



THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

RURAL ACCELERATOR INITIATIVE

Save the Children has partnered with Partners for Education at Berea College, StriveTogether and the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) to design the Rural Accelerator Initiative. The initiative broadly seeks to accelerate progress toward cradle-to-career outcomes for children in selected rural communities, beginning with Kindergarten Readiness and 3rd Grade Reading or Math. We plan to achieve this by helping communities establish or enhance collective impact efforts aimed at these outcomes. Our strategies for advancing communities' collective impact efforts include:

- Leadership development
- Civic infrastructure development
- Strategic investment
- Connection with broader learning community

Leadership Development

Strong and dynamic leadership is essential to change the culture of organizations and systems to achieve better results; often, even that, is not enough. If kids are to grow up healthier and better off, collaboration and action must reach a new level — with data driving decisions toward concrete goals. The Rural Accelerator Initiative has partnered with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to deliver the Rural Accelerator Leadership

Program for selected rural communities. For more than 25 years, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has used its Results Count™ leadership development approach to help leaders in the social and public sector achieve better outcomes for children and families. The leadership program will support community-based teams with the leadership skills necessary to move from talk to action to advance progress on a locally identified result, including: developing and executing an equitable results action plan with clearly identified strategies, addressing adaptive and technical leadership challenges that arise when managing the competing interests among diverse, cross-sector partners, building the capacity of leaders and practitioners to use data for continuous improvement of action plan strategies, making mid-course corrections as the landscape shifts and new priorities emerge, and building the organizational and community capacity needed for sustaining results work over the long term. The program will also provide community leaders with opportunities to collaborate on shared priorities with leaders from other Rural Accelerator Initiative communities.

About Our Partners

StriveTogether is a national, non-profit network of more than 70 community partnerships, working to ensure that every child succeeds from cradle to career, regardless of race, income or zip code. StriveTogether believes that those who care about a community's children — from parents and educators to civic leaders and local employers — can accomplish more by working together than by working apart. With that principle as their focus, StriveTogether provides coaching, connections and resources to help partnerships share data, align resources and shape policy.

Partners for Education works to ensure that All Appalachian students succeed by deploying high-quality college access and success programs, building community capacity to support a cradle-to-career, results-based approach, and by providing technical assistance to organizations seeking to improve educational outcomes in rural places. Partners for Education implemented the first rural Promise Neighborhood in the nation and now leads work in three Promise Neighborhoods. Save the Children has been a key partner in each neighborhood. Through the Promise Neighborhood work, Partners for Education has shown the potential for collective impact in rural America.

Collective Impact Capacity Building

As community leaders work to establish common outcomes and a shared action agenda, Save the Children and Partners for Education will support their civic infrastructure to bolster collective impact. Specifically, we will work with local leaders to support their collaborative working groups (CWGs), comprised of cross-sectoral stakeholders – including representation from local churches and businesses, health professionals, and other community members such as parents and teens. We will support these CWGs as they develop and execute strategies aimed at achieving the results identified by community leaders. Save the Children and Partners for Education will provide results-based guidance and resources to facilitate this work.

Communities also need local backbone infrastructure to facilitate collective impact. Backbone functions include supporting program monitoring and data collection, ensuring fiscal stewardship, convening partners, building community awareness, facilitating partner data sharing and communicating progress. Save the Children and Partners for Education will work with community leadership to ensure all backbone functions are supported. This will include providing staff and operational support for these functions as needed while establishing action plans to transfer and integrate this capacity into local institutions.



Strategic Investments

True to its name, the Rural Accelerator Initiative does provide substantial financial support for communities to launch and firmly establish efforts. Each community will have access to the Rural Accelerator Fund. Over three years, communities will have access to \$400,000, with \$75,000 being available in Year 1 of the initiative and the rest split between Years 2 and 3. Requests for Rural Accelerator Fund dollars will be submitted by the backbone staff on behalf of the community leaders. Requests for funds will be in alignment with the community results action plans. Funding will be based on an annual budget request process, and allocations will be made in funding categories such as data infrastructure, capacity building, parent and community engagement, communications, partner alignment, equity or outcome-specific strategies. These investments will support the ongoing work of collaborative working groups as it relates to the established results action plan.

To ensure sustainability of efforts, the Rural Accelerator Initiative will support communities in leveraging seed funding to marshal resources for execution of their results action plans. Specifically, the Initiative will help communities use data to identify disparities, assess which solutions produce results, and align resources and development efforts with the emergent needs associated with their action plans. And, the Initiative will work with funding partners to allocate resources to investments that address these needs.

Connection with Broader Learning Community

Communities that participate in this initiative are joining a growing StriveTogether network of communities that have embraced collective impact. The vast majority of StriveTogether communities are in urban or suburban areas. Our collaboration with Partners for Education in Appalachian Kentucky provides a model for a rural collective impact approach. Over the next five years, the Rural Accelerator Initiative aspires to replicate and expand upon these impressive results and begin fostering a national network of rural communities committed to accelerating progress for children. The Initiative will learn from StriveTogether's proven approaches with urban and suburban communities and adapt and apply them in rural contexts. To optimize effectiveness, the Rural Accelerator Initiative will foster opportunities for communities to share experiences and learn from other collective impact communities. The Initiative will support data sharing within and across collective impact communities and lift up rural voices to practitioners and policymakers. In addition, communities will have access to StriveTogether's 70+-member network of collective impact partnerships, with a goal of each community joining the network after one year in the Rural Accelerator Initiative.