EDUCATION & WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION IN RURAL COMMUNITIES WEBINAR SERIES

Rural Leadership and Strategies in Quality Green Jobs

JFF

Our education and workforce systems are broken.

92M people

More than half the U.S. labor force is not in quality jobs and faces systemic barriers to advancement.

2x

The Black unemployment rate has been twice the white unemployment rate for more than 50 years.

14%

Less than 14% of students with low wealth who attend college complete their studies and graduate.
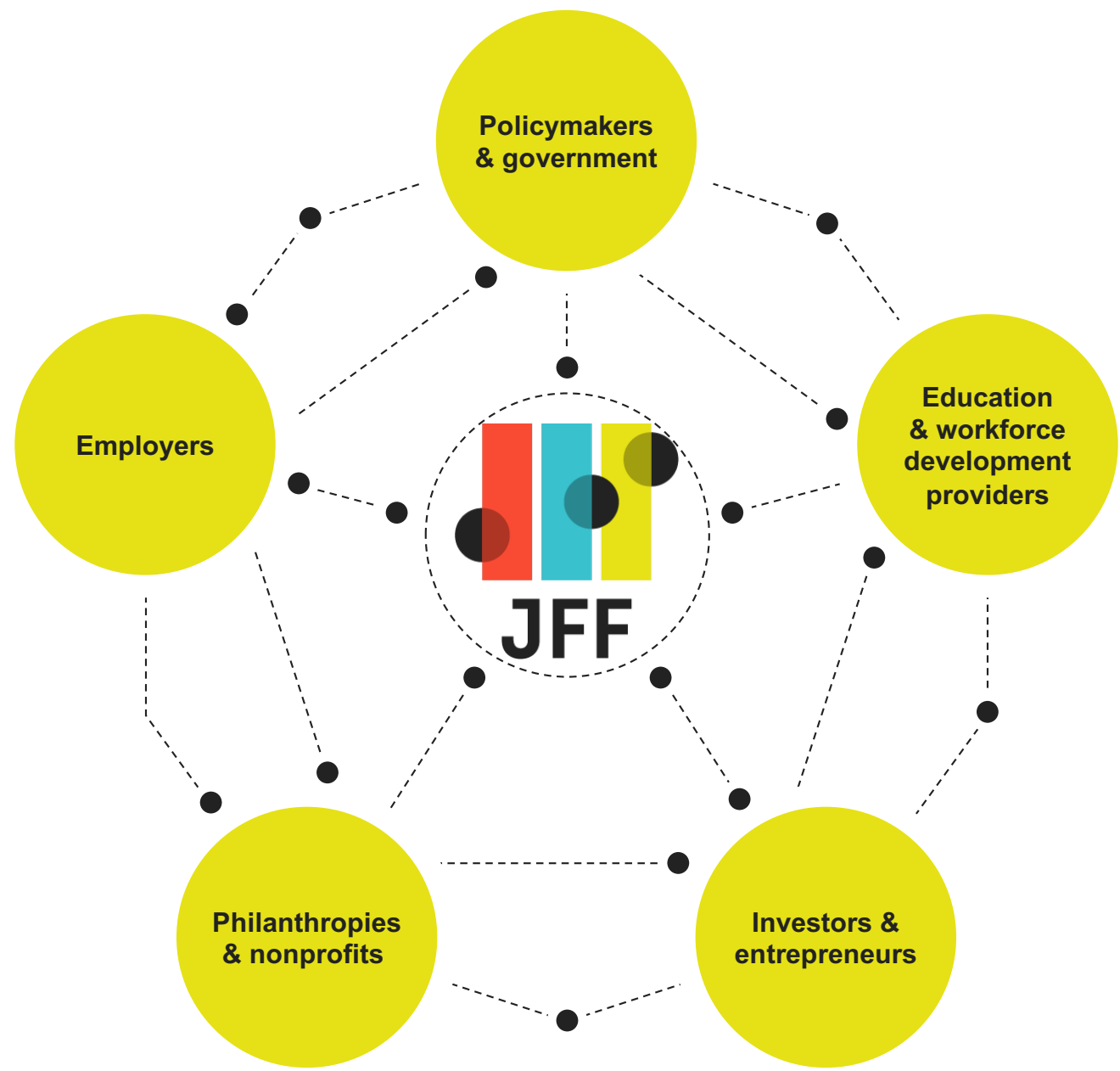
JFF's North Star

