



# **The Rural Roadmap:**

## **A National Project for Strengthening College Pathways**

**TACC.ORG/TSC**



**Texas Success Center**

# What is a Rural College?

*A Rural College generally defined as an institution of higher education (most often a community college or technical college) whose main campus is located in a geographic area officially classified as rural, non-metropolitan, or outside the boundaries of a major urban center.*



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# AGENDA ITEMS



## Collaboration and Learning in Rural Community Colleges

- Rural Leader Learning Community - NCII
- Rural Community College Excellence: A Guide – Aspen College Excellence Program
- State and regional collaborations

## The Rural Guided Pathways Project

- Overview, structure and participating colleges
- Learning goals and partnerships
- Institute themes
- Support for college leadership

Kilgore College – Integrating RGP into our reform work.

# Collaboration and Learning in Rural Community Colleges



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# Rural Leader Learning Community

- Organized and facilitated by the National Center for Inquiry and Improvement (NCII)
  - Twenty-six leaders from 25 states convened in 2020-2022
  - The group explored common challenges and collectively addressed issues related to their redesign and institutional improvement efforts
- Published the Rural Community College Leader series, a series of six action-oriented briefs:
  - *Creating a College-going Mindset*
  - *Acting Boldly to Build Financial Solvency*
  - *Cultivation Partnerships to Support Students' Basic Needs*
  - *Diversifying Faculty at Rural Colleges*
  - *Redesigning Advising and Support Services*
  - *Collaborating to Create Regional Economic Opportunity*

<https://ncii-improve.com/rural-community-college-leader-series/>

# Rural Community College Excellence: A Guide to Delivering Strong Opportunity for Students and Communities

## Strengths

- Strong assets on which to build employment opportunities
- Connection to place
- Small size and importance to region
- Can-do spirit
- Influx of diverse talent
- Guided pathways work

## Challenges

- Affordable housing for faculty and students
- Distance between homes, K12, colleges, employers and universities
- Gaps between available good jobs and skilled workforce
- Trust/understanding: “Is college worth it?”
- Gaps in success outcomes among student populations.

# Elements of Strong Rural Community Colleges

[https://www.aspencsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Aspen\\_RuralCommunityCollegeExcellence\\_Spring2023.pdf](https://www.aspencsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Aspen_RuralCommunityCollegeExcellence_Spring2023.pdf)

- Create Pathways to Economic Mobility
- Convince Students to Enroll and Stay in School
- Build Strategic Partnerships
- Utilize Small Size as a Strength

# State and Regional Collaborations

## North Carolina Rural College Leaders Program

- 10 colleges
- Support leadership development
- Identify best practices
- Develop toolkits for partnership with industry partners.

## Texas Community College Consortium (TC3)

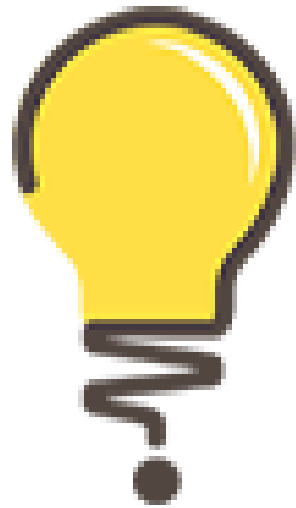
- Expanded beyond original set of east Texas colleges to include central and western colleges
- Improve student outcomes, lower administrative costs, and improve data insights
- Collaborative purchasing power.



# The Rural Guided Pathways Project



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**NCII**

*Rural Guided  
Pathways Project*

# Rural Guided Pathways Project Overview

**A multi-year project with a national cohort of rural community colleges who will work together — and with community partners in their regions — to implement pathways to economic prosperity.**



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# Rural Pathways Phase I

## (2022 to 2024)

- National cohort of 16 rural community colleges
- First of its kind in two ways
  - Only pathways institute structure focused specifically on the needs of rural institutions
  - First time community partners are deeply embedded in pathways implementation.

