

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION  
IN RURAL COMMUNITIES WEBINAR SERIES

Empowering Rural Immigrant Success:  
**Exploring the RISE  
Network's Impact  
and Strategies**



# 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.

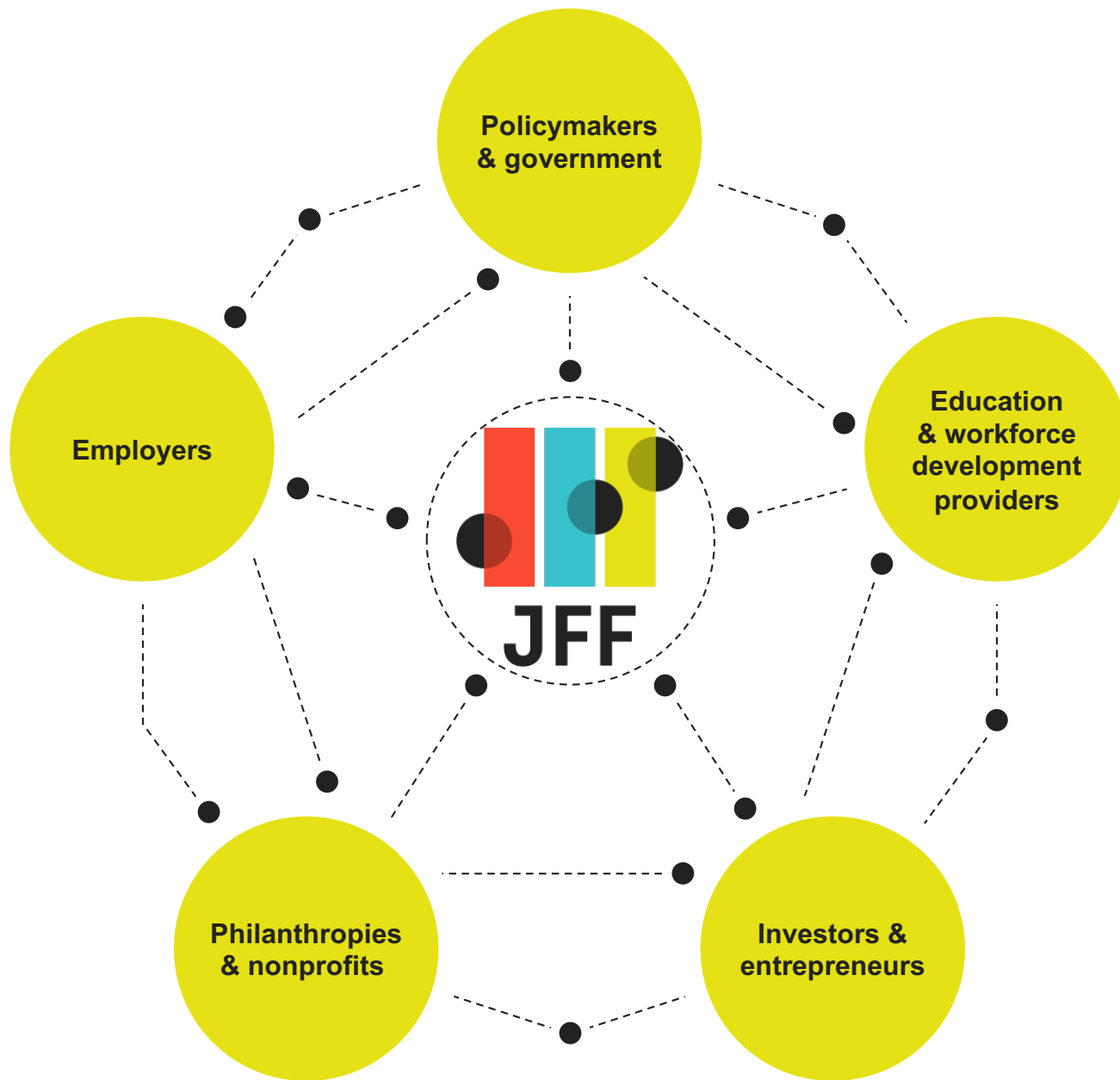
# JFF's North Star

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



OUR PARTNERS

# JFF works with:



# Meet our experts



**Paige Korbakes**

Director, JFF



**Carly Martell**

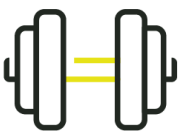
Sr. Program Manager, JFF

# Empowering Rural Immigrant Success

Exploring the RISE Network's Impact

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# The report is based off three pillars...

