



Rural Leaders for  
Economic Mobility

Mobility Action Plan

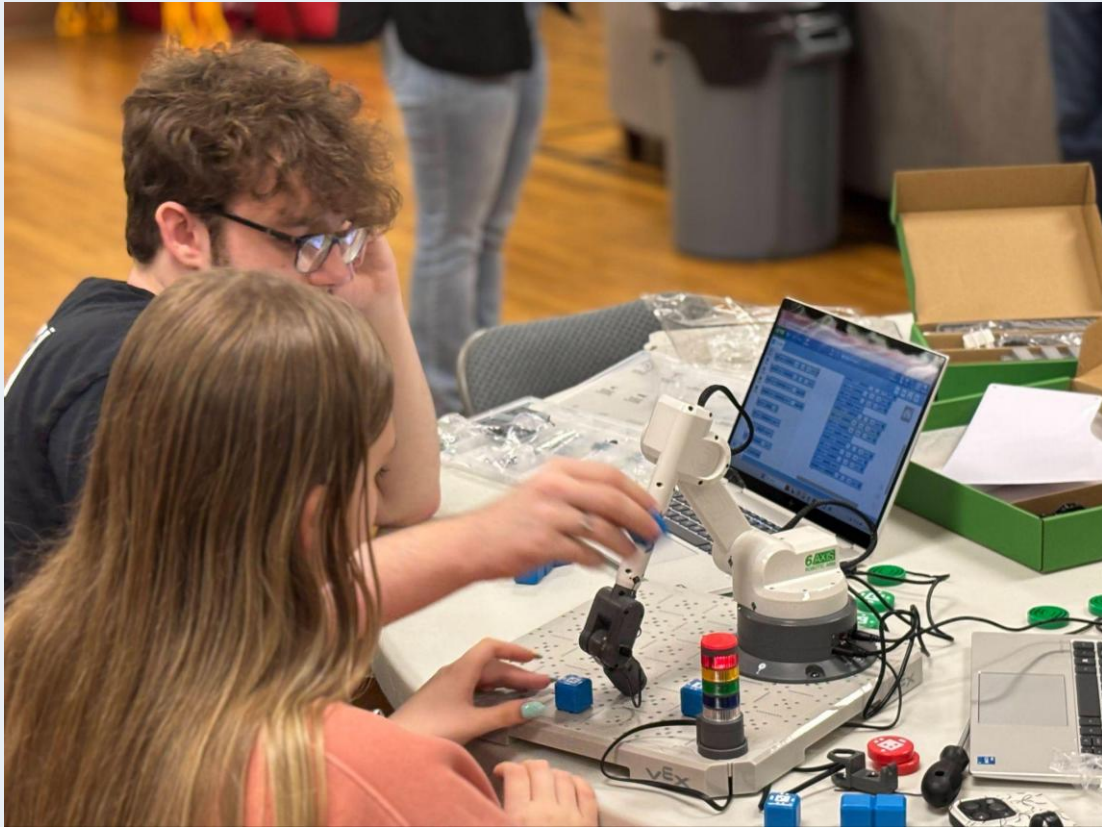
# Venango County, Pa.

RURAL LEADERS FOR ECONOMIC MOBILITY

# VENANGO COUNTY

PENNSYLVANIA

*Mobility Action Plan*



<b>County</b>	Venango County, PA
<b>County Seat</b>	Franklin, PA
<b>County Population</b>	49,346
<b>RLEM Subgrant</b>	\$50,000
<b>Primary Contact</b>	Tim Heffernan, Venango County Commissioner and II4T President & CEO
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# BUILDING A RURAL INNOVATION ECONOMY

*From robotics to aviation — how Venango County is connecting the workforce to the future*

Venango County, Pa., is a rural community with a strong manufacturing heritage, a growing aviation asset and a workforce that is running out of pipelines to grow into. Like many rural Pennsylvania counties, Venango faces population decline, young adult outmigration and a widening gap between the skills its employers need and the training pathways its residents can currently access. Median household income remains below state averages. Employers across manufacturing, healthcare, aviation and skilled trades continue to report difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified workers. Many young adults leave the region not because they want to, but because they do not see a future here that connects to the careers of tomorrow.

