The Partners for Rural Transformation

Strategic Plan

January 2020 - December 2025

Partners for Rural Transformation
Eliminating Persistent Poverty
Advancing Prosperity and Economic Justice
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Executive Summary

Guided by a vision of a nation where persistent poverty no longer exists, six regional Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) located in and serving regions with a high prevalence of persistent poverty came together. The CDFIs—Community Development Corporation of Brownsville, Communities Unlimited, Fahe, First Nations Oweesta Corporation, HOPE Credit Union and Enterprise Corporation, and Rural Community Assistance Corporation—formed a coalition, currently called the Partners for Rural Transformation (“The Partners”) and formerly called the Persistent Poverty Working Group. We represent the nation’s rural persistent poverty counties and have records of accomplishment spanning decades. In the last 10 years alone, we have deployed over $2 billion reaching millions of people who reside in persistent poverty. With a shared ethos of investing in both people and places and informed by the voices of local people, we seek to unify around opportunities in diverse communities at a time of great division in our nation.

A closer look at persistent poverty America reveals how structural exclusion by place and race continues to paint a picture that is steadfastly rural and marred by racial inequity. These challenges are exacerbated by a history of disinvestment. However, our organizations have long track records of rising to such challenges—as CDFIs, we are uniquely positioned to meet the needs of local people and places. Our strategic plan sets forth our group’s overall vision, mission, core values, and strategic priorities. The plan centers on our group’s Theory of Change and four long-term outcomes that lead to the elimination of persistent poverty:

- **Hope and Opportunity Mindset**
- **Power and Engaged Communities**
- **Equitable Thriving Economies**
- **Communities and Wealth**

To make these outcomes a reality, we are organizing our work around four strategic objectives:

- **Capital**: infuse persistently poor areas (PPAs) with sufficient private and public financial capital to support economic development efforts and build wealth.
- **Thought Leadership**: elevate our collective voice with a new narrative that highlights the solutions we have proven will bring about sustainable change in our regions and the value that we find in the people and places found in our regions.
- **Power Building and Civic Engagement**: build leadership capacity and political involvement to amplify local voices.
- **Systems**: strengthen capacity at a local level and work at a regional level to challenge assumptions and build appropriate systems that provide comprehensive strategies as well as complement the work that is being conducted in local communities.

Each strategic objective is driven by strategies and actions that set the course of our work over the next five years. In the Appendix, we propose a timeline and next steps for implementing our strategic plan.
Background: Persistent Poverty America

Structural Exclusion by Place and Race in Persistent Poverty America
Perhaps nowhere else in the United States is the structural exclusion by place and race more self-evident than in persistent poverty America. Of the 395 persistent poverty counties, 8 out of 10 are non-metro—home to nearly seven million people (Map 1). Additionally, every rural majority black and Native American county is persistently poor.

While high and persistent poverty exists throughout the nation, the regions and populations that are most often represented are along the Mexico border, Appalachia, the Delta and Deep South, the Central Valley of California, and Native American lands. Notably, regions of deep persistent poverty were created by design, formed by policy choices that facilitated the acquisition of wealth through slavery in the Mississippi Delta and Black Belt, the taking of land and life from Native and Latino people, and the extraction of natural resources from Appalachia. Today, the consequences of history are apparent in other forms of distress and structural exclusion—high unemployment, a lack of access to banking services, a paucity of quality affordable housing and safe drinking water, and lack of venture capital critical to the formation of small businesses—all of which contribute to higher rates of premature death and lower health outcomes.
Investments Lag in Persistent Poverty Areas

In places of great need, financial capital serves as a critical intervention. Small business loan programs create jobs to address unemployment and poverty. Affordable housing programs offer opportunities for individuals and families to build assets through home purchase. When available, capital increases access to financial services that establish credit pathways and savings. Infrastructure development provides clean drinking water and safe disposal of waste water. Collectively, these strategies create wealth that stays in communities. We have the solutions that work but not the capital to take them to scale.

