



Investing in Rural Capacity:
Key Findings from the
Northeast Region



A Comprehensive
Summary of Findings
from the National
Rural Development
Stakeholder Listening
Sessions

February 2023

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE NORTHEAST REGION

Introduction

This section focuses on findings from the region served by the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development. This region is the smallest in terms of total geographic area but the largest in terms of population. It comprises 12 states plus the District of Columbia. It is home to 16 Land-Grant Universities, of which three are minority-serving 1890 institutions, and 12 Sea-Grant program locations.



Northeast Regional Listening Session at a Glance

- Held virtually on April 5, 2022
- Hosted by Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development
- Number of people who registered: 34
- Number of people who participated: 16

Summary Findings

Priority Rankings

Respondents who primarily work with Northeast communities, on average, indicated that addressing physical infrastructure and public services was the most important topic. Responses especially highlighted the need for broadband services, diversification of energy production and transmission, and pressures on housing availability and affordability. Economic development – particularly entrepreneurship and small business creation and retention – and workforce training were also top priorities. The Northeast was unique among the regional groupings in that it was the only one for which the topic of climate change, climate variability, and extreme weather ranked in the top four priority areas.

Priority Ranks

	North Central	Northeast	South	West	National Scope	Total
1	Economic development	Physical infrastructure and public services	Workforce development, training, and education	Physical infrastructure and public services	Health	Physical infrastructure and public services
2	Workforce development, training, and education	Economic development	Physical infrastructure and public services	Economic development	Physical infrastructure and public services	Economic development
3	Physical infrastructure and public services	Workforce development, training, and education	Health	Health	Economic development	Workforce development, training, and education
4	Community vibrancy	Climate change, climate variability, and extreme weather	Economic development	Workforce development, training, and education	Community vibrancy	Health

Assets, Challenges, Opportunities, and Recommendations for Top Four Priorities

Each survey participant was asked to answer questions concerning assets, challenges, and opportunities connected to the top three topics they identified as priorities. Responses to these open-ended questions were coded, and results are shown in the tables below. (Below each table, the statistic for perceptions of low/no capacity at the respondents’ respective institutions came from the survey as well.) These are followed by the recommendations for future investments discussed during the Northeast Region virtual listening session.

Participants registering for the Northeast regional listening session were asked to identify two of these four top-priority topics that they would be most interested in discussing. Based on responses, the NERCRD staff created three topics for targeted dialogue during the session:

- Climate-resilient Communities and Economies
- Infrastructure and Economic Growth
- Preparing for the Workforce of the Future

Recommendations made via small-group conversations during the Listening Sessions are placed under the topical area to which they are most pertinent in the summaries that follow.

Physical Infrastructure and Public Services – Northeast Region Survey Results

Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to land and space for further infrastructure development • Limitations on community assets posing a challenge • Networking and partnership among community organizations • Renewable energy production sources
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited broadband and wireless phone service • Identifying funding sources and mechanisms – including taxes and tax structures - that can be used to invest in maintaining/improving infrastructure • Meeting housing and transportation needs • Sufficient leadership for community needs
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing developments that address access and affordability crisis • Improve processes and planning for transportation infrastructure • Expand renewable energy infrastructure and innovation • Funding for rural community priorities and capacity to access funding sources

Perception of low/no capacity at respondents’ institution to address the challenges and opportunities:

- 73%

Recommendations for future investments – Northeast Region Listening Session Results

- Human capital building critical; lacking capacity of community development professionals, leaving communities without expertise
- Create an ecosystem of community development within and across the University (whole of institution approach)
- Improve understanding within institutional environments of the types of processes and timelines inherent within community development work

Economic Development – Northeast Region Survey Results

Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural and outdoor spaces • Rural innovation and entrepreneurship • Tourism, recreation, and travel • Social reciprocity and sense of community
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited amenities (affordable housing, healthcare, financial services, shopping/retail) • Lack of resources for small businesses and entrepreneurs • Lack of broadband or technologies • Aging population and loss of younger generations within rural communities
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Startup funds, incubation effort, and training for business owners and innovators • Broadband access, digital assistance and tools, and remote work capabilities • Workforce development, training, and education programming • Building rural tourism businesses, infrastructure, and capacity

Perception of low/no capacity at respondents’ institution to address the challenges and opportunities:

- 53%

Recommendations for future investments – Northeast Region Listening Session Results

