



**PARTNERS FOR RURAL
TRANSFORMATION**

2023 END OF YEAR MESSAGE

Harvesting Growth: A Year of Resilience, Evolution, and Collective Triumph



2023 IN REVIEW



**SOWING
SEEDS OF
CHANGE**



As we approach the end of 2023, Partners for Rural Transformation proudly reflects on a year of remarkable growth and success. Emerging from the challenges posed by the lingering impacts of COVID-19, our partnership seized the opportunities for normalcy that unfolded for the country. Yet, we remained vigilant in acknowledging and addressing the aspects that were not beneficial for our rural communities.

Our successes this year showcase the profound impact that PRT has had on the lives of those we serve. Our commitment to eradicating persistent poverty in rural America has absolutely deepened and been reflected across regions. Together, we have not only sown seeds of change but have cultivated a legacy of resilience, community, and positive transformation. As we celebrate the end of this transformative year, we look ahead with optimism, anticipating a continued harvest of progress in the years to come.



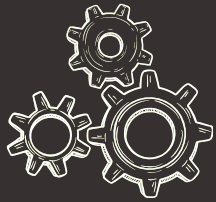
**REAPING THE
HARVEST OF
PROGRESS -
TOGETHER.**



2023 IN REVIEW, CONTINUED

»»» THANK YOU ALL!

In our work, financial capital investment assists to drive the depth and reach of our community impact. Those who invest in PRT are warmly appreciated. As we've been able to enhance and further the tenets set in our strategic plan, we continue to thank the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#), the [Heron Foundation](#), and the [Wells Fargo Foundation](#) for their ongoing support. We would also like to send a special thank you and acknowledgment to the organizations that assisted our CDFIs throughout the nation, including the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, the United States Department of Agriculture, the CDFI Fund, and others.



THIS IS HOW WE WORK.

PRT's five Working Groups are our lifeblood. Comprised of over 60 staff members from our Partner organizations, they work in tandem to address Advocacy, Communications, Fund Development, Lending, and Research.

Thank you to all our Working Group members for volunteering your time and ingenuity this year!

»»» WORKING GROUP PROGRESS

PRT accomplished a tremendous amount via our Working Groups this year. Most of our Working Group Priorities, established in 2022, have been completed, with the remaining ones estimated to be wrapped up in early 2024.

Advocacy responded to nine requests for comments in 2023, championing racial and financial justice, access to capital, and rural solutions unique to each community. In May, we visited Capitol Hill and spoke to the Senate Community Development Finance Caucus. Here, we highlighted the importance of funding to rural-serving CDFIs, the Community Reinvestment Act, and more. In October 2023, we returned to the Hill (alongside National Partner OFN), meeting with Senators Thune (R-SD) and Manchin (D-WV) about CDFI Fund funding, Native CDFI inclusion, and more!

Communications amplified the voices of our Partners and rural neighbors with vigor in 2023. Starting in May 2023, The Partners collaborated on [four articles](#) published by Nonprofit Quarterly. The articles focused on four topics: PRT's Theory of Change, Changing the Narrative, Making Policy Work for Rural America, and Doing the Work. We published several blogs, collabs and solos, and formed a weekly newsletter to keep our Partners up to date with current happenings.

Fund Development spent 2023 pursuing opportunities to learn from each other at the organizational level, through open conversation at meetings. This has helped form the foundations of a living, growing, and functional knowledge base. First up? New Market Tax Credits.

The **Lending** Working Group was created in April 2023 and has spent the year evaluating opportunities for participation with loans. While no loans have been closed yet, we've created a term sheet that will go to the Partners' individual loan committees next year!

Research had a stellar 2023, making huge strides with the Dashboard and completing two data pulls. We hosted the Advancing Rural Health Equity through Partnerships, Data & Finance event in collaboration with the Urban Institute. Around 300 people attended (virtually and in-person), with attendees from federal agencies, health organizations, and others!

