didn't know how to get there.*

*I really enjoyed this experience. It was a time where I felt from talking to others from different places that seconded that we are doing good things that are also being attempted elsewhere. I appreciated how different the focus was compared to other conferences from the standpoint that all was linked to rural education and this is very different than say education found in an urban setting.*

– Team Members



## THE SUMMIT PROVIDED ATTENDEES WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT WITH TEAM MEMBERS, OREGON GEAR UP STAFF, AND LEADERS FROM OTHER RURAL COMMUNITIES.

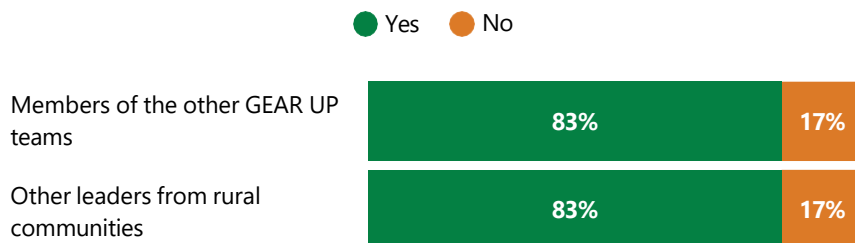
The majority of team members (83%) reported they developed or deepened their connections with members of the other GEAR UP teams and other leaders from rural communities. All respondents (100%) reported their connections with their team developed or deepened during the summit.

**100%**

of respondents reported they developed or deepened their connections with their team.

**Figure 4: Impact on Connections**

Did you develop or deepen your connections with...(N=12)?



# END-OF-PROJECT TEAM REFLECTIONS

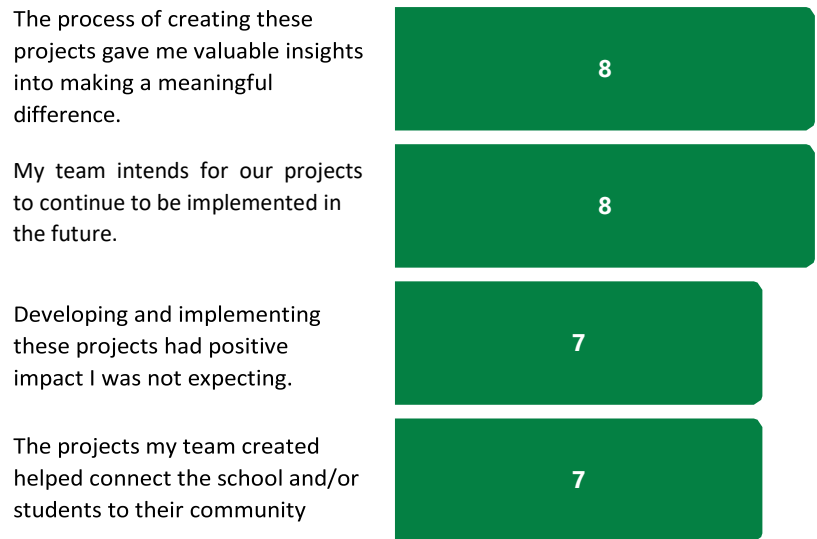
## THE PROJECTS DESIGNED AND IMPLEMENTED BY EACH TEAM HAD POSITIVE IMPACTS ON STUDENTS, SCHOOLS, AND COMMUNITIES.

At the conclusion of the initiative, eight participants completed a reflection survey about their experiences, insights, and project outcomes.

As shown in the graph to the right, survey responses suggest that team members felt very positively about their involvement with and the impact of The Ford Family Foundation initiative on their communities. All respondents (N=8) agreed that the process of creating the small and large projects gave them insights into making a meaningful difference and that their districts plan to continue the projects in the future. In open-ended responses, team members further highlighted the unintentional positive impacts the initiative has had on their schools, students, and greater communities.

**Figure 5: Creating Meaning and Sustainability**

Number of participants who “strongly agree” “agree” with the following (N=8):



### UNINTENTIONAL POSITIVE IMPACTS



*The partnerships, systems, and planning structures developed through this work created access well beyond the original project design, resulting in broader student participation and more equitable access to high-quality, career-connected learning experiences than initially anticipated.*

*[Collaboration] with students who traditionally do not get along. [...And] the link to service learning with students who for the most part had never been involved in a community project.*

– Team members



# END-OF-PROJECT TEAM REFLECTIONS

## THIS INITIATIVE FOSTERED VALUABLE TEAM COLLABORATION AND RELATIONSHIPS THAT WILL BE SUSTAINED AND EXPANDED MOVING FORWARD.

**Figure 6: Impact on Collaboration**

Number of participants who “strongly agree” “agree” with the following (N=8):



As shown in the graph to the left, all team members (N = 8) agreed that developing and implementing their projects was a valuable experience and that their teams were aligned in their goals and intentions. In open-ended responses, participants also described the positive impacts of the relationships formed through this work, including the establishment of new partnerships and a deeper understanding of the diverse perspectives and support systems within their community.

### IMPACT OF TEAM RELATIONSHIPS



*I learned that our team brings a wide variety of expertise and community connections, and that leveraging those relationships is especially powerful in a rural setting. The more we collaborate and tap into local knowledge and partnerships, the greater the opportunities we can create for our students.*

*Relationships that were already established were further strengthened through this work... I developed new relationships with team members I had not previously worked with, resulting in connections I expect will be long-lasting. I would not hesitate to reach out to any member of the team to discuss new project ideas or seek collaboration in the future.*

– Team members



# CONCLUSION

Team members emphasized that The Ford Family Foundation initiative served as a critical catalyst in rural communities for bringing together local stakeholders who share common goals and bringing valuable opportunities and experiences to historically underserved students.

Respondents from each team unanimously agreed that other school districts would benefit from participating in similar initiatives.



**100%**

of respondents reported that they believe other rural school districts would benefit from participating in similar initiatives (N=8).

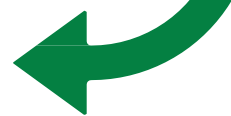
## IMPORTANCE OF THE INITIATIVE



*This experience created intentional opportunities to connect schools with community partners in ways that may not have otherwise occurred. Often, a project like this serves as the catalyst for bringing together individuals and organizations who share a common goal but may not naturally collaborate, helping break down silos and expand opportunities for students.*

*Having a set amount of funding available and a team successfully implement a shared project will demonstrate what is possible for rural school communities that don't always have the same resources that are available in larger regions/communities.*

– Team members



## THIS COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVE'S SUCCESS DEMONSTRATES THE POWER OF:



Providing structured funding and support for collaborative rural projects



Creating intentional networking opportunities to increase connections across rural communities



Leveraging local expertise and partnerships to drive long-lasting changes in schools and communities



Focusing on sustainable systems and programs, rather than one-time efforts