# Rural Pathways Phase II

## (2025 to 2027)

- Expands Rural Pathways to 28 colleges
  - 15 of the 16 colleges returned for Phase 2
- Participating colleges work with each other — and community partners in their regions
  - Designing and implementing a better student experience
  - Ensuring that more students earn credentials and move on to living-wage jobs or transfer to a four-year institution with junior status
  - Collaborating with key stakeholders to increase economic opportunity in their region through a cross-sector approach
  - Implementing evidence-based reforms that lead to improved educational and workforce outcomes.

# A Community-based Approach is Imperative



## K-12 Partners

Early and ongoing conversations with students about value of post-secondary credential

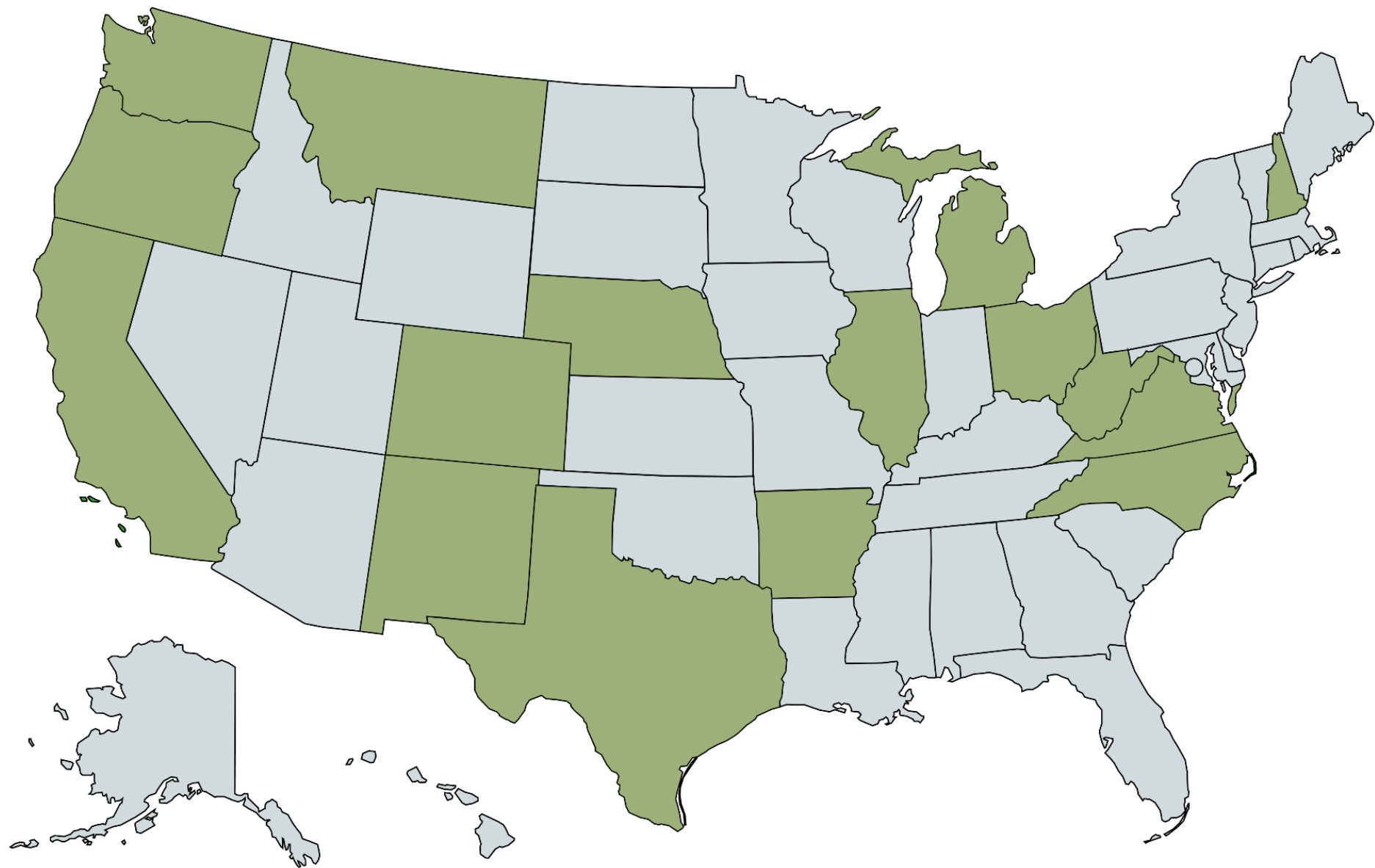


## Employers

Collaborate with the college on developing clear paths that include entry-level positions and opportunities for advancement

# Rural Guided Pathways Project Colleges

- Bay de Noc Community College (MI)
- Central Carolina Community College (NC)
- **Central Texas College (TX)**
- Colorado Mountain College (CO)
- Columbia Gorge Community College (OR)
- Davidson-Davie Community College (NC)
- Edison State Community College (OH)
- Grays Harbor College (WA)
- John Wood Community College (IL)
- **Kilgore College (TX)**
- Linn-Benton Community College (OR)
- Marion Technical College (OH)
- Missoula College (MT)
- **McLennan Community College (TX)**
- Montcalm Community College (MI)
- Mountain Gateway Community College (VA)
- North Central State College (OH)
- Northeast Community College (NE)
- Patrick & Henry Community College (VA)
- Reedley College (CA)
- San Juan College (NM)
- Southwestern Oregon Community College (OR)
- **Temple College (TX)**
- Tillamook Bay Community College (OR)
- University of Arkansas CC – Batesville (AR)
- Washington State Community College (OH)
- West Virginia Northern CC (WV)
- White Mountain Community College (NH)





# Overview of Cohort College Enrollment

- Colleges range in size from 500 to 8,200 (F23 enrollment)
- 95,000+ students across the 28 colleges
- 70% - part-time students on average
- 27% of the students are over 25 yrs.