Venango County is building that connection. Through the Rural Leaders for Economic Mobility (RLEM) program, the county designed a four-strategy plan centered on a straightforward conviction: the industries that will define rural economic opportunity for the next generation — robotics, automation, drones, artificial intelligence, aviation and advanced manufacturing — are accessible to this county right now. The county does not need to wait for them to arrive. It needs to build the pathways that connect its residents to them.

Strategy	Focus	Lead	Timeline
<b>1. RAD Accelerator</b>	Hands-on workforce development in robotics, AI, drones, automation and advanced manufacturing; industry credentials and employer connections	Venango County + Innovation Institute for Tomorrow (I14T)	Year 1–2 (pilot to scale)
<b>2. Aviation &amp; Airport Economic Development</b>	Long-term economic development tied to Venango Regional Airport: hangar utilization, aviation business recruitment, workforce training and infrastructure growth	Venango County, Venango County Economic Development Authority, airport leadership, regional partners	2-5 years
<b>3. Education-to-Workforce Alignment</b>	Stronger pathways connecting K–12 education, career and technical education, postsecondary institutions and employers; expanded internships and credentials	County schools, CTE centers, I14T, higher education, workforce boards	Year 1–5 years
<b>4. Rural Innovation &amp; Economic Diversification</b>	Coordinated regional strategy connecting manufacturing, aviation, tourism, agriculture and technology into a long-term economic resilience platform	County, economic development orgs, I14T, private sector	5-year horizon

### **Support Requested from Capstone Partners**

Venango County is requesting support from capstone partners in three areas:

- Workforce development funding for the RAD Accelerator: grants, employer sponsorships and equipment partnerships for robotics, drone and automation training infrastructure
- Aviation business recruitment connections: introductions to aviation businesses, aerospace operators and drone technology companies that could locate at or partner with Venango Regional Airport
- Employer engagement and internship partnerships: companies willing to provide hands-on industry exposure, apprenticeships and credential-connected work experience for county residents

SECTION 1

# ECONOMIC MOBILITY VISION

*A county where residents can build modern careers without leaving home*

**Vision Statement**

*Venango County will create a rural community where residents of all ages have access to meaningful career pathways, modern workforce opportunities and the ability to build long-term economic stability without leaving the region, positioning itself as a leader in rural workforce innovation by connecting education, technology, infrastructure and economic development into a coordinated strategy that supports both residents and employers.*

## The Problem This Plan Addresses

Venango County’s workforce challenge is not simply a shortage of workers, but a shortage of pathways. Employers across manufacturing, aviation, healthcare and skilled trades are hiring, but they cannot find workers with the specific technical certifications those industries require. Students and young adults are graduating from local schools without a clear picture of what careers exist in the county, because the industries that are growing fastest, automation, robotics, drone technology, aviation maintenance, are not yet visible in the county’s education and training ecosystem. The result is a two-sided gap: employers who cannot fill jobs, and residents who cannot see the jobs.

Venango County also faces a structural demographic challenge. Population has been declining for two decades. Young adults leave after graduation at rates that are unsustainable for long-term workforce supply. Median household income trails state averages, and educational attainment gaps limit workforce competitiveness. These are not new problems, they are the accumulated result of a regional economy that has not yet made the transition from its industrial past to its technology-enabled future.

## Why This Plan Can Work

What makes Venango County’s plan credible is that it is not built on aspirational projections, it is built on assets that already exist. The Innovation Institute for Tomorrow (I4T), led by county commissioner Tim Heffernan, has an established regional track record in robotics, drone technology and STEM education. The Venango Regional Airport is a publicly accessible facility with real potential for aviation business recruitment and workforce training alignment. Regional postsecondary partners (Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology, Slippery Rock University, and Carnegie Mellon University) provide credentialing infrastructure that most rural counties cannot access. And the county’s manufacturing base provides immediate employer demand for the technical workforce the RAD Accelerator will produce.

