



**T.L.L. TEMPLE FOUNDATION**

EST 1962

**BUILDING A THRIVING DEEP EAST TEXAS**

## **Regional Capacity Building and Community Development STRATEGY OVERVIEW**

### **Objective**

Rural East Texas communities will have the high-capacity institutions, essential infrastructure, and dynamic investments they need to thrive

### **Challenge**

Thriving communities have inclusive, engaged local and regional institutions, robust and reliable infrastructure, and entrepreneurial and career pathways that put opportunity within reach for all residents. For decades too many rural communities, dealt repeated blows by job displacement, globalization and automation, and declining populations and tax bases, have struggled to sustain institutions, infrastructure, and financing. As a result, there is a pervasive perception that rural places have been left behind as modern opportunity and success agglomerates in cities. Changing this narrative and charting a new course toward thriving rural communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will require new models of institutional innovation, infrastructure renewal, and catalytic investment.

### **Opportunity**

There is an emerging consensus around new models of rural development that prioritize capacity building, elevate regional collaboration, and align resources. Place-based rural development hubs are building civic infrastructure and creating innovative partnership platforms from the bottom up, maximizing local assets and attracting new public-private investments. These hubs are convening leaders to identify community needs and connect them to networks of technical assistance in key sectors. As a result, rural communities are beginning to harness emerging trends, including the expansion of broadband, the rise in telehealth and virtual learning platforms, expanded remote work opportunities, the growth of rural innovation hubs and networks, infrastructure regionalization and shared service partnerships, and new ways to capitalize on natural assets.

### **Strategy**

The T.L.L. Temple Foundation is implementing a targeted strategy to ensure rural East Texas communities have the high-capacity institutions, essential infrastructure, and dynamic investments they need to thrive. To strengthen regional capacity, the Foundation will launch and reinforce multi-sector regional development hubs that connect to state and national partner networks. Targeted support will focus on data collection, convening and coordination, technical assistance, and grantmaking that prioritizes rural broadband connectivity, water and wastewater systems, and entrepreneurship and small businesses ecosystems. These catalytic investments aim to align regional development efforts to leverage and secure new investment resources for rural East Texas.

### **Focus Areas**

- ***Strengthen Essential Community Infrastructure:*** Essential rural community infrastructure, prioritizing broadband, water, and entrepreneurship ecosystems, is improved, propelling broad-based rural development
- ***Strengthen Broadband Connectivity:*** Support rural communities to expand broadband infrastructure, accessibility, adoption, and usage
  - Embed broadband technical assistance within regional partners
  - Verify the accuracy of state and national broadband maps
  - Pursue regional broadband development planning and ensure adequate capacity to secure and manage infrastructure projects
  - Activate communities and organizations to plan, design, fund, and implement broadband projects
  - Ensure key rural anchor institutions have the capacity to support residents with broadband adoption and usage
- ***Strengthen Rural Water Systems:*** Support rural communities to strengthen rural water and wastewater systems
  - Host rural water summit and follow-on convening of regional stakeholders
  - Support technical assistance for local water and wastewater systems and other sector partners
  - Connect regional anchor partners to targeted technical assistance to pursue regional water solutions
  - Establish the baseline water and wastewater quality status for East Texas systems to identify areas in need of technical assistance and track investment over time
- ***Strengthen Rural Entrepreneurial Ecosystems:*** Support dynamic rural economic ecosystems and eliminate barriers for underserved entrepreneurs

- Launch community development financial institutions (CDFIs) in East Texas and track and accelerate investments in underserved communities and jobs created by CDFIs
  - Identify opportunities to use innovative mechanisms that CDFIs have access to, such as New Markets Tax Credits, incubators and accelerators, and partnerships, across rural East Texas
  - Ensure CDFIs are adequately capitalized and leverage funding whenever possible to bring new dollars into East Texas
- **Launch Multi-Sector Rural Development Hubs:** Place-based rural development hubs are activated, strengthened, and connected to robust regional ecosystems and state and national partner networks
  - **Strengthen the Capacity of Rural Development Hubs:** Launch, strengthen, and connect rural development hubs and supported by anchor intermediary partners to activate transformational regional development partnerships
    - Strengthen the capacity of three Rural Development Hubs launched and led by Communities Unlimited in Northeast Texas, Deep East Texas, and Southeast Texas through the ConnectRURAL Initiative
  - **Strengthen State- and National-Level Rural Development Networks and Platforms:** Support the needs and priorities of rural East Texas by shaping and engaging state- and national-level development networks and platforms
    - Strengthen State- and National-Level Rural Development Networks and Platforms
- **Leverage and Secure New Investment Resources:** Access to public and private resources is increased, driving dynamic economic ecosystems and vibrant rural development opportunities
  - **Maximize State and Federal Funding:** Increase access to state and federal funding to leverage TLLTF investments and achieve significant rural development impacts that are only possible through transformational investments (more than \$1 million)
  - **Advance Pooled Funding and Other Innovative Financing Mechanisms:** Partner with local, regional, state, and national funders to secure new private investments for East Texas infrastructure development priorities

## **Monitoring Progress**

To ensure that we are accelerating change and achieving results, the foundation is monitoring regional capacity building and community development:

- Via dashboards tracking advancements in business lending, job growth, community engagement, partnerships, and new investment resources into rural East Texas
- Through targeted mapping and assessment tools for broadband access and water quality and system capacity

## **Contact Information**

For more information about T.L.L. Temple Foundation or about this strategy, please refer to our website <https://tlltemple.foundation/> or call 936-634-3900.