

# Rural Development Innovation Group

Starting in 2017, the **Rural Development Innovation Group**, in partnership with the **Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group (CSG)**, has hosted the **America's Rural Opportunity** series to explore innovative and proven approaches to rural economic development. The **Rural Development Innovation Group (RDIG)** is a diverse set of practitioners, intermediaries and funders who are deeply engaged in rural community and economic development across the United States. Initially convened in 2016 by the Northern Forest Center, the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities and Aspen CSG, RDIG's goals are to accelerate the knowledge, adoption, adaptation and impact of innovative rural development strategies in the United States.

## Current Members

**John T. Cooper, Jr.**  
Assistant Vice President, Public Partnership & Outreach  
Texas A&M University

**Nils Christoffersen**  
Executive Director  
Wallowa Resources (OR)

**Mariano Diaz**  
Lead Partner  
R&M Consulting Group (CA)

**LaMonte Guillory**  
Chief Communications Officer  
LOR Foundation (WY)

**Marten R. Jenkins, Jr.**  
President  
Natural Capital Investment Fund (WV)

**Deborah M. Markley**  
Co-Founder  
Center for Rural Entrepreneurship (NC)

**Bernie Mazyck**  
President & CEO  
SC Association for Community Economic Development

**Alan McGregor**  
Immediate Past Vice President  
U.S. Endowment for Forestry & Communities

**John Molinaro**  
President and CEO  
Appalachian Partnership for Economic Growth (OH)

**Ines Polonius**  
CEO  
Communities Unlimited, Inc. (AR)

**Rob Riley**  
President  
Northern Forest Center (NH)

**Kelly Ryan**  
President & CEO  
Encourage Community Foundation (WI)

**Joe Short**  
Vice President  
Northern Forest Center (NH)

**Connie Stewart**  
Executive Director  
California Center for Rural Policy

**Janet Topolsky**  
Executive Director  
Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group

**Dennis West**  
President  
Northern Initiatives (MI)

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**Annie E. Casey Foundation, Encourage Community Foundation, LOR Foundation, Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, Northwest Area Foundation, U.S. Endowment for Forestry & Communities, Northern Forest Center, Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group (CSG)**

In addition, today's **Rural Opportunity Youth** session was organized and presented in collaboration with and support from two of Aspen CSG's colleague programs at the Aspen Institute: the *Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund* of the *Forum for Community Solutions*, and the *Center for Native American Youth*.



# America's Rural Opportunity

## Linking Rural Opportunity Youth to Better Economic Futures

### Today's Moderator

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**Kathy Moxon** is the Director of USA Rural and Native Initiatives for YouthBuild USA, and helps lead Redwood Coast Rural Action, a four-county community leadership network working together to improve prospects for local people, place and economy in the region. A former director of community strategies for the Humboldt Area Foundation, Kathy has also served as the chairperson for the California Stewardship Network and has spoken across the nation on issues of rural economic and community development.

### The Innovators

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**Karen Jacobson** is Executive Director of the Randolph County Housing Authority (RCHA) in Elkins, West Virginia, where she also manages housing development projects and serves on the boards of two nonprofit housing groups. With an MBA from Boston University and a WV Contractor License in General Building, her experience includes leadership roles in the fields of community economic development, lending and social services.

**Mable Starks** is President and CEO of the Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE) in Greenville, Mississippi. In October 2009, she initiated the MACE YouthBuild program, with the goals of providing training and support to young people in the Delta as they first get a GED or high school diploma, and then placement in a career-starting job or higher education. She is also the owner of the Delta Arts Gallery and Craftorium in downtown Greenville.

**Deontay White** is a Construction Trainer for the MACE YouthBuild Program. Deontay grew up in Ruleville, a small town in Sunflower County, Mississippi – and the home of civil rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer. Deontay is a MACE YouthBuild graduate. He was so successful in the program that MACE brought him on as a construction trainer for other YouthBuild participants.

**Shawna Campbell-Daniels**, an enrolled Coeur d' Alene Tribe member, is the State Tribal Education Partnership (STEP) Manager for the Coeur d'Alene Tribe Department of Education in Plummer, Idaho. The focus of her work is creating culturally relevant curriculum, teacher professional development, organic family & community engagement systems, and equitable education policy initiatives. She is currently a Doctoral student in the College of Education at the University of Idaho with a focus on Indigenous research.

### The Researcher

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**Andrew Schaefer** is a Vulnerable Families Research Scientist at the University of New Hampshire's Carsey School of Public Policy. Andrew's work focuses on poverty, the social safety net, and women and work – including policies and programs that support low-income and other working families. Andrew received his PhD in sociology from the University of New Hampshire in 2017, with concentrations in work, family, and religion.

- **Tweeters:** Want to share your thoughts on today's discussion? Use **#ruralinnovation**
- Follow us on Twitter **@ruralinnovators** and **@aspencsg**
- To learn more about RDIG, get updates, and share your stories of rural innovation: Visit us at **as.pn/rural**

**For more about the series, and to view videos of prior ARO panels, visit:** <https://tinyurl.com/ASPEN-ARO>