ASSETS & STRENGTHS	OBSTACLES & CHALLENGES
✓ I4T established track record in robotics, drones and STEM education	X Population declining; young adult out-migration after graduation
✓ Venango Regional Airport as a long-term economic development anchor	X Median household income below Pennsylvania state average
✓ Strong manufacturing base with existing employer demand for technical workers	X Educational attainment gaps limit workforce competitiveness
✓ Regional postsecondary partnerships: Thaddeus Stevens, Slippery Rock, CMU	X Transportation barriers limit access to training and employment across rural geography
✓ Commissioner Heffernan’s dual role aligning county government and I4T strategy	X Limited exposure among students and families to emerging technical career pathways
✓ Outdoor recreation, tourism and natural resource assets supporting quality of life	X Childcare and support service gaps affecting workforce participation

SECTION 2 <b>LOCAL CONDITIONS</b> <i>The data and community voices that shaped this plan</i>			
Indicator	Venango County	Pennsylvania Average	Source
<b>Population</b>	49,346	—	U.S. Census ACS
<b>Poverty rate</b>	13.2%	11.6%	U.S. Census ACS
<b>Median household income</b>	\$61,522	\$77,545	U.S. Census ACS
<b>Unemployment rate</b>	5.3%	4.2%	BLS
<b>Labor force participation</b>	55%	62%	U.S. Census ACS
<b>Population change (2010–2020)</b>	54,984	—	U.S. Census
<b>Leading employment sectors</b>	Manufacturing, healthcare, skilled trades	—	U.S. Census ACS

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates; Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2024)

### Workforce and Economic Conditions

Venango County’s economy has historically been shaped by manufacturing, energy production, small business activity and rural industry. These sectors remain important, but economic transitions over time have reduced the number of traditional workforce opportunities available to younger generations. The manufacturing plants that anchored the county’s employment base for decades are in many cases operating with smaller workforces and increasingly requiring technical certifications that the county’s education systems have not yet been designed to provide.

Employers across manufacturing, healthcare, aviation and skilled trades consistently report difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified workers — not because there are no workers, but because the pipeline of workers with the specific technical skills these industries require has not kept pace with demand. At the same time, many young adults in the county are making the decision to leave after graduation because they do not see locally available careers that match the fields they want to pursue. This is a solvable problem: the industries young people want to work in — robotics, automation, technology, aviation — are growing in Venango County. They are simply not yet visible.

### What Leaders and Those Impacted Have Said

*“The future of Pennsylvania’s workforce depends on giving students access to emerging technologies and hands-on learning opportunities in areas such as robotics, automation, aviation, and unmanned aerial systems. When rural students are provided those opportunities locally, communities are better positioned to grow talent, strengthen workforce pipelines, and support long-term economic development.”*

— Judd Pittman, Director of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Career and Technical Education

*“It has opened the world of STEM and specifically robotics to myself, staff, and our students. It is providing real-world applications for our student’s knowledge and*

*problem solving-skills. This is the best thing I have seen happen for our students in NW PA in the 26 years I have been involved in education in Pennsylvania.”*

— Ritt Smith, Principal of Cranberry Area School District (Retired)

*“This programming gives students younger than me an opportunity to learn about STEM in a way that is typically unheard-of in rural areas. Because of this, students like me can be more equipped to compete against others in areas where funding and resources are more abundant.”*

— Andrew Castner, I14T Intern and former participant

## Transportation and Access Barriers

Rural geography creates real barriers to workforce participation in Venango County. Many residents face challenges accessing technical training programs, workforce development opportunities or reliable transportation to employment centers. The county’s training programs and employer sites are not always reachable by public transit, and many families — particularly those with childcare needs or irregular work schedules — face compounding barriers that standard workforce programs are not designed to address. Reducing these barriers is embedded in the implementation of every strategy in this plan.

SECTION 3

# MOBILITY PATHWAY

*How four connected strategies lead to lasting economic opportunity*

Venango County’s four strategies are components of a single coordinated system. The RAD Accelerator creates the workforce; the airport strategy creates the economic activity that workforce can support; the education-to-workforce alignment strategy builds the pipeline from the ground up; and the rural innovation ecosystem strategy ties all of it into a long-term regional development model. Each strategy reinforces the others. Together they address both the immediate workforce gap and the structural conditions that created it.