Despite the well-documented benefits of capital investment, particularly when deployed by CDFIs, regions with large concentrations of persistent poverty lag behind large urban areas in philanthropic investment. According to National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, “These two regions [the Alabama Black Belt and the Mississippi Delta] benefitted from just $41 in foundation funding per person between 2010 and 2014, compared to the national funding rate of $451 per person and the New York state rate of $995 per person.” This level of disparity is evident in every region we serve.

Underinvestment in rural persistent poverty regions, however, is not limited to philanthropy. Historically, particularly in large cities, banks have been the primary source of capital to support the growth of CDFIs and the subsequent strategies implemented to address unemployment, gaps in affordable housing, access to financial services and community infrastructure development. Due to structural deficiencies in the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) tying qualifying investments to branch locations, bank investment in rural CDFIs lag behind investment in CDFIs serving urban areas. In 2017, for example, only 27 cents of every dollar borrowed by rural CDFIs was from a bank in contrast to over half of funds borrowed by urban CDFIs.

Who We Are: Value Proposition and Unique Niche

CDFIs are Uniquely Position to Address Challenge of Persistent Poverty

For decades, CDFIs in some of the most economically distressed regions of the country have been successfully meeting the needs of local communities and people to address the challenges associated with persistent poverty. CDFIs bring capital to communities and regions that otherwise suffer from disinvestment; we build human capacity, strengthen local economies and entrepreneurs, improve housing and access to safe drinking water, and empower local people to determine their desired destiny. Regionally- and locally-focused CDFIs are assets in communities that have often been structurally excluded from building community assets that create self-determination.

The Partners have over 200 years of collective experience focused on high and persistent poverty regions. Our reach extends to the most forgotten or ignored corners of America, and our dedication to these places is unmatched. Respectively we are all governed by the people and regions we serve, requiring a solidarity of purpose, and making our assets a powerful part of the wealth creation to these same communities. Our individual organizations have staying power. We have each been working for 20 to 50 years serving the most difficult-to-reach communities, and we have a long track record of success. Collectively we have served millions of people.

All of the regions we serve face similar challenges. We have evolved unique strategies to address these challenges, and now we are sharing our strengths and successes. We have banded together, investing our individual experience and leveraging our partnerships and political connections to create a collective power focused on places of persistent and high rural poverty.
The Partners for Rural Transformation is the only group that can address the need for meaningful change at the individual, community, and regional levels; and we are prepared to bring our expertise and experience to collaborations with allies aiming to address persistent and high poverty in our country.

**Vision**
The Partners envision a country where persistent poverty no longer exists.

**Mission**
The Partners work collaboratively across geographies and cultures to collectively influence policy and simultaneously lead, advocate, innovate, and finance individual and community solutions to poverty so that our neighbors can build sustainable and promising futures.

**Core Values**

- **Collaboration:** Building on trusted relationships, we make more happen together. We work together and openly share brand, influence, and successful strategies. We build a stronger voice and have greater impact, bringing expertise from other regions into our regions to learn from each other.

- **Equity:** Injustice has led to wealth being stripped from people in our regions, and we build equity for all people in every facet of our work and advocacy.

- **Inclusion:** We intentionally celebrate and engage our diversity and uniqueness, while recognizing our common traits and experiences. We acknowledge that the best decisions are made when all voices are heard, valued, and integrated into our solutions.

- **Leadership:** We empower local residents by identifying achievable strategic solutions to collective problems. We value the ability to use our leadership to motivate and cultivate new and existing leadership at all levels: local, state, and federal.

- **Building Power Advocacy:** We ensure that local voices reach as far as they can while empowering local residents to create opportunities to advocate for themselves. Community priorities and voices matter and inform policy at all levels: local, state, and federal.

- **Innovation:** We are committed to real change in the communities we serve and dedicated to long-term progress that is measurable. Innovation happens in our communities, which are challenged by disinvestment. We adapt and identify new solutions to create economic opportunities for individuals and communities.

