Partners *for* Rural Impact

2026

Annual Report

OUR NORTH STAR

All 14 million young people across rural America are on a path to economic mobility.

2026

Highlights

5,222
rural leaders supported.

1,673,150
young people reached across the U.S.

Stay Connected

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT

partnersrural.org

SCAN THE QR CODE TO GET UPDATES IN YOUR EMAIL

VISIT OUR DIGITAL PORTAL

partnersrural.org/membership-login



Roots & Wings

Dear friends, I have spent my life in rural America. I know the strength of these communities. I have lived the ups and downs. I know what happens (and doesn't happen) when rural places are talked about more than they are ***listened to.***

> **"Where you live in the United States should never determine your destiny. That belief shaped a defining year at Partners for Rural Impact. "**

On July 1, 2025, we launched "For Rural, With Rural" —our strategic plan for helping rural communities move from isolated efforts to place-based partnerships, from underinvestment to activated capital, and from overlooked to nationally recognized. This report tells the story of our first year living into this plan, which will guide our work through 2030.

Our roots remain in Appalachian Kentucky, where we still do the daily work of partnering with children, families, and schools. That work keeps us grounded in a simple truth:

> **"Lasting change is built through close relationships, trust, and evidence. Those roots also give us wings. "**

Across the country we are working alongside rural leaders who prove every day that rural brilliance abounds.

The title of our plan – "For Rural, With Rural" – speaks to how we aspire to serve communities across the country.

Rural America does not need someone to arrive with all the answers. They deserve partners who ***listen first, strengthen*** local leadership, and ***connect*** them to resources long denied.

That commitment came to life at our Rural Summit in Buffalo — and it runs through the five strategies that organize this report:

- **Movement**
- **Activate**
- **Strengthen**
- **Bright Spots**
- **Enduring Organization**

Investing in rural young people is not charity. It is an investment in America's future. If you believe our future depends on the talent and promise of rural young people, we invite you to build it with us.

For rural, with rural,



Dreama Gentry
President and CEO,
Partners for Rural Impact

ROOTS & WINGS BLOG

To learn more about Dreama's mission to ensure rural children enjoy lives of opportunity and choice, follow her blog: dreamagentry.com

Scan the QR code to hear more from Dreama on her blog

Rooted in Practice. Built for National Impact.

Partners for Rural Impact was not built from theory.
It was built from practice.

The work began in 1995 in Rockcastle County, Kentucky — in our CEO's home community, with her office in the local high school — to lift the ***educational aspirations*** of every young person in the county.



Three decades later, that conviction still defines us. We remain a practitioner in Appalachian Kentucky — working inside rural schools alongside students, families, and educators — and a national partner helping rural communities everywhere build the local partnerships that move outcomes from birth to career.

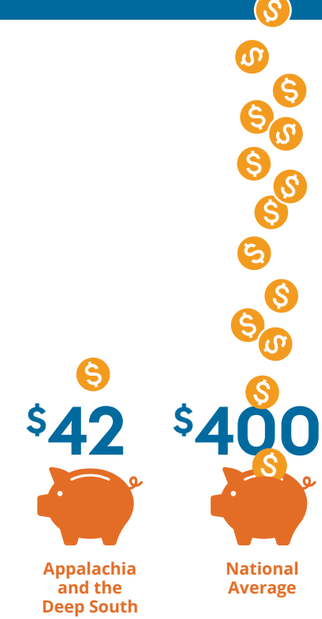
1 in 5
Americans lives in a rural community
and 14 million young people are growing up there.





The talent is there; too often the ***pathways*** are not. The gap is not ability. It is investment, access, and trusted local capacity.

Rural students graduate high school at higher rates than their urban peers (90% versus 82%) — yet enroll in higher education at lower rates (29% versus 37%).