In 10 years,
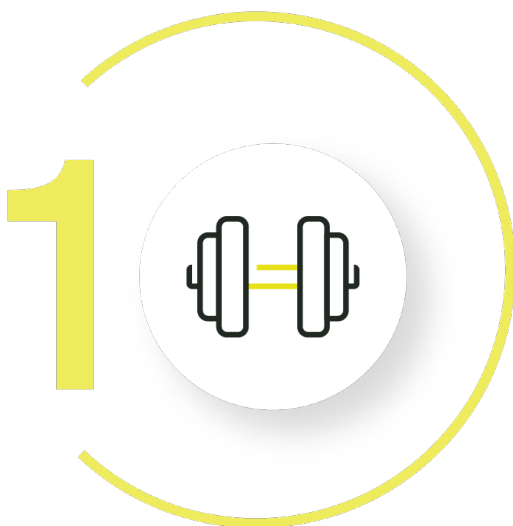**75 million people** facing systemic barriers to advancement **will work in quality jobs**.

JFF

Rural Leadership + Strategies in Quality Green Jobs

Diverse regional strategies to create and expand access to quality green jobs.

The report is based off three pillars...

1
Build on local strengths and context

2
Prioritize inclusive economic development

3
Embed remote opportunities

Today we're focusing on pillars 1 and 2

- Leveraging the unique insights, opportunities, and networks of rural communities to promote access to quality green jobs

- Empowering rural communities with resources and training to create and/or bolster local job markets focused on quality green jobs

JFF's Quality Green Jobs Regional Challenge

The **Quality Green Jobs Regional Challenge** is a Climate Resilient Employees for a Sustainable Tomorrow ("CREST") initiative led by Jobs for the Future (JFF) and funded by the Ares Charitable Foundation that directly invests nearly $5 million in communities to develop regional quality green job strategies.

Place 25K people in quality green jobs

across diverse U.S. regions, between 2024 and 2027

Pilot strategies to

disrupt occupational segregation

in the growing green economy through focus on racial, gender and systemic inequities

Deepen understanding of regional climate-related challenges and opportunities in the labor market, reaching

100K people

through exposure or training

The Challenge Phases

1

Learn
$10,000 Participation Grants

20 selected regions (Challenge Members) receive $10,000 Participation Grants and form a national learning community to deepen understanding of regional needs, risks, and opportunities at the intersection of climate change and workforce development.

2

Plan
$75,000 Planning Grants

Challenge Members submit applications for one-time, $75,000 Planning Grants.

10 selected regions develop regional Quality Green Jobs Agendas, describing their strategies for training individuals and placing them in quality green jobs.
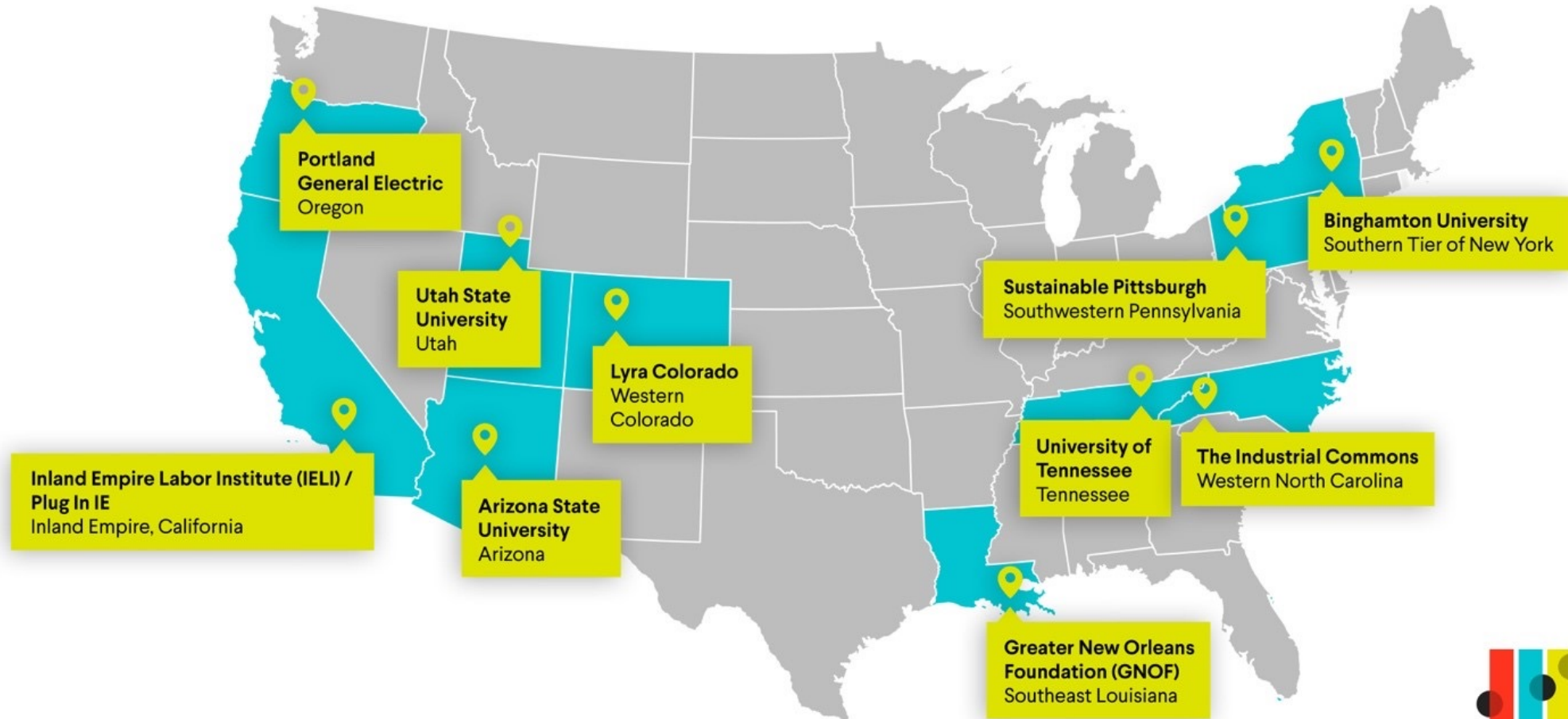
3

