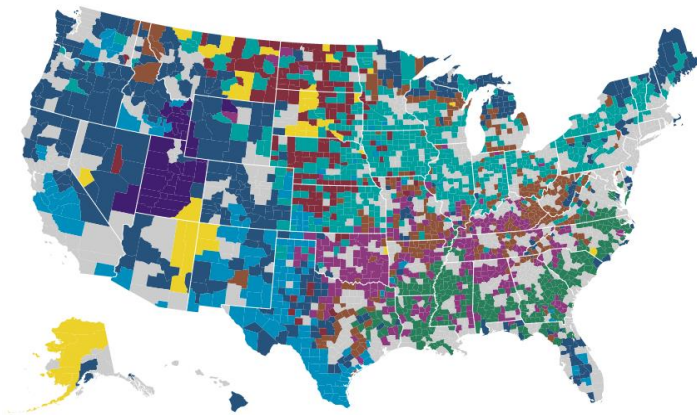


Rural Communities are Not a Monolith

- Defining “rural” is a complex task in a nation of diverse geography and changing demographics. NACo categorizes small counties as those with 50,000 or fewer people but with the recognition that rural communities have diverse and nuanced attributes and include many types of counties.

THE NINE RURAL COMMUNITY TYPES



Source: American Communities Project

- Forty-eight states have at least one rural county, yet there are several different types of rural counties:
 - Racially mixed communities of the African American South,
 - Sparsely populated Aging Farmlands,
 - Culturally conservative Evangelical Hubs,
 - Senior-heavy Graying America,
 - Ethnically diverse Hispanic Centers,
 - Mormon-populated LDS Enclaves,
 - Sovereign Native American Lands,
 - Small-town Rural Middle America,
 - Blue-collar Working Class Country

- **Over one-fifth of rural counties are more racially diverse** than the U.S, while nearly half of rural counties are less diverse than national averages.
 - Whites make up 80% of overall rural populations, but **Latinxs are the fastest-growing rural group.**

Rural U.S. Offers Economic Opportunity

- **Upward mobility for young people is slightly higher in rural counties** than in urban ones.
- In “amenity-rich” rural counties, **only 9% of the population is without a high school degree and one-third of adults have an associate’s degree or above.**
- Rural areas appeal to many: **over one-quarter say they would prefer to live in a rural area**—more than twice as many that say they prefer a big city.
- Nearly **70% of counties classified as “recreation” destinations are rural**, offering opportunities for population attraction and economic development.
- Rural areas possess economic assets to leverage, including natural resources, manufacturing capabilities, and agriculture.
- Immigrants bring population and new business creation to rural areas: **in 21% of rural counties that experienced population growth in the last two decades, all of the growth was from immigrants.**

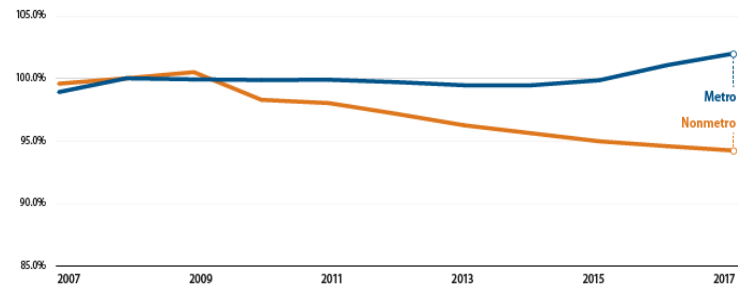
But Rural Communities are Facing Economic Challenges

- Rural parts of the U.S. generally face population loss or stagnation, even though some rural counties are growing and there have been small upticks in population growth:
 - **Metro areas account for 36% of all U.S. counties—but accounted for 99% of all job and population growth** from 2008 to 2017.
 - In the Northeast and Midwest, over **80% of rural counties lost population and jobs.**
- The employment rate for prime age (25-54) workers in rural areas is 71%—lower than the 77% rate in urban and suburban areas.
- As of 2018, **rural areas in general still had not returned to pre-recession levels of employment**—although there is considerable variation across rural counties.
- In “chronically poor” rural counties, **one-fifth of the population does not have a high school degree and only 23% have an associate’s degree or above.**
- Despite high school completion rates that are overall higher than urban and suburban areas, rural students—both white and non-white—attend college at lower rates and are more likely to drop out.
 - **Only 29% of 18-24 year old’s enrolled in any higher education come from rural areas**, making non-traditional pathways a necessity to ensure educational and economic success for rural communities.
- Rural and Tribal areas continue to lag behind urban areas in both fixed and mobile broadband deployment.
 - **Over 31 percent of rural populations do not have access to broadband at home**, compared to only four percent of urban Americans who can’t get access.
 - Approximately **14 million rural people and 1.2 million people living on Tribal lands still lack mobile LTE broadband** at speeds of 10 Mbps/3 Mbps.

