



T.L.L. TEMPLE FOUNDATION

EST 1962

BUILDING A THRIVING RURAL EAST TEXAS

OPERATIONAL PLANNING MIDPOINT UPDATE

October 2026

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Introduction: Looking Back and Moving Forward

The T.L.L. Temple Foundation has served the needs of rural East Texans for 64 years. It has always sought to do so in a spirit of stewardship and service, with a commitment to investing its resources thoughtfully and effectively. As the most recent plan period for 2021–2025 came to a close, the foundation embarked on a new planning process. We call this an operational plan instead of a strategic plan to highlight that our future efforts will prioritize implementation, relevance, and adaptability to best serve our communities.

A MIDPOINT UPDATE

We are sharing a midpoint update so there's visibility into our direction, decisions, and evolution. While the planning process is still ongoing to address prioritization, impact measurement, evaluation, and learning, we feel it is important to let our grantees, partners, and neighbors know about changes in a timely way.

We've spent time listening to and learning from our communities and peers to establish what rural East Texans need and expect from us. Thank you to the hundreds of East Texas stakeholders who chose to participate in those opportunities and the countless others who have shared their perspectives through our work together. We also spent time with rural peers, researching how they best learn from and contribute to their communities across the country, completed an economic analysis, and most importantly observed how people actually live and work across rural East Texas. The message was consistent: the Foundation has done substantive and meaningful work, plays a critical role across rural East Texas, and also has an opportunity and responsibility to build from this point.

Some highlights include:

- We simplified our mission to: “The T.L.L. Temple Foundation works alongside communities to build a thriving rural East Texas.” And for the first time, with our communities, we put a stake in the ground on defining “thriving.”
- We established five Core Values that inform the expectations and actions of our own organization and those we are seeking to partner with in service to rural East Texas.
- We previously organized our work and program structure by sector (i.e., health, education, human services, etc.). We will now do so through a lens of place – geographic areas of Northeast, Deep East, and Southeast (see more [here](#)). This increase in physical presence allows for direct engagement and alignment with our communities.
- The shift recognizes something we learned in our process — trust and presence are critical ingredients to working together, particularly in rural settings. Additionally, challenges in our communities are rarely if ever confined to a sector. We will continue accessing sector expertise through the vast and abundant networks of peers and practices available.
- We have added Marion County and Harrison County to contiguously connect our Deep East and Northeast service areas. This is the first expansion into new counties since our inception in 1962. Miller County (with the exception of the city of Texarkana) and Harris County are no longer in our formal service area. These shifts yield a 5% increase in the average percentage of rural residents living across all counties served.

- We are expanding the utilization of every type of capital (Total Impact Approach) to support progress toward communities' goals. This will unlock significantly more resources for rural East Texas. We are piloting this now, and the full structure will be released when planning concludes in spring 2027.

WHAT'S AHEAD

- We will work with communities to build priorities for the newly defined service area. New staff roles across our service region will gather deeper knowledge to inform those priorities.
- We will identify, build, and advance data collection, measurement, learning, and evaluation frameworks that better capture the realities of a rural region and quality of life.
- We will lean further into the advantage that philanthropy has to be innovative and take risks. Theory and real life often diverge in implementation. Increasing the ability for communities to test solutions and adjust based on learnings in much shorter cycles than decades or even years provides real-time impact and continuous growth. This must be balanced with the longer game of improving and sustaining systems that surround those communities.
- During our continued planning through spring 2027, we are less likely to engage in larger new or multi-year requests until our planning and new structure are complete.

As part of these midpoint shifts, our staff structure has been impacted. The program officer role has come to an end. We are incredibly grateful for the work that our

program officers have contributed, and they have been offered significant support during this transition. Our work would not have been possible without them, and this evolution is in no way a reflection of their performance or contributions. We are also ready to build in our next chapter and are launching new roles geographically based throughout our service area: Impact Director, Northeast; Impact Director, Deep East; and Impact Director, Southeast.

We are not moving away from the critical efforts, issues, and organizations we have partnered with to date; in fact, we are doubling down. But we are moving closer to our communities by significantly restructuring how we do our work. We recognize that our vast region is dynamic. As we center our work on place, we hope to grow trust, build on the momentum of local communities, and be a stronger catalyst based on the capacity, will, and desires of those we serve. We will provide updates as we build the team and then complete our planning process next spring and look forward to continuing to support the communities that make rural East Texas great. Please feel free to reach out directly with any questions or feedback.

Thank you for your partnership and for the work you do in and for rural East Texas.

Onward,



Charlie Glover
President & CEO, T.L.L. Temple Foundation

Looking Back

Building on its history of support for the well-being of East Texans, the foundation evolved its approach throughout the 2021–2025 plan period. In particular, it developed strategic focus areas and invested in initiatives to improve specific outcomes and build capacity across the region. In survey responses and interviews, community members have credited many of these initiatives with generating momentum and building enduring assets for the region. During this period, the foundation's total giving also grew to engage more communities within the region.

“[TLLTF] has transformed into a more strategic organization where they're not just handing out money because you're doing something good and it's worthwhile. They're trying to direct those investments to make really more transformational changes and improvements.”

ANGELINA COUNTY

It was heartening to find, through survey and interview feedback, that certain initiatives launched in the past half-decade have had a significant positive impact on the lives of rural East Texans. A few highlights:

- In education and workforce, the Deep East Texas College and Career Alliance (DETCCA) has gained traction and meaningfully increased college and career educational opportunities across the region. This has produced thousands of new credentials and certificates and become a statewide model for rural communities.