Implement
$750,000 Implementation Grants

Five regions are awarded $750,000 Implementation Grants over three years.

The five winning regions implement their Quality Green Jobs Agendas, collectively training 25,000 individuals and placing them in quality green jobs.

The Challenge Members | Phase 2

Portland General Electric
Oregon

Utah State University
Utah

Lyra Colorado
Western Colorado

Binghamton University
Southern Tier of New York

Sustainable Pittsburgh
Southwestern Pennsylvania

University of Tennessee
Tennessee

The Industrial Commons
Western North Carolina

Inland Empire Labor Institute (IELI) / Plug In IE
Inland Empire, California

Arizona State University
Arizona

Greater New Orleans Foundation (GNOF)
Southeast Louisiana

Jobs for the Future

Meet our experts

Julia Delgado

Manager

Jobs for the Future

Sara Vander Zanden

Director

Jobs for the Future

Jon Shefner, P.h.D.

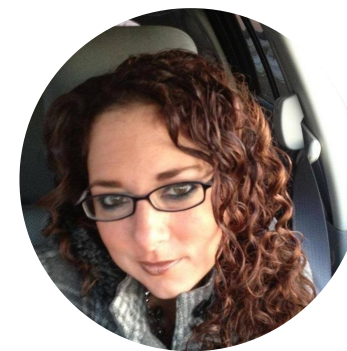Professor, Department of Sociology and Director, Community University Research Collaboration Initiative

University of Tennessee

Elizabeth Harbaugh

Director of Climatarium

Lyra Colorado

Stacey Johnson

Director, New Energy New York Workforce Development

Binghamton University

Eastern Tennessee / Southern Appalachia

Building cross-sector partnerships to expand access to advanced manufacturing, green construction, and sustainable tourism careers in the South.

- Poverty in Southern Appalachia is a persistent result of the extraction of coal and timber, amid a consistent youth and brain drain. In some of the former coal counties, **workforce participation doesn't surpass 30%**.

- The UTK Green Economy Initiative (UTKGEI) was born after a 2011 Brookings Institution report revealed that the Knoxville Metropolitan area, which reaches into rural Anderson and Campbell counties, was the **largest and second fastest growing green economy in the US**.

- **Trust-building and coalition building** were primary goals: We gathered and continue to work with rural community organizations (SOCM, others), UTK and ORNL researchers, as well as county officials to seek out common ground.

- This work has taken off with access to **Justice40** linked projects. We are now linked to 3 NSF Innovation Engine Proposals, an EPA grant, among others. Here too we are coalition building among unlikely partners.

- Our contribution is connecting expanding job opportunities provided by industry while addressing multiple and intersecting needs of the rural communities. We do this by working with the '**trusted messengers**' of those communities.

- Our **greatest challenge will be how to make the coalition endure** by helping secure benefits to all parties.

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Rural Western Colorado

Creating community-driven approaches to designing pathways to quality green jobs for rural youth.

- Lyra currently supports **five** Climatarium "hubs": rural collaboratives of K12, Higher Education, and Industry in creating sustainable intermediary structures that foster economies of scale and capacity for innovation in rural regions.

