



Rural Economic Realities

Rural communities have faced **chronic underinvestment** and **extractive economic strategies** that pull wealth away.

Rural America accounts for **20% of the US population** and its economy contributes **6.6% of the United State's GDP**, yet received **less than 1% of venture capital** and **only 7% of philanthropic dollars** (*less than 0.5% supports Native communities*).

Barriers to Economic Development

- Local capacity
- Basic infrastructure needs
- Preserving rural identity and culture
- Balancing growth of new industries while maintaining traditional sectors
- Integration of outside actors

Strategies for Successful Rural Economic Development

Resource local capacity building

- Expand access to peer learning networks, rural specific training, technical assistance, and advisory support

Facilitate community economic strategies

- Fund community inclusive economic development processes, local government engagement, and seed grants for early priority projects

Invest in rural support organizations

- Strengthen rural-specific economic development and capacity building organizations to improve coordination and responsiveness across the economic development ecosystem

Use rural-specific funding approaches

- Provide adaptable funding structures, seed grants, and low or no match requirements
- Invest in local funds to support community economic development and entrepreneurship



Rural Economic Models

Rural Visibility Project Report:
October 2025



Community-led Economy Building Is Possible and Necessary



Independence, OR



Othello, WA

Examples like Independence and Othello show what is possible when communities come together—residents, businesses, nonprofits, and local government—to identify their distinct assets and co-create sustainable pathways forward.

What Success Looks Like for Rural Communities

- Basic needs are met
- Defined by each community and their values
- Opportunity is community driven
- Sustainable collaboration between communities
- Connection to outside resources and partners

Virtual Community Conversation

Featured Leaders in Economic Development

- Shawn Irvine, Economic Development Expert in the City of Independence, OR
- Lisa Dawson, Executive Director of Northeast OEDD
- Hannah Lewis, Economic Vitality Program Manager at RDI
- Michael Held, Regional Services Manager for Business Oregon

How to Get Involved

Sign up on our interest form @ ruralvisibilityproject.org to get notified when we hold info sessions and when a monthly topic is about to start

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Talk about the project when in community and gather stories to share