“[TLLTF] has been instrumental in creating this partnership of six different school districts (DETCCA) that are having a significant impact on what we're able to offer our students and that is absolutely a thriving program that continues to grow and expand. So, that's been wonderful.”

TYLER COUNTY

- The foundation partnered with Lufkin ISD and Angelina College to launch one of the first Early College High Schools in the region and an anchor example for neighboring districts.
- Built a comprehensive approach to increasing early literacy, pursuing a multi-pronged approach: 1) the alignment of teacher preparation programs to evidence-based instruction at three East Texas universities, 2) assisting Education Service Centers to develop high-quality alternative certification programs, and 3) supporting school instructional leaders in implementing and sustaining schoolwide evidence-based early literacy instruction. This has resulted in a record number of candidates pursuing certification through ESC Region 7 and multiple participating districts seeing an increase in overall literacy rates.
- The Rural Family Residency Program was a first ever residency partnership that is broadening access to primary care providers through a unique partnership with regional providers and Baylor College of Medicine. The model is poised to expand in other rural communities.

- The foundation launched resource centers to build on the theory that point of contact for high need families is often at nutritional access locations (food banks and pantries). Three separate centers were launched in partnership with Feeding Texas affiliates and expanded wraparound services at point of contact and are now operating across the service region.

“The newly constructed Resource Center, largely funded by the T.L.L. Temple Foundation, is doing amazing work.”

JASPER COUNTY

On the economic development front, multiple initiatives have had a positive impact.

- The ROC-ET Initiative supported two existing community development finance institutions (CDFIs), Communities Unlimited and PeopleFund, to establish physical office locations and services in rural East Texas.
- Since first opening the doors of their new offices in 2022, the two CDFIs have collectively overseen 80+ transactions, deploying more than \$20 million across the region. The impact stretches from Texarkana to the Gulf Coast. This was the first CDFI offering in many of the counties across the foundation’s service area.
- Another foundation grantee and partner, AR-TX Regional Economic Development Inc. (REDI) has emerged as a key anchor organization for

economic development in Northeast Texas, supporting multiple initiatives that have accelerated regional development.

- The foundation’s efforts to address food insecurity have eased hunger and strengthened critical institutional infrastructure. The J.H. Rowe Resource Center in Jasper is one example of how collaboration and partnership enabled the expansion of vital services to help people in need across multiple Deep East Texas counties.
- Boggy Slough Conservation Area has been recognized nationally for setting the standard in conservation, land stewardship and research.
- Many partners came together to dramatically expand broadband coverage across the entire region, which creates opportunities from education to economic development to healthcare.

“In the last couple of years, the foundation’s engagement has been significant in the broadband space and the water space. I’ve been really grateful for Temple Foundation’s engagement with us, not only from a funding standpoint, but from a from really a strategic planning standpoint.”

RUSK COUNTY

All of these undertakings – and many others – have solidified important partnerships and contributed to a thriving rural East Texas. We intend to build on them as we envision the future.

Building an Operational Plan

Core Values

To start, we needed to be able to make decisions from a shared set of principles. So that's where we began — establishing the Foundation's first-ever core values (Figure 1). Core values ensure that our entire organization is working in alignment and provide a touchstone to return to continually as circumstances change and strategies shift. They also keep us focused on creating positive impact for communities in rural East Texas.

FIGURE 1 • T.L.L. TEMPLE FOUNDATION CORE VALUES



A Thriving Rural East Texas

In addition to establishing the five Core Values, we simplified our mission to: working alongside communities to build a thriving rural East Texas. But we hadn't yet established what “thriving” meant. We drew on definitions offered by our communities. We wanted it to be specific and reflect the perspective of those we serve. In our regional survey, three elements stood out, each selected by more than 60% of respondents, while none of the other five options reached 40%. Respondents also tied thriving to the next generation: young people should be able to stay in their community without sacrificing opportunity.