A NEW DIRECTION: PRT RETREAT 2023

»»» PARTNERS IN PINE BLUFF

Our Annual Retreat in October brought together the Partners for Rural Transformation in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, for a much-needed gathering. This retreat exemplified the great work our Partners are doing as we visited multiple sites around Pine Bluff and Dumas, AK, we saw the fruits of Hope, CU, and cdc's labor. From life-changing medical businesses funded to town meetings hosted, our Partners' are still turning passion into product. We maintained what made us work and established just how we'll achieve our collective mission of uniting power players in our world - policymakers, investors, and the media - and align them with our mission of eradicating persistent poverty through partnership.

»»» MOVING FORWARD

In late September, PRT's former President, Jose Quinonez, resigned. Rather than have our growth slowed by the transition, we used the momentum to become stronger. Through thoughtful discussion with the Steering Committee and PRT Staff, we outlined plans to ensure that our future would remain bright, acknowledging that change is an inherent part of growth. Emphasizing our Strategic Plan and shared commitment to our mission, we explored ways to work better together and capitalize on our collective strengths.

»»» EXPERTISE IS LEARNED. PASSION IS INNATE.

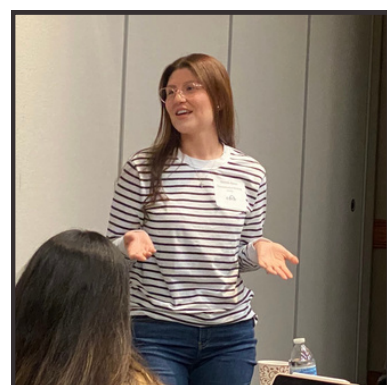
These words were spoken to us by Codney Washington (third picture, center) Director of WE Center in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. WE Center is a vocational and technical training institution, offering apprenticeships for mechanical engineering, carpentry, construction, and more. Mr. Washington, who was also featured on the first iteration of our Story Map, was kind enough to allow us to tour the WE Build Workshop. WE Build is their newest addition to the Center. Inspired from and guided by cdc/DreamBuild, WE Build restores the Arkansas Delta one home at a time, combining DreamBuild's modular housing model with the construction training/apprenticeships offered from WE Center. The visit displayed the true power of the Partners; WE Build came to be from not just cdc, but the partnership between cdc and Communities Unlimited.



WORKING GROUPS UNITE!

Though PRT Staff, Partner Deputies, and the Partners themselves spent the first three days meeting, we didn't have all the fun alone. Thursday was reserved specifically for the Working Groups (WGs). At PRT, Our Working Groups are our lifeblood. They represent our primary departmental focuses and are comprised purely of volunteers from our Partner organizations. It was such an amazing gift to be able to meet with over 30 of our WG members in Arkansas - for a lot of folks, and it was their first time ever meeting their other WG members in person.

Multi-talented frequent collaborators KERTIS Creative facilitated our Working Group Retreat, leading discussions and organizing projects. Activities included envisioning PRT now and what it should be, fulfilling a project with the Project Caucus model, and discussing how we feel within PRT. We spent the full day learning, growing, and envisioning a brighter future as Partners - together.



PRT'S SUPERHEROES

"What superpower do you wish you could use more at work?"

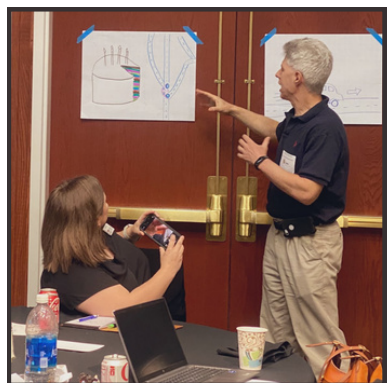
Drew Tucker (KERTIS Creative) asked this of the Working Group members - prompting everyone to think about themselves outside of their roles and silos. The results were illuminating - from music to map-making, we discovered the multitude of gifts our WG members possess. Our Project Caucus model activity asked us to assign ourselves to roles we wouldn't normally be in. The shier ones in the room served as leaders, while those usually in the spotlight served as notetakers.