- These hubs include **20 school districts**, **30,000 K-12 students**, **seven institutions of higher education,** and a wide range of community partners **committed to expanding opportunities for all rural students**.

- We take an **ecosystem approach,** supporting local capacity through statewide policy, pilot implementation with rural intermediaries, industry informed climate career pathways, and leveraging youth leadership. Examples include:

  o Developing and passing the Seal of Climate Literacy in Colorado

  o Supporting Climatarium Hubs in developing pathways in Skilled Trades, Outdoor Recreation, Regenerative Agriculture, Water Conservation, and Cleantech

  o Developing Green Skills Frameworks that support the integration of industry defined durable and technical green skills in existing pathways

  o Leveraging and developing experiential and hands on learning experiences, like the Environment and Climate Institute

Southern Tier of New York

Utilizing XR training initiatives to prepare underserved and underrepresented workers about battery safety in quality green jobs.

- Binghamton University's New Energy New York is building a workforce to meet energy demand!

- **More than 200,000 new jobs** are required by 2030 to support the U.S. battery storage supply chain demand – meaning domestic workforce capacity will need to approximately quadruple.

- NENY Workforce Development programs are preparing the future workforce with our over **70+ industry partner network** with training content spanning all education levels from K-12 students to existing employees looking to upskill across the battery lifecycle.

- Preventing Near-Miss Accidents:

  o XR-based safety training provides **realistic simulations of potential workplace hazards**, allowing trainees to experience and learn from near-miss scenarios in a safe environment.

- On-Ramp to Quality Green Jobs:

  o XR training enhances **workforce on-ramps**, seamlessly transitioning learners who graduate from our online learning platform to VR Safety Training for comprehensive safety protocols, leading to guaranteed interviews after they successfully pass their VR training, allowing for accelerated entry into quality green jobs.

- Accelerated Onboarding and Enhanced Productivity:

  o XR-based safety training equips workers with a **solid safety foundation**, streamlining onboarding and enhancing productivity by facilitating seamless transition from virtual to real-world environments, fostering confidence and efficiency in workplace navigation.

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Panel Discussion

An exploration of the unique and diverse assets and challenges related to quality green job expansion in rural communities.
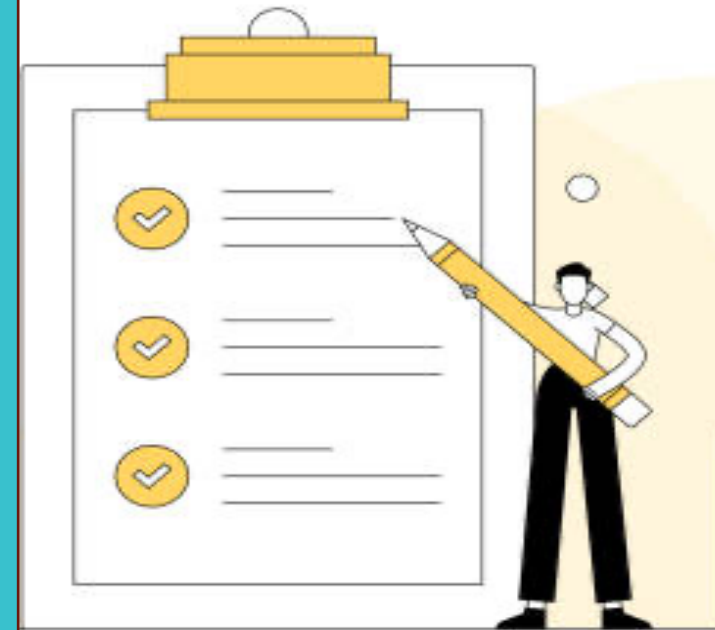
Resources

- [Framework for the Design and Implementation of College and Career Pathways in Rural Communities](#)

- [Quality Jobs Framework](#)

- [JFFLabs Climate and Careers: A Digital Magazine](#)

- [Growing Quality Green Jobs: Driving Economic Advancement in the Green Economy](#)

- [Regional Solutions for Growing Quality Green Jobs](#)

- About The Quality Green Jobs Regional Challenge

  - [Regions Are the Real Leaders in Climate Resilience](#)

  - [Five Insights From JFF's Quality Green Jobs Regional Challenge](#)

Thank you!

Share your webinar feedback with us here!

Webinar Schedule

- May 15 @ 2pm ET
  Building Economic Mobility for Workers and Learners: Lessons on Apprenticeship & Work-Based Learning from Rural Communities

- May 22 @ 1pm ET
  Empowering Rural Immigrant Success: Exploring the RISE Network's Impact and Strategies

- May 29 @ 2pm ET
  Designing and Implementing Pathways in Rural Communities

[Register here!](#)