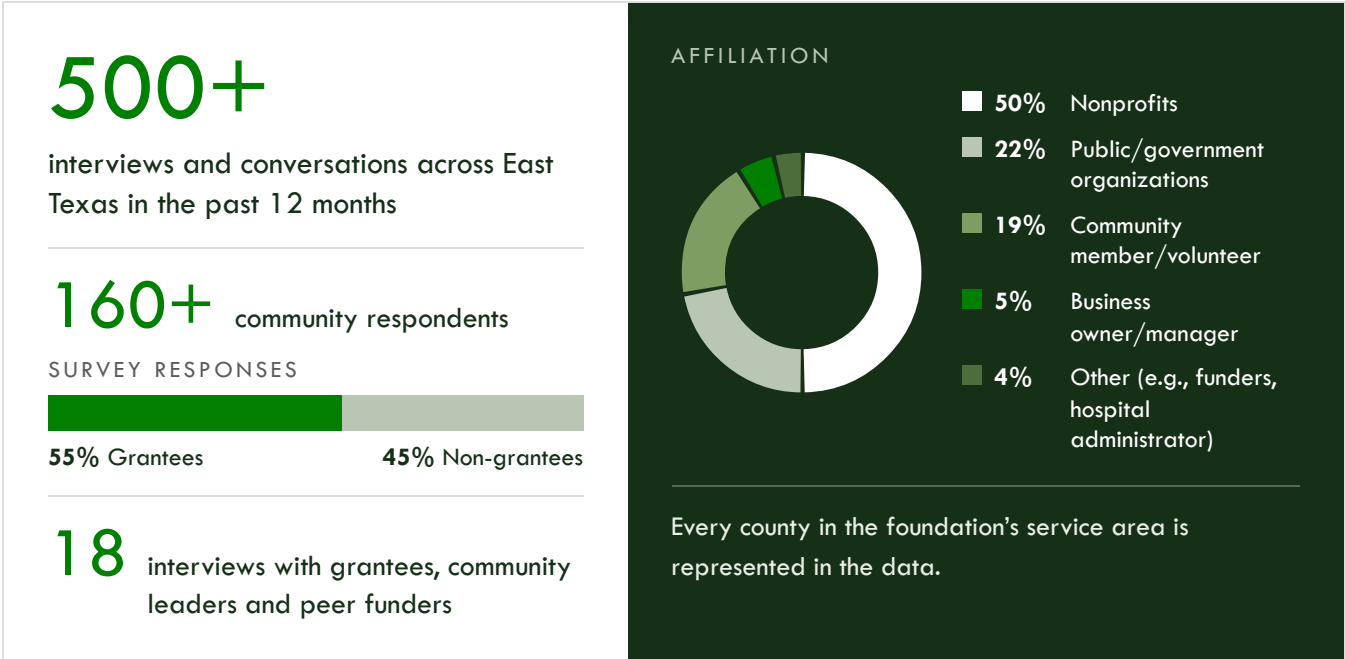
THE “THRIVING” WE ASPIRE TO

For the T.L.L. Temple Foundation, a thriving rural East Texas means that economic opportunity and mobility are widely available and that every resident has access to high-quality goods and services, such as healthy food, education, and healthcare. A thriving region also provides plentiful opportunities for individuals and their families to both enjoy the present and build toward a promising future in East Texas. The foundation works to ensure our region inspires a sense of belonging and pride in all who live here.

Your Perspectives

We are grateful to those who shared their perspectives with us over the past year. This included hundreds of individual conversations and a wide-ranging survey available to anyone in the community. The survey drew a strong response from East Texans throughout our service area, as shown in Figure 2. We also conducted 18 interviews with grantees, community leaders, and peer funders, and held surveys and discussions with the foundation’s trustees and staff.

FIGURE 2 • WHO WE HEARD FROM



As we looked across all the data we collected, four observations emerged clearly from stakeholders’ reflections, each of which has deeply informed the thinking behind the operational plan.

1) Relationships and trust are critical to the work.

When asked about what enabled successful efforts and positive impact over the most recent planning period, stakeholders repeatedly pointed to the establishing of collaborative relationships and trust. This held true across topic areas and specific initiatives. Trust and relationships were cited as critical to making the work possible to begin with and to ensure that it is sustainable over time.

Another point that came across clearly from rural East Texas residents in the survey is that you can’t build relationships and trust if you are not present with people in their communities. 81% of survey respondents feel it is very or extremely important for the foundation to have a presence in their community to build trust (Figure 3).

Proximity is also necessary to fully understand the needs and opportunities of a community. An even larger percentage of respondents, 90%, feel it is very or extremely important for the foundation to have a presence in their community to understand its needs (Figure 4).

FIGURE 3

Survey question: How important is it for foundation staff to have a presence in your community to build trust?

Local stakeholders consider foundation presence in the community critical for building trust

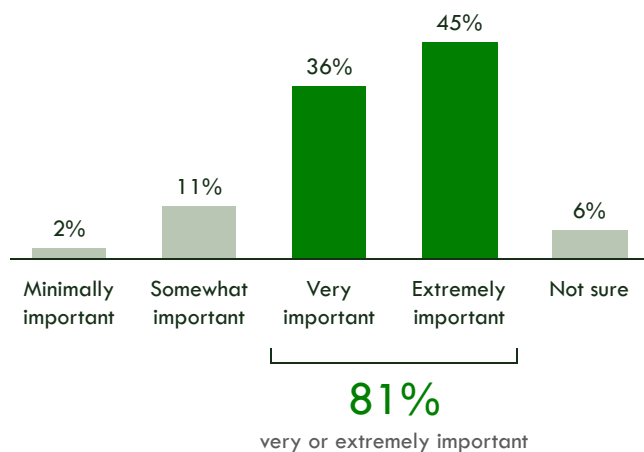
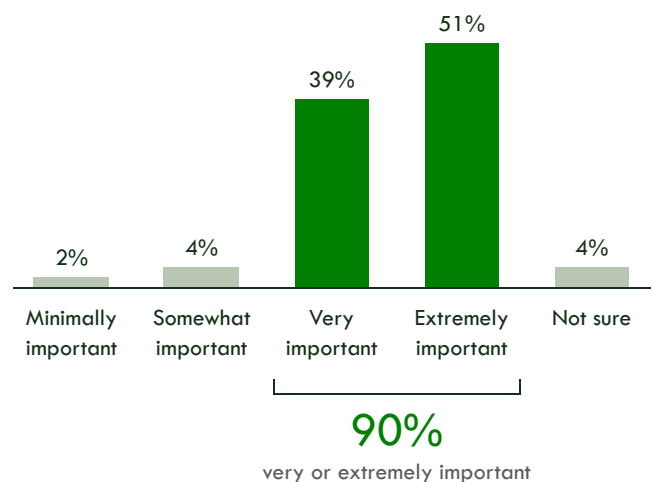


FIGURE 4

Survey question: How important is it for foundation staff to have a presence in your community to better understand its needs and opportunities?