At that moment, we became the superheroes we wanted to be.



WHAT COMES NEXT?

The Working Group Retreat was a jam-packed day full of epiphanies, new friendships, and at least a thousand ideas among the WGs. Of course, we won't leave all that great progress in the past. PRT Staff and WG Chairs are currently developing and reviewing an action plan - with each deliverable developed from a suggestion made by the WG members. We'll review the Working Group charters, phase in the Project Caucus model, and strengthen our ties with the Partners. Moreso, we will carry our new and tightened bonds through the next days, months, and years until our collective vision for PRT is accomplished. With this team of superheroes, everything is possible.



PARTNERS' IMPACT

In 2023, our six CDFIs experienced an incredible journey of progress and success. As we approach the year's end, let's take a moment to embrace the collective impact our individual strides have had on fostering a healthier and more vibrant community.



In 2023, cdcB | come dream. come build. housed 281 families through the construction, acquisition, and preservation of affordable homes. cdcB's housing counselors also provided housing counseling and financial coaching to nearly 600 individuals, many of which came to us with the goal of rebuilding their credit, building their savings, and reducing debt.

Through cdcB's CDFI, The Rio Grande Valley MultiBank originated over \$4.9 million in small-dollar loans to 5,051 employed individuals in the Rio Grande Valley. These loans are aimed at mitigating the effects of predatory lending in the valley by offering a lower-interest loan to those who need it.

cdcb's YouthBuild program is a comprehensive program for 16-24-year-olds that offers GED classes, construction training, manufacturing/CNC certifications, and leadership development. In 2023, 34 students graduated with their OSHA certification and their NCCER credentials. 26 of those students received their GED, while 33 of those students were placed in different jobs/trades. These skills and certifications will serve to enhance their resume and secure a spot in a well-paying trade.

In March, cdcB's policy shop, "p3: people. policy. power" organized an Affordable Housing Advocacy Day at the Texas Capitol in Austin, Texas. Here, affordable housing providers in Texas came together and met with Texas senators and representatives to advocate for the allocation of funds toward affordable housing. In addition to this, p3 released multiple fact sheets and policy papers on cdcB's impact in the Rio Grande Valley. One notable finding was the impact of cdcB's Cameron County Emergency Rental Assistance which disbursed over \$12.4 million in rental and utility assistance to 4,129 households. p3 also ran a month-long Homestead Tax Exemption Workshop where homeowners in Cameron County could file for a Homestead Tax Exemption, effectively lowering property taxes for low-to-median income-earning homeowners. p3 helped 65 homeowners submit their applications and engaged with over 500 people, many of whom already had their homestead exemption and didn't know it, or those who wanted more education on the exemption.



Affordable Housing Advocacy Day
📍 Austin, Texas



cdcb YouthBuild Graduation Day



DreamBuild Homeowners
📍 Rio Grande Valley, Texas

PARTNERS' IMPACT

COMMUNITIES
Unlimited

2023 was a year of growth, bringing changes, new partnerships, and new faces for Communities Unlimited (CU). The work impacts people and communities affected by persistent poverty and social inequity.

LOANS BY THE #S

41

Small Business

20

Environmental

29

Household Water/
Wastewater Systems

41

Nuestra Casa

LENDING | CU made 244 loans that totaled \$7,163,141. Throughout 2023, CU's Lending Department worked with several small businesses and water/wastewater systems on loans to help improve a community's quality of life or help entrepreneurs fulfill their dreams.

NUESTRA CASA | CU also celebrated the Nuestra Casa Home Repair loan program's 1st birthday in Weslaco, Texas! The program serves the people of Cameron, Hidalgo, and Starr counties on the South Texas border. CU provided 212 loans for a total of \$585,890.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP | In 2023, the Entrepreneurship Team hosted 28 webinars helping entrepreneurs with capacity building, business planning, and more. MEMShop is a place-based program that activates vacant and underused storefronts in Memphis, Tennessee. Six MEMShop clients developed their businesses in 2023. The eWealth Program completed the first cohort of businesses seeing wealth built with entrepreneurs, and a second cohort has begun.