- **Resiliency:** We build strong local organizations that can sustain change and strengthen communities. We promote and reflect the beauty and strength of the people, places, and cultures of persistently impoverished areas, so that solutions stem from the strength of our communities.

- **Capital:** We place capital in the hands of local community leaders who are connected to long-term partners with expertise and resources. In communities that have suffered disinvestment, there is a vital and critical importance of capital as a driver for creating change. When people witness change that is tangible and holds meaning for their lives, their belief about the future changes.
**Strategic Priorities**

To support each other and our communities, the Partners will pursue the following priorities:

- Continue investing time and energy in the trusted relationships among our organizations’ leadership. The purpose being that these relationships are at the heart of our ability to accept a high level of risk together, which in turn ushers in the transformation impact and policy necessary to end persistent poverty.

- Achieve a collective brand and voice. The end goal is to create a narrative that replaces the widely accepted, inaccurate, and incomplete narrative that currently exists about places of persistent poverty. We will build a politically relevant narrative to change the flow and use of resources that create scalable solutions and effect change of magnitude.

- Bring significant, new amounts of money to locally-lead work in our communities by engaging philanthropic, federal, and private funders.

- Expand capital flows to the parts of persistent poverty regions that are least likely to have consistent investment by investing in the organizational capacity of regional CDFIs. As regional CDFIs serving persistent poverty regions, we play a unique role and our ability to influence the capacity and work at the local level is critical.

- Promote and replicate solutions from each region.

- Reform policy at the local, state, regional, and national levels, to drive and support more resources to benefit PPAs.

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**Theory of Change**

The Partners for Rural Transformation is committed to investing in a collaborative effort to serve as the accelerators guiding the Partners’ Theory of Change. We are focused on the following long-term outcomes that lead to the elimination of persistent poverty.
Outcomes:

1. Hope and Opportunity Mindset
The elimination of persistent poverty relies on changes from within communities. The Partners’ work focuses on changing mindsets from ones that “wait for assistance” to an entrepreneurial mindset that seeks opportunity. Whether they are elected officials, community leaders, or residents, people with an entrepreneurial mindset develop solutions to local problems and seek out the resources to help them succeed.

Although we realize our families are facing complex social realities, our shared community-grounded experiences reveal that the families we serve are contagiously hopeful, persistent in their pursuit of better opportunities, entrepreneurial in financial endeavors, resourceful in how they leverage social and financial capital, creative in their approach to challenging the status quo, and resilient in the face of formidable opposition, which includes market trends and structural inequalities beyond their control.

2. Power and Engaged Communities
Engaged community members have the capacity to inform an authentic narrative. They also have the power to organize individuals and convene critical stakeholders to advocate for the advancement of local, state, and national policy agendas that remove systemic structural oppressive barriers to economic stability and mobility. Changing national and state policies impacting persistent poverty requires the mobilization of the very people impacted by the effects of poverty. Engaged and empowered communities rise to the challenge with a renewed sense of purpose; we diligently tackle the difficult work of operationalizing solutions to close the massive wealth gaps in our communities.

3. Equitable Thriving Economies
The negative ramifications of frail and fractured economies, including the chronic financial instability of individuals, families, communities, and private and public sectors, is well documented and cannot be overstated. Many persistent poverty communities have a history of extraction that includes natural resources and cheap labor. When the resources are gone or the labor is cheaper elsewhere, the jobs and investment leave the community or region. Thriving economies are built from the inside out through local individuals building locally-owned businesses. A strong local economy keeps wealth local and inspires others to start businesses which leads to a new vibrancy that positively impacts the "opportunity mindset" discussed above. Thriving economies include quality of life businesses, job creators, and tech ventures as they mature.

Equitable thriving economies advance economic opportunity for residents in persistently poor areas, and intentionally provide workforce development opportunities where employees are financially stable and earn sufficient income to cover all of their basic expenses, save for emergencies, and invest in retirement and other assets.