They consider it even more important for understanding their communities' needs and opportunities

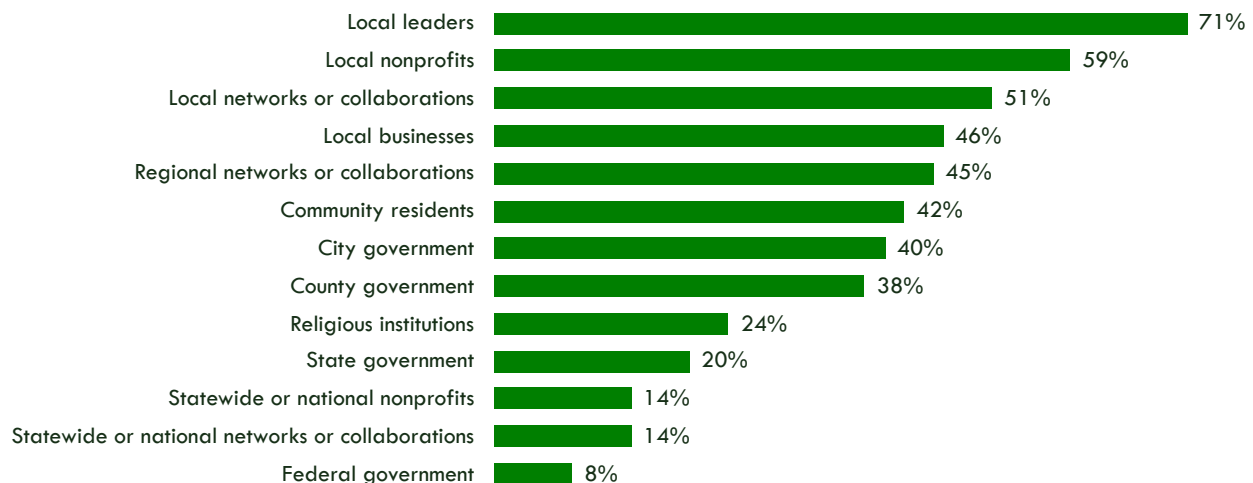


This makes sense both on its face and in the context of a region where residents overwhelmingly feel that local entities are most central to developing and implementing solutions to challenges (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5

Survey question: What elements of infrastructure in your community are central to developing and implementing solutions to challenges?

Stakeholders consider local entities most important in developing solutions to challenges



“Relationships and trust did more of the work than anyone expected. What went well seems to have run on years of built-up trust with superintendents, community leaders, grantees, and peer funders...Relational capital is infrastructure, and it needs to be treated that way.”

T.L.L. TEMPLE FOUNDATION TRUSTEE

2) Challenges are interconnected and not confined to one system. Effective solutions must account for the way in which each of the different systems that people interact with – education, health, transportation, the labor market – affect outcomes in the others. For instance, not being able to access healthcare because of inadequate transportation can lead to a loss of employment, which may then require a family member to withdraw from college. Many local residents mentioned three or four linked challenges in their survey responses.

“The most pressing challenges facing the communities I serve are interconnected and often magnified by the rural nature of the region.”

SOUTHEAST TEXAS

3) Each community has a unique set of assets and relationships that can sustain change efforts. In the survey responses and interviews, people from all parts of

rural East Texas expressed excitement about local efforts in education, downtown revitalization, making healthy food available and many other initiatives. Some regions have built significant capacity and strong momentum, and others are getting started on working to assemble support and resources. Regardless of where their community is on that journey, local residents share the sense that lasting change is built on local engagement, knowledge and networks.

“One of our greatest strengths is collaboration. Nonprofits, civic organizations, local government, schools, businesses, churches, and volunteers frequently work together to address community needs.”

JASPER COUNTY

As a corollary, many East Texans have concerns that experts from outside the region may not understand the local context or be able to build trust and that solutions developed by experts without that context or trust may not be practical for rural East Texas.

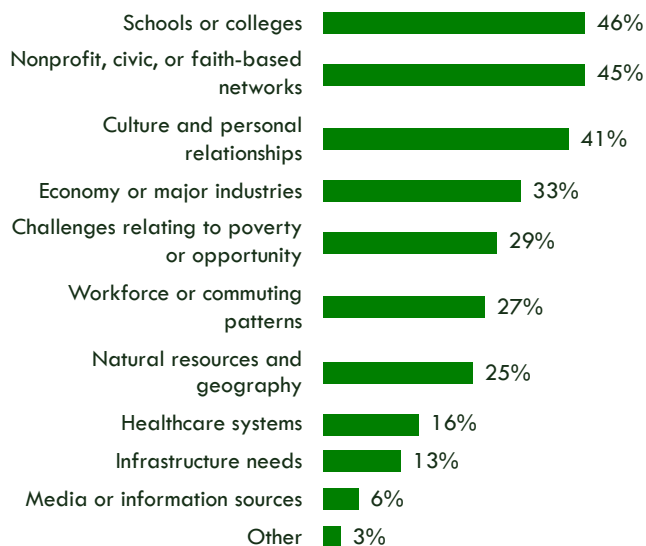
“Outside expertise is most effective when it works through trusted local partners, builds lasting local capacity, and respects community values and rural identity.”

JASPER COUNTY

FIGURE 6

Survey question: What connects people in your community most strongly?

Local networks, schools and personal relationships are the most important means of connection in rural East Texas



The survey also points to the kind of support communities want from the foundation. Asked how the foundation could best help their community thrive, more than 85% of respondents selected each of two options: fostering and supporting local community-driven initiatives and solutions, and seeding new initiatives or collaborations based on an understanding of local needs.

4) There is enthusiasm for regional capacity building work. In the most recent strategic plan cycle, the foundation invested in regional capacity building efforts, including expanding access to broadband and

“We’re literally going from arguably the least served region in the nation, as far as broadband, to one of the very best served rural regions in the nation.”

ANGELINA COUNTY

FIGURE 7

Survey question: What concerns would you have about outside content experts working in your community?

