Texas Rural Opportunity Youth
Landscape Analysis

November 2018

“It’s different in rural areas than it is in urban places.”
About the Landscape Analysis

This landscape analysis of opportunity youth in rural East and West Texas was commissioned by the Aspen Institute and supported by The Greater Texas Foundation with thought partnership from the TLL Temple Foundation. We are grateful for the support and participation of our partners in East and West Texas who made this possible by sharing their knowledge and experience. The document can be accessed online at www.edtx.org/txrural

About Educate Texas

For more than a decade, Educate Texas, an educational initiative of Communities Foundation of Texas, has partnered with public and private entities to achieve large-scale change to transform the Texas public and higher education systems so that every student is successful in school, the workforce and life.

Our approach begins by identifying innovative, evidence-based strategies with the potential to achieve systems transformation. Once we recognize an effective strategy, we work with our public and private partners to find ways to accelerate adoption and implementation of the initiative by informing public policy, securing funding and providing training within or throughout the Texas education system.
Contents

Executive Summary ........................................................................................................................................... 1

Regional Overviews ........................................................................................................................................ 4
  East Texas .................................................................................................................................................. 4
  West Texas ................................................................................................................................................ 6

Themes from Both Regions ............................................................................................................................. 10

Statewide Resources for Rural Regions ......................................................................................................... 17

Ideas & Examples from Regions .................................................................................................................... 18

Recommendations ......................................................................................................................................... 21
  Understanding Rural .................................................................................................................................. 21
  Designing Programs for Rural Regions ....................................................................................................... 21
  Providing Training and Technical Assistance ............................................................................................. 22
  Developing Funding Strategies for Rural Regions ......................................................................................... 22

Lessons Learned from Conducting Rural Landscape Analysis ....................................................................... 23

Attachments .................................................................................................................................................. 25

  1. Texas Rural Opportunity Youth Interview & Meeting Schedule ......................................................... 26
  2. Regional Meeting Invitations .............................................................................................................. 27
  3. Regional Meeting Run of Show ........................................................................................................... 29
  4. Regional Meeting Discussion Guide .................................................................................................... 30
  5. Data Placemats: Graphic Organizer ...................................................................................................... 35
  6. Actor Map Template ........................................................................................................................... 36
  7. West Texas Actor Map ........................................................................................................................ 37
  8. East Texas Actor Map .......................................................................................................................... 38
  9. Think, Share Response Word Clouds .................................................................................................... 39
Executive Summary

There are currently 4.9 million opportunity youth – defined as young people between the ages of 16 – 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor market in the United States. Nearly half of all opportunity youth can be found in rural communities. There are 5.3 million students in Texas and over 608,000 of these students are rural; of the 1,247 school districts in the state, 49% are rural. This is the largest number of rural students in any state in the country. As such, gaining an understanding of the opportunities and challenges of reaching and serving rural opportunity youth in Texas is important, not only for the state but also for the nation.

The major goal of this project is to add to the body of knowledge about opportunity youth with particular attention to the needs of students in rural Texas. In order to gather first-hand perspectives from rural Texans, we conducted interviews and community meetings in East and West Texas. The information from each region was analyzed together, in comparison to larger, urban environments and separately, in comparison to one another. Through this process, we sought to identify common themes and areas of divergence. Recommendations for understanding rural, designing programs for rural, providing training and technical assistance, and developing funding strategies are described in detail on pages 23-25 and summarized on page 26.

We are deeply grateful to the individuals and organizations who shared their insights, connections, and ideas. In both East and West Texas, there is interest, energy and capacity for serving opportunity youth. Our analysis indicates that both regions have the ability to move forward. In either region there will likely be challenges around organizational capacity and determining where to locate projects within the region. However, there are very high levels of need and interest. In fact, every interview and both regional meetings ended with offers of additional help and support. Rural opportunity youth in Texas, while challenging, has great promise to provide return on investment for students, families, and communities.

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1 Expansion of Rural and Tribal Community Impact, Aspen Forum for Community Solutions, Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund


Organization of Report
The report begins with background information and methodology. It continues with an overview of each individual region followed by themes from both regions. The final section of the report highlights statewide resources for rural regions, ideas and examples from East and West Texas, as well as recommendations and lessons learned. A series of appendices provide samples protocols and templates that may be used or adapted to conduct similar landscape analyses.

Background
The Aspen Forum Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund (OYIF) plans to add new rural and tribal communities to its national learning community in the coming year. The goal of adding new communities is to advance learning and spur action that results in systems change and youth outcomes. Texas, which has a significant number of rural students and opportunity youth, is a new state of interest for inclusion in the network. The Aspen Institute and The Greater Texas Foundation partnered with Educate Texas to conduct a landscape analysis in order to identify communities in Texas with interest and capacity for participation in OYIF.

Methodology
Educate Texas collaborated with The Aspen Institute and The Greater Texas Foundation to identify two regions of the state to focus on as part of the rural opportunity youth landscape analysis – East Texas (including Texarkana, Kilgore, Tyler, Lufkin, and Nacogdoches) and West Texas (including Abilene, Sweetwater, Snyder, and Ranger). We conducted three types of meetings:

1. Meetings with state-level leaders and national contacts.
   - Goal: learn from the experience of state and national contacts and identify potential thought leaders at the regional level.
   - Spoke with state-level leaders and national contacts familiar with opportunity youth (OY) and/or rural regions of Texas.
   - Identified leadership at organizations in each region and examined differences between East and West Texas.

2. Meetings with regional thought leaders for outreach, based on conversations with state-level leaders.
   - Goal: identify and engage regional conveners and thought leaders in order to host regional meetings.
   - Identified meeting convener(s) or host(s) for regional meetings to maximize participation.
   - Spoke with representatives from multiple sectors, including education, workforce, and where possible, community organizations and government.
   - Sought to understand culture, context, partnerships, opportunities and challenges.
3. Regional Meetings
   - Goal: host an Opportunity Youth Forum in East and West Texas with the help of regional hosts identified through meetings with regional leaders.
   - Meetings were scheduled for three hours, including two hours of activities and discussion, followed by a networking lunch. Specific activities included:
     a. Data Review – examined and discussed regional data from the Opportunity Index and Regional Labor Market One Pagers developed by the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Workforce Commission using Burning Glass, a real-time job market analytics tool.
     b. Actor Mapping – this activity allowed attendees to identify organizations and entities in the community working on issues affecting opportunity youth and to determine levels of engagement and connections.

4. Analysis and Reporting
   - Synthesized all interviews and activities from regional meetings to identify themes.
   - Triangulated qualitative information from interviews with feedback from meetings.
   - Analyzed East and West regions together (in comparison to larger, more urban environments) and separately (in comparison to one another).
Regional Overviews

East Texas

Partners in the region do not use the term opportunity youth, but there is a focus on this population and a particular focus on 18-24 year-olds, who have graduated from high school but have limited opportunity and mobility and do not go to college. The level of poverty is high and students lack access to resources.