4. Communities and Wealth
Wealth includes financial assets as well as individual skills, innovation through new knowledge, social capital, built capital, natural assets, political influence, and cultural assets. To be successful, people and communities need to see increases to all forms of wealth. Eliminating persistent poverty requires a holistic approach. The Partners will engage community members in a departure from the traditional bricks and mortar approach to community development; we will shift the focus on income as the sole metric of household and community level financial wellbeing to a focus on wealth.
Historical and ongoing institutionalized racism has resulted in egregious wealth disparities that exist within persistent poverty counties throughout the United States. Further disparities in access to financial supports have rendered individuals in persistent poverty counties unable to weather economic shocks and access opportunities to accumulate both short- and long-term wealth reserves. Community members largely operate outside the financial mainstream in the second tier of financial services: a market saturated by predatory, aggressively-advertised, high-cost credit products. The Partners’ strategic efforts strive to provide individuals with access to sound financial products and services that enable individuals and communities to be resilient and productive. We support the creation of asset holdings that are widely distributed and opportunities to increase financial assets specifically by ensuring that homeownership and entrepreneurship resources are available to individuals across the socio-economic spectrum.

Income is a static measure, describing a household’s financial status in a point in time where wealth encapsulates an individual’s and community’s combined financial past, present, and future. Wealth includes the equity in a home, business, or personal asset accounts, and provides a family with economic security. It mitigates the impact of economic shocks, provides financial security during retirement, supports intergenerational upward mobility, and provides substantial stability for the surrounding community. Through the implementation of the proposed $1 billion philanthropic Opportunity Fund and the additional $5 billion in federal funding and investments described below, the Partners will infuse persistently poor communities with sufficient private and public financial capital to support economic development efforts that build wealth. Expanding access to sound financial products and services, checking and savings accounts, small dollar loans, and small business and mortgage loans is key to asset building. The Partners contribute to the creation of financially resilient individuals who build their formal credit profiles and participate in the first-tier mainstream financial services market.

As we delve into the financial profiles of low-wage earners in our communities, we will continue to use an intentional health, wealth, and equity perspective to interpret the implications of deep-rooted financial instability and an absence of opportunity. Our cadre of partners is committed to writing a narrative that highlights the hope, tenacity, resilience, and dignity that families in our communities deserve as they purchase their home, establish their own business, establish new community health centers, and build wealth for themselves, our communities, our cities, our regions, and our nation. Together we pledge to continue working to own more than we owe, to treat the root causes of persistent poverty, to know our financial health numbers, and to live in the black—not in the red. Together we are striving to change the intergenerational wealth trajectories of families in the communities we serve through the provision of a revitalized sense of hope, power building and engagement opportunities, and the development of thriving equitable economies and tangible community wealth.

**Strategic Objectives, Strategies, & Actions**

The Partners will work together toward a set of strategic objectives: Capital, Thought Leadership, Power Building and Civic Engagement, and Systems. In alignment with our Theory of Change, the influx of **Capital** into persistent poverty areas, and specifically with the Partners, will fuel our **Thought Leadership**, which will fuel **Power Building and Civic Engagement**, which will in turn move **Systems** to the change needed to create Community Engagement and Wealth Building in previously persistent poverty counties. We will use the strategies and actions listed below each objective to advance our work toward the outcomes detailed above:
Capital
Given the challenges facing persistent poverty areas and the clear funding gaps left by banks and philanthropy, deep, meaningful investments made with a sense of urgency are needed to create opportunity for both people and places. To begin to remedy the inequity in funding and scale investment to equal need, it is imperative that philanthropic, federal and private investment 1) collectively commit to increasingly higher investment strategies in persistent poverty regions, and 2) ensure that such investments are made to regional and local institutions and organizations that primarily serve these places. Only then can we build the community assets and wealth that is desperately needed to bring about meaningful change.