HOUSING | CU's Housing program partnered with WeCenter in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. WeCenter has an offshoot titled WeBuild, which received foundational guidance from DreamBuild.

BROADBAND | In 2023, CU became the host site for the American Connection Corps AmeriCorps program and brought on three American Connection Corp Members. The initiative began in 2022 to educate and facilitate broadband internet connection in rural communities across our service area. Increased speeds will provide connectivity & and opportunities in their service area.

NEW BEGINNINGS | Thanks to the support of the T.L.L. Temple Foundation, CU celebrated the Grand Opening of the Texarkana Office. Check out this [interview](#) with Jerry Kearney, the T.L.L. Temple Foundation Program Officer!

CONNECT WITH CU | CU launched a new podcast series, "[Small Talk with CU](#)," discussing rural communities and the challenges they face. The communities that CU serves are all unique, and to represent that, we held a contest for students in rural school districts to submit artwork representing their hometown. The winner was a fourth grader from Dewitt Elementary School in Dewitt, Arkansas. All The submissions were outstanding, and Communities Unlimited chose one for the cover art for our podcast.

PARTNERS' IMPACT



Fahe brings people, organizations, and resources together to build homes, communities, and a thriving Appalachia through expanding economic opportunity and security for all.

As a Network organization of 50+ nonprofit organizations serving the Appalachian states of Kentucky (KY), Tennessee (TN), Virginia (VA), West Virginia (WV), Maryland (MD), and Alabama (AL), Fahe has cultivated the deepest-reaching platform to connect investment to boots-on-the-ground leadership throughout one of the most difficult places to serve in the country.

NETWORK IMPACT

\$277M
total direct

INVESTMENTS

housing can't wait
44 homes built **217** homes rehabbed

\$1.45B
total
ASSETS

Fahe's network
changed the lives of
941,707
people

10,095
owned/managed
RENTAL UNITS

justchoice lending/katr
54% households served are
BIPOC

4,328
people
EMPLOYED

83,664
residents
REPRESENTED

Fahe continues to be Member-owned and -governed—as the needs of its Members and their communities change, so do Fahe's strategies and priorities. By working together to achieve Strength in Numbers, they've grown both in the depth and breadth of their impact and in their ability to influence opportunity across communities, sectors, systems, constituencies, and geographies. Fahe's Network is building hope and belief that opportunity is possible in Appalachia by being agents of change for the people and places they serve every day.

This year, Fahe published its 2024 - 2028 Strategic Plan. The "Four Corners" focus on ushering transformative resources and investments into the region (Corner #1: **Money**), deploying them where they are needed most (Corner #2: **Capacity**), shaping a new narrative about what is possible in the region (Corner #3: **Narrative**), and collaborating with more people with diverse perspectives and influence than ever before (Corner #4: **People**).

Fahe also made amazing strides externally. Through their Housing Can't Wait initiative, they've directed approx. \$210m towards flood recovery and relief in Eastern Kentucky. Their mortgage lending group, JustChoice Lending, connected 3,200+ families with over \$500m in 502 Direct packaging! In October, they visited The White House to share bold ideas outlined by the Underserved Mortgage Markets Coalition (UMMC), urging the U.S. Federal Housing Finance Agency to require Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to improve their performance in serving families that cannot access traditional mortgage markets. 2024 will be an amazing year for Fahe!



(L to R) Nick Mitchell-Bennett, Executive Director of cdc, Sara Morgan, President of Fahe, George W. McCarthy, President and CEO of Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Andrew Jakobovics, VP of Policy Development at Enterprise Community Partners, Jim Gray, Senior Fellow at Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Chris Tyson, President of National Community Stabilization Trust

PARTNERS' IMPACT



For nearly 30 years, HOPE has channeled the power of partnership and innovation to advance economic opportunity in rural, persistent poverty places, especially in the Mississippi Delta. HOPE continued this work in 2023 by providing technical assistance to small town mayors, expanding access to capital for a local hospital and leveraging its balance sheet to improve critical infrastructure to create jobs.