- “Our students that we have here at the college. We’re 70% first gen and about 90% of our students are on financial aid ... I’ve worked in other areas of the state and I had no idea there was this level of poverty.

- “There is a need for more opportunities for students to swim, safe places to go, mentoring, especially in the summer.”

There is not a widespread understanding of the role of education and its connection to the workforce.

- “We are still dealing with a culture that doesn’t value education. It’s a culture that doesn’t realize things have change and where you could go to work for Campbell’s Soup years ago, with just a high school diploma, you can’t do that anymore ... it’s changing a culture that’s been here forever and it’s changing attitudes.”

However, there is a strong partnership between community colleges in the region and they regularly collaborate because they are facing the same issues. For example, three institutions purchased the same student information system and financial software. In addition, the workforce board convenes college presidents in the region in order to learn about their challenges and opportunities.

- “We have a lot of common issues. The region works fairly well together. At the community college level we work together really well.”

- “We’ve all three bought the same [Student Information System and financial] software so we can share. We’re looking out for the future of the region and we don’t see each other as competing against each other. We just want to this region of the state to survive.”

Colleges work to meet student needs, despite limited resources.

- “If we find students with a need and we can’t connect them with a social service, we usually pay for it ourselves so we can keep them in school. This fall we are starting a food pantry and a clothes pantry on campus. We don’t have child care on campus because we can’t afford to.”
• “The three community colleges, we share resources, we will move someone between institutions if that’s the best thing for that student. We work together so that all three of us can survive. Our biggest concern over the past 5-10 years is the way the state has funded community colleges. We’re worried that this region could lose all three of us…”

The Chambers of Commerce in Texarkana, Mt. Pleasant, and Paris have a regional alliance. And, in Lamar County (which includes Paris), there is a Coalition of Education Business and Industry that was created 27 years ago. It brings together business and industry with education to encourage students to graduate from high school.

There are unique and important natural resources in East Texas, but some residents don’t feel that there is a recognition from state or urban leaders that rural and urban Texas are interconnected.

• “East TX has wood and water. We have abundance of wood and water. Why don’t you hear leadership saying rural Texas is our backbone? And rural Texas couldn’t make it without Dallas and Austin. We know that … it’s time people give rural TX the attention it deserves.”

The natural resources in the region provide jobs, but it’s challenging to find employees.

• “Fewer and fewer students are coming out of college wanting to be foresters and do wildlife management because it’s hot and dirty. It’s declining, so what do we need to do. Our natural resources here need workers to take care of it”

There is a historic divide between two communities – Lufkin and Nacogdoches – that is changing. There are new leaders in the region, but they need support.

• “As we have seen a new generation of leaders, we see that gap closing. I tell the leaders ‘You are that hope for breaking down that wall at the Angelina river’ … they just want to be productive, they just want to move up the steps of leadership and if we don’t allow them to do that …”

For many people, there is limited mobility and loss of talent due to limited opportunities

• “Our students don’t move so much between institutions … people are place bound because of poverty and them having to take care of elderly relatives.”

• “Professional positions – it’s very hard to find them and attract them to the region, so we have to be in a position to grow our own. Many times, when young people go away to university, they don’t come back.”

In spite of challenges, there was a previous successful program serving young adults who did not have a high school diploma. However, it was unsustainable due to lack of funding. Houston
County received approximately $70,000 in funding through the Deep East Texas Council of Governments that originated as a social services block grant provided after Hurricane Ike. This two-year program began as a work-focused program with a little bit of classroom education and was successful. The partners brainstormed ways to improve the program in year two and decided to focus on helping young people who had dropped out of school or were at risk of dropping out of school earn their GEDs.

Participants worked in public service roles while completing their GEDs and the funding was designed so that when they reached specific programmatic milestones they received increasing amounts of money. This design was informed by a Superintendent who was passionate about helping at-risk students earn GEDs. After the grant ended, the partners were unable to sustain the program despite its success.

- “For young people, one of the motivating factors was making a little money.”
- “Our philosophy was to figure out how to get them motivated to get a GED or high school diploma so they could go find something they liked to do and have a chance.”
- “The reality was that there were a significant number of people who were not achieving in that system. A fair number of kids were going 11, 12 years in school and having nothing to show for it and he [the Superintendent] was passionate and had an out of the box approach.”
- “We would have definitely kept doing the program except there was no money. It was very significant even though it was a small budget.”

West Texas

Approximately 2-3 years ago, the Workforce Board convened regional partners to discuss serving opportunity youth and they catalogued community resources for inclusion in 211. There was enthusiasm and support, but no organization took a leadership role in serving opportunity youth.

Geography is a particular challenge in this area of Texas where the average and maximum distances from high schools to higher education institutions are higher than all other regions of the state. According to research conducted by The Bush School at Texas A&M University, the average distance to a community college in West Texas is 38 miles, while in other regions the average ranges from 11 to 17 miles. The average distance to a university is 39 miles, compared to other regions which range from 20 to 27 miles. The maximum distances in West Texas are significantly higher for both community colleges (188 miles versus a range of 62 to 71 miles).
and universities (141 miles versus 70 to 90 miles). West Texans regularly drive long distances, which is reflected in this quote:

- “In West Texas the practical problem is the distance between communities.”

Long distances and widely-dispersed populations can be a significant limiting factor in access to job opportunities or resources.

- “There’s not that many resources out there. We’re supposed to be providing labor market information, tutoring, etc. It’s hard to do this when you live in a community of 1,000. Labor market information tends to be regional. You may get to county level at best, in some cases but you sure aren’t going to get to a city level. What are you going to share with them that they already don’t know unless you are going to share what’s in demand, probably in your region? What does that mean for you? You have to leave your community. There’s not a transportation option. You almost have to relocate and leave behind your support system to get the training, access that you need to get a job versus [an urban] neighborhood with public transportation where the jobs may be on the other side of the community. There's not child care. What are they supposed to do with their child while they’re at work?”

A number of organizations, including workforce boards, colleges, school districts, and libraries seek to provide resources. There is a network of rural workforce boards in West Texas comprised six workforce boards headquartered in Abilene, Amarillo, Lubbock, Midland/Odessa, San Angelo, and Wichita Falls. Texas Tech in Lubbock and West Texas A&M are supportive of and engaged in partnerships with school districts throughout West Texas.

Libraries provide much-needed internet access to connect residents to educational and work opportunities. Workforce partners in West Texas specifically highlighted the libraries in Colorado City, Coleman, and Eastland.

- “Libraries – they have computers and people come when they are looking for jobs. They look at it as part of their mission.”