Amount philanthropy invests in Appalachia and the Deep South vs. the national average.
(per person)

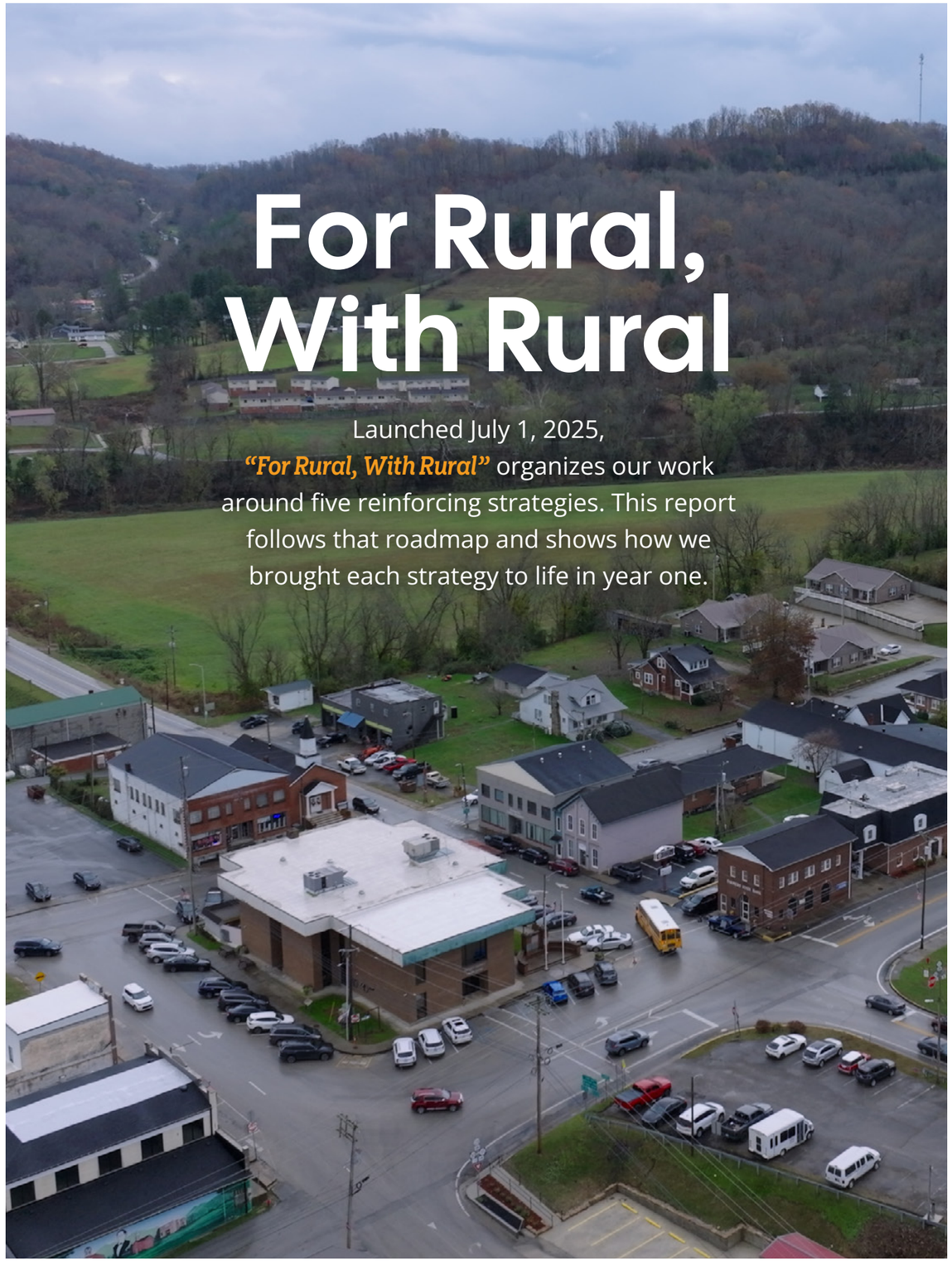
Dr. Amon Couch was superintendent of a partner district in our first rural place-based partnership. He saw what became possible when schools, families, and community partners aligned around a shared result, and later joined PRI to help lead and grow the model. Today he leads the Appalachian Cradle to Career Partnership and serves as Senior Advisor to the CEO, reflecting a core truth in PRI's approach.

