

2019

A CLOSER LOOK

RURAL & EQUITY WORK



nonprofitpathways.org

Why rural?

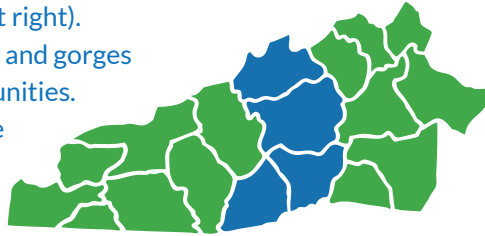
Quite simple: it's our mission.

The local partner funders of Western North Carolina Nonprofit Pathways made the entire region our first name.

An estimated 47% of people and almost 50% of nonprofits call the more rural areas home (green area in Pathways' region map at right).

Our breathtaking peaks and gorges also isolate rural communities.

While serving the whole region, we must focus our resources where they are needed most.



Note

We recognize that "rural" and "urban" are broad-stroke terms and there are rural pockets in all WNC counties. We designate the four counties in blue as "more urban" based on proximity to Asheville. Population tends to be denser in these areas, and it is easier for nonprofits to connect with each other and the resources available.



“Some of the typical nonprofit strategies or requirements Pathways has had are less appropriate for rural communities or grassroots groups that are found in the mountains”

– Nonprofit response to DEI audit survey

How have we changed our approach?

Energy follows attention.

In real time, we have carefully tracked trends of rural enrollment in all programs, used technology to identify interested prospects, and connected with people via personal emails, phone calls, and visits.

“They do a great job at reaching out to the rural area, taking a proactive approach reaching out to us.”

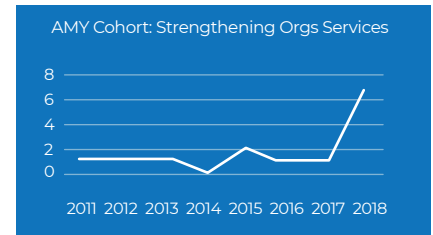
– Nonprofit response to DEI audit survey

Pathways' DEI audit survey (more info next page) showed that most nonprofit representatives see Pathways as **prepared to support rural communities**, and yet many of the comments indicated that **many people are unfamiliar with Pathways** and the resources we offer. We have shifted our programming:

For the seven southwest counties, Pathways created the WNC Nonprofit Collective, a group of nine organizations from this area. Staff leaders from these organizations meet in person and via video conference to share ideas, build collaborative relationships, and learn together about topics that affect their daily work.

Pathways hosted our first-ever signature event in a rural area: "Leading Beyond Your Walls." Focused on collaborative leadership, this April 15 event in Cherokee included a case study panel from the Nikwasi Initiative. 33 leaders attended from organizations across the seven SW counties.

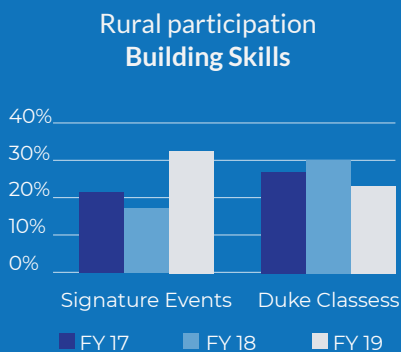
The Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey Cohort shows that focused work over time reaps rewards.



What has happened because of the change in Pathways' approach?



PARTICIPATION



Strengthening Organizations: Holding steady with overall participation in programs; percentages are up for organizational assessments and down for on-site trainings.



OUTCOMES

Building Skills: rural groups' outcomes are comparable to urban groups in terms of learning levels and next steps.

Strengthening Organizations: We have seen a significant uptick in the number of rural groups engaging with deeper capacity-building and reactivating, as compared to urban groups. However, historic data shows that rural groups accomplish priorities at a lower rate than urban groups.



WHAT WE LEARNED

While trends are generally good, participation has not reached rural demographic levels. Duke University Nonprofit Management Program enrollment numbers are dropping; some signature event numbers are holding steady and others are climbing.