It is challenging to engage people in long-term education or career seeking opportunities when there are more short-term, but much-less-stable options. For example, oil companies recruit young people as truck drivers for oil companies but the nature of the work is very “boom and bust”; according to Indeed, the annual salary for a driver in Lubbock is $71,000, but the average tenure is less than one year. According to one workforce partner:

- “All of us are struggling to serve this population because of low unemployment rates and the availability of jobs.” For example, Chick-fil-a pays $17 an hour for cashiers/food servers and, as a result, workforce organizations: “have to offer something that’s more attractive … connections to employment opportunities they couldn’t make on their own or quicker/easier connections to employment.”
A number of jobs are in technical fields, but there is a stigma among parents, students, and even some educators about career and technical education.

- “I think what I see a lot of times in our smaller districts whenever we’re talking about CTE and providing opportunities. A lot of times communities see themselves as not having something to offer. In helping shift that mindset that they do have more to offer than they realize. And how to approach the community and how to involve students with job shadowing or internships, that is a huge mind shift for this culture.

- A lot of [students are] seen as the other path ... If you’re CTE you’re not going to college. So really changing that mindset. We need to not say it that way. We don’t need to be separating those two groups. That’s a lot of the challenge”

- “A lot of times they will say, ‘we just can’t get kids interested’ and I will ask ‘how are you promoting this?’ Are you giving kids opportunities to see what is going on and be exposed or are you just standing there talking to them about it? Kids get really excited when they get exposed to this kind of work.”

Transportation and funding for transportation is both a challenge and an opportunity.

- “One of the barriers is maybe they just don’t have the transportation funds ... when you’re looking at very small districts they just have such a tight budget and they just don’t”

- “If you could find resources that would even just help with transportation, being able to give kids the opportunity to see what’s beyond their district walls and their school walls. Sometimes just giving them the opportunity to be out in their own communities.”

In order to create connections in rural regions, it is important to recognize the differences in scale and how funding sources may not accommodate rural regions.

- “When we start getting into the rural communities it gets to be really challenging because there aren’t organizations. There is no YMCA. You don’t have the same type of organizations and neighborhoods. National legislation like WIOA was written more with an urban center in mind [where] you have a group of young people and you can do things in a cohort. This is the best way to work with this population but that’s really hard to do in a rural community because those young people are scattered. It’s hard to come up with a group of people who are interested in going to work and need to go to work all at the same time.”

Human and social service projects require more time, money, and coordination than infrastructure projects. Whereas infrastructure projects have a tangible endpoint and
government funding, social service projects tend to be ongoing and to require organizations to add to the workload of staff members that are already over-extended.

- “People work is different. It requires a different level of investment that is not required to put in a sewer system. And there are financial incentives that are different. The company that’s putting in the sewer system has a motivation to keep the project moving along. With social services you don’t have many people with an incentive.”

But there is great interest in finding ways to support this population.

- I know we would all be interested in learning about strategies to better engage and serve this population.”
Themes from Both Regions

Urban and Rural – Similarities and Differences
Participants described small, rural communities as more similar than different. This sentiment is summarized in the following quote:

- “There’s a lot more commonalities than there are differences, but every community, every county is a little different ... each and every one has its own unique challenges.”

They felt that there are particular differences between urban and rural areas and while people in urban areas want to help, they don’t always have a full understanding of what is needed.

- “I think nothing takes the place of real decision makers getting out and seeing what it’s like in the real world. For me, the real world is rural Texas. I’m comfortable in the city and I lived in Austin, but even when I lived in Austin, I was working with rural counties ... everybody wants to be part of the solution, wants to be successful, and I’m not sure everyone understand what that means and how to make that happen.”

There is more information and resources in urban than rural areas.

- “In some cases ... parents and students in rural areas, don’t always know what they are missing out on. They’re not aware of the types of programs in urban environments.”

- “there is high, high poverty and very little positive opportunities, especially during the summer months, for students in these areas ... this is a big difference between urban and rural – lack of positive opportunities in down periods”

Education

High School Graduation vs. College Matriculation and Jobs
Participants are concerned about the disconnect between high graduation rates and the low number of students matriculating to college or finding work.

- We are getting these students through high school, and then they are falling off the track and they are staying. We are left with a growing group of students who don’t have much of a future."

- “You will find our high school graduation rates are better, at least on paper. I think so much more of our problem starts at the 18-24 range.”

Often, the choice is between earning wages and attending school. While the following statement was made in East Texas, the following challenge is also prevalent in West Texas.
• “We are oil field dependent. People will take that job instead of going to school. It’s hard to understand the concept of delayed gratification.”

Perceptions of Career and Technical Education
Both regions talked about working to change perceptions of CTE, which offers jobs that pay well.

• “there is still a stigma with career and technical education” even though there are a number of jobs that pay well.

• “If you think about an auto mechanic 15-20 years ago, it was not a pleasant working environment. Now they are using computers in a clean facility hooking engine up to a piece of diagnostic technology that will tell you what you need to do to fix it.”

• “Partners in Education (PIE) is developing a video designed to change perceptions of jobs by including footage of parents and students talking about how opportunities are different today.

Dual Credit
Earning college credit in high school is viewed as a resource and an opportunity for students, but partners are working together to address costs and to determine where there is room for improvement.

• “The more affluent school districts are able to pay for all of their tuition, textbooks, the smaller ISDs can’t afford to pay for it.”

• “We’ve done a little bit of research with regards to our dual credit students. Approximately 22% of students we serve never show up in education anywhere past high school graduation …. what is keeping those students from actually transitioning to postsecondary education after they have earned dual credit?”

Importance of Motivation and Counseling

• “To have young people excel and be motivated they have to be successful at something ... the way you motivate someone is to find something they can be successful [at] ... and that just turns the motor up and whether that’s academics or some kind of skill or craft.”

• “Counseling is so important ... parents don’t really know what they need and frankly all the school people don’t know. The schools are under a lot of pressure ... it’s not hard to see where kids that are struggling for various reasons might not end up getting all the individual attention they need. The ‘worst’ kid in school – if you can
find something that motivates them, their sense of self-worth and pride goes through the roof.”

Culture
Participants described lack of opportunity and willingness through the lens of generational poverty in contrast with the mindset of young people who are college and work-bound

- “generational poverty and the mindset that goes along with that … ‘if it was good for my parents, if it was good for grandparents, then it’s good for me.’”

- “it’s the idea of the opportunities and knowing that there are opportunities that exist. When you’re working with someone from a culture of poverty it’s a lot harder to break through.”

- “A lot of parents don’t have the education they need to help push their students to opportunity” and “You get so downtrodden in generational poverty that you don’t see a way out.”

- “Even if school professionals in rural areas are fully engaged and informed they may not be able to fully implement if they don’t have the support of their community. Within the community there is an opportunity to educate the communities and the parents a little better.”