- 31% of the students are under 18 yrs.

# Project Professional Development and Support

## Institutes

Six 2 ½ day institutes. Participating colleges will send an 8-person team to each institute.

## Coaches

Colleges will have an assigned implementation coach & leadership coach

## Site Visits

Colleges will have one site visit from its rural pathways coach each year

## Office Hours

Each college team will participate in two virtual office hours per semester

## Virtual Consultancies

Each college team will be invited to two virtual consultancies annually

## Topical Webinars

NCII and its partners will develop and host three topical webinars per year



# College Roles & Expectations

*Pathways Project Team Leadership and Composition:*

- **CEOs are required to attend** and actively oversee the work with support from designated Rural Pathways Leads
- CEOs designate five or six (5–6) **community partners** who are committed allies in enhancing regional economic opportunity
- College CEOs & Project Leads also identify **a core project team** who help advance the work over the project.

# College Roles & Expectations

*Participation and engagement throughout the project:*

- Colleges send an eight-person team to each Institute (6)
- CEO and the Pathways Project Lead attend **every** Institute
- College teams participate in virtual support events
- College teams coordinate with the Implementation Coach to set agenda for one coaching visit to the college each year
- CEO and Project Lead participate in each coaching visit and all other project support structures.

# Rural Pathways Institutes & Curriculum



# Rural Pathways Implementation Coaches

*14 Implementation Coaches are grouped into two-person teams*

- Each coach is responsible for leading the work of 2 colleges
- Coaches work with their partner to provide backup for 2 additional colleges
- Coaches provide facilitation, guidance, leadership, and support to their colleges through the following activities:
  - During team time at all Institutes
  - Have regular check-in meetings with college project leads
  - Support their colleges as they prepare for the institutes
  - Work with the CEO and Project Lead to conduct one site visit each year.