There are concerns about outside content experts not having appropriate local context or trust



establishing certified community development financial institutions (CDFIs) in rural East Texas. Both broadband and financial services are vital for the growth of local and regional economic ecosystems, which, in turn, support other elements of thriving communities. Rural East Texas residents highlighted the value of the foundation’s role in helping to catalyze these regional capacity building efforts in survey responses and interviews. In light of the positive results of these initiatives and the regional stakeholders’ support for them, regional capacity building will continue to be an important focus for the foundation in the coming years.

HOW THE FOUNDATION CAN BEST HELP

85%+ of respondents selected each option

- Foster and support local community-driven initiatives and solutions
- Seed new initiatives or collaborations based on an understanding of local needs

Implementing Promising Practices in Rural Philanthropy

As part of our operational planning, we conducted research and interviews to understand how other rural funders approach their work. As the T.L.L. Temple Foundation has evolved over the past several years, so too has the field of rural philanthropy. Foundations across the country have been learning more about how best to support rural communities through place-based, systems-oriented approaches. These approaches address complex social challenges by designing solutions in partnership with a specific community, while also attending to shifting interconnected local systems that drive long-term outcomes. This research is also informing the operational plan.

Rural funders play a unique role

The unique characteristics of rural places are informing a different approach to philanthropy among some rural funders. Philanthropic practice largely developed in the context of dense, urban places that often have many foundations working in the same area. In that situation, funders developed approaches which allow for specialization. When there are multiple funders in an area, a particular funder can specialize in a topic, knowing that there are other sources of philanthropic capital to address other needs.

However, rural foundations have come to realize that the role they play may be different because they work in areas where there is less philanthropic funding available.

In rural areas, there are fewer funders, and sometimes only one. In that context, specialization in a content area has more of a downside, since there are no other funders to cover the other areas.

Given the breadth of needs and the few sources of funding available, it is often more helpful for a rural funder to be flexible so that it can address the needs that actually show up in the communities it serves. The Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, Dogwood Health Trust, and the Patterson Family Foundation are all rural-focused funders who start by understanding what a particular community needs and then work with local residents to identify and provide the investments necessary to address those needs.

Balancing resources across immediate and long-term purposes

Challenges always outnumber the resources available to address them. Rural funders must balance addressing immediate needs with helping communities prepare for emerging issues. Many of the place-based foundations we spoke with strive to build infrastructure, networks, and vehicles for collaboration that can be used to tackle both current challenges and those that are still over the horizon.

In order to work more deeply with the communities they serve, many rural, place-based funders have been restructuring to be less centralized and have a presence across their region. An early innovator in rural philanthropy, the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, uses a “distributed model” that prioritized field-based expertise. The foundation intentionally hires staff who reflect an understanding of communities served. These individuals act as “weavers” and “connectors”. They are situated “in the field,” spending significant time fostering relationships and learning the local context of each subregion. This model also supports local residents in leading innovation and increases the speed at which the foundation can learn.

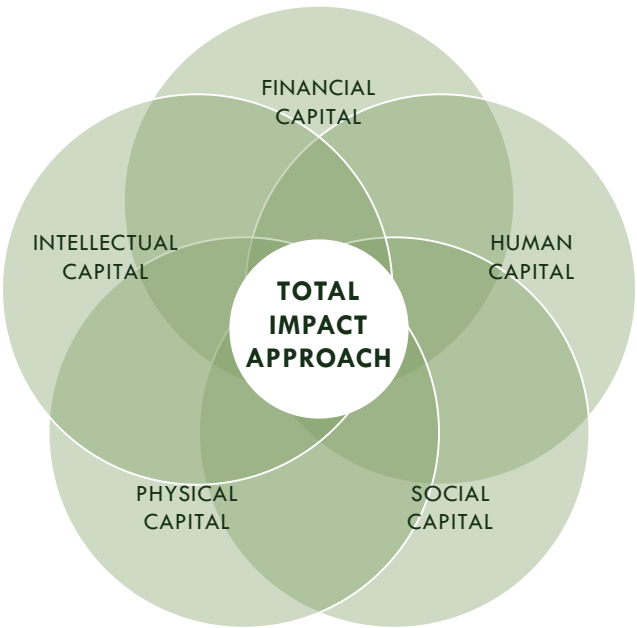
Dogwood Health Trust, a foundation focused on improving the health and wellbeing of people in Western North Carolina, makes grants for general operating support; its staff think holistically about its grantees and their place in the community. To understand that, they attend a lot of local meetings and get out in the community extensively.¹

Even while they prioritize local knowledge and networks, these funders are finding innovative ways to access the sector and functional expertise that is still required to develop effective strategies, whether that means establishing fellowships, engaging consultants, or building a function in-house so that it can be a resource to the entire region.

Using all the tools in the toolbox

Another notable shift that we observed in our research is that foundations have been finding ways to use the full range of capital they possess to benefit the communities they serve. Using the Total Impact Approach framework to inform the foundation’s operational plan,² we classify the types of capital foundations have as financial, human, social, physical, and intellectual (Figure 8). Our hypothesis, borne out in our research, is that using all these forms of capital in an aligned way can create broader impact and exponentially increase the chances of building thriving communities. Foundations have generally seen only one type of capital as their main lever to drive change: philanthropic dollars. We now see funders striving to use all the tools at their disposal to support communities and improve outcomes.

