

### “KEEP TRYING” IS ADVICE TO SMALL & RURAL COLLEGES

Persevering despite challenges and being open to learning from other community colleges' experiences with Advanced Technological Education grants are key strategies that three rural community college leaders shared during the CCPI-STEM webinar on [Building Institutional Grant Capacity at Small and Rural Colleges](#).

“These grants can definitely be transformational to your institution, and help put things in place that can be sustainable for many, many years down the road,” said Dr. Scott Alsobrooks, president of [East Mississippi Community College](#).

Dr. Alisa Carter, dean of STEM Pathways at [Hill College](#) in Texas, Dr. Scott Alsobrooks, president of East Mississippi Community College in Mississippi, and Dr. Jennifer Wimbish, president emerita of Dallas College Cedar Valley Campus in Texas, were the featured in CCPI-STEM's November webinar—Building Institutional Grant Capacity at Small and Rural Colleges.

“These grants can definitely be transformational to your institution, and help put things in place that can be sustainable for many, many years down the road,” Alsobrooks said. His first successful Advanced Technological Education (ATE) proposal resulted in a 2006 grant award to start a utility lineman degree program at Pearl River Community College, which the college continues to offer.

Since then Alsobrooks said he has written three or four NSF grants that were not funded. “That’s just part of it. But you’ve got to keep trying. It’s like playing baseball. You get up to the plate; you’re going to strike out some. You’re going to fly out or ground out. Every once in a while you get a nice hit. Sometimes you get a home run. Just keep going up to the plate and swinging the bat. Good things will happen eventually. Just keep trying,” he said.

Tragically the effort to build East Mississippi's institutional capacity for grants with mentoring from Project Vision was derailed when the faculty leader and the administrator of the college's ATE project both died of COVID. Without those two team members—one with cybersecurity expertise that could not be replaced quickly—the college declined that grant award. However, it is preparing new proposals now. “It’s challenging to be in our environment in rural community colleges, but we’re not going to quit, that’s for sure,” Alsobrooks said.

Carter shared that Hill College's first attempt at preparing an ATE grant proposal fell short due to internal processes. But, she said, the team working on the proposal continues to talk and the initial grant preparation spurred three other grant proposals.

“For every challenge we encountered, we can see multiple positive things that came out of it as we moved forward through it,” she said. The preparation of the ATE proposal built relationships across the college's three campuses and across academic divisions. Carter said the collaborative effort “has created a culture that this [an NSF grant proposal] is something we can do. And we never would have gotten to this point, if it had not been for the mentoring that we go through FORCEE-ATE and Mentor-Connect, and we cannot thank them enough.”

FORCEE-ATE, Mentor-Connect, Project VISION are ATE projects that provide professional development and mentoring to help community college teams of faculty, staff, and administrators develop competitive ATE proposals. CCPI-STEM, also an ATE funded initiative, focuses on advancing STEM workforce education and the NSF Advanced Technological Education (ATE) program.

When Wimbish was president of Cedar Valley College she sent faculty and staff to visit strategically selected community colleges that had received ATE grants. “Relationships became the key as we learned together,” she said, noting that the teams working on the grant proposals built partnerships with the colleges they visited and on Cedar Valley's campus. Based on what they learned they then connected with local community organizations and churches to reach underserved populations. In 2015, the college received an ATE grant to start a supply chain management and manufacturing program (Award 1501105). The logistics and supply chain management associate of applied science degree the college continues to offer is aligned with industry-recognized certifications.

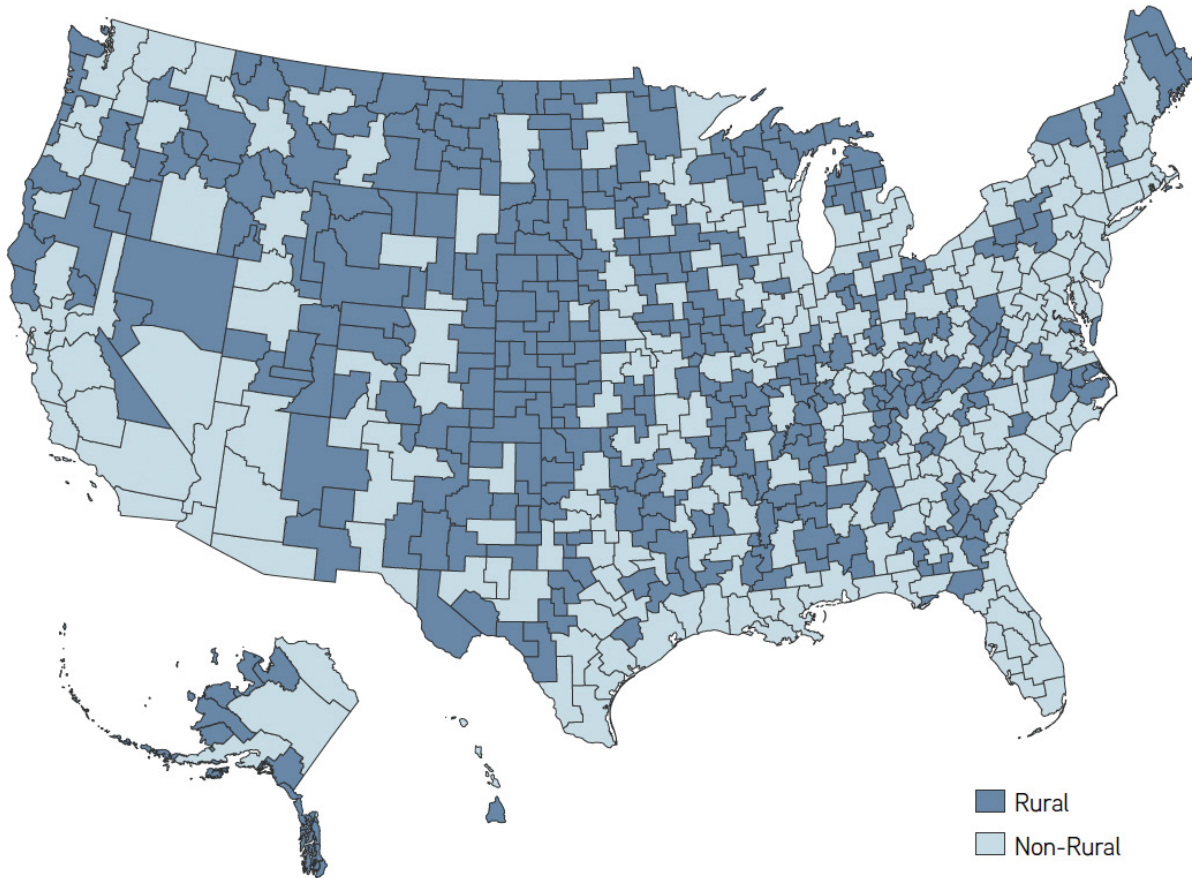
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Wimbush said, “My words of wisdom would be to listen, to share, to execute with excellence, but then to focus on sustainability. And think about then: How do I leave something in place where people learn from what we’ve done as they continue to climb?”

## Demographics of Rural Commuting Zones



Data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s ACS and Mobility Surveys to explore demographic shifts in rural places.

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