Philanthropy must meet the challenge. PRI exists to change who is in the room, how rural places are seen, and how resources move. Corporations and foundations clearly care about education and workforce strategies, but they are not yet including rural communities in their investments at scale.



Dr. Amon Couch,
Partners for Rural Impact Senior Advisor

"Rural practitioners do not just inform this work — ***they drive it.*** Our strength comes from a growing network of leaders who built the work in place, continue to drive it forward, and continually bring others to the table."



For Rural, With Rural

Launched July 1, 2025, ***"For Rural, With Rural"*** organizes our work around five reinforcing strategies. This report follows that roadmap and shows how we brought each strategy to life in year one.

Our 2030 Strategic Plan

Movement

Link rural leaders to one another, to opportunities, and to resources.

Page 10

Activate

Move public and private dollars into rural places.

Page 12

Strengthen

Build the place-based partnerships that move outcomes from cradle to career.

Page 14

Bright Spots

Amplify rural places and practices that demonstrably work.

Page 16

Enduring Organization

Build the people, systems, and funding model to serve rural America for decades.

Page 18

Movement

STRATEGY ONE

Rural leaders do hard work across long distances, often with small staffs and little access to the rooms where decisions get made.

'Movement' is how we link rural leadership — connecting leaders to one another, to opportunities, and to the funders and national partners who can move their work forward.





That is what movement-building looks like in practice — the introduction someone would not otherwise have had, and the trust that forms when rural leaders, funders, and national partners are in the same room.

THE RURAL SUMMIT

This year the movement came to life in Buffalo, New York, where rural leaders and allies gathered from across the country to share what is working and talk through what is hard. Our annual summit is designed to help rural leaders, across the country, to feel less alone and to start seeing themselves as part of a national field.

For Josh Cramer of the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, new relationships translated into new resources for the work. Through the Summit, a PRI introduction to a national funder over coffee helped open the door to funding for Nebraska's rural work.

In Josh's words: "PRI's Rural Summit has connected us to rural leaders, national partners, and funders we would not have met otherwise. Those relationships have helped move our rural work forward."



Josh Cramer,
Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

The summit is an expression of the connection work that PRI does every day. In the first year of implementing "For Rural, With Rural," we launched The Rural, a newsletter published every other month, and continued developing The Rural digital portal, a free-access platform for resources and evidence-backed models. We also expanded the Rural Library Network, which extends the movement further, connecting nearly 2,000 rural library professionals — among the most trusted anchors in rural communities — with free resources and peer support.

The Rural Library Network has connected

2,000

rural library professionals

In Alaska, young Pacific Islander leaders are telling the stories of navigating identity and belonging while pursuing college in the diaspora.

In Mississippi, a youth-led dance recital blends gospel, West African dance, and blues to explore rural identity — lifting up creative resilience in overlooked places, "where art still grows wild and free."

In Muscatine, Iowa, young leaders are reviving a collegiate LULAC chapter and mentoring children of Spanish-speaking families.

In New Hampshire, a theatre company gives young people technical craft and a real voice on its committees.

In East Tennessee, teens run a monthly art night.

RURAL YOUTH LEADERS

Rural young people are not the audience for this movement. They are part of its ***leadership.***

This year's Rural Youth Leaders fellowship — a partnership with Clear Creek Creative — paired emerging leaders aged 18 to 24 with cultural stewards in their own communities and asked them to build something where they live.

In the words of one Rural Youth Leader Fellow: "I matured a lot through this program. There's more of a calmness in me, I appreciate things more and I connect with people on a deeper level. This has helped me with my development as a community leader and as a person."

2030 Goals

1

10,000
rural leaders engaged

2

2,500
leaders who've cumulatively attended the Rural Summit

3

A connected national field committed to all
14 million
rural young people

Activate

STRATEGY TWO



Rural communities are rich in leadership and commitment — but the dollars too often don't reach them.

'Activate' is how we move public, private, and philanthropic investment into rural places, and help funders see rural communities clearly enough to invest with them rather than around them.