Strategy 1:
Increase Philanthropic Investment in Persistent Poverty Counties. The Partners will work to raise $1 billion in new philanthropic investment over the next five years, to benefit persistent poverty counties/census tracts.

- Engage funders, investors, and legislators about the holistic needs of persistently impoverished communities and how they can influence policy and regulatory change while partnering with existing organizations and each other to bring about sustainable change.
- Create a $1 billion Persistent Opportunity Fund.

Strategy 2:
Increase Access to Federal Funding in Persistent Poverty Counties. The Partners will work to access $2 billion in new federal funding over the next five years to benefit persistent poverty counties/census tracts.

- Target new and existing federal programs, and expanding federal funding to PPAs.
- Adapt unused or underused resources that are provided by existing sources, advocating for more successful use of the money that provides solutions for unserved communities.
- Engage funders, investors, and legislators about the holistic needs of persistently impoverished communities and how they can influence policy and regulatory change while partnering with existing organizations and each other to bring about sustainable change.
- Continue pursuing CRA reform, until the system benefits the communities that really need it.
- Continue pursuing the addition of 10-20-30 language across all pertinent departments within the federal government.

Strategy 3:
Increase Private Investment in Persistent Poverty Counties.
The Partners will work to raise $3 billion in new private investment over the next five years, to benefit persistent poverty counties/census tracts.

- Continue pursuing CRA reform, until the system benefits the communities that really need it.
- Leverage new philanthropic funding to bring in private investment.

Strategy 4:
Increase in Other Forms of Capital.
The Partners will work to increase all forms of capital in PPAs—including but not limited to human, social, and cultural capital.
• Engage funders, investors, and legislators about the holistic needs of persistently impoverished communities and how they can influence policy and regulatory change while partnering with existing organizations and each other to bring about sustainable change.

• Seek increased investment from national intermediaries in the capacity of CDFIs serving PPAs.

• Expand Bank Lending and Community Development Investment in PPAs.

• Create incentives for bank investment into CDFIs serving PPAs.

• Adapt and change to best serve our communities. Historically, members of the Partners for Rural Transformation have established the thoughtfulness and resiliency needed to adapt for the changing economic and political climates we’ve experienced over time. We will continue to adapt to serve our communities as they come out of persistent poverty to help strengthen them as they grow into more sustainable communities.

• Grow our operating budgets and balance sheets to facilitate the additional work made possible by greater investment.

Thought Leadership
Poverty in America is structural and intentional. The Partners name and call out matters of structural racism and exclusion in rural, persistently poor places. Our lived experience in the rural places we serve allows us to make purposeful connections between the strategies that lift up places of persistent poverty—from safe and affordable housing to small business development, from access to financial services to basic community infrastructure. Equitable development is the outcome of the Partners’ thought leadership.

The message of persistent poverty is a difficult one for our country’s leaders to hear. As individuals and single organizations in isolated geographies, our message can easily be tuned out. As a national collaborative, the Partners cannot be ignored.

Strategy 5: Elevate our Collective Voice.
The Partners’ compelling communications strategy and message will lift up solutions, data, and local voices. We will highlight a rural America that is integral to the overall economy and strength of the United States, articulating our shared vision and the importance of collaborative efforts to uplift and promote economic development in rural communities.

• Create a new narrative. Partners will create and use a narrative that highlights the solutions we have proven will bring about sustainable change in our regions and the value that we find in the people and places found in our regions. Over 200 years of collective experience gives us a deep understanding of the solutions that make a measurable difference in persistently poor rural places. We have succeeded in places that most have given up on. Our solutions come from the communities in which we live and work, are crafted from deep listening, and are the result of giving local people choices and the power to be part of the solution. This is how we learn. Through strategic investments, we can scale these solutions.

• Develop case studies and collect data to underscore our already compelling message.