	Inputs	Key Activities	Outputs (Short-Term)	Outcomes (1–3 Yrs)	Long-Term Impact
<b>RAD Accelerator</b>	RLEM subgrant; II4T expertise and facilities; regional postsecondary partners (Thaddeus Stevens, Slippery Rock, CMU Robotics); employer partnerships; workforce development grants	Curriculum development for robotics, AI and drone training; hands-on cohort delivery; employer engagement and internship development; credential preparation; transportation and participant support	Training cohorts launched; industry-recognized credentials earned; employer partnerships established; students and adults enrolled in technical pathways	County residents placed in manufacturing, automation and aviation jobs; technical credential attainment increasing; employer pipeline shortages reducing	Venango County establishes regional identity as a rural workforce innovation hub; young adults see and choose local career pathways; out-migration slowing
<b>Aviation &amp; Airport Development</b>	Venango Regional Airport; county leadership; aviation consultants; economic development partners; federal and state aviation infrastructure funding	Strategic planning and airport assessment; hangar restructuring and tenant recruitment; aviation workforce partnership development; drone and aerospace business outreach; grant coordination	Airport strategic plan complete; new tenants recruited; aviation workforce pathway developed; infrastructure grant applications submitted	Increased hangar utilization and tenant revenue; aviation business activity growing at airport; workforce training aligned to aviation employer needs	Venango Regional Airport operating as a regional economic development anchor; aviation sector contributing meaningfully to county employment and tax base
<b>Education-to-Workforce Alignment</b>	Local school districts; CTE centers; higher education partners; workforce boards; II4T STEM programming; employer advisory groups	Career exploration programming in K–12; expanded STEM and technical education opportunities; educator-employer collaboration; internship and	Increased career awareness; internship and work-based learning opportunities expanded; educator-employer connections formalized	More students pursuing technical credentials; local talent retention improving; postsecondary alignment with employer needs strengthened	Students graduating with credentials matched to local employer demand; Venango County retaining a higher share of its graduates

		mentorship development; credential pathway mapping			
<b>Rural Innovation Ecosystem</b>	County government; economic development organizations; II4T; tourism assets; agricultural sector; entrepreneurship support organizations; long-term public and private investment	Regional planning and coordination; innovation ecosystem development; tourism and recreation integration; entrepreneurship support; strategic communications	Coordinated regional economic development strategy; stronger cross-sector partnerships; improved county identity around innovation and opportunity	More diversified economic activity; stronger workforce attraction; improved quality of life supporting retention	Venango County a resilient, multi-sector rural economy capable of capturing future economic opportunities as they emerge

SECTION 4

# STRATEGIC ACTIONS & IMPLEMENTATION

*Four strategies, one system*

## Strategy 1: RAD Accelerator Workforce Innovation Initiative

The RAD (Robotics, AI and Drones) Accelerator addresses the most fundamental disconnect in Venango County’s workforce system: the gap between what regional employers need and what local training systems currently provide. Manufacturers, aviation businesses and technology companies across Northwestern Pennsylvania report growing shortages in technical and middle-skill positions requiring hands-on experience with robotics, automation systems, drone technology and artificial intelligence. These are not futuristic industries — they are the current operational reality of the employers in and around Venango County.

The RAD Accelerator’s approach is direct: design hands-on training programs tied to verified employer demand, deliver them through II4T in partnership with regional postsecondary institutions and credentialing bodies, and connect completers directly to hiring. Participants earn industry-recognized credentials, engage with employers through internships and mentorships, and graduate with a career pathway that does not require them to leave the region to pursue.

The RAD (Robotics, AI and Drones) Accelerator is currently in the late implementation phase and nearing completion of its initial pilot programming cycle. Planning, partnership development and curriculum alignment activities were completed in collaboration with regional education, workforce and industry partners, including Carnegie Mellon University, Slippery Rock University, Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology, workforce development organizations and local employers.

II4T has launched and operated multiple robotics, drone and STEM learning initiatives that served as the operational foundation for the RAD Accelerator model, including hands-on robotics competitions, drone education programming, career-connected STEM experiences and workforce-aligned technical training opportunities for students and adult learners across Northwestern Pennsylvania. All educational programming activities associated with the pilot phase have been completed, including instructional coursework, workforce readiness activities and hands-on technical learning experiences. Students have also successfully completed all required career development and workforce engagement hours associated with the program, and every participant earned at least one STEM-related credential during the implementation process.