1 

**Build on local strengths and context**

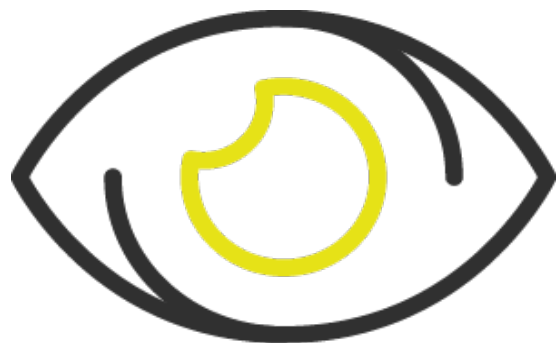
2 

**Prioritize inclusive economic development**

3 

**Embed remote opportunities**

# Build on local **strengths** and **context**



**Create a shared  
vision**



**Align efforts and  
establish shared  
infrastructure**



**Foster durable  
relationships**





# Rural Immigrant Success Exchange (RISE)

Initiative Overview

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# About the Rural Immigrant Success Exchange (RISE) Network

With funding from Ascendium Education Group and the WES Mariam Assefa Fund, Jobs for the Future (JFF) launched RISE in August 2022. The multi-year initiative focuses on the economic advancement of immigrants, refugees, and migrant workers in rural areas. RISE will build a network of education and training providers working to break down barriers to education, training, and employment for immigrant and refugee workers residing in rural communities across the United States.



# The RISE Context

- Funding partners with different expertise collaborated towards a common interest with co-investment
- JFF to facilitate these learnings in rural communities for strategic planning purposes
- Recognize and design with the understanding that rural communities are not a monolith
- Asset-based approach: In many rural communities, new residents reverse population loss, spur economic growth, open new businesses, fill critically needed roles in critical industries
- Barriers to workforce integration: language proficiency, employer hesitation to hire, challenges transferring foreign training / credentials to a US context, lack of social capital, lack of work authorization, unstable political climate, etc