Limited Resources
Interviewees described have limited resources, not only in terms of funding and staff capacity, but also infrastructure, including broadband access and transportation.

Funding
Both regions shared examples of the profound impact of funding on the viability of programs and the importance of partnerships, ongoing support, and sustainability.

- One participant described efforts to raise money for an Executive Director’s salary and how one funder had decided to “go in a different direction for next year” which resulted in a decrease in funding from $30,000 to $10,000.

- Another leader had successfully procured a $100,000 grant from the Texas Workforce Commission to provide STEM agricultural and veterinary equipment for K-12 students. It requires a 100% match and the leader, who was hopeful and working to obtain matching funds said, “we don’t have $100,000, but we couldn’t afford to turn down the other $100,000.”
Broadband Access and Technology
Both regions discussed how lack of access to broadband and technology put individuals from rural regions behind counterparts who do have this access.

- “Lack of connectivity is huge here. Kids that need to go home and do homework that are required to get on the internet, they don’t have it.”

- “I wonder whether the general population in the rural areas truly understand what a leg up it is if your school system is able to offer the latest technology.”

- A school district in East Texas, outside Nacogdoches, created a hot spot for students: “you see the corner of the county road and the farm to market road. We used to have an old school bus that was our hotspot.” The interviewee describing the hot spot said “they do a great job with what little bit they have.”

- One interviewee graduated in the 1970s as valedictorian and matriculated to the University of Houston. Upon enrolling in a Computer Science course for the first time, this individuals realized that other students from large school districts near Houston had already taken computer courses in high school. As a result, this individual feels that “the technology for distance learning and partnerships between high schools and colleges has helped.”

- The Deep East Texas Council of Governments is conducting a comprehensive rural broadband project that was unanimously supported by 59 board members from 12 counties – “We are trying to provide broadband to everyone in the region and our attitude is that if we don’t all hold hands and charge together forward then within our region we will have a smaller microcosm of what’s happening in our state and country. There will be smaller areas that get access and it will be tremendous but some areas will be left out ... We want to take advantage of the collective bargaining power of all of our communities so none of our communities are left out.”

- One suggestion for thinking about providing rural broadband at the state level is as follows: “The state needs to bring entire state to the table with bargaining power, otherwise the AT&Ts of the world are going to do what they do and they’re going to invest in largest markets and rural areas are going to get left out.”

Transportation
In addition to the long distances in West Texas, which limit access to job opportunities and cause challenges related to child care, transportation in East Texas was discussed in relation to healthcare. Participants described a scenario in which a patient has no transportation to a health clinic:
“but the only place he can have that test done is in Lufkin and he’s got no transportation ... they have no way to go ... there’s another challenge.”

The Multiplying Effect of Limited Resources
Participants in both regions described the multiplying effect of many different challenges. Because resources are so limited, when challenging circumstances occur – such as natural disasters or employers leaving a region – the consequences are significant. One individual from East Texas described how a hurricane affected communities that already had little or no safety net and another participant described the limited resources of counties.

- “healthcare, education ... our [broadband] connectivity in rural East Texas, there is none ... obesity and healthcare. We’ve got counties that were declared distressed counties. Disaster relief is huge.”

- “The only source of revenue they [counties in Texas] have is property taxes and that’s extremely limited.”

Workforce and Economic Development

Job Opportunities, Changing Demographics, and Shifting Attitudes
The multiplying effect is not limited to natural disasters. Individuals in both regions talked about the impact of losing jobs or not having them at all. One participant described the changes that occur when a large employer leaves a community: the departure of an employer can cause an out-migration of middle class citizens because of loss of jobs in the community. This, in-turn, leaves small school districts with a higher percentage of low-income students whose performance tends to be lower. As a result, there are examples of districts where community members withdraw support for the school district.

Economic Development and Economies of Scale
In urban areas, economic development corporations, chambers of commerce and workforce boards collaborate to bring job opportunities to the region. However, in rural areas, the workforce ecosystem is much smaller and capacity is limited. This was highlighted by comments about lack of economic development expertise, the challenge of attracting companies to rural regions, and the significant positive impact of new jobs in small, rural areas.

- “7 of our 12 counties don’t even have economic development professionals.”

- “Small towns that land 50 jobs – for small towns that 50 jobs is the same as landing Toyota corporate headquarters.”
• “What comes first the chicken or the egg? You show us the jobs and we’ll show you the workforce ... we can’t show you 500 people saying ‘pick me, I need a job’ but we’ve proven time and time again that we can produce a quality workforce.”

• “We are crippled because there are people outside of the region who have the mindset that if we’re going to move to the region we need to be guaranteed to have employees. People will flock out of Houston and Dallas for a job but they can’t move on the hopes of finding a job. They have to know that a job is available.”

Organizational and Administrative Requirements

Service Areas and Allowable Uses of Funding
In Texas, there are separate service regions for K-12, higher education, and workforce. In rural regions, services are usually concentrated in larger cities or towns. As a result, smaller, more rural communities may be on the border between service areas; this can lead to being assigned to a service area but being located closer to services that are inaccessible because they are in another service area. Similarly, organizations seeking to provide services may not be allowed to cross assigned boundaries. However, one workforce partner that seeks to reach and serve as many school districts and employers as possible said:

• “I just ignore the service center boundaries.”

Federal, state, and even private funding often has specific geographic or service area limitations. Therefore, it’s not always possible to ignore the boundaries. For example, workforce funding that is designed to target adults may not be used when students are enrolled in school was described as follows:

• “Since 75% of our funds must be spent on out-of-school youth, we have to wait until the student completes, then we can enroll as an out-of-school youth.”

Partnerships and Leadership Capacity
In rural areas, it is important to develop capacity, provide pathways to leadership and to recognize that organizational resources are usually at or near capacity.

• “One observation that I have made over the last several months as we have been talking to many of these small communities ... is that they differ dramatically in the level and quality of the leadership on the local level. There are a few that have really outstanding local leadership – their ability to understand the real challenges and act effectively. There are many of these communities that have no one acting in that role. We have been talking about the way to develop community leadership and training.”
“Once you have a grant program in place, including the staff you are able to hire, you can build connections to the schools and become part of the grassroots team that will facilitate a program.”

“a lot of times it was a matter of somebody stepping forward to lead the effort. Once you had someone who would say ‘hey, I’m willing to do the organizing and follow through on a particular program’ the workforce board would have some money it could direct to transportation or tuition ... but everyone who is professionally engaged to run these programs is already up to their eyeballs”

Community connectors may not be in an official leadership capacity and, in rural areas, county judges play an important role.

“It’s not always people who hold particular positions. It’s the right people themselves. It may be a minister in one community or a judge in another or a Superintendent of schools in another.”