HOPE Municipal Opportunity Partnership

In 2022, the end-of-year message closed with reference to the launch of the HOPE Municipal Opportunity Partnership (HMOP). Through the HMOP, HOPE works closely with local leaders to identify and secure federal investment to advance community and economic development priorities. This past year, the HMOP team assisted 40 small towns in securing funding awards through the Mississippi Municipality & County Water Infrastructure Grant program. Managed by the Department of Environmental Quality, the grants were made available through the American Rescue Plan Act.

Quitman County Medical Center

One of the success stories included the reopening of Quitman County Medical Center in Marks, Mississippi. Facing financial constraints in a majority Black county that grapples with one of the highest poverty rates in America and ongoing population loss, the hospital closed in the fall of 2016. Local leaders, however, saw an opportunity and organized around a strategy to re-open the hospital. Central to the approach included attaining the Critical Access Hospital (CAH) designation. The designation was a game-changer, guaranteeing Medicare and Medicaid payments at a rate of 101%, crucial for sustaining healthcare services in Quitman County. HOPE provided \$2.4 million in financing to support the acquisition and renovation of the hospital. The hospital's reopening restored essential healthcare services and provided employment opportunities. Investments of over \$1 million in state-of-the-art medical equipment underscored the commitment to delivering top-notch care to patients living in Quitman County and the broader region, a significant stride in bolstering the region's healthcare infrastructure.

Greenville Mid-Delta Airport

The largest unoccupied airport hangar in America is located in Greenville, Mississippi, a small Delta town located in a rural persistent poverty county on the Mississippi River. In a first-of-its-kind transaction for HOPE, the organization leveraged its balance sheet by purchasing \$6.4 million in bonds to support a larger \$12 million reinvestment in the airport. The Hangar Improvement Project promises to bring 200 jobs to Greenville in aircraft maintenance, fostering partnerships with educational institutions like Delta State University and Mississippi Delta Community College. During the partnership announcement, HOPE CEO, Bill Bynum, emphasized the Delta's potential for future investment and reflected on HOPE's roots in Greenville, which date back to 1994.



PARTNERS' IMPACT



This year has been a transformative year for Oweesta as they witnessed not only the realization of their 3-year strategic plan for 2021-2023 in exceeding all their goals, but also observed its real-time impact on the Native communities they serve. Oweesta intermediary lending efforts resulted in our deployment of \$13,490,000, resulting in 2,940 jobs created or retained in Native Nations, 24 new homes built, over 3,743 Native individuals receiving consumer lending products, and 273 native ranchers directly capitalized for their agriculture efforts.

Additionally, Oweesta's Programs Department conducted 2,855 hours of technical assistance and training in 2023, reaching 2,146 people through training, conferences, and webinars. Oweesta is also in its second year of providing their Native CDFI Practitioner Certification Program. The program was designed to help Native industry members build on their knowledge of CDFI operations. Since its inception, 521 Native CDFI practitioners have attended 23 training courses ranging from effective fundraising and capitalization to financial management.

In 2023, Oweesta hosted their 8th Annual Capital Access Convening (CAC). This was the first in-person convening since the pandemic in which Oweesta hosted our Native Awards Celebration and conducted a tour of local businesses and historic landmarks during our event. Oweesta collaborated closely with the President of the Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, as well as other Alaska partners who provided historical context and discussed issues impacting Alaska Natives during the convening. This event convened tribes from across the continent; in total 110 Native CDFIs and Native American financial institutions were in attendance, with a total of 242 participants, including funders, investors, and partners.

Oweesta also hosted their 18th annual Native Gathering Day and Native Awards ceremony in conjunction with the Opportunity Finance Center (OFN) conference. During our Native Awards ceremony, Oweesta had the honor of presenting the Native CDFI Catalyst Award and Native CDFI Seed Capital Award to deserving Native organizations making a meaningful impact within their communities.