- Promote holistic engagement with and investment in diverse community members (not just established community leaders)
- Amplify rural voices, which are often lost in the region leading to dictates from outside
- Training and professional development programming that builds capacity of professionals to engage in economic development work and expands presence in rural communities
- Reform of matching requirements for funding mechanisms

Workforce Development, Training and Education – Northeast Region Survey Results

Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational programming at technical centers and vocational schools • Access to rural community colleges • Available, willing workforce in communities • Partnerships and established relationships between stakeholder groups
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited broadband access, affordability, and reliability • Lack of higher education/training facilities and programs • Workforce retention and retraining • Community leadership and planning for workforce issues
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More workforce training and education programs • Targeted funding on educational programs with workforce readiness • Investments that build capacity of community leadership • Improved access to broadband and wireless internet service

Perception of low/no capacity at respondents’ institution to address the challenges and opportunities:

- 56%

Recommendations for Future Investments – Northeast Region Listening Session Results

- Promote and invest in activities that convene, foster networks, and build collaboration among various community development players/organizations
- Engage in narrative reformation that removes stigma of trades and vocational education
- Programs that help communities conduct asset mapping and enable holistic planning
- Diversify input streams/improve inclusiveness of planning so that youth and marginalized populations are at the table

Climate Change, Climate Variability, and Extreme Weather – Northeast Region Survey Results

Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Farming, agriculture, and local and regional food systems• Extension and other outreach education programming• State, local, and community-driven initiatives
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community planning processes and lack of established plans for climate change• Inclusive and accessible programming for diverse populations• Environmental justice and distributive effects on marginalized communities
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research infrastructure, including institutions of higher education and private research industry• Improve local capacity to expand community-driven approaches• Build more inclusive and accessible programming that improves equity

Perception of low/no capacity at respondents' institution to address the challenges and opportunities:

- 48%

Recommendations for future investments – Northeast Region Listening Session Results

- Targeted programming investments, including financial and human capital
- Expand efforts to reach new and diverse audiences
- Integrated climate-related education into all Extension program areas
- Attention to groups with heightened vulnerability
- Inclusion of indigenous knowledge and perspectives
- Develop information and training on career and entrepreneurial opportunities in the new “green economy”

Roles for the Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDCs)

The listening sessions were intended to inform a broad range of rural development partners, including leaders with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Land-Grant Universities, among others. Given their focus on building capacity across organizational and state lines, the RRDCs may play several roles in advancing the strategic investments addressed in this report. These include the following themes.



Reaching across 1862, 1890, and 1994 Land-Grant University systems to collaborate on priority issues.



Conducting, translating, and disseminating research through journal articles, special issues, briefs, and presentations.



Scaling Extension outreach through curriculum development, training, gauging impacts, and showcasing promising practices.



Helping to acquire and leverage funding for research, Extension, and scholarship.



Actively encouraging the integration of research and Extension on key issue areas.



Facilitating workshops, listening sessions, and dialogues for innovative problem solving.



Convening researchers, Extension practitioners, and rural development stakeholders on high priority issues.



Building and coordinating multi-state teams.

Notes

Information in this report is excerpted from a report titled “*Investing in Rural Capacity: Comprehensive Summary of the National Rural Development Stakeholder Listening Sessions.*” The report shares findings from a national initiative conducted through the Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDCs).

For a comprehensive description of methods and participants, download the full report at:

<https://www.usu.edu/rrdc/listening-sessions#reports>

This work was supported in part by funding under the New Technologies for Agricultural Extension Program, led by the Extension Foundation, Federal Award Number is 2019-41595-30123. The RRDCs receive core support under funding via USDA NIFA. Graphics (excluding maps) were produced by the Extension Foundation. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USDA NIFA, the Extension Foundation, host institutions, or others providing material support.

Suggested Citation

Entsminger, J., Green, J., Welborn, R., Wiatt, R., Bednarikova, Z., Gayle, R., Pan, Y., Goetz, S. (February 2023). *Comprehensive Summary of National Rural Development Stakeholder Listening Sessions.* Regional Rural Development Centers. <https://www.usu.edu/rrdc/listening-sessions>

For More Information

More information, including the comprehensive listening session report, survey report, supplementary materials, and an interactive data dashboard, is available at:

<https://www.usu.edu/rrdc/listening-sessions>

Learn more about the Regional Rural Development Centers at: <https://www.usu.edu/rrdc/index>