“County judges are one of the more overlooked assets in all of this. They have been extremely helpful to me over the years. You’ve got to know how to use them because they are very busy people ... but they know everybody. I go to them when I need connections and ask ‘Judge who should I talk to about this’ or ‘who should I include.’ I don’t think they’re the right people to include in the network, but when you’re trying to find out who to include.

Working Together Across Communities
There are strong, historic rivalries in some communities and in others there is interest in working together. In both situations, there are legitimate concerns about how each individual, small community will benefit and what resources will be made available. But, there are steps that can be taken to ensure equal participation and access to benefits.

“There are always little rivalries ... small town rivalries within counties and we try to keep it down to Friday night football games. There’s always a concern that we’re all going to work together but I want to make sure my community benefits. Are we getting our fair share out of the deal?”

The East Texas Council of Governments works to ensure that their committees represent the region equitably: “If there are 12 members on an advisory committee then we make sure they are populated with a good representation from every part of the region.”

Perspective on Opportunity Youth Work
Both regions were enthusiastic to serve opportunity youth. There was agreement that students become disconnected once they are outside the education system. There was recognition that although the
work is challenging, it is extremely important for the health of local and regional economies. This was also coupled with the reality of needing resources to meet the needs of this population.

- “It would be great – there needs to be more discussions among many of those organizations so they understand it’s important.”

- “Usually students have left the school system. Some schools have programs where they are doing outreach but a lot of schools just don’t have the resources.”

- “Don’t think you are going to find much going on, organized in this area at all, unfortunately … I don’t think there is a targeted program, especially starting with 16 year olds not working. Lots of targeted work by community colleges with 18-24.”

- “Finding young people who have barriers is not a problem. If you find someone they are probably going to qualify for our program based on barriers. It’s easy to qualify but what’s hard to figure out is how are you actually going to serve them? How do you get enough resources to actually help with the barriers?”

Statewide Resources for Rural Regions
During this process, participants identified state-level organizations that provide useful resources for rural regions. The following organizations were discussed:

**Texas A&M Agrilife Extension**

- Extension agents are present in all 250 counties in the state and they play many different roles. For example, ‘Extension agents serve as chairs of local advisory committees in each county … they have existing relationships with parents and are already connected.”

- 4H Pilot Project: 11 counties were selected to participate in pilot where county extension agents are receiving professional development and training from College Forward and Learning Forward, with the goal of increasing college readiness.

- Additional information is available at the Agrilife Extension webpage.

**Texas Department of Agriculture**

- TDA is described as “the” organization focused on rural economic development in Texas. While the Office of the Governor focuses on urban areas, TDA offers many services that benefit rural regions, including an Office of Rural Affairs.

**Texas Department of Family and Protective Services**

- DFPS provides a comprehensive list of prevention and early intervention programs and a database of programs searchable by county. One program included in this database that may provide useful referrals to an opportunity youth program is STAR
(Services to At Risk Youth), funded by Department of Family and Protective Services. This program, which is present in all 254 counties in Texas, is designed to serve youth and their families needing crisis intervention, help with family conflict, concerns involving school performance and attendance and building parent and youth skills.

Ideas & Examples from Regions

Next Generation Sector Partnership
This model, which builds on traditional sector partnerships, places business at the center of the effort and provides a forum for employers and workforce to define an agenda and receive support from education, government, non-profits, and other community partners.

• “We have chosen manufacturing. For little Texarkana we had 15-20 manufacturers around the table that represent about 15,000 jobs. It’s targeted at 18-21 year old male.

• “We have three major industries guaranteeing a job interview after 16-weeks. You have to incentivize business to do this. I have been wanting to (shield from liability, incentive through tax) find a way to get 15 and 16 year olds. These partnerships and internships are huge in doing this.”

Education-Workforce Partnerships

• Employer Training Partnership with ISD and College: East Texas – The RoyOMartin company worked with the Polk County Economic Development Corporation to open a new plant in Corrigan, TX to manufacture strand board, a wood-based building product. The new plant not only opened a new market to a Louisiana-based company and met a need for building supplies in Texas, but also brought training and jobs to the region. The WoodWorks program, which was developed in partnership with Corrigan-Camden CISD and Angelina College to train high school students to work in the wood-products industry and RoyOMartin University prepares employees to advance within the company. Additional details about the partnership are available here.

• CTE Co-Op or Service Agreement Between Districts: West Texas – The Vocational Tech Campus at Rochester in Haskill CISD has a focus on manufacturing. This remote school district a farming community partners with several small, rural districts to serve students in surrounding communities. Under the leadership of Monty Moeller,
“they’re a hub for the surrounding school districts ... he takes his kids to the Ft. Worth / Arlington area to programs and competitions.”

- **Economic Development Through Dual Credit**: School districts and colleges collaborate with economic development corporations to use dual credit as a tool for attracting industry to the region.

- **Superintendent Roundtable**: Colleges or workforce boards hold a Superintendent roundtable 2-3 times per year. One college partner described how this is beneficial: “we invite them all to the college to find out what they need. That’s been beneficial because we begin to understand their challenges on a different level and it gives them a chance to meet peer to peer.”

- **Internships**: “Something I’m big on – positive internships with area businesses. Show up at a job, build positive relationships with adults that work every day.”

- **Short- and Long-Term Training Opportunities**: Kilgore College’s goal is to “make sure there are some training opportunities for everyone.” For example, the college offers its fire and police academies through continuing education to make it easier for students to enroll in the programs. Kilgore has also expanded its electrical lineman training program to keep up with need across the state. In addition to meeting workforce needs, “within 10 weeks you can see that light at the end of the tunnel ... they [graduates] are able to find work and they are getting family supporting wages.” Kilgore is also developing its pharmacy training program.

**Education Partnerships**

- **Statewide Leadership Group**: When asked what resources would help serve opportunity youth, one education leader suggested convening forward-thinking education leaders to share ideas with one another.

- **Early College High School**: Roscoe Collegiate ISD partners with Western Texas College to operate an Early College High School. There is no opportunity to earn a four-year degree in the community, so Roscoe is in discussions with the A&M System to bring bachelor’s degree options to the area.

- **ISD-College Barter Agreements**: Kilgore College has barter agreements with school districts including Kilgore, Longview, and Henderson ISDs.
In Longview ISD, Kilgore Colleges uses their facilities nights and weekends to offer courses such as culinary arts. The fair market value that’s assessed to the buildings and equipment is bartered for the cost of CTE courses.

Kilgore and Henderson ISDs gave the college property that adjoins the college. Instead of paying rent the college barters tuition for dual credit.

Kilgore College launched fundraising efforts for dual credit scholarships and then worked with high school counselors to identify recipients, specifically “those individuals who don’t have family support ... working class families.” The partners focused on CTE dual credit with the goal of “help[ing] students who are involved in dual credit coursework with dollars” and targeting “a population that does not necessarily have the resources.”