In 2023, Oweesta continued to reimagine what inclusive lending could look like in Native communities. The concept of engaging in participation lending for larger-scale projects was presented to Oweesta's board of directors and has been piloted over the past 12 months. During this pilot phase, Oweesta has successfully closed and funded three participation loans.

Oweesta also concentrated during the year on the obstacles that Native individuals face when seeking housing financing. The difficulties experienced by Native CDFIs in gaining access to the secondary mortgage market are impeding mortgage lending in Indian Country, and, consequently, the number of Native individuals throughout the nation who can achieve homeownership. Presently, Oweesta is prioritizing its efforts towards looking into expanding into the secondary housing market, specifically by purchasing mortgage loans from Native CDFIs to increase their liquidity for providing mortgage lending products to their respective tribal communities.



PARTNERS' IMPACT



RCAC continued to grow in 2023 as they added new team members to implement projects serving rural and Indigenous communities. RCAC welcomed 23 new staff, bringing their total ranks to 218.

Their Wellness Initiative expanded this year - they launched Affinity Groups, including Caregivers, Writers, and Project Managers, and continued Lunch & Learn training for staff. Practicing what they preach, RCAC's offices will close between Dec. 25 and Jan. 1 for Rest and Reset Week.

RCAC's Diversity Equity & Inclusion Committee (pictured below) received recognition for its work this year at the Sacramento Business Journal's annual awards; the Committee also released its first progress report.



Community & Environmental Services	Environmental: \$45,378,457 Community: \$4,986,262
Housing	\$5,058,655
Loan Fund - Grant & Loan	Grant: \$15,159,528 Loan: \$39,621,553
Non-public Funds Raised	\$4,022,994
Public Funds Raised	\$69,407,453

The Rooted Relative Fund (RRF), originally a Vector Fund project, launched this year. The RRF is a 5-year pilot with the goal to be a long-term and sustainable fund focused on providing patient and equitable lending capital that does not rely on the 5C's of credit but works with Indigenous-led community partners to self-determine how to fund entrepreneurs in their communities. The RRF seeks to learn with our community partners and is a unique learning opportunity for the field of lending to pilot more relationship-based lending strategies.

RCAC continued our Data & Impact initiative, moving the organization toward data measurement, with departments setting Key Performance Indicators and baselines. RCAC's Events team managed 657 training sessions and workshops with 21,056 attendees in 2023!

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS:

HOUSING | This year, RCAC's U.S. Department of Agriculture Self-Help Housing partners completed 556 new construction homes and completed 54 rehabs. The Disaster Recovery Program team is engaged with seven rural communities. DRS, along with RCAC Program Managers, joined the Rural Community Assistance Partnership's Climate Resiliency Working Group.

COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES | The environmental team served 1,337 water, wastewater, and solid waste projects this year, an increase of 37.6% over last year. Of those projects, 389 were in Indigenous communities, which is a 29.1% increase over last year. The Building Rural Economies team continues to provide small business coaching, and 2023 saw increased demand for this service, up 45.9%, with 108 clients this year compared to 74 last year.

LOAN FUND | RCAC's Loan Fund ended FY 2023 with \$151 million in lending capital. The team closed 139 loans for a total of \$93,841,517, tripling the volume from last year. The team closed loans in each of the 13 states in RCAC's service area. The Biomass Utilization Fund closed its first two loans for projects in the Sierra Nevada, which will create jobs and increase community and forest resilience.

PRT IN PUBLIC

RAISING OUR VOICE

Beyond the shared plight and promise, the Partners exemplify the pure spirit of cooperation - and how our rural neighbors across the country benefit from that. One of those ways we showed this spirit is presenting how our partnership works across the country. The Partners for Rural Transformation have been featured at multiple events collectively in 2023, discussing several aspects of our vision, strategies for success, and what we look forward to accomplishing - together.

OFN 2023

PRT displayed our collective strength at OFN's 2023 Conference, themed "Capital Meets Purpose."