Between
3-7¢
of every philanthropic dollar reaches rural communities

PRI is committed to making every cent ***go further*** and to making the case that ***more follow.***

This means bringing new partners and rural investors to the table. From the Summit main stage in Buffalo, Google and TechSoup announced the Rural AI Catalyst Fund — an innovative effort to support youth employability, local innovation, and AI capacity in rural communities.

This was a prime example of our activate strategy in action, where a global technology company, a nonprofit technology partner, rural leaders, and funders were all in one room, focused on growing rural opportunity.

Another example was our partnership with the BlackRock Foundation, where PRI helped deliver mini-grants to 20 rural communities — flexible dollars that let local leaders test ideas, convene partners, and build readiness for larger funding. These early, flexible investments unlocked critical momentum for local projects. They show what is possible when we bring together corporate leaders and leaders of rural partnerships to co-create brighter futures.

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

PRI also secured investment in its own capacity to serve. In the words of Cecilia Gutierrez, Managing Director at Blue Meridian Partners:

"Blue Meridian invested in PRI because it combines deep place-based practice in Appalachia with the vision and capacity to amplify rural brilliance, strengthen local capabilities, and help rural communities across the country build the build the place-based partnerships, systems, and supports young people need to thrive."



Cecilia Gutierrez,
Managing Director at
Blue Meridian Partners



When funders invest in PRI, they are not backing a single program — they are building the connections that link rural leaders to one another and to the resources their communities need. Blue Meridian Partners' commitment, anchored in two years of scale-readiness work, is a validation of us creating those connections at scale.

2030 Goals

1
Unlock or protect
$150 million
in public funding

2
Activate
$50 million
in private funding

Strengthen

STRATEGY THREE

Rural communities are already full of people working on behalf of children and families. The challenge these communities face is rarely commitment. Much more often, it is capacity and alignment.

'Strengthen' is where we help place-based partnerships build cross-sector, resident-centered coalitions that organize their community's people, data, and resources around young people from cradle to career.





PRI's national support is led by people who have built complex partnerships in real places.

NATIONAL SUPPORT

This year PRI's partnership with the Texas A&M University System helped unlock $8 million to build place-based, cradle-to-career capacity across rural Texas. This was a breakthrough investment by a major public university system to organize around rural young people at scale, with PRI's coaching and framework as the engine.

Katie Basham, a Senior Director at PRI, has coached place-based partnerships from idea to implementation — including work with Yakima Valley Partners for Education and Enterprise Muskingum — and she leads PRI's work with the Texas A&M University System. In her words: "Strengthening a place-based partnership starts with listening. Communities already know a great deal about what their young people need. Our role is to help leaders organize that knowledge into shared goals, stronger partnerships, and practical next steps.



Katie Basham,
Senior Director at
Partners for Rural Impact

This year PRI worked alongside Utah's Promise to explore how place-based partnerships could support rural communities across the state. Traveling through southern Utah — Monticello, Moab, Price, Richfield — the team listened as leaders named their barriers and bridges.

BARRIERS

- Long Distances
- Funding Related Organizational Silos
- Small Staffs

BRIDGES

- Pride in Local Schools
- Deep Relationships

> "We don't need another initiative. We need ***alignment*** around what ***already exists***."
>
> **Utah Leader**

Our work is guided by the

5 core elements of Place-Based Partnership

and we work alongside *StriveTogether*, *Purpose Built Communities*, and the *William Julius Wilson Institute* at Harlem Children's Zone to strengthen the field of Place-Based Partnerships.

Scan the QR code to learn more about the 5 Core Elements

That is exactly the work PRI helps communities to achieve — not start from scratch, but strengthen what is already there. In Union County, South Carolina, the same principle shaped Union Uplifted, a place-based partnership rooted in community listening sessions that helped local leaders hear directly from residents, families, and young people about the future they wanted — an approach later highlighted in NationSwell's place-based toolkit as an example of making space for community voice.

2030 Goals

1. **50** rural place-based partnerships
2. **150,000** rural youth supported
3. **20** strategic partners across the field

Bright Spots

STRATEGY FOUR



'Bright spots' are the practices and conditions that help young people to succeed — caring adults who notice and respond, community schools that connect families to support, partners aligned around shared goals.