Outcomes show that **Building Skills** services meet the needs of rural and more urban groups similarly. We need to reconsider **Strengthening Organizations** programs to meet the needs of rural groups.

Why DEI?

Diverse and equitable organizations are stronger.

After several years of exploring DEI opportunities, Pathways engaged Every Level Leadership to conduct a DEI audit of our model, and provide guidance for moving forward.

The DEI survey, with a 97% completion rate, showed the following:

- The leadership of Pathways views DEI work as a top priority and there is a strong interest in supporting Pathways' DEI efforts.
- Coordinating consultants, program consultants, and the steering and advisory committees named many of the same challenges to prioritizing DEI. Most frequently cited:
 - Lack of diversity among leadership
 - Lack of analysis around DEI and race equity issues and the need for a shared DEI vision and strategy
 - The need to change funding criteria and outreach strategies to better support more nonprofits, particularly those that serve underrepresented groups
- High priority: language justice and accessibility, predominately for Spanish speakers.

“Pathways’ culture is reflective of the larger system of which it is a part. Its mediator role within philanthropy in many ways reinforces the status quo. Transforming systems is such challenging and difficult work, I believe it needs to start within.”

– Nonprofit response to DEI audit survey



Every Level Leadership provided recommendations based on survey results. The Pathways Steering Committee chose short-term priorities in these areas:



Shared DEI statement

Sources of funding for this work

Training opportunities for Pathways' leadership & consultants

Outreach and program accessibility

Consultant diversity

Where is this work pointing us?

Internally and with the nonprofits we serve, directly addressing questions of DEI is intense and difficult work for everyone involved. It moves “at the speed of trust” and requires new approaches and adequate resources.

Pathways has formed a planning group to address the mid- and long-term recommendations, as well as opportunities for resources to support this work. We are excited to think big about how Pathways’ model and approach can adapt to grow and become more equitable.

“I would say that Pathways is not fully ready to work with and support nonprofits that are LED BY black and POC organizations. There is clear intention and motivation from the leadership of NPP, however, how those translate into practices/policies is not yet aligned.”

– Nonprofit response to DEI audit survey

Program highlights

While launching the internal focus, Pathways continued DEI programming through two cohorts.

GO Nonprofits – Green Opportunities, which provides job training for people from marginalized communities, issued invitations to other POC-led organizations. Diverse instructor teams led peer learning opportunities focused on fundraising and board development. Five Boards of Directors explored their own organizations’ strengths and gaps and identified areas of focus for further growth and change.

Access to Healthy Food Cohort – Since 2016, six organizations have participated in individual equity audits and staff/board training focused on DEI in their own organizations. This has been difficult, emotional work and but has provided the participating organizations the opportunity to engage in their equity work in a deeper way. Five additional organizations have joined the group for peer learning sessions focused on racial equity and food access initiatives.



Looking out & looking in:

where does it all come together?

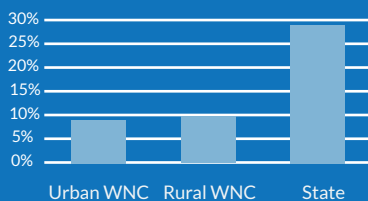
The two key areas of focus in this report rural and DEI are not exclusive of each other:



CHECK OUT THE DEMOGRAPHICS

While some rural counties have very few People of Color there are many other forms of diversity and the combined demographics of our WNC rural regions show a very similar percentage of POC in the population of urban and rural communities.

2018 Percent POC



WORKING & LEARNING IN CHEROKEE

Over the years, Pathways has invested significant time, creativity, and resources to program development on the Qualla Boundary, where these two areas of focus converge. We have seen great progress in relationships and engagement through this work, and can apply this learning to Pathways' work in other areas.