Our opening session on October 16th, "Making Funding Work for Persistent Poverty Areas," expounded upon how we promote prosperity in rural America. There, PRT introduced a new draft framework to transform rural America, emphasizing the need for flexible funding in hard-to-reach places.

In the subsequent session on the 17th, titled "The Power of Innovative Capital in Rural America - Lessons Learned," PRT shared how our unique collaborations provided promise for our neighbors in persistent poverty rural America. We highlighted projects like RCAC's new Rooted Relative Fund, Community Unlimited's Broadband Financing, and Fahe's New Market Tax Credit Leveraging Lending.

"Instead of those investments from administration benefiting those who are most vulnerable [as intended], the rich are going to get richer and the wealth gaps are going to get wider. Organizations like ours have to play a role in pushing back against it."

Bill Bynum, CEO | HOPE

The Partners showcased innovative products and initiatives that empower low-income families, promote camaraderie, and make a substantial impact.

Across rural America, the Partners are forging a new path, and the efficacy of collaboration is our driver. Beyond meetings and discussions, we're investing in both people and place, and our rural neighbors are reflecting the bounty of that investment. We're placing rural voices at the forefront, deploying inventive capital solutions, and making real generational change. The question is, what exciting developments will PRT bring in the months and years ahead?



L to R: Tim Rios (Wells Fargo), Dwain Neely (Fahe), Ines Polonius (CU), Nick Mitchell-Bennett (cdcb), and Suzanne Anarde-Devenport (RCAC)

"If we're not out of our comfort zone, we will not eradicate poverty. Find some friends because it's good to have friends [doing the work with you] while you're outside of your comfort zone."

Ines Polonius, CEO | Communities Unlimited

PRT IN PUBLIC

▶▶▶ PRT + URBAN INSTITUTE

Our PRT team joined forces with the Urban Institute to produce Advancing Rural Health Equity through Partnerships, Data, and Finance. PRT's first panel, titled Financing Rural Health Equity & Ways to Address the Needs. The panel (from l to r) was moderated by Katrina Badger (RWJF) and paneled by Emily Burleson, Alex Lawson (Hope), and Bonita Robertson-Hardy.

Capacity building, funding, and thought leadership are all crucial to reaching healthy solutions in rural America. Our Partners eloquently described how we secure just that for our rural neighbors. Health, place, and race are inextricably linked. Rural residents have higher occurrences of mental and behavioral health diagnoses, compounded by the limited access to mental health care in these communities. Health outcomes are even more bleak for rural regions of persistent poverty.

Persistently poor communities and people of color in rural America face not only the poor health outcomes associated with the region, but also those associated with racial segregation, discrimination, and gentrification.

Elaine Crutchfield (CU) was also featured in the final panel, Partnerships for Identifying Needs and Tracking Progress on Promoting Rural Health Equity. On sharing data on rural, Elaine had this to say: "Sharing data in a way that your partners can understand, add comments, and share [is very important]. While it's a challenge, it's very important. In many communities, it opens doors for future researchers."

Read the write-up from the event here: <https://www.ruraltransformation.org/blog/blog-advancing-rural-health-equity-through-partnerships-data-and-finance/>



L to R: Katrina Badger (RWJF), Emily Burleson (PRT), Alex Lawson (HOPE), and Bonita Robertson-Hardy (Urban Institute)

"Wastewater and sewage systems are rural health work. Accessible broadband is rural health work. Adequate housing is rural health work. These things have to be included in the rural health conversation; that'll help get us the capital we need."

Emily Burleson, PRT, Program Manager | Advocacy & Research

2024: A PREVIEW

As we approach 2024, PRT is excited to share a preview of the amazing programs and projects our Partners have in the pipeline.

COMMUNITIES UNLIMITED

- Communities Unlimited has done great work with the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) in 2023. With an anticipated increase in federal funds coming next year, the CU team anticipates a larger educational and programmatic campaign!