- Advisors or Coordinators for Dual Credit: Colleges investing in separate dual credit coordinators for academic transfer and career and technical education dual credit.

- Peer Recruitment: “Peer recruitment or really friends bringing friends seems to be the other key for this generation—if we can identify multiple eligible youth who know each other, they are more likely to participate.”
Recommendations

Understanding Rural

1. **When Beginning Projects in Rural Areas, Understand the Context of Communities Where Work Will Occur.** While there are similarities in the challenges in rural areas in East and West Texas, there are notable differences that should not be dismissed and which must be addressed in order for projects to successfully move forward. Examples of differences include the distance between communities, the presence or absence of partners, and historic rivalries.

2. **Recognize The Differences in Community Sizes.** While resources and infrastructure, including higher education and non-profit partners, are more concentrated in larger areas, there is significant need in smaller, outlying areas. For example, in East Texas, we identified larger communities, including Texarkana (population 37,000), Tyler (population 104,000), and Lufkin (population 36,000). We hosted our meeting in Kilgore (population 14,800) which is considered a mid-point between communities. Our attendees included individuals from Palestine (18,000), Jasper (7,600) and Pine Tree (1,000).

3. **Be Aware That Economies of Scale are Smaller in Rural Regions.** Many programs are inadvertently designed with urban or suburban communities in mind. As such, it is important to develop program requirements for participation, funding, partnership, etc. in a way that accommodates smaller numbers. When developing programs, it is important to understand the opportunities and limitations related to smaller numbers of participants. For example, a program requirement to serve 100 students per grade level automatically excludes small, rural districts from participating if their total enrollment in K-12 is 300 or fewer. This is highlighted by a comment from one individual who described 50 new jobs in a rural region as equivalent to having a new Toyota headquarters.

Designing Programs for Rural Regions

1. **Build on Existing Partnerships and Provide Resources to Develop Capacity.** We identified a number of existing productive partnerships between school districts and colleges, between education and employers, and between workforce boards and non-profit organizations. However, we also found effective, well-implemented programs that could not be sustained due to lack of funding or the departure of staff. When bringing new programs to rural regions, identify and expand upon existing programs and allow resources to be used for capacity-building.
2. **Increase Equity by Supporting Partnerships Between Smaller and Larger Areas or Develop “Hub and Spoke” Models That Support Outlying Areas.** To address needs in smaller, outlying areas, support programs and partnerships that expand beyond larger communities.

**Providing Training and Technical Assistance**

1. **Support Training, Technical Assistance and Professional Development In Rural Regions.** Individuals from rural regions spend significant amounts of time and money traveling to larger cities to receive training and technical assistance. When trainings occur in rural regions, it enables organizations to train more individuals at a lower cost.

2. **Provide Adequate Funding To Attend Impactful Conferences And Use It As An Opportunity To Bring New Ideas to Rural Areas.** When individuals from rural regions do travel, ensure that funding is adequate. It can go unnoticed that individuals from rural areas travel much farther and at greater expense than their urban peers. Use conferences as a way to challenge and support regional partners to bring new ideas to their regions.

**Developing Funding Strategies for Rural Regions**

1. **Ensure that Funding is Distributed Equitably Among Partners.** When developing partnerships between multiple organizations, one entity often serves as the primary contact or lead organization. To ensure equitable participation and benefit, require that each partner organization receive a percentage of funding or that program benefits are equitably distributed across partner organizations.

2. **Incentivize Support from External Partners.** Develop program requirements that encourage a match or in-kind support from businesses or community organizations. Recognize that resources are limited and, as a result, it is important to identify a level of support that does not prohibit partnerships from developing.

3. **Use Metrics To Support Innovation and Partnership.** Provide additional funding for partnerships that reach certain metrics such as largest increase, most improved, most innovative, etc.

4. **Promote Sustainability by Allowing/Encouraging Partners to Leverage Grant Funds.** Identify other regional, state, national grants. Provide technical assistance and identify ways for grantees to leverage these opportunities. Regional funders attended the East Texas meeting and it was helpful to have that perspective and support in the room.
Lessons Learned from Conducting Rural Landscape Analysis

1. **Phone Interviews Are Crucial Before Community Meetings.** We conducted numerous interviews with regional leaders by phone prior to regional meetings. The interviews were extremely insightful and useful in building interest and support. They helped identify hosts for regional meetings and everyone who was interviewed offered to provide additional help. However, in the absence of regional meetings, significant information can be gathered through phone interviews.

2. **Local Partners are Critical to Ensuring Meeting Attendance.** We held regional meetings in West Texas (Abilene) and East Texas (Kilgore). We identified regional hosts that either signed the invitation, shared invitation lists or sent invitations. In West Texas, the Workforce Board shared an extensive list of non-profit and higher education institutions and the regional education service center invited all school districts in the region. In East Texas, TLL Temple Foundation and Kilgore College shared invitation lists. We could not have held successful regional meetings without these supports.

3. **Geographic Location of Meetings Matters.** The location of the meeting and the geographic dispersion impacts who attends meetings. We worked to select locations that were at the geographic center of larger regions. In West Texas, where there is much more distance between cities, the highest concentration of attendees was from Abilene whereas in East Texas, attendees represented a larger portion of the region.

4. **Know Your Audience When Developing Meeting Facilitation Protocol.** We developed a meeting facilitation protocol that included data analysis (including the Opportunity Index and regional labor market data) and asset mapping. Both activities were useful, but we modified the asset mapping activity after our first community meeting. We found that it was too in-depth for a community that had not yet started a project. For example, it was not as useful to discuss linkages and blockages between actors in this first meeting. It was extremely helpful to see which sectors had less activity or where meeting attendees had less knowledge of a particular sector.
### Rural Opportunity Youth Landscape Analysis Recommendations

<table>
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<td>2. Local Partners are Critical to Ensuring Meeting Attendance.</td>
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<td>3. Geographic Location of Meetings Matters.</td>
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Attachments

1. Texas Rural Opportunity Youth Interview & Meeting Schedule
2. Regional Meeting Invitations
3. Regional Meeting Run of Show
4. Regional Meeting Discussion Guide
5. Data Placemats: Graphic Organizer
   Actor Map Template
6. West Texas Actor Map
7. East Texas Actor Map
8. Think, Share Response Word Clouds
### Texas Rural Opportunity Youth Interview & Meeting Schedule