As part of the implementation process, students participated in educational outreach and workforce exploration activities at Slippery Rock University focused on robotics, drone technology and emerging technical career pathways while engaging directly with university students and instructors. Current participants are completing final capstone projects and preparing presentations for the program’s concluding meeting and evaluation activities, while additional industry and workforce site visits remain scheduled as part of the broader implementation process.

Future implementation phases are expected to expand structured workforce cohorts centered on robotics, artificial intelligence, drone technology, automation and advanced manufacturing pathways, including additional employer partnerships, internship and mentorship opportunities, FAA Part 107 preparation and industry-recognized credential pathways aligned with regional workforce demand.

<b>Lead</b>	Venango County and Innovation Institute for Tomorrow (II4T)
<b>Key Partners</b>	Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology, Slippery Rock University, Carnegie Mellon University, regional manufacturers, aviation employers, workforce development boards, Northwest PA Job Connect / PA CareerLink, EDSI Solutions, Venango County Economic Development Authority

<b>Timeline</b>	Year 1: planning, partnership expansion, curriculum alignment and pilot delivery → Year 2: scale programming and employer partnerships → Year 3: sustainable operating model established
<b>Key Milestones</b>	Initial RAD Accelerator pilot cohort completed all educational, workforce readiness and career development requirements by Spring 2026; Curriculum alignment and regional partnership development completed with Carnegie Mellon University, Slippery Rock University and Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology by Winter 2026; Educational workforce alignment completed with Slippery Rock University robotics and drone programs by Spring 2027; Expanded employer engagement, industry site visits and planning for future workforce cohorts and internship opportunities underway through Fall 2026
<b>Measurable Outcomes</b>	Increased enrollment in technical workforce programs; industry certifications and drone trust certifications earned by participants; employer partnerships formalized; local placement and retention rates tracked
<b>Budget</b>	\$750,000–\$1 million over multiple phases (workforce development grants, employer sponsorships, equipment partnerships, postsecondary collaborations and public investment)
<b>RLEM Subgrant Use</b>	Provided critical early-stage support for planning, coordination and pilot implementation activities connected to the Mobility Action Plan. Funding supported strategic workforce development, regional partnership coordination and implementation efforts tied to the RAD Accelerator

### Strategy 2: Aviation and Airport Economic Development

The Venango Regional Airport is one of the county’s most underutilized economic development assets. Located in Franklin, Pa., the airport offers access, infrastructure and geographic positioning that — with strategic investment and targeted business recruitment — can support aviation maintenance operations, drone technology businesses, aerospace workforce training and broader industrial activity. Most rural counties of Venango’s size do not have a publicly accessible regional airport. This county does, and this strategy is about making it work harder for the local economy.

The airport strategy develops over a three- to five-year horizon. Near-term priorities focus on strategic planning, infrastructure assessment, hangar optimization and initial business recruitment. Longer-term milestones include aviation workforce pathway development, drone and aerospace business attraction, and alignment between airport operations and the RAD Accelerator’s emerging technology curriculum — creating a physical home for the drone and aviation components of the workforce program.

<b>Lead</b>	Venango County, Venango Regional Airport, Venango County Economic Development Authority
<b>Key Partners</b>	Aviation consultants, aviation businesses,, Northwest Commission, state aviation agencies, workforce boards, II4T (drone technology alignment)
<b>Timeline</b>	Year 1: strategic planning and airport assessment → Year 2–3: tenant recruitment, infrastructure improvement planning and workforce pathway development → Year 4–5: infrastructure expansion and aviation sector growth
<b>Key Milestones</b>	Airport strategic plan complete by Fall 2026, First aviation business tenant recruited, by Fall 2026, Aviation workforce pathway designed in partnership with II4T by Fall 2027
<b>Measurable Outcomes</b>	Increased hangar utilization; new aviation tenants recruited; aviation workforce pathway established; infrastructure grant applications submitted; airport operational sustainability improving

<b>Budget</b>	Several million dollars over multiple phases (federal aviation infrastructure funding, state investment, private-sector partnerships and airport revenue)
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### Strategy 3: Education-to-Workforce Alignment

Long-term economic mobility in Venango County depends on what happens before residents enter the workforce — in K–12 classrooms, CTE programs and postsecondary institutions. For years, the county’s education systems and its employer community have operated in parallel rather than in partnership, producing graduates who may be academically prepared but are not necessarily aware of or credentialed for the specific careers that exist locally. This strategy builds the connective tissue between those two systems.