FAHE

- Fahe will implement its new Strategic Plan through the launch of working groups across the Membership. These working groups correspond to the Four Corners of our Strategic Plan: Money, Capacity, Narrative, and People. This provides a new framework and information flow so on-the-ground practitioners / Appalachian experts are informing future strategies and programs through a shared lens.
- In order to keep their hard-won Advocacy momentum moving forward, Fahe is working on replication and expanding the Housing Can't Wait campaign beyond just Kentucky and disasters to create urgency at the state level around dedicating resources regularly to address the housing crisis.
- Fahe is growing its Communication Team and harnessing the power of its relationships and platforms to change the narrative about what is possible in Appalachia and to increase its Strength in Numbers by building a bigger and more inclusive tent for people who share their commitment to a nation that values every American person and place.

PRT

- PRT is releasing Volume II of our Story Map project, with eight (8) new stories from our rural neighbors around the country.
- Continuing on the momentum around rural health work, PRT will be leading an initiative that will generate a series of 5-minute videos that show step-by-step, and click by click, how to download public health data. This will bolster the work of the Guidebook that Urban Institute published with the help of PRT and the PRT Research working group and allow the data to be easily accessed. Some public data sources we want to prioritize first are: Census data, ACS data, RWJF County Health Rankings data, and more.
- We're also launching our Comms/Fund Development media campaign, a tri-part series featuring the following themes: Of A Place, The Pivot, and Real Politics.
- Lastly, we plan to attend several events throughout the year, featuring our newest conference materials, and amplifying the unifying and unique message of the Partners.

CLOSING REFLECTION

With all the work we do collectively and individually, it can be difficult to take it all in. We'd like to take this moment to wish you all a happy holiday, a gleeful transition into the new year, and a prosperous 2024. Thank you for standing alongside us as we eradicate persistent poverty in rural America. We leave you with this poem from Silas House, prompting those to reflect on the beauty of our places, people, and impact.

THOSE WHO CARRY US

written for the second inauguration of Governor Andy Beshear (D-KY)

When I was little, a storm gathered
in the night with shivers of lightning
and quaking thunder. The rain fell cold
and sideways for three days. All the creeks
conspired to the raging river.
As the flood seeped beneath our door
my mother sat me on her hip.
She carried me, muddy foam
striking her knees, then her waist,
before she reached high ground, where
neighbors waited to help us.

Once, my aunt ran down the road with me
latched to her chest, a tornado
behind her. In the church basement
we could hear the havoc. She whispered:
if you are still and quiet this will pass.
Afterwards, a mighty moon shined
so bright I could see our shadows
as the world dripped and righted.
Already people were rebuilding.
Even hammers and saws make a kind of music.

Often, these days, I study
on those who carry us.
The everyday people who
keep the engine of the world
running. When the darkest skies
move in, I remind myself
that most people are good.

I think of schoolteachers who say:
You matter. Bus-drivers who are glad
to see us each morning. Lunch-ladies,
laughing as they ladle out our food.
All those who stand up for what is right.
There are so many ways to change
the world. The mechanic and miner,
mail carrier, cashiers and clerks.
Singers, farmers, and truckdrivers.
I can see them. I imagine
their sore shoulders and tired legs.
I thank them for carrying
me, even when I didn't know.

We carry each other, from Pine Mountain
to the Pennyroyal. Past tulip
poplars and goldenrods. From city
streets to holler roads, from the wide
Ohio to the quickening
creeks of the Gorge, we go forward,
together. We lift our neighbors
from Hickman to Hindman, Mayfield
to Louisville, Cadiz, Cumberland Falls,
Falls of Rough, from the Bluegrass to Bowling
Green. Eminence to Independence.
Lawrence, Laurel, LaRue, I will carry you.
Kentucky, we walk a ways together, no matter
if it is in cold rain or moonlight. Sometimes
the only music is hammers and saws, but we
keep going, aiming for the high ground where they
will be standing with their arms out, saying
Come here, and rest. Let me help you.

Silas House is Kentucky Poet Laureate 2023-2025.