#### State & National Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 4, 2018</td>
<td>Dr. Wynn Rosser</td>
<td>President and CEO</td>
<td>TLL Temple Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2, 2019</td>
<td>Rick Rhodes</td>
<td>Recently retired</td>
<td>Formerly Texas Department of Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 10, 2018</td>
<td>Dr. Maria Luna-Torres</td>
<td>Director, Rural Student Success Initiative</td>
<td>Texas A&amp;M Agrilife Extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 11, 2018</td>
<td>Austin Buchan</td>
<td>President and CEO</td>
<td>College Forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 13, 2018</td>
<td>Lili Allen</td>
<td>Associate Vice President</td>
<td>JFF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 30, 2018</td>
<td>Larry McManus</td>
<td>Senior for Rural Economic Development</td>
<td>Texas Department of Agriculture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### West Texas Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 24, 2018</td>
<td>Dr. Kim Alexander</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>Roscoe ISD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 30, 2018</td>
<td>Mary Ross</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Workforce Solutions, West Central Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1, 2018</td>
<td>Dr. Brad Johnson</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>West Texas A&amp;M and former President, Northeast Texas Community College (East Texas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 15, 2018</td>
<td>Vicki Hayhurst</td>
<td>Career &amp; Technical Education Specialist</td>
<td>Region 14 Education Service Center</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### East Texas Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 26, 2018</td>
<td>Pam Anglin</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Paris Junior College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 30, 2018</td>
<td>James Henry Russell</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Texarkana College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 6, 2018</td>
<td>Nancy Windham</td>
<td>President &amp; CEO</td>
<td>Texas Forest Country Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 22, 2018</td>
<td>Dr. Brenda Kays</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Kilgore College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 14, 2018</td>
<td>The Honorable Lonnie Hunt</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Deep East Texas Council of Governments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Regional Meetings

**West Texas – Abilene – August 29, 2018**
- Hosts: Region 14 Education Service Center and Workforce Solutions of West Central Texas
- Number of RSVPs: 31 Yes / 2 No / 1 No But I Would Like to Receive Follow-Up Information
- Invitation: See attached

**East Texas – Kilgore – September 21, 2018**
- Hosts: Kilgore College, Paris Junior College, Texarkana College
- Number of RSVPs: 23 Yes / 6 No But I Would Like to Receive Follow-Up Information
- Invitation: See attached
West Texas Opportunity Youth Forum
August 30, 2018 –10am to 1pm– Region 14 ESC, North – 1850 TX-351, Nolan Room

You are invited to participate in a forum and lunch on Opportunity Youth in West Texas. Opportunity Youth – or 16-24 year-olds who are not working or in school – are an important population of young adults to identify and serve so they can receive the education and credentials to contribute to our communities.

We are inviting community leaders from education, workforce, nonprofits, and government to share their perspectives, knowledge and experience on the needs, challenges, and resources for opportunity youth in West Texas. You will be contributing to a national and state learning process about rural opportunity youth and West Texas.

We hope you can join us for this important event. Please RSVP here by Friday, August 24th.

Questions?
Please contact Kelty Garbee at kgarbee@cftexas.org

Schedule
10am-Noon: Forum
Noon-1pm: Lunch from Betty Rose’s Little Brisket

With sincere thanks,

Region 14 Education Service Center
Workforce Solutions of West Central Texas
Educate Texas
East Texas Opportunity Youth Forum

September 21, 2018 – 10am to 1pm – Kilgore College, Devall Student Center Ballroom

You are invited to participate in a forum and lunch on Opportunity Youth in East Texas. Opportunity Youth – or 16-24 year-olds who are not working or in school – are an important population of young adults to identify and serve so they can receive the education and credentials to contribute to our communities.

We are inviting community leaders from education, workforce, nonprofits, and government to share their perspectives, knowledge and experience on the needs, challenges, and resources for opportunity youth in East Texas. You will be contributing to a national and state learning process about rural opportunity youth and East Texas.

We hope you can join us for this important event. Please RSVP here by Friday, September 14th.

Questions?
Please contact Kelty Garbee at kgarbee@cftexas.org

Schedule
10am-Noon: Forum
Noon-1pm: Lunch

With sincere thanks,

Kilgore College
Paris Junior College
Texarkana College
Educate Texas
## 3. Regional Meeting Run of Show

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Start</th>
<th>End</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductions</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10:00</td>
<td>10:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data Placemats</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Orient Data Placemats</td>
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<td>10:15</td>
<td>10:17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual fill graphic organizer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10:17</td>
<td>10:20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Table discuss 3 Qs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10:20</td>
<td>10:25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plenary discuss 3 Qs</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10:25</td>
<td>10:32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actor Map: Populate &amp; Discuss</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Introduce Actor Mapping</td>
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<td>10:32</td>
<td>10:33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructions for stickies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10:33</td>
<td>10:35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write actors on stickies</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10:35</td>
<td>10:40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place stickies on map</td>
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<td>10:40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Refine and discuss map</td>
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<td>10:45</td>
<td>11:05</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Actor Map: Connections</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Draw connections</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11:05</td>
<td>11:10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discuss connections</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11:10</td>
<td>11:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actor Map: Momentum, Blockages, Opportunities</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green dots: momentum</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11:20</td>
<td>11:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange dots: blockages</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11:22</td>
<td>11:24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss momentum/blockages</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11:24</td>
<td>11:34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss collaboration clusters</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11:34</td>
<td>11:44</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Final Discussion</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual answer 3 index card Qs</td>
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<td>11:44</td>
<td>11:49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plenary discuss 3 Qs</td>
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<td>11:49</td>
<td>11:59</td>
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<tr>
<td>Next Steps</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11:59</td>
<td>12:00</td>
</tr>
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</table>
4. Regional Meeting Discussion Guide

**Introduction [15 minutes]:**
Hello, introduce Educate Texas. We are helping the Aspen Institute to conduct a landscape analysis/learning process/engaging community this summer to better understand the challenges and opportunities of rural communities in Texas in working with opportunity youth. Opportunity youth are defined as young people between ages of 16 - 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor employed.

Thank you for meeting with us today. The information shared with us today will be developed into a report for The Aspen Institute and Greater Texas Foundation. Your comments will be aggregated by region – we will not be using any individual names or titles. All feedback will be at the regional level.

We’d like to begin by each introducing ourselves, with name, position, organization, and your connection/interest in OY.

**Data Placemats – Macro view: [17 minutes]**

**Purpose:** To help us think through the [systemic] factors that contribute to the OY population. Here are the factors people look at nationally, then in your region/community.

**Protocol:** Each group receives copies of the Opportunity Index data sheet for their county and regional labor market data, along with worksheet with following 3 questions. Individual (3 min), table (5 min), plenary (7 min):

1. What do these data tell you?
2. What surprises you about these data?
3. What do these data make you think about in relation to OY in your community?

**Actor Mapping: [1 hr, 12 min]**

**Purpose:** To identify all entities in the community that are working on issues affecting OY, the level of engagement of each entity, connections between the entities, and which ones might be interested in forming a collaborative to work on OY issues.

**Protocol:**

1. **Introduction: [1 min]**
   “A system map is a visual depiction of the parts, interactions, and relationships between actors, organizations, and other components of a system at a point in time.”