Education-to-workforce alignment is not a single program — it is a set of ongoing relationships between schools, employers, workforce organizations and training providers that create visibility, opportunity and accountability on both sides. Employers who participate in career days, mentor students, offer internships and help design curriculum are investing in their own future workforce. Students who see real careers at local companies — not just the careers that leave the region — make different decisions about where to build their lives.

<b>Lead</b>	Local school districts, CTE centers and II4T in partnership with Venango County
<b>Key Partners</b>	Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology, Slippery Rock University, regional manufacturers, healthcare employers, workforce development boards, Northwest PA Job Connect
<b>Timeline</b>	Year 1–2: career exploration programming, employer engagement expansion, internship development → Year 2–3: credential pathway mapping, postsecondary alignment formalized → Year 3–4: expanded regional coordination and outcomes tracking
<b>Key Milestones</b>	First employer advisory group convened by Winter 2026; Career exploration and STEM workforce engagement programming launched in four school districts by Fall 2027; Internship and work-based learning program established with five regional employers by Spring 2028
<b>Measurable Outcomes</b>	Increased career awareness among students; internship and work-based learning participation growing; credential attainment increasing; local talent retention improving
<b>Budget</b>	\$500,000–\$750,000 (workforce grants, educational funding, philanthropic support, employer partnerships)

### Strategy 4: Rural Innovation and Economic Diversification

No single sector can sustain a rural economy long-term. Venango County’s fourth strategy is the connective framework that ensures the county’s workforce investments, airport development, education alignment and existing strengths in tourism, recreation, agriculture and small business all reinforce each other rather than developing in silos. This strategy is the least programmatic and the most visionary — but it is also the one that determines whether the other three add up to something lasting.

Venango County’s natural assets — Oil Creek State Park, the Allegheny River, historic Oil Region heritage and outdoor recreation infrastructure — are quality-of-life anchors that support workforce attraction and retention. A county where people want to live, where there are things to do and places that feel connected to something larger, is a county that people choose to stay in. Connecting these assets to the workforce and innovation strategies creates a more complete picture of what Venango County is building.

<b>Lead</b>	Venango County government, Venango County Economic Development Authority, Northwest Commission, I14T
<b>Key Partners</b>	Tourism organizations, agricultural sector, small business development organizations, chambers of commerce, state and federal economic development agencies, private-sector partners
<b>Timeline</b>	Ongoing, five-year horizon; coordination and planning in Years 1–2; implementation and partnership expansion in Years 3–5
<b>Measurable Outcomes</b>	Stronger cross-sector economic development collaboration; workforce attraction metrics; business development activity; infrastructure investment; community engagement outcomes
<b>Budget</b>	Phased public investment, private-sector partnerships, state and federal grants and regional collaboration (several million dollars over five years)

**Use of RLEM Subgrant Funds**

The \$50,000 NACo Rural Leaders for Economic Mobility subgrant provided critical early-stage support for planning, coordination and pilot implementation activities connected to the Mobility Action Plan. Funding supported strategic planning and workforce coordination tied to the RAD Accelerator and broader county mobility initiatives in partnership with the Pennsylvania Bureau of Career and Technical Education, Carnegie Mellon University, Slippery Rock University and Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology.

Specific uses of funding included:

- Curriculum development for robotics, artificial intelligence, drone technology and workforce readiness programming
- Pilot hands-on technical training activities through I14T
- Equipment purchases supporting early-stage robotics, drone and automation demonstrations
- Stakeholder engagement with employers, workforce organizations, educational institutions and economic development partners
- Regional travel and coordination related to workforce alignment efforts, partnership development and strategic meetings
- Development of internship, mentorship and work-based learning opportunities
- Research, labor market analysis and community outreach activities supporting workforce and economic mobility planning
- Aviation workforce alignment planning connected to Venango Regional Airport initiatives
- Administrative coordination and project management necessary to sustain collaboration across multiple regional partners

## SECTION 5

**GOVERNANCE & PARTNERSHIPS***Who leads, how decisions are made and how partners are coordinated*

Venango County government provides overall governance and strategic oversight of the Mobility Action Plan, with the Board of Commissioners responsible for monitoring implementation, pursuing strategic partnerships and maintaining alignment between initiatives. Day-to-day implementation is led collaboratively with the Innovation Institute for Tomorrow (II4T), with individual strategies supported by designated lead organizations and implementation teams.