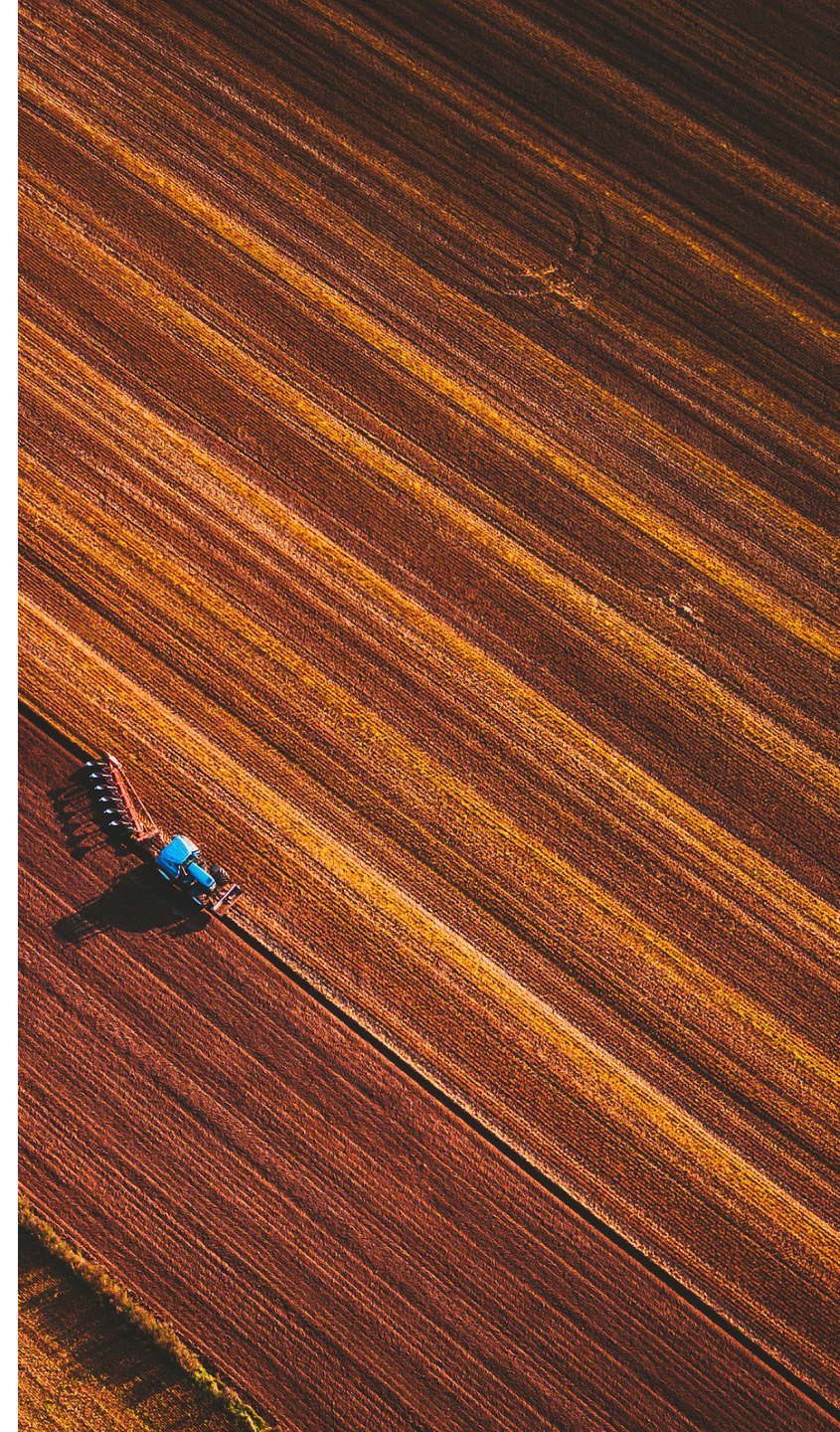
# RISE Objectives

1. Fund 10 **rural, immigrant and refugee serving organizations** across the country
2. Form a **learning community** focused on sharing and adopting career navigation, participant support and job readiness best practices with peer institutions, RISE funders and the field
3. Support the **development of new innovative approaches** to serving refugees and immigrants, and/or **scaling existing high-impact programs**



# RFP Application Insights

- **101 applications** for 10 grantee awards
- **Flexible funding & scope** is compelling to providers
- A strong appetite exists for opportunities to engage in **peer-to-peer learning**
- Most applicants offer multiple and holistic services (not solely workforce)
- More traditional social and human service organizations with job readiness training are targeting workforce development funding
- 48% of applicants highlighted English language learning as a programming pillar, in addition to job readiness
- Lesson learned to be more explicit around what type of programming *wouldn't* be as competitive



# RISE Network Profiles

- **Rural** serving in nature
- Serves **immigrants** and **refugees** from **low-income** backgrounds
- Offers **workforce development** and/or **education programming** to improve social and economic outcomes for participants
- Demonstrates organizational interest and **capacity to actively engage** in a peer learning community

*\*\*Organizations with **proximate leadership** were highly encouraged to apply and were prioritized throughout the selection process*



**10 RISE organizations received \$150,000 in funding to support their work over two years**

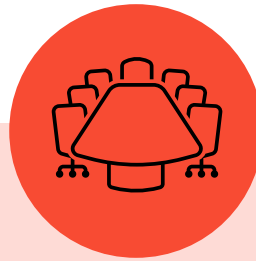




# JFF & RISE: Key Activities



**Technical Assistance (TA) & Coaching**



**Annual Convenings**



**Research & Evaluation:  
Learning Agenda**



# Lessons Learned

*Findings from JFF's Technical Assistance and Learning Agenda Efforts*

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# TA and Coaching Insights

## Networks Amplify Best Practices & Emphasize Tailored Approaches

- Rural immigrant and refugee service providers have a **strong appetite for coalition-building**, connecting with and learning from one another.
- Expanding services into rural areas requires time and intentionality to refine existing programming using an **asset-based and place-based approach**.