They become powerful when they move from evidence on paper into daily practice.

This year, one special bright spot showed up in Leslie County, Kentucky, through a pair of broken glasses. A young elementary student came to school wearing bright pink glasses that had been taped together again and again. The frames were cracked; the lenses no longer fit. She had learned to make do. She did not ask for help — she assumed this was simply how things were. But in Leslie County, she was not invisible. Her teacher knew her. The school's community school coordinator knew her story. And her family knew the coordinator.

That matters in rural places, where families may hesitate to accept help from an institution but will accept it from ***someone they know.***

PRI's coordinators are from the community. When the teacher saw the broken glasses were affecting the student's learning, the coordinator already had the relationships needed to help. Within a short time, the student received an eye exam, got new glasses, and returned to school able to see clearly.



To the adults it may have seemed small. To that child it changed everything. She was known. She was seen. Someone cared enough to act — and the community was already connected enough to make it happen.

Leslie County was not always positioned to respond this way. In 2009, when PRI began working with the district, Leslie County High School ranked 215th out of 217 Kentucky public high schools. Educators and families were committed to their students; what was missing was the alignment needed to overcome generations of barriers. By 2025, the school ranked sixth out of 254 statewide.

215th → 6th

Leslie County High School ranking in 2009 out of 217 statewide

Leslie County High School ranking in 2025 out of 254 statewide



MEASURABLE GROWTH

Over time, schools, families, employers, health providers, and community partners began aligning around shared goals. Schools were no longer expected to do the work alone. And the change became measurable.

68% → 95%

Leslie County High School graduation rates change

79%

Kindergartners that arrived ready for school in 2020-21 compared with 53% statewide

A bright spot only matters if others can learn from it. PRI shares what works through the Summit, The Rural, coaching, and — going forward — Rural WoRx, a developing portfolio of rural practices that work.

2030 Goals

1. High-quality cradle-to-career supports to reach **76,000** rural youth in Appalachian Kentucky
2. Create a **Rural Mobility Hub** in Rockcastle County
3. Rural WoRx portfolio of 15 proven practices demonstrated in **15** rural places.

An Enduring Organization

STRATEGY FIVE

Rural work takes time — to build trust, align partners, and move outcomes from cradle to career. To stand beside rural communities for the long term, we have to build an organization that can last.

For PRI, building *'an enduring organization'* means developing the leadership and talent to carry our mission forward – and, in Appalachian Kentucky, helping to strengthen the Appalachian Cradle to Career Partnership and their people and institutions. Throughout 2026, we continued to invest in both.





LEADERSHIP

To build leadership for the long haul, rural organizations – starting with PRI – need strong teams of leaders. As PRI has grown, we have been intentional about deepening our leadership bench and ensuring that knowledge, relationships, and accountability are shared across the organization. This year our bench grew stronger with two Executive Vice Presidents. Together, they are helping us to expand our role as a national rural intermediary while we continue leading our Appalachian Kentucky work.

DEVELOPMENT

Across our staff, we are building the talent to work both nationally and ***deeply in place.***

Our team is hands-on with school and community partners in Appalachian Kentucky and is helping place-based partnerships across the country to build their own capabilities. We are actively growing this talented team.

263
employees were assessed for development pathways

33
identified for teacher certification support

13
are pursuing certification

5
are receiving tuition assistance

We have seen this happen over time, where people who built their skills at PRI went on to serve in schools and agencies across Appalachia, taking their relationships, knowledge, and expertise with them. As leaders continue serving the region – across roles and agencies – we are nurturing the talent needed by PRI in the future and by many of our most important partners.



This year, a talent initiative supported by the Ballmer Group gave us the opportunity to accelerate our approach to ***staff training*** and ***growth.***

After assessing the skills and interest of staff across our Appalachian Cradle-to-Career team, we created targeted development pathways, including support for employees interested in earning teacher credentials or earning project management credentials for coordinating complex work. In particular, the teacher pathway helps to address a critical workforce need in our rural schools.