**A Note on County Commissioner and II4T Leadership**

Venango County commissioner Tim Heffernan also serves as president and CEO of the Innovation Institute for Tomorrow (II4T), the county's primary implementation partner for workforce innovation and the RAD Accelerator strategy. This dual role is not a conflict — it is one of the plan's greatest structural strengths. Commissioner Heffernan's position in county government provides direct policy authority, funding access and public accountability; his leadership of II4T provides operational expertise, established partnerships and a proven track record in technical workforce development. The alignment between county strategy and implementation capacity that results from this dual role is rare in rural economic development and is the foundation on which the plan's ambition is credible.

**Tim Heffernan** — *Venango County Commissioner and President & CEO, Innovation Institute for Tomorrow (II4T) — MAP Lead*

Tim Heffernan serves as a Venango County commissioner and as president and CEO of the Innovation Institute for Tomorrow (II4T). He has led II4T for more than eight years, helping build regional workforce and STEM programming focused on robotics, artificial intelligence, drone technology and career-connected learning opportunities for rural students and adult learners across Northwestern Pennsylvania. While serving less than a year in elected office as a county commissioner, Heffernan brings multiple years of experience in workforce development, education and service on civilian and law-related boards focused on community development, public safety and regional collaboration. His leadership has supported the growth of regional robotics competitions, drone education initiatives, workforce credentialing opportunities and partnerships with school districts, career and technical centers, higher education institutions and industry partners designed to strengthen long-term economic mobility in rural communities.

**Albert “Chip” Abramovic** — *Former Venango County Commissioner — MAP Lead support*

Chip Abramovic served as a Venango County commissioner at the inception of the Mobility Action Plan and currently serves as Board Chair of the Innovation Institute for Tomorrow (II4T). During his time in county leadership, Abramovic consistently focused on initiatives tied to economic development, workforce advancement and regional collaboration designed to improve quality of life for local residents.

Abramovic is a past President of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania and served as Special Advisor to the Robotics Institute at Carnegie Mellon University. His additional leadership experience includes service on the University of Pittsburgh Institute of Politics Board of Fellows, participation with the National Association of Counties Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee, membership on the Northwest Workforce Development Board and prior service as Chair of the Northwest Commission. His extensive background in workforce development, regional planning and statewide policy collaboration helped shape the strategic partnerships and long-term economic mobility framework embedded throughout the MAP initiative.

## Key Partner Organizations

Organization	Role in the Plan
<b>Innovation Institute for Tomorrow (I14T)</b>	Leads workforce innovation, RAD Accelerator implementation, STEM programming and industry-connected learning; provides regional robotics and drone technology expertise
<b>Venango County</b>	Provides strategic leadership, governance oversight and economic development coordination
<b>Venango County Economic Development Authority</b>	Supports business recruitment, workforce alignment, infrastructure planning and regional economic development strategies tied to innovation, manufacturing, aviation and long-term workforce growth initiatives.
<b>Venango Regional Airport</b>	Leads aviation economic development strategy, anchors drone and aerospace workforce pathway
<b>Northwest PA Job Connect / PA CareerLink</b>	Workforce outreach, participant engagement, career services and workforce funding alignment
<b>EDSI Solutions</b>	Workforce coordination, participant support systems and employer engagement
<b>Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology</b>	Technical credential programs aligned with manufacturing and trades workforce pathways, provided advanced manufacturing training
<b>Slippery Rock University</b>	Postsecondary workforce alignment, regional research capacity, robotics and drones support for educators and student participants
<b>Carnegie Mellon University</b>	AI research and curriculum development for RAD Accelerator
<b>Northwest Commission</b>	Regional infrastructure planning, grant coordination and economic development
<b>Local school districts and CTE centers</b>	Career-connected learning, STEM education and education-to-workforce alignment

SECTION 6

# SUSTAINABILITY & FUNDING STRATEGY

*How the work continues beyond the initial grant period*

Venango County’s Mobility Action Plan is designed as a long-term regional investment rather than a short-term program. Sustainability depends on three things: diversified funding that does not rely on any single source; employer co-investment that grows as workforce programs demonstrate measurable results; and institutional capacity at the county and I4T level that maintains momentum through leadership and funding cycles.