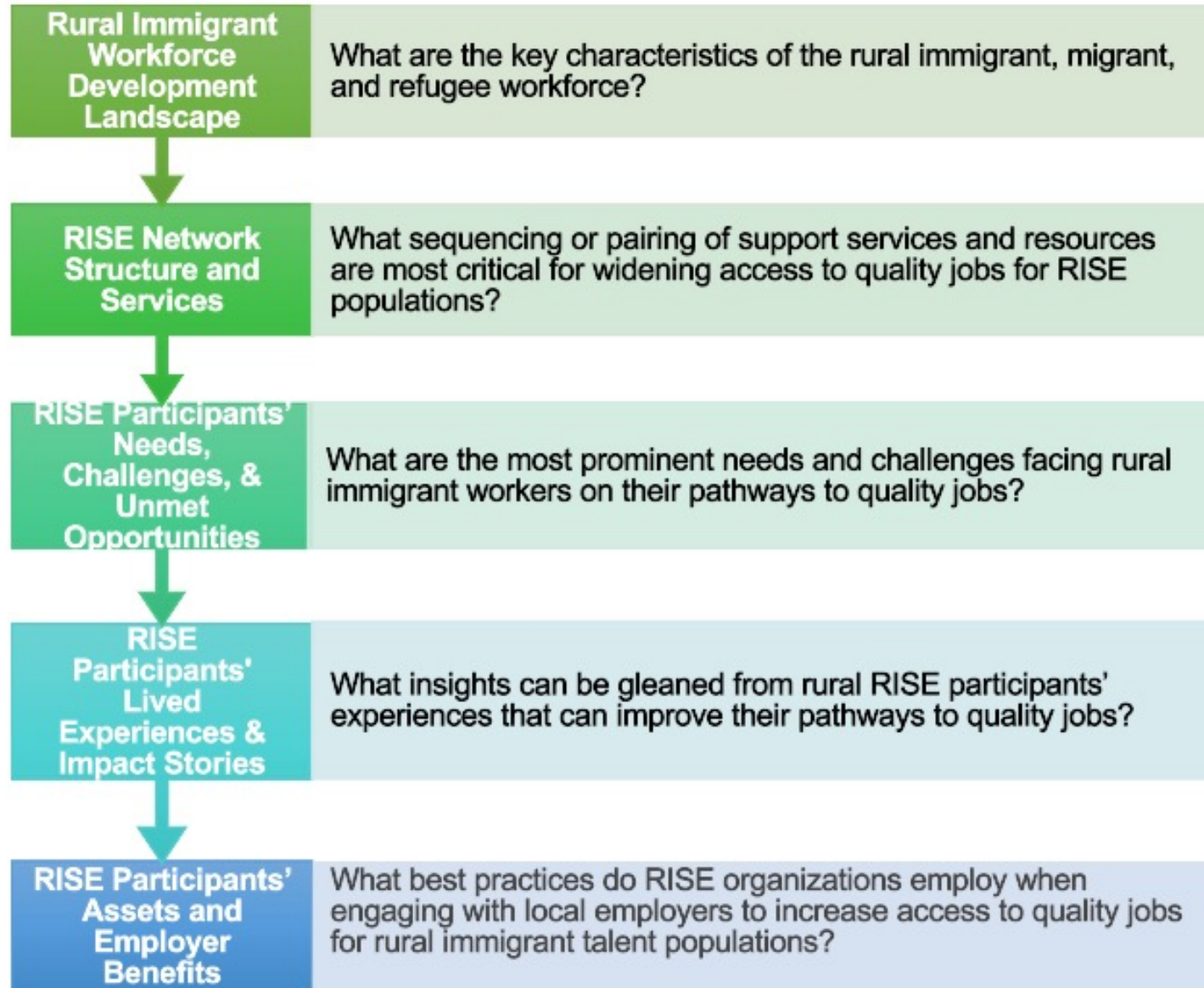
## Accessible Pathways to Economic Advancement

- **Entrepreneurship is a critical and often more accessible career pathway** for immigrants, but success is contingent on access to financing.
- **Co-ops and worker committees offer additional models** that demonstrate promise for immigrants seeking and sustaining quality jobs.

## Service Providers & Populations Seek Capacity Building Support

- Improving proficiency of **digital literacy skills for an employment context** is often a required wraparound support.
- Capacity-limited organizations frequently request **legal and data literacy support** when serving immigrants on pathways to economic advancement.

# RISE Learning Agenda Questions



# Learning Agenda Findings

LEARNING AGENDA QUESTION	EMERGING FINDINGS
<b>What are the key characteristics of the rural immigrant, migrant, and refugee workforce?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Less institutional and organizational silos than urban areas.</li><li>• Growing populations and economic resiliency</li><li>• Increased opportunities and support for entrepreneurship.</li><li>• Significant heterogeneity across rural areas and workforce systems.</li><li>• Highly dependent on regional networks and strategies.</li></ul>
<b>What are the most prominent needs and challenges facing rural immigrant workers on their pathways to quality jobs?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of full social and cultural inclusion efforts</li><li>• Negative immigrant public discourse</li><li>• Low levels of trust with the government.</li><li>• Precarious labor and limited awareness of worker rights.</li></ul>
<b>What insights can be gleaned from rural RISE participants' experiences that can improve their pathways to quality jobs?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Workforce development programs can better serve RISE populations through asset-based approach that aims to increase worker/learner human and social capital.</li><li>• Need sector strategy partnerships that are community-driven, culturally responsive and elevate worker voice.</li></ul>
<b>What best practices do RISE organizations employ when engaging with local employers to increase access to quality jobs for rural immigrant talent populations?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intentional investment in cultivating relationships with community members and organizations.</li><li>• Deeply embedded in the community with significant efforts toward trust-building.</li><li>• Active participation and rich connections with local government.</li><li>• Strong emphasis on leveraging and building social capital</li></ul>

# LEARNING AGENDA INSIGHTS

## *Rural Challenges and Opportunities*

**Sociocultural Integration:** One early finding from the analysis is that social integration is a **key determinant of success** for RISE populations. Both RISE network organization representatives and participants consistently express the importance of positive social connections for their stability, success, and general wellbeing.

