

Developing a Diverse and Thriving Workforce

Access to quality education and career opportunities are key components to success among underserved and at-risk communities. Land-grant universities are working to identify and address barriers to inclusion, benefitting individuals, communities and economies.

Here are a few examples of that work:

- In **Missouri**, rural counties experience high rates of drug overdose, suicide and related diseases. The Rural Opioid Technical Assistance team consisting of community leaders, workforce members, business representatives and social services agencies developed the Recovery Friendly Workplace initiative, which resulted in employers, businesses and organizations better understanding substance misuse, behavioral health and their connection to workforce challenges. A network of employers formed to create safe work environments to create positive change, eliminate stigma and support recovery and retain a healthier, more productive and more motivated workforce.
- In **Illinois**, developing culturally responsive post-secondary leadership instructors improves the quality of collegiate leadership education, enhances student experiences and prepares students to meet workforce needs in every sector, including food, agriculture, natural resources and human sciences.
- In **West Virginia**, 53% of students go to college immediately after high school, below the national average of 69%. Only 8.4% go directly to two-year colleges. Families can't finance their children's college education, yet post-pandemic, FAFSA completion rates dropped 11%. To address this issue, Extension introduced a four-week financial literacy course to high school students that included ways to pay for post-secondary education. A survey of 296 students who completed the course indicated that 73% were motivated to apply for financial aid opportunities, and 58% intended to complete FAFSA forms and apply for financial aid. Half (50%) increased their confidence in handling financial aid applications, and 33% had an overall positive attitude toward attending college.

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