   “An actor map is a type of system map that focuses on relationships and interconnections between various actors. These maps help show how the parts of, or people within, a system are connected, identify weak connections or gaps, bring out ideas for
intervention points in the system, and help identify ways of determining whether these changes have occurred.”

“Today, we will participate in an actor mapping activity to better understand the roles, engagement, relationships, momentum, blockages, and opportunities in our system. Our activity will include several steps: populating actors, refining the map, identifying engagement, relationships and/or connections,

2. **Populate the map with actors & Discuss: [32 min]** Participants of each group write the entities that provide the programs/pathways identified in previous activity on sticky notes and place them on the map frame.

“You will see that we have prepared a draft frame for the actor map, identifying related sub-systems where you may wish to place sticky notes with the entities/actors relevant to OY work or factors affecting or contributing to the OY population.”

   a.  K-12
   b.  Postsecondary
   c.  Workforce – workforce board, employer
   d.  CBOs/Youth orgs
   e.  Juvenile justice
   f.  Foster care
   g.  Mayor’s office
   h.  Council of governments
   i.  Funders – public, private, local, regional
   j.  Other

As you think about organizations/actors for each of these areas, you may wish to consider 3 types of OY subpopulations and the factors contributing to their situations:

- High school age, not in school (no high school diploma), not working
- Older than high school age, no high school diploma, not in school, not working
- Older than high school age, high school diploma, not in school, not working

**[5 min]: Each person writes organizations/actors on sticky notes- one actor per note.**

- **Top:** organization/actor
- **Center:** program or pathway offered by the entity that connects OY back to education and career. (if any)
- **Bottom:** Program goal (ie. Improve attendance, high school graduations/GEDs, postsecondary readiness, credit accumulation, postsecondary
enrollment/persistence, job placement, wages at at least 80% of median wage, etc) – if you know it

- Upper right corner: Level of engagement - Draw an S, M, W, or N on the relevant actors. (Note: These could also be depicted through colors and gradations if/when the map is transferred to an electronic format.)

[5 min] Place each sticky note where you think it belongs on the map, following these guidelines. It’s okay if there are repeated entities on sticky notes – it will help us understand

Place actors on the map in a way that illustrates which subsystem they belong to. If the actor cuts across two subsystems, place the sticky note in between. You may modify the frame by adding or crossing out related subsystems as needed.

Place actors on the map in a way that illustrates their degree of influence (e.g., place actors with direct influence on the system in or close to the center).

Place actors on the map in a way that illustrates their “proximity” to one another (e.g., place an individual school next to its related school district).”

[20 min] Refine and discuss the actor map:

- Does everyone agree on the placement of these actors?
- Are there areas where there are few/many actors and why?
- Agreement on level of engagement? Pathways? Goals?
- Are there additional types of actors/organizations at play that are important to OY work? What’s missing? (Note that we are not trying to build a comprehensive list of actors; rather, we are trying to capture the most relevant actors.)
- Are there types of actors/organizations depicted here that are not important to OY and should be excluded? If yes, please move/remove these sticky notes.

3. Connections: [15 min] Participants identify & discuss existing connections (by type) between entities.

[5 min] Draw Connections Between Actors

- Draw connections on the map by drawing lines between relevant actors. Use solid lines for strong or established relationships and dotted lines for weak or emerging relationships.
• Write the type of relationship above the line. For example, is it a funding relationship? A partnering relationship on a key initiative?" Highlight ones with data-sharing relationships.

• Again, we are not attempting to be exhaustive, but rather to capture the most important strong and weak relationships in the system.

[10 min] Discuss Connections

• Discuss connections in plenary.

4. **Momentum, blockages, and opportunities: [24 min]**

Now that we have a sense of the connections and gaps among key actors and organizations in the system, we can begin to understand momentum and blockages and think about opportunities for influence."

**Momentum & Blockages**

• [2 min] Place an orange dot on parts of the system where there are blockages, challenges, or gaps. This is not negative, it’s places where people need to work together or need more resources to overcome challenges. Discuss in plenary.

• [2 min] Place a green dot on connections/parts of the system with positive energy and momentum."

• [10 min] Discuss momentum & blockages in plenary.

**Discuss Opportunities for Collaboration**

• [10 min]: Step back to take a bird’s-eye view of the actor map. Based on where the green and red dots fall, draw amoeba-like shapes around different groups of actors that form clusters that indicate collaborative opportunity for leverage and influence. Name the clusters if possible (e.g., policy change). Confirm with group"  
  o Discuss: What key opportunities are we poised to build on?

5. **Final Discussion [16 min]**

**Think, Share:**

[5 minutes] Individually write on 3 colored index cards:

• What is unique about doing work around OY in a rural region?

• What is your highest priority to improve OY outcomes?

• What can you or your organization do to be an active partner in the solution to improve OY outcomes?
[10 minutes] Discuss in plenary, popcorn share about each question

Review next steps:
[1 min] Share with participants: Plans regarding how the maps will be used within and outside the organization.
5. Data Placemats: Graphic Organizer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do these data tell you?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What surprises you about these data?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do these data make you think about in relation to opportunity youth in your community?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Opportunity Youth
(young people 16-24, not in school, unemployed)

- K-12
- Postsecondary
- Workforce organizations
- Employers
- Non-profits
- Foster care
- Juvenile justice
- Government
- Funders
- Others?
7. West Texas Actor Map
9. Think, Share Response Word Clouds

Participants in both West Texas and East Texas gave feedback on the following three questions:

1. What is unique about doing work around opportunity youth in a rural region?
2. What is your highest priority to improve opportunity youth outcomes?
3. What can you or your organization do to be an active partner in the solution to improve opportunity youth outcomes?

The following word clouds show the participants’ most frequently used words to answer each of these questions, in aggregate and for the West Texas and East Texas participants separately.
Combined Response: What is unique about doing work around opportunity youth in a rural region?
East Texas Response: What is unique about doing work around opportunity youth in a rural region?
West Texas Response: What is unique about doing work around opportunity youth in a rural region?
Combined Response: What is your highest priority to improve opportunity youth outcomes?
East Texas Response: What is your highest priority to improve opportunity youth outcomes?
West Texas Response: What is your highest priority to improve opportunity youth outcomes?
Combined Response: What can you or your organization do to be an active partner in the solution to improve opportunity youth outcomes?
East Texas Response: What can you or your organization do to be an active partner in the solution to improve opportunity youth outcomes?
West Texas Response: What can you or your organization do to be an active partner in the solution to improve opportunity youth outcomes?


iii Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Prevention and Early Intervention Programs. Accessed at https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Prevention_and_Early_Intervention/About_Prevention_and_Early_Intervention/programs.asp

iv Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Programs Available in Your County, Program Locator. Accessed at https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Prevention_and_Early_Intervention/Programs_Available_In_Your_County/default.asp