# Rural Pathways Leadership Coaches

*There are six Rural Pathways Leadership Coaches*

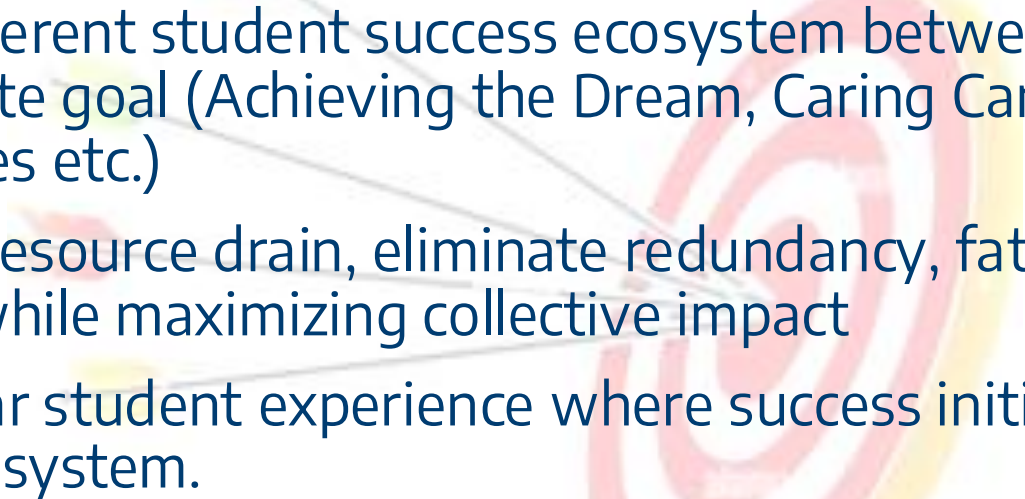
- Role is to support the institution when participating in the Aspen Leadership Teams curriculum
- Leadership coaches attend two in-person institutes
  - *Spring 2025 and Fall 2027*
- Leadership coaches facilitate the virtual Aspen Leadership Teams events:
  - *September 3rd, 2025*
  - *February 6th, 2026*
  - *September 3rd, 2026*
  - *February 5th, 2027*

# Summary of College Goals

Clarifying Paths to Student Employment and Transfer Goals (20 college goals)	Helping Students Choose and Enter a Program (24 college goals)	Ensuring Students are Learning Across Programs (16 college goals)	Ensuring Students Complete their Program (15 college goals)	Recruiting Students into Programs (29 college goals)
Meta majors 4 goals	Academic and career exploration and program choice 3 goals	Active and experiential learning 5 goals	Class scheduling based on educational plans 9 goals	Bridges to credit programs for non-credit program students 12 goals
Transfer program mapping 6 goals	Educational planning 11 goals	Corequisite support in math 8 goals	Student advising 6 goals	Onramps to college degree programs for HS career-technical students 3 goals
Workforce program mapping 10 goals	Helping students explore the connection between programs and living wages 10 goals	Faculty professional development 3 goals		Onramps to college degree programs for HS dual enrollment students 14 goals



# Aligning Initiatives – Why?

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- Create a coherent student success ecosystem between initiatives that share the same ultimate goal (Achieving the Dream, Caring Campus, Unlocking Opportunities etc.)
  - To prevent resource drain, eliminate redundancy, fatigue and student/staff confusion, while maximizing collective impact
  - Create a clear student experience where success initiatives feel like a single, coordinated system.

*Alignment shifts the focus from managing individual programs to leading a single coherent student success strategy.*

# Aligning Initiatives – How?

- **Centralized Oversight** - authority to coordinate all major initiatives is given to a single leadership entity (VP, Steering Committee etc.)
- **Integrated Teams** - Cross-functional teams or workgroups are established, requiring key personnel from different projects to meet regularly and share progress
- **Unified Intake / Referral System** - all student support programs are required to use the same platform or system
- **Common Metrics** - all projects agree on a core set of shared success metrics (e.g., fall-to-fall retention, course completion in gateway math, and credential attainment). **Collective effort** drives institutional improvement

*By creating an overarching structure that connects the goals, processes, and data of separate projects*



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**QUESTIONS?**

# THANK YOU!

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