FIGURE 8 • TOTAL IMPACT APPROACH



¹ “Reinventing Program Officers,” Chronicle of Philanthropy, May 12, 2026; The Ford Family Foundation, “How Philanthropy Can ‘Go to Where the People Are,’” 2023; Easterling, D. (2012), “Building the Capacity of Networks to Achieve Systems Change,” The Foundation Review, 4(2).
J.L.L. Temple Foundation · Operational Planning Midpoint Update
² <https://tlltemple.foundation/total-impact-approach-theory/>

With their **financial capital**, foundations are increasingly adopting impact investing strategies to complement their grantmaking. Impact investing vehicles like program-related investments (PRIs) and mission-related investments (MRIs) allow foundations to achieve social good with their full set of financial resources, beyond the five percent of their assets that they are required to distribute annually. Impact investing vehicles also have the advantage that both invested capital and investment returns can be reused over and over again, unlike grant funds which can only be expended once. These forms of investment also allow foundations greater freedom and flexibility to test innovative ways to provide financial support to partners and communities. Constraints on access to capital in rural areas, such as challenges in accessing federal loan and community development funds, can make impact investing even more effective. Community members see this potential too: in our survey, 74% of respondents said it would be very or extremely impactful for the foundation to provide flexible investment tools, such as low-interest loans, to help move important projects forward.

“If I could identify one area where the Temple Foundation could have a transformational impact, it would be strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem throughout rural East Texas.”

BOWIE COUNTY

We found that place-based rural funders have adopted impact investing approaches to support economic development and regional investment. For instance, the Ford Family Foundation, which supports rural communities across Oregon, has a Growing Rural Oregon (GRO) initiative that provides just-in-time capital and early-stage infrastructure to local businesses. The Bush Foundation, focused on the upper Midwest, maintains a

\$70 million portfolio of below-market loans and even some equity stakes in businesses that align with its impact goals. The T.L.L. Temple Foundation has also launched relevant initiatives, including partnerships with Communities Unlimited and PeopleFund. Overall, impact investing is a lever for change and development in rural areas whose potential is just beginning to be realized, and there are exciting possibilities ahead.

On the **human capital** front, many foundations are redefining the program officer role to be more embedded in communities.

That shift, in turn, allows foundations to use their **social capital** to support connections and networks in their regions. Funders are often in a position to bring people together who might not otherwise gather. For example, the Patterson Family Foundation organizes a Thriving Rural Retreat to bring together important voices and perspectives in collaborative discussions on rural opportunities. It then can support ideas which emerge from those conversations.

East Texans want the foundation to play this role. When asked to choose the three foundation activities that would have the most positive impact in their community, respondents most often selected two uses of social capital: actively supporting connections between leaders, organizations, and others who can help advance solutions (89%), and building trust and strengthening networks (66%).

“When Temple convenes people, they show up because the Foundation is a powerhouse in the region. The Foundation is likely to be able to get people to the table that other entities would not be able to.”

NACOGDOCHES COUNTY

Physical capital can also drive impact. Philanthropic funders often own buildings or other tangible assets. Our research identified many funders who are integrating their physical assets as key components of their strategies. In Central Oregon, the Roundhouse Foundation has converted dairy barns, historic farmhouses, and outbuildings on its 260-acre working ranch into an artist, conservation, and scientific residency space. They use the ranch to explore the intersection of traditional agricultural techniques, ecological conservation, and creative arts. In exchange for studio space and lodging, visiting residency cohorts host public studio tours, lead workshops for local residents, and collaborate directly with Central Oregon farmers, researchers, and community members. Other foundations have designed buildings that incorporate shared spaces for public use, provide offices for local nonprofits, or serve as community hubs where organizations can offer programming.

Intellectual capital can fund research, support advocacy, share lessons learned from its grantmaking, or publish evaluation reports. One of the most interesting uses of intellectual capital to support rural areas has been funders investing in data and research that enable a better understanding of the assets rural communities have and the challenges they face. Many commonly used, public data sources, such as the census and the American Community Survey, are not designed and executed in a way that accurately capture or represent

information about rural communities. Among other issues, as a report from the Urban Institute highlights, “small populations across sometimes large geographic areas make high-quality data collection and reporting challenging. Sampling in these contexts is more prone to error, and individual privacy is more at risk. Inadequate or misleading data can distort policies, discourage private investment, and limit the information rural practitioners and local officials need to make well-informed decisions.”³

Many rural funders, as well as larger national funders, have launched initiatives to close this gap and provide accurate data and information on rural areas. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation supports the County Health Rankings and Roadmaps database, which is not limited to rural counties, but provides detailed data on them. Among funders focused specifically on rural areas, the Ford Family Foundation funds Oregon by the Numbers, an annual report on each of Oregon’s 36 counties, and the Walton Family Foundation’s Home Region program team (focused on Northwest Arkansas and the Arkansas-Mississippi Delta) partners with Gallup to produce periodic reports on the state of rural America. The T.L.L. Temple Foundation also made significant investments in funding research and disseminating data on rural East Texas during the last strategic plan period, including supporting the development of the Rural East Texas Economic Opportunity Analysis.⁴

³ “In Search of ‘Good’ Rural Data: Measuring Rural Prosperity,” Urban Institute, Housing Assistance Council, and Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group, April 2020.

⁴ <https://tlltemple.foundation/rural-east-texas-economic-opportunity-analysis/>

Responding to Learnings: Three Immediate Shifts

At this point, given what we have learned from our own work, heard from the communities we serve, and observed among our philanthropic peers, we can share that we are shifting our philanthropic approach in three ways.

