

## Gaining by Degrees Increasing Rural Education, Career and Community Success

### Today's Moderator

**Dan Porterfield** is President and CEO of the Aspen Institute. Before coming to the Institute in 2018, Dan served for seven years as the President of Franklin & Marshall College. At F&M, he led the development of the Next Generation Initiative talent strategy, strengthening the College by tripling its percentage of incoming low-income students and more than doubling its percentage of domestic students of color. The Next Generation Initiative helped to galvanize the creation of a national project of the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program, the American Talent Initiative (ATI), which has a national goal of enrolling 50,000 more high-achieving low-income students in leading institutions by 2025. Dan was named a White House Champion of Change in 2016 in recognition of his work to expand educational opportunity. Earlier in his career, Dan served as Senior Vice President for Strategic Development at Georgetown University and as a senior public affairs official in the US Department of Health and Human Services.

### Today's Innovators

**Robert G. Templin, Jr.**, a Senior Fellow with the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, is committed to cultivating a new generation of college leaders who achieve extraordinary outcomes for students while also leveraging the college's role to strengthen and sustain their communities. Starting out as a community college graduate, he has now taught in and led both small rural community colleges and one of the largest in the nation – Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA).

**Janet Ayers** leads the Ayers Foundation, dedicated to improving quality of life for the people of Tennessee by positively affecting the fields of education, conservation and social welfare. The flagship program of the Foundation, the Ayers Scholars Program, offers comprehensive services in ten high schools and two community colleges in rural Tennessee and Missouri. Since its inception in 1999, the program has dramatically increased college-going rates and degree completion.

**Brianna Morton** is a college access counselor with the Ayers Scholars Program in Decatur County Riverside High School in Decaturville, Tennessee. Brianna joined the Scholars Program staff after working earlier as a mental health and substance abuse counselor and a clinical supervisor. She is a first-generation college graduate with an undergraduate degree in psychology, and a master's degree in community counseling, both from the University of North Alabama.

**Michelle Bailey** was attending high school in rural Pennsylvania hometown when a new program – the College Advising Corps – placed a recent college graduate at her school to advise students on the wide range of possibilities they had for going to college. The adviser also helped the students learn the ropes of how to apply for college admission and financial aid – processes about which Michelle had “no idea” at the time. Now a graduate of Franklin & Marshall College, Michelle joined the same College Advising Corps and is in her second year of building a college-going culture in Panther Valley High School in Lansford, a former coal town in northeast Pennsylvania.

**Hal Higdon** is Chancellor of Ozarks Technical Community College (OTC) System and President of the OTC Springfield Campus. He oversees the strategic direction of the OTC system and works to strengthen its resources and funding. Prior to OTC, Hal served in administration with Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, and in human resources and workforce training at Alabama's Faulkner State Community College. He also spent several years in private business. Hal has served as vice-chairman of economic development for the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, and chair of the Presidents and Chancellors Council of the Missouri Community College Association (MCCA).

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## About America's Rural Opportunity

Rural America is full of innovation – people working together in new and proven ways to solve tough problems and to increase and make the most of opportunity. Too often, these stories of invention, collaboration and creativity go untold – and they have critical value for both rural and urban America. Starting in 2016, the Rural Development Innovation Group and the Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group sought to change that by showcasing stories of what's working to increase opportunity and prosperity in rural America through this **America's Rural Opportunity** series.

Today's event is the 12<sup>th</sup> in the **ARO** series.

To find out more about the series and to view videos of other **ARO** exchanges, please visit: <https://tinyurl.com/ASPEN-ARO>

Since 2016, support for the **America's Rural Opportunity** series has been generously provided by:

Annie E. Casey Foundation, Appalachian Partnership, Incourage Community Foundation, LOR Foundation, Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, Northwest Area Foundation, U.S. Endowment for Forestry & Communities, Northern Forest Center and the Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group.

Today's **America's Rural Opportunity** event is supported by:



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## Rural Development Innovation Group

The Rural Development Innovation Group (RDIG) is a diverse set of practitioners, intermediaries and funders 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 aims to accelerate the knowledge, adoption and impact of innovative rural development strategies in the United States.

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## Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group

The Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group (CSG) connects, motivates and equips local leaders to build more prosperous regions and simultaneously advance those living on the economic margins. CSG produces tools to help communities make smart decisions, manages short and long-term initiatives that catalyze innovation and progress, and builds networks to spread good ideas and useful lessons. More than 75% of CSG's work focuses on rural America.

[www.aspenicsg.org](http://www.aspenicsg.org) | [@aspenCSG](https://twitter.com/aspenCSG)

## Aspen Institute College Excellence Program

The Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program aims to advance higher education practices and leadership that significantly improve student learning, completion, and employment after college-especially for the growing population of students of color and low-income students on American campuses.

<https://higher.ed.aspeninstitute.org/> | [@AspenHigherEd](https://twitter.com/AspenHigherEd)

## rootEd Alliance

rootEd Alliance partners with local and national organizations working to meaningfully improve postsecondary and career outcomes with advice, exposure and access to financial resources, so that all students in rural areas and towns can pursue their dreams. Together, these organizations form a holistic model that supports students starting in high school through college and beyond.

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