Sometimes a leader's next opportunity will be within PRI. Other times it may be in a classroom, a school district, or another organization supporting the same children, youth and families.

> "We are here with you while you're here. We're also here for ***your next***."



Renee Hargrove,
Senior Vice President of People and Administration



Board of Directors
(From left) **Joshua Frazier-Sparks, Jennifer Blatz, Danny Murphy, Derrick Singleton**



Jane Hodgdon,
Executive Vice President

Jane Hodgdon brings robust national leadership experience that strengthens our movement, partnerships and field-building work.

Penny Jordan,
Executive Vice President

Penny Jordan brings deep institutional knowledge, operational leadership, and proximity to our Appalachian Kentucky practice.

Scan the QR code to learn more about our leadership and the foundation of our enduring organization.

2030 Goals

$87.8 million
"For Rural, With Rural" fully funded budget

A stable and proximate leadership team

Integrated organization-wide systems

A national brand respected by corporate funders, philanthropists, and strategic partners.

The 14 Million

More than 14 million young people are growing up in rural communities across America. They are not a side story in the future of this country — they are central to it.

AN INVITATION

Place should not determine possibility. Rural communities do not need someone to arrive with all the answers; they need partners who ***invest in what is already taking root.***



Danny Murphy,
Partners for Rural Impact Board Chair

In the words of our Board Chair, Danny Murphy: "My belief in this work is personal. I grew up in a small town in Kentucky, and I was the first in my family to graduate from college. My parents worked hard and sacrificed for me, but they could not do it alone. Like so many young people, I needed a village — teachers, mentors, neighbors, and caring adults who helped me see possibility in myself and opened doors I could not have opened alone."

> This work reaches far beyond any single program or grant. It focuses on place-based partnerships.
> ***It changes generations.***



That is what PRI helps rural communities build. Every day, our staff and partners create the relationships, supports, and opportunities that help young people imagine a different future and move toward it.

JOIN OUR WORK

Our invitation to funders, partners, and leaders considering how to invest in rural America is simple: join this work. Co-invest with us for the long-term. Help build the village every child deserves.

Scan the QR code to learn more about our Rural Portal and how you can get connected