CONVERGING NEEDS AND INTERESTS

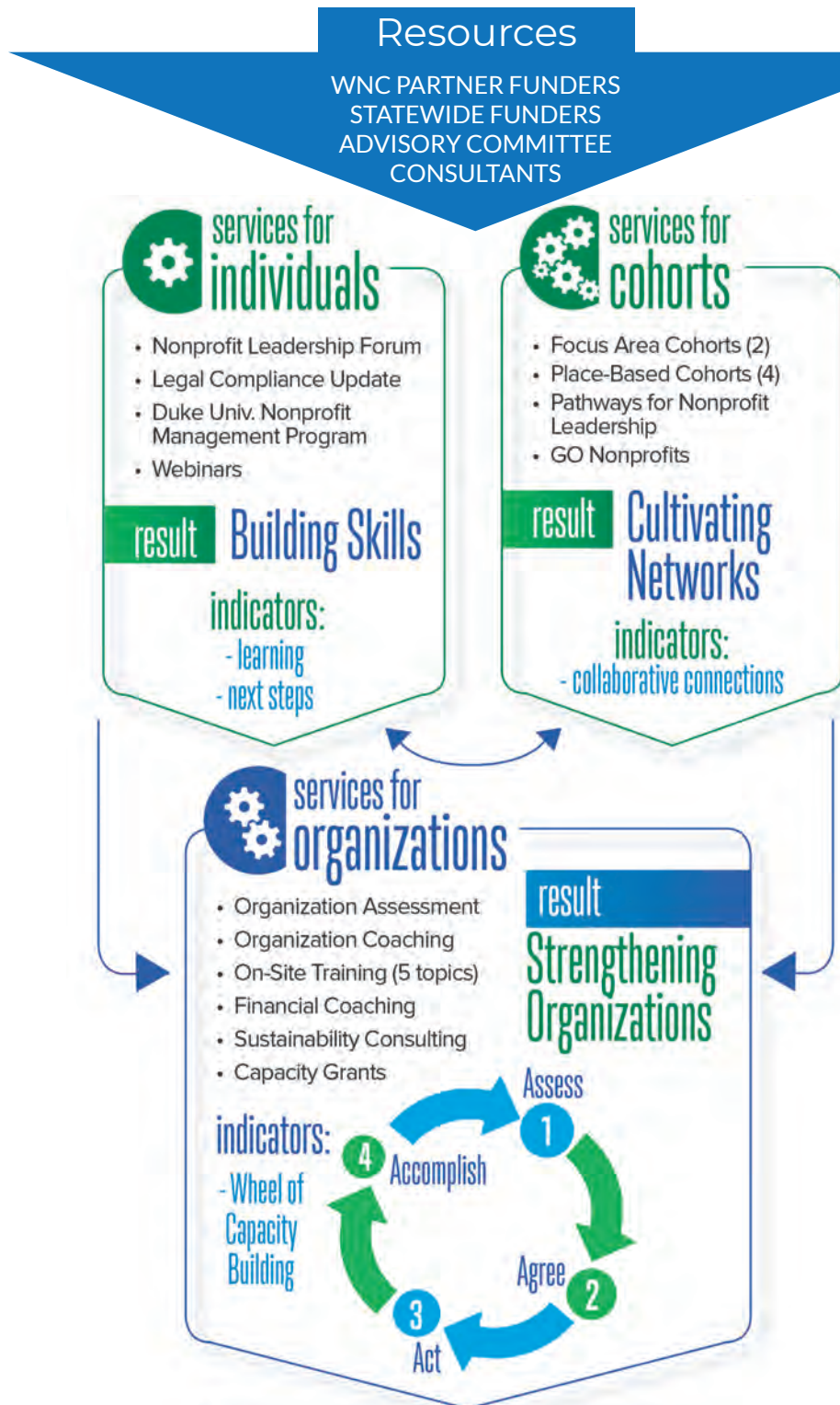
Rural and POC-led orgs tend to be smaller and under-resourced, and may need similar things, which are different from Pathways' Strengthening Organizations programming.

What can be done with our resources and expertise to meet the needs of smaller nonprofits in a sustainable way?

We now have the opportunity to become more intersectional and adapt our programs to benefit both areas of focus. It is time to explore more deeply the questions of how DEI matters to rural communities and how rural perspectives inform and can strengthen DEI work.