FIGURE 4

Labor force participation has decreased in nonmetro counties since the Great Recession

Average county labor force participation rates by metro status, 2007–2017



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, "Atlas of Rural and Small-Town America," available at <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/atlas-of-rural-and-small-town-america/> (last accessed August 2019).



Poverty Persists in Rural Areas

- Overall, the **poverty rate is higher in rural counties than elsewhere**—with the highest rates in Appalachia, the Mississippi Delta, the Rio Grande Valley, and on Native American lands.
- Childhood poverty rates vary widely across rural counties, from a low of 15% in one type to a high of 33% in another type.
- Across rural counties, poverty rates vary by race and ethnicity. Poverty is higher for Black, Latinx, and Native Americans/Indigenous communities than white communities.
 - In 2017, Blacks made up 8% of the total rural population but 15% of the population in poverty. The **rural poverty rate for Black and Native American/Indigenous communities is over 30%.**

Case Studies: Multigenerational approaches to addressing poverty

In Garrett County, MD, the Garrett County Community Action Committee (GCCAC) leads a coordinated approach to reducing two-generational poverty. Based on a new strategic plan in 2009, GCCAC focused on integrating early childhood and family support programs with financial management and career advancement services. All families participating in Head Start and Early Head Start programs, for example, are required to receive lessons in basic budgeting, career planning services (coordinated with the local community college), and services from the Health Department.

- A pilot in 2010-11 had a 91% success rate in terms of positive outcomes for nearly every family involved: jobs, new housing, college completion, for example.
- Based on that pilot, GCCAC recognized the need for internal reorganization. The county itself needed to move from an orientation of addressing short-term crises to building long-term success. Instead of programs and departments, GCCAC structured itself around strategic goals—100 staff job descriptions were reduced to 12 as part of the reorganization.
- A key component of the two-generational approach has been data tracking and monitoring, centered on a universal intake system. This ensures there is “no wrong door” for families and advances service coordination for the county.

In 2016, Weber County, UT, launched the Intergenerational Poverty Initiative. Focused on children identified as already in, or at risk for, intergenerational poverty, the initiative aimed to improve the coordination of different county services. Human services, schools, and juvenile courts—all serving children but existing in silos—would be brought together in the development of individualized plans for children. The county official who led the creation of the initiative failed to win re-election, but the effort continues today as Integrated Community Action Now (I-CAN) and, in 2019, Weber County created the [Prosperity Center of Excellence](#) to coordinate county services and agencies.

Learn more in a Maryland [statewide report](#) and [case study](#) about GCCAC and more about two-generation [approaches](#) to poverty in general and in [rural areas](#).

Additional Resources

- Find additional definitions of “rural” used by the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) and the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) (USDA).
- Explore the gallery of data-driven tools on the [Rural Opportunity Map](#) created by Center on Rural Innovation.
- Listen to the [Rural Revival](#) podcast to hear the stories of people who are bringing to life small towns and rural communities across the country.
- Track varying socioeconomic statistics using the [Atlas of Rural and Small-Town America](#) created by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- Map broadband access across the country using the Federal Communications Commission’s [Fixed Broadband Deployment Maps](#).
- Watch the [webinar](#) based on USDA’s “[Rural America at a Glance](#)” 2018 report.

Further Reading

- American Communities Project, “[A New Portrait of Rural America](#),” September 2019.
- Ascend, Aspen Institute, “[Making Tomorrow Better Together: A Guide to Outcomes for 2Gen Policymakers](#).”
- Aspen Institute, “[Rural Development Hubs: Strengthening America’s Rural Innovation Infrastructure](#),” May 2019.
- Bipartisan Policy Center, “[The Appalachia Initiative: A Bipartisan Approach for the 21st Century](#),” September 2017.
- Center for American Progress, “[Revival and Opportunity: Immigrants in Rural America](#),” September 2018.
- Center for American Progress, “[Adversity and Assets: Identifying Rural Opportunities](#),” October 2019.
- Economic Innovation Group, “[From Great Recession to Great Reshuffling: Charting a Decade of Change Across American Communities](#),” October 2018.
- Richard Florida, “[The 3 Rural Americas](#),” CityLab, June 1, 2018
- Richard Florida, “[Some Rural Areas Are Better for Economic Mobility](#),” CityLab, October 2, 2018
- Richard Florida and Karen M. King, “[America’s Urban-Rural Divide: Myths and Realities](#),” Martin Prosperity Institute, January 2019.
- Lumina Foundation, “[A Dangerous Divide](#),” Focus, Fall 2019.
- National Association of Counties, “[Innovations in Addressing Rural Poverty](#),” October 2018.
- NeighborWorks America, “[Turning the Tide on Persistent Rural Poverty: Blueprint for a Path Forward](#),” April 2017.
- David Swenson, “[Most of America’s Rural Areas Are Doomed to Decline](#),” CityLab, May 7, 2019