• Engage the narrative with our collective voice. Partners will use our narrative and our collective voice to provide thought leadership that will direct and move the civic and political will in our regions and country in such a way that will move appropriate resources into persistent poverty areas to accomplish our other outcomes.
• Uplift local voices. Persistent poverty is not a concept about an area that has no faces and no voices. Yet, places struggling with persistent poverty are easy to ignore; the people here are easy to ignore. The Partners will shine the light on people who are doing the difficult work every day to help themselves and their communities.

**Power Building and Civic Engagement**

The root of political and civic engagement is at the local level but change must focus on the national level. Most PPAs are disenfranchised due to decades of structural racism, exclusion, and wealth extraction. Therefore, building leadership capacity and political involvement to give voice to the residents in the communities we serve is extremely difficult as well as critically important. The Partners will pursue greater political and civic engagement for ourselves and the residents of our regions.

**Strategy 6:**

**Foster Civic Engagement.**

The Partners working in PPAs will continue to identify opportunities to discuss the importance of civic engagement.

• Engage with community groups to develop their leadership capacity to promote greater diversity in community decision-making processes.

• Amplify these new leaders’ voices so are heard by political and administration leaders as they make decisions about new opportunities for community investment at the local, state, and national levels.

**Strategy 7:**

**Catalyze Political Engagement.**

As community groups engage in local change, the Partners will ensure that they recognize the importance of political engagement to effect that change and emphasize the importance of regional collaboration and cooperation in making change attainable and sustainable.

• Establish a Congressional Caucus on persistent poverty which includes more than half of the Representatives of persistent poverty counties as members.

• Facilitate the following Caucus-led activities:
  ▪ Hold hearings in PPAs to gain insight to the challenges and opportunities for community and economic development in those areas.
  ▪ Convene listening sessions to hear from local leaders about the challenges they face.
  ▪ Draft legislation that could bring new federal resources to the Partners’ efforts.

**Systems**

Rural and persistent poverty areas have historically witnessed egregious disinvestment that has resulted in fractured social, economic, and human capital systems with limited capacity to address the most pressing local issues. Although rural communities are often isolated from traditionally recognized large urban centers of innovation, the Partners recognize the immense value of innovative solutions developed by experienced local practitioners who understand the nuances of their individual communities as well as the need for critical investment to support organic programs and policies created by and for the communities they serve. We have been recognized for our ability to develop cross-sector partnerships, invest in and train local leaders, and build the capacity within their respective organizations to convert ‘transactional’ social and economic development
outcomes such as affordable housing into enterprises that consistently produce systemic ‘transformational’ returns. Local leaders are then able to apply the subject matter expertise they have acquired to address other areas of concern within their communities.

However, we recognize that local leadership in isolation is not enough to further our outcomes. Leaders must be able to come together and work at a regional level to challenge assumptions and build appropriate systems that provide comprehensive strategies as well as complement the work that is being conducted in local communities.

Eliminating persistent poverty requires a deliberate alteration of systems of structural racism and exclusion that have perpetuated poverty and inhibited economic mobility and financial resilience for individuals in the communities we serve. We are acutely aware of dominant social and political agents that actively refute the negative impact of structural inequalities. This results in further exclusion of members of our communities, forcing them to operate outside the financial mainstream, and exist on the margins of society. Although we reside in physical places that have encountered historical extraction of human, social, physical, and financial capital, collectively we have developed a working partnership where we are actively implementing innovative programs from various disciplines born out of successful community practice across our respective regions and thus expanding their scale and impact. Historically, capital represented by natural resources and the products of physical labor have flowed out of our communities and largely benefited national and multinational corporations. This form of wealth stripping has depleted natural and human capital reserves. The CDFIs represented in this partnership have secured investments of financial capital that represent an infusion of funds to support equitable development. As programs are replicated or expanded across regions, incremental adjustments within one sector have a ripple effect that leads to larger systematic change: for example, CRA regulations are modified to further encourage mainstream institutions to invest in CDFIs.