Funding Source	Target Use	Status
<b>RLEM / NACo Foundation (\$50,000)</b>	Workforce planning and coordination, RAD Accelerator pilot implementation, robotics, AI and drone curriculum development, technical training equipment and demonstrations, employer and workforce partnership development, internship and work-based learning planning, aviation workforce alignment initiatives, and administrative and regional coordination support.	Deployed
<b>Federal workforce development (WIOA)</b>	Training delivery, participant support, barrier removal	Active federal program
<b>Pennsylvania workforce and CTE funding</b>	Career-connected learning, credential attainment, workforce readiness	Active state programs
<b>Federal aviation infrastructure grants</b>	Venango Regional Airport infrastructure, hangar development	To be pursued
<b>USDA Rural Development</b>	Rural workforce infrastructure, broadband, technology	To be pursued
<b>Employer sponsorships and co-investment</b>	Equipment, internships, curriculum development, workforce placement	In development through I4T partnerships
<b>Philanthropic partnerships</b>	Barrier removal (transportation, childcare), equity-centered outreach	To be developed
<b>County and economic development allocations</b>	Coordination, oversight, planning capacity	County budget process

The county’s long-term sustainability model is anchored in employer engagement. As the RAD Accelerator demonstrates placement outcomes, employers who benefit directly from its graduates have a financial rationale to co-invest in sustaining and scaling the program. The goal is to reduce the plan’s dependence on competitive grant funding over time by building employer cost-sharing, postsecondary partnerships and county operational investment into the base budget of each strategy.

SECTION 7

# FOR MORE INFORMATION

*Key contacts for funding, partnerships and implementation*

The following organizations and contacts support the planning, implementation and sustainability of Venango County’s Mobility Action Plan.

Organization / Contact	Role	Contact Info
<b>Tim Heffernan Venango County Commissioner   Innovation Institute for Tomorrow (II4T)   President &amp; CEO Franklin, Pa.</b>	County leadership, strategic coordination and MAP implementation; RAD Accelerator and II4T workforce innovation	tim@ii4t.com   814.673.5072 www.ii4t.org
<b>Venango Regional Airport Franklin, Pa.</b>	Aviation infrastructure development, airport economic development and aviation workforce pathway lead	www.venangocountypa.gov
<b>Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology</b>	Workforce and automation support and outreach	www.stevenscollege.edu
<b>Northwest PA Job Connect / PA CareerLink</b>	Workforce outreach, career services and employer engagement	www.pacareerlink.pa.gov
<b>EDSI Solutions</b>	Workforce coordination and participant support	www.edsi.com
<b>Northwest Commission</b>	Regional planning and grant coordination	www.nwcommission.org

Venango County welcomes continued collaboration with employers, educational institutions, philanthropic organizations, workforce agencies, state and federal partners and private-sector organizations interested in supporting long-term economic mobility and workforce innovation. For more information about specific partnership or funding opportunities, contact Tim Heffernan at [tim@ii4t.com](mailto:tim@ii4t.com).



**VENANGO COUNTY**  
• PENNSYLVANIA •

## ABOUT RURAL LEADERS FOR ECONOMIC MOBILITY (RLEM)

Rural Leaders for Economic Mobility (RLEM) was a 22-month peer-learning initiative that supported rural county leaders in advancing equitable economic mobility. The initiative brought together leaders from 10 rural counties to strengthen local systems that expand opportunity for residents, particularly in communities facing persistent workforce, education and infrastructure challenges. NACo continues to share RLEM experiences with rural counties across the United States.

### **Mobility Action Plans**

The central outcome of the RLEM initiative is the development of a Mobility Action Plan (MAP) in each participating county. These locally informed roadmaps help counties move from learning to action by identifying priority economic mobility challenges, target populations and practical short- and long-term implementation strategies.