A critical factor in determining the likelihood of a positive sociocultural integration is the **role of mediating organizations** such as churches, schools, and community centers.



# Field Recommendations & Considerations



- **Engage in Policy Conversations:** Encourage rural organizations and local government actors to actively participate in local and state policy discussions to advance workforce integration for immigrant and refugee populations.



- **Share Success Stories:** Utilize success stories of participants to increase exposure and prepare for advocacy, highlighting the impact of their work.



- **Facilitate Cross-Cultural Exchanges:** Design and implement (low stakes + high reward) events, programs, and spaces that encourage interactions between diverse community members, fostering understanding and appreciation of different cultures.



- **Tailor Programs to Local Strengths + Needs:** Develop programs that are specifically designed to build on the unique cultural and regional strengths as well as socio-economic needs of the rural area.



- **Address Population-Specific Challenges:** Recognize and strategize around limitations faced by specific groups, such as undocumented individuals, adapting the program approach accordingly.

# Impact Story

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# Central Valley Immigrant Integration Collaborative







In Madera, we've established a strong partnership with both the City of Madera and the Madera Housing Authority since last year and we will continue working hand in hand with these two partners in 2024. **These collaborations have enabled us to tap into existing networks and resources within the community, enhancing our outreach and engagement efforts.** The support from these partners has been instrumental in laying the foundation for our program's success in Madera.

Similarly, in Reedley, we've **forged partnerships with the City's Economic Development Department and the Greater Reedley Chamber of Commerce.** Leveraging these alliances, we are poised to deliver impactful training sessions and support services to participants in Reedley. **These partnerships not only broaden our reach but also ensure that our program is recognized and establish a stronger credibility within the community.** Additionally, partnering with the City of Reedley and the Chamber of commerce will **facilitate the connection with Spanish-speaking entrepreneurs and therefore create bridges between the two audiences that for long have had challenges connecting previously.**

— *RISE Project Lead, CVIIC*

# Resources & Contact Info

- [Framework for the Design and Implementation of College and Career Pathways in Rural Communities](#)
- [JFF RISE Announcement](#)
- Upcoming (2025): Learning Agenda

Carly Martell: [cmartell@jff.org](mailto:cmartell@jff.org)

Paige Korbakes: [pkorbakes@jff.org](mailto:pkorbakes@jff.org)



# Last Series Webinar

May 29 @ 2pm ET

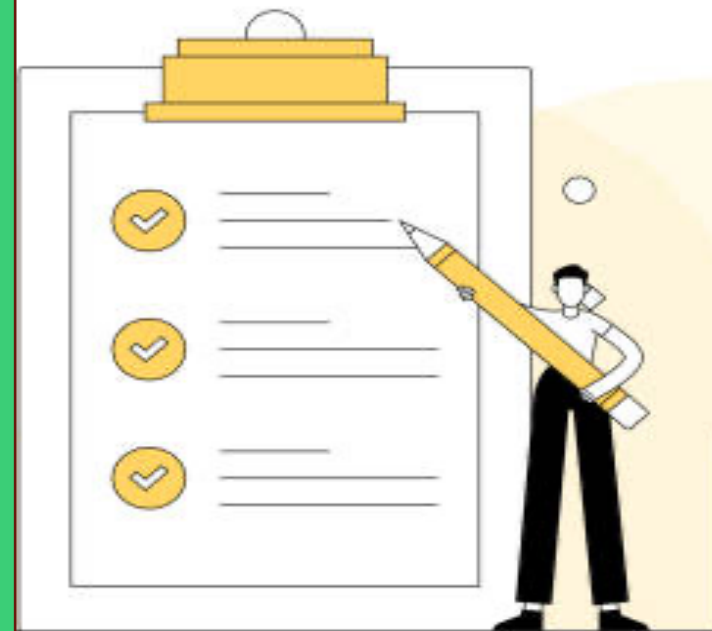
Series Debrief: Discussing Key Takeaways and Implementing Strategies



[Register here!](#)

# Thank you!

Share your feedback with us [here!](#)





**JFF**