**Strategy 8:**

**Increase Local Capacity.**
The Partners will draw on our unique areas of expertise to increase the capacity of local organizations and individuals in a manner that intentionally strengthens local leaders and regional intermediaries.

- Increase strategic investment in local organizations and individuals. This will increase the capacity of local leaders to develop and implement a continuum of comprehensive, locally-grounded, place-based programs to produce impactful outcomes with long-term sustainability.
- Support the creation of new/alignment of existing infrastructure and systems to support the intergenerational accumulation and transfer of wealth within rural communities.

**Strategy 9:**

**Analyze Local and Regional Institutional Capacity.**
In order to ensure that local capacity is supported with scalable solutions, the Partners will seek to identify and fill gaps at the regional level.

- Establish a persistent poverty research agenda that will address CRA assessment and the gaps that exist. We will further look at the issue of under-reported census numbers for PPAs.
- Establish research that identifies quantitative and qualitative methods to measure the impact of the work. It will include finance, technical assistance, leadership development, and the building of power at the local level.
- Create an inventory of each Steering Committee organization’s primary, potentially-replicable business and product models and best practices.
• Create report(s) detailing our respective models for leadership and capacity building that we each do with our respective networks and partners.
• Create a plan that addresses gaps in capacity for capital, delivery, core capacity, and structural barriers.
• Promote Financing Flows by testing at least three business models built from this collaboration and implement one of them.

Conclusion

Building on our 200-year collective experience in rural persistent poverty regions, the Partners now have a plan to guide our movement forward over the next five years. We will be looking for allies at all levels (local, regional, and national) and sectors (philanthropic, public, and private) to join us in our call to action to extend opportunities to the most forgotten corners of America. Our dedication to rural people and places is unmatched. We have solutions that work. With the capital to take those solutions to scale, together we will strengthen the playing field in PPAs and amplify our stories to influence decision-makers to consider the needs and opportunities in rural places, and to deepen the shared humanity among all Americans.
Appendix
Appendix: Strategic Plan Timeline and Next Steps

The Partners for Rural Transformation will pursue the following steps over the next year to begin implementation of this strategic plan.

Hire Project Manager  
**January 2020**

The recruiting team will develop a job description. The entire team will conduct outreach to disseminate the job announcement. If there is not an adequate pool of candidates, The Partners will discuss hiring a search firm. The individual will work for Fahe but will not be required to live in their region or report to the Fahe home office.

Operations Plan  
**March 2020**

The Partners and the new Project Manager will develop an operations plan with clear strategies, an action plan, and a timeline for each area outlined in the strategic plan. The plan will delineate steps needed to strengthen the working group as a whole. It will provide a blueprint for future meetings of the group and the work to be accomplished.

Communications Plan  
**Deadline per contract**

Working closely with Spitfire, the Partners will design a communications plan spanning the development of the website, creation of collateral materials, schedule of speaking engagements by the Partners’ allies, and op-ed/articles to be published.

Fundraising Plan  
**May 2020**

Once communications materials are in place, the Partners will develop boiler plate language and a foundational PowerPoint presentation that can be adjusted to the requirements of funders. The fundraising plan will clearly outline the national philanthropic and federal agency partners to be approached.

Research Focus  
**July 2020**

Each member in The Partners for Rural Transformation will identify the specific research related to the work it is expanding via RWJF funding. As a group, we will identify the possible overlap and complementing focus areas for research to be undertaken by the group and with the support of third party researchers. The group will identify data sets needed to support the data and create a stronger foundation for our policy and advocacy work. The plan will create a timeline for the publication of policy briefs.

Policy and Advocacy Plan  
**September 2020**

The Partners will decide on the top three federal policies for which to advocate as a group. The plan will also outline state policies to be addressed by individual partners with help from those whose states have positive policy solutions. The plan will outline times for joint visits on Capitol Hill in order to speak as one voice. The plan will identify other ruraly-focused national groups with a policy agenda.