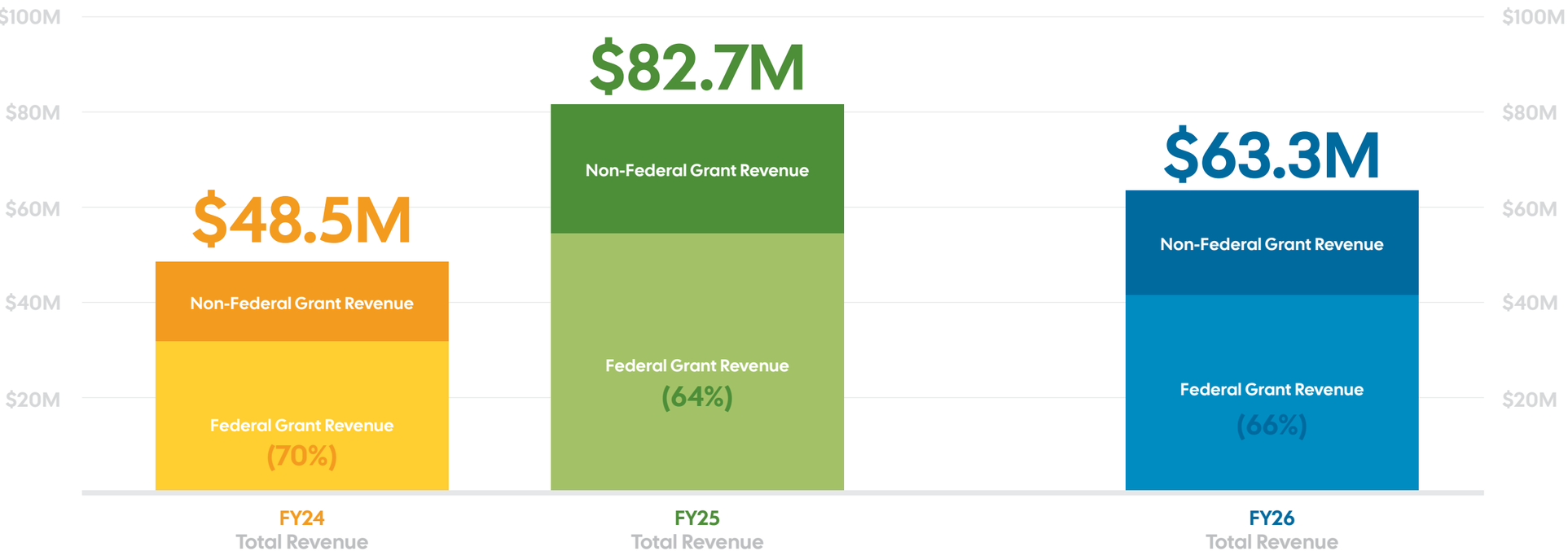
Financials

Rural communities need partners who will still be standing in ten years.

"For Rural, With Rural" made *revenue diversification* a priority: we are an organization historically anchored in federal funding that is deliberately broadening its base across philanthropy, corporate partners, and public funding.

In FY24, federal grants represented 70% of PRI's revenue. By FY25, total revenue had grown to $82.7 million, while the federal share decreased to 64%. Over that same period, non-federal revenue more than doubled, growing from $14.5 million to $29.8 million. As of the date of this report, PRI's FY26 financials remain unadjusted. Even so, we continue to see a broader funding mix take shape, with non-federal sources expected to represent roughly one-third of FY26 revenue. Expenses have grown with the work, as we expanded cradle-to-career partnerships across Kentucky, Missouri, and Texas, while also growing as a national intermediary.

	FY24	FY25	FY26*
Total Revenue	$48.5M	$82.7M	$63.3M
Total Expenses	$49.2M	$73.3M	$66.5M
Federal Grant Revenue	$34.0M	$52.9M	$41.9M
Non-Federal Revenue	$14.5M	$29.8M	$21.4M
Federal Share of Revenue	70.0%	64.0%	66.2%



Through this broader funding base, we are bringing together public and private partners around a *shared mission.*

This gives us the flexibility we need to pursue the highest impact opportunities with rural communities, and strengthens our ability to deliver on our strategic priorities. Crucially, we continue to maintain our federal partnerships – which are key to achieving our mission – even as we actively diversify our revenue.

*FY26 reflects unadjusted transactions through June 2026. PRI is still waiting on reimbursement reports from several school districts; once received, federal grant revenue and federal share are expected to increase by as much as $1million. Federal share is based on the GL's dedicated Federal Grants income account; final classification of certain federal sub-awards and indirect-cost revenue will be confirmed through year-end close and audit.

Partners *for* Rural Impact

A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY & SOURCES

This report covers Partners for Rural Impact's fiscal year, July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026 — the first year of our "For Rural, With Rural" strategic plan, and is organized around the plan's five strategies.

Financial figures reflect FY2026; audited, unaudited, or preliminary status as indicated in the financial appendix.

National figures for rural population, education, and philanthropy are drawn from the sources cited in our "For Rural, With Rural" strategic plan (U.S. Census Bureau / American Community Survey, USDA Economic Research Service, CDC, the Economic Innovation Group, the Center for American Progress, and TICAS). County- and school-level outcomes cite the Kentucky State Assessment, the Kentucky Center for Statistics, and program documentation.

Leaders Supported and Youth Supported reflect PRI's combined reach through direct services, training, and technical assistance, grantmaking, and thought partnership. Leaders are captured only for initiatives reporting over five to avoid possible duplication in other larger PRI initiatives. Youth are counted using census-based, county-level population data (ages 0-24) for the service areas where PRI and its partners are active, and are separated where possible into urban and non-urban counties. Of the 1,673,150 youth counted this year, roughly 94% (1,567,569) live in non-urban counties. This year's reach spans 22 states.

External quotes appear with the speaker's approval.