1. Organizing Around Place

First, the foundation is shifting from organizing our work and program structure by sector (i.e., health, education, human services) to planning, staffing, and organizing that work through a lens of place. Accordingly, we will emphasize through our staffing and structure a greater presence in rural East Texas communities. Expertise and best practices will still be part of our approach to impact. The lens will be one that sees issues as existing within a particular system to one that starts from a holistic view of communities as the place where numerous systems come together and interact. The foundation will integrate deep content knowledge in several ways, including fellowships, engagement with academic experts, and partnerships with other foundations and institutions. This approach will allow the foundation to bring to bear the expertise most needed to solve the problems communities identify as most urgent and to adjust as those needs change.

2. Updating Our Service Area

Second, the Foundation has updated its service area to align its geographic footprint more closely with its mission to serve rural East Texas. These changes are:

- We have added Marion County and Harrison County to contiguously connect our Deep East and Northeast service areas.
- Miller County (with the exception of the city of Texarkana) and Harris County are no longer in our formal service area. Organizations located outside the foundation's service area will continue to be eligible for grants that support programs serving populations within the service area.
- Investments that the foundation makes in Jefferson County will preference programs that benefit rural areas within Jefferson County and the greater service region.

The additions to the foundation’s service area mark a material change; the other adjustments mainly codify existing foundation practice. This is the first expansion into new counties since our inception in 1962. The modified service area is geographically contiguous and will enable partnerships that provide greater capacity to serve rural communities south of Texarkana and north of Nacogdoches. Focusing only on counties in Texas enables the foundation to align with Texas state policy context and partnerships, rather than manage the complexity of two different state policy environments. This shift results in a five-point increase in the average percent of rural population living in the counties we serve. Harris County, which is nearly 99% urban, sees almost \$2 billion in philanthropic giving each year, compared with \$76 million across all other counties in the current footprint.⁵ Most importantly, the changes allow the foundation to concentrate on the challenges of rural East Texas, where it is most needed and best positioned to build the relationships that will lead to sustainable progress.

New T.L.L. Temple Service Area

The new service area will be divided into three subregions: Deep East, Northeast, and Southeast. The counties in each subregion are shown in the table (Figure 9) and map below.

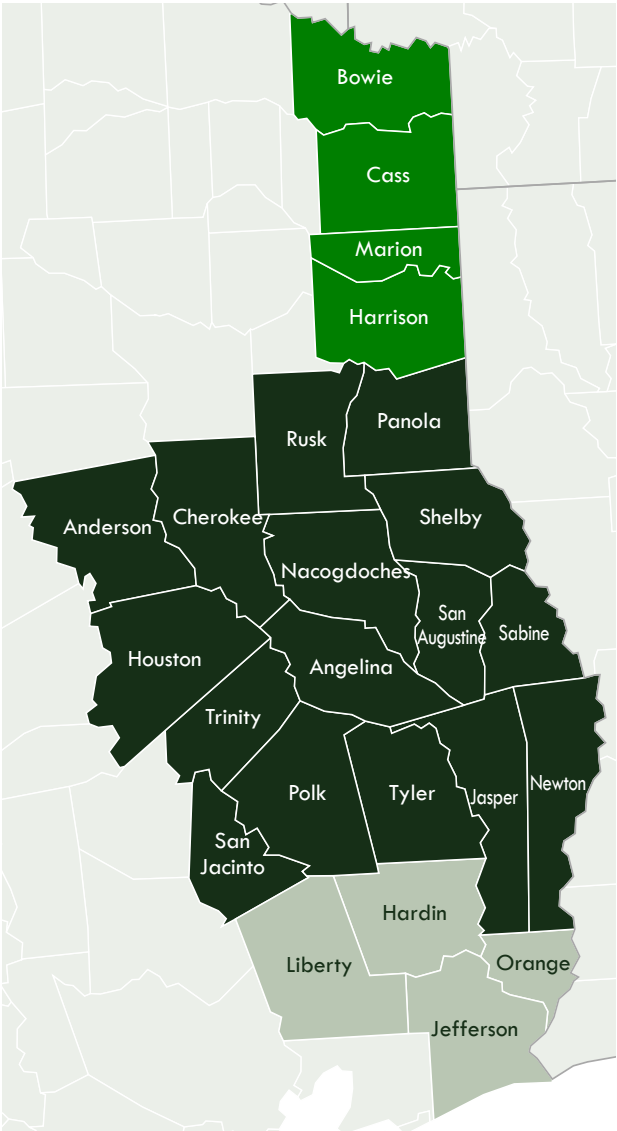


FIGURE 9 • NEW T.L.L. TEMPLE SERVICE AREA - SUBREGIONS

Northeast

4 counties • 203,199 residents (2025)

Bowie, Cass, Harrison, Marion

Deep East

16 counties • 572,317 residents (2025)

Anderson, Angelina, Cherokee, Houston, Jasper, Nacogdoches, Newton, Panola, Polk, Rusk, Sabine, San Augustine, San Jacinto, Shelby, Trinity, Tyler

Southeast

4 counties • 520,674 residents (2025)

Hardin, Jefferson, Liberty, Orange

Population: US Census Bureau, 2025 estimates.

⁵ Urban share: US Census, 2020. Philanthropic giving: USDA, “The Geography of America’s Philanthropic Sector,” annual average, 2014–2021.

We assessed multiple dimensions and examined several data sources in determining the subregional composition that would create the most coherent groupings of counties. We reviewed demographic information, 15 governmental or administrative service area definitions (e.g., councils of governments), the Rural East Texas Economic Opportunity Analysis commissioned by the foundation, as well as transportation corridors and population distribution. We also included responses from the survey and interviews, which provided insight into how rural East Texas residents themselves define their community boundaries. We thought particularly carefully about how the intersection of a subregion with various

administrative divisions would facilitate or hinder working across county lines. Each county is unique and no grouping will be perfect, but we believe that these subregions will allow the foundation to engage meaningfully and collaborate closely with communities. We also recognize that there will be opportunities and challenges that many communities across rural East Texas have in common, across subregions, such as water quality, broadband access and healthcare availability. In the next phase of operational planning, we will design organizational structures that can effectively address those issues.

