

# Six Principles for Measuring Rural Development Progress

*October 19, 2024*

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Peer Learning

Field Development

# Measure Up: A Call to Action

## Our Goal

To deepen conversations about ways for funders to design programs that consider lower-capacity communities' realities, needs, and goals.

## Who Contributed

46 rural economic and community development practitioners from a diverse range of rural and Native nation communities.

# Why Measurement is Important



A fundamental reassessment of how we measure rural development progress and who defines success



Funding pipelines from all sources will have far greater impact



There has to be mutual respect, and I think oftentimes communities value what funders bring to the table because of the connection to the financial resources that will come along with them. But that same respect isn't always given or shown by funders who walk into a space acknowledging the [local] work. . . If you don't demand that, it doesn't happen.



**Felicia Lucky**  
*President, Black Belt  
Community Foundation*

# THRIVE RURAL FRAMEWORK

Rural Voice and Power

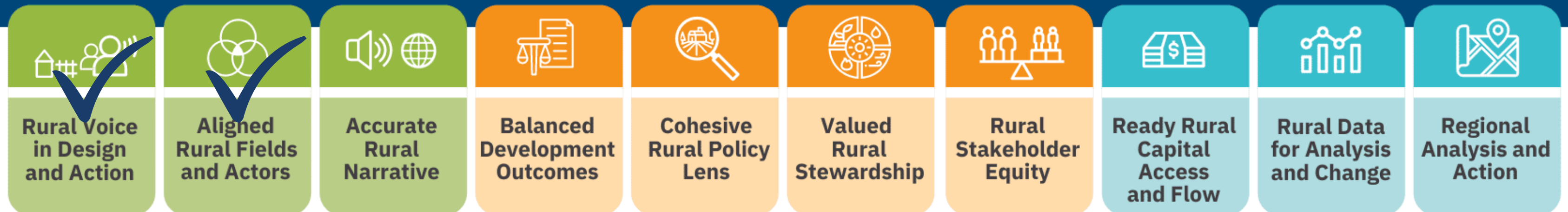
Equitable Aims and Design

Resources for Productive Action

## Local-Level Building Blocks



## Systems-Level Building Blocks



The Foundational Element requires identifying and dismantling historical and ongoing discriminatory practices that disadvantage rural people and places based on place, race, & class.

1

Expand the range of individual and community assets used to indicate critical rural development progress.

**There is a need for broader, more holistic sets of community and economic development progress measurements.**

“

The data for Puna says that 78% of households are ALICE (AssetLimited, Income-Constrained while Employed) and in poverty. A woman from Puna told us, ‘We might be the worst when it comes to income, but we are the best when it comes to ‘ohana (family): None of us are making it on our own, and all of us are making it because of ‘ohana.’ The definition of wealth for Hawai‘i Island communities is very different from what’s being presented to us as a measure of success.

”



**Janice Ikeda**  
*Executive Director,  
Vibrant Hawai‘i*

2

Do not dictate what to measure. Work with rural initiatives to define the progress indicators that make local - and mutual - sense.

**Extensive reporting requirements are time-consuming, extractive, and inhibit grantee effectiveness.**

“

“It seems to me that in rural communities there may be a different quality of conversation about what matters, because of the strength and importance of our social network and our quality of life, more so than how much someone makes, or their status.



**Ajulo Othow**  
*Founder and CEO,  
EnerWealth Solutions*

”

3

Measure progress relative to the rural effort's starting point at its current stage of development - not against an ideal "success" standard.

**More progress is made when communities are allowed to assess progress from their own starting points.**

“

I was a government funder for eight years in rural New Mexico, and I walked into communities thinking, 'The poverty rate was X,' or 'This was the income level to get [to in] this program.' And if I could have walked into a community knowing what that community felt was low income, or how to measure how they felt they were at, or their level of satisfaction with their economic situation, that would [have been] so much better. ”

”



**Terry Brunner**  
*CEO, Pivotal New Mexico*



4

Measure decreases in place, race, and class divides – and increases in the participation and decision-making that reduce these divides – as inherent elements of increasing rural prosperity.

**Policy and investment designers should reach out to the “unreached rural” in every region, race, and class.**

“

To us, rural is a culture, and when we define it as a culture and make it a topic around equity, I think it’s harder to marginalize rural people in rural places. [A] huge part is just ensuring that people understand who we are and that we have representation in those different buckets – to not only see our successes and see our wins, but to understand how to digest our data and make it a story that’s positive and not weaponize it against us.



**Justin Archer Burch**  
*Washington County Economic Alliance and Delta Compass  
President & CEO*

”

5

Identify, value, and measure effective collaboration as progress toward rural prosperity.

**Collaboration must be built on trust, shared understanding and goals, broad participation and decision-making across stakeholders**

“

[In rural America] nobody has the resources to go it alone. One of the things it takes to do better – that almost no funding streams are willing to pay for – is collaboration. They’re willing to pay for that particular project, but the glue that holds it all together is just probably the most difficult piece to find support for in rural communities.

”



**John Molinaro**  
*Principal,  
RES Associates, LLC*



Identify, value, and measure signals of local momentum as progress toward rural prosperity.

**Youth engagement is a particularly good indicator of momentum - it increases young adults' belief that they can find a way to stay in the community.**



Our native youth, of the ones I was able to survey on Cheyenne River, feel optimistic that they can do better than what their parents had access to. That is a direct reflection of how recently colonization happened to us. You can tell from your grandma going to [non-Native] boarding school that "I'm going to have a better access to education or better opportunity access than what my grandma did." I think that optimism from youth could be a good measurement of success in rural America.



**Lakota Vogel**  
*Executive Director,  
Four Bands Community Fund*





## Thinking about your own work...

How are you currently measuring your success/impact/need?

Are there metrics missing from how you could be capturing impact/need/change?

# Community Strategies Group



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