3. Taking a Total Impact Approach

Third, we are expanding the definition and use of every type of capital at our disposal to support progress toward communities' goals. Over time this will unlock significantly more resources for rural East Texas. The Foundation has already made the framework, the Total Impact Approach, available on our website to inform how it could leverage the full range of capital types (Figure 8). We are piloting this now, and the full structure will be released when operational planning concludes in spring 2027.

Financial capital: The foundation will continue to explore and expand its use of tools beyond grants, such as program-related investments, mission-related investments, endowment capital, and other types of impact investing vehicles.

Human capital: The foundation will be physically closer to our communities, allowing for greater proximity to challenges, and greater sharing of ideas, networks, and trust. Grantmaking portfolios will be organized by subregional focus (e.g., Northeast, Deep East, Southeast).

Social capital: The foundation will continue to build relationships to help identify and strengthen local community-driven initiatives and to gather feedback and information that can guide it in directing its own efforts and investments.

Physical capital: The foundation will further integrate its physical assets more closely with its overall mission, finding ways those assets can be used by the community as a whole to enable a thriving rural East Texas.

Intellectual Capital: The foundation is exploring approaches to measurement, learning, and evaluation to both learn from and share with others.

Moving Forward

Organizational Implications

This evolution of our approach will necessitate changes to our structure. The foundation's current organizational structure was built around program areas of content expertise alone. That structure was appropriate and effective for executing the strategies in place. A place-driven approach across an area the geographic size of South Carolina, with additional counties added, requires an aligned structure. The foundation's portfolio will be organized by subregion and will require extensive knowledge of and deep connections in specific regions of rural East Texas.

The change in approach has required a complete restructuring of the team. Our sector-based program officer roles have come to an end. The individuals in those roles have served the people of rural East

Texas with dedication and care and we have greatly appreciated their contributions to the foundation and its work.

We are creating three new roles — Impact Director, Northeast Texas; Impact Director, Deep East Texas; and Impact Director, Southeast Texas — each responsible for one part of our region: deeply rooted in the area, knowing its people and institutions, and building relationships close to the ground. We are hiring for these positions now and expect to have all three directors in place by early 2027. Subject-matter resources will supplement the regional structure.

We are not moving away from health, education, or human services. What is changing is how we staff the work and, for a small number of counties, where we work.

Next Steps

Again, this is a midpoint update to our planning process. We chose to share this before all planning is complete, as there are material impacts even at this stage of our process. The operational planning process will continue through the spring of 2027 (Figure 10). There is substantial work ahead for us to finalize the plan.

In our next phase of planning, we will work with communities in building tailored priorities for the newly identified subregions of our service area. Restructured

human capital investments and a revised organizational structure will enable us to gather deeper knowledge to inform those priorities. We will also identify, build, and advance data collection, measurement, learning, and evaluation frameworks that better capture the realities of a rural region and represent its quality of life in ways that are comprehensive and useful.

As we plan for implementation, we will lean further into the advantage that philanthropy has to be innovative and take risks. The operational plan will incorporate an operating framework designed to facilitate resident-led innovation, enable faster learning and improvement cycles, and strengthen and sustain systems that support communities. One of our goals will be to increase the ability of communities to prototype and test solutions and adjust rapidly, with shorter intervals between seeing results and using them to shift approaches than the years or even decades that have been the traditional pace of philanthropy. We are also aware that support for innovation must be balanced with the long-term investments required to stabilize and improve the systems which affect the well-being of communities. As we go

through the next several years of implementing the operational plan, the foundation will be learning alongside communities how to do that work and strike that balance and will be on its own journey of trial and improvement.

We are not moving away from the critical efforts and issues we have worked on to date or from the organizations with whom we have partnered; in fact, we are doubling down. We are moving closer to our communities by significantly restructuring how we do our work. We recognize that our vast region is dynamic. As we center our work on place, we hope to increase trust, build on the momentum of local communities, and be a stronger catalyst informed and in line with the capacity, will, and desires of those we serve.

FIGURE 10 • OPERATIONAL PLANNING PHASES

●	Core values	Nov 2025 – Jan 2026	COMPLETE
●	Philanthropic types and timelines	Jan – Apr 2026	COMPLETE
●	Retrospective assessment of the 2021-2025 strategic plan; definition of “thriving”	Jan – Apr 2026	COMPLETE
●	Develop the foundation’s Total Impact Approach	Mar – Jul 2026	COMPLETE
●	In-depth regional stakeholder research	Mar – Jul 2026	COMPLETE
●	Primary and secondary research on funder best practices	Mar – Jul 2026	COMPLETE
●	East Texas subregions research	Jun – Sep 2026	COMPLETE
○	Adopt design and learning framework	Winter 2026 – Spring 2027	PLANNED
○	Identify subregional priorities	Winter 2026 – Spring 2027	PLANNED
○	Develop metrics, evaluation, and assessment practices	Winter 2026 – Spring 2027	PLANNED

We anticipate questions will arise, especially from organizations that have partnered with us in the past. As we continue to make progress on the plan and additional decisions are finalized, we will provide further updates on our website and through additional outreach.

Thank you to all of our partners in this work. We will strive to communicate with you clearly and in a timely way. We are excited about the new direction and closer collaboration with you to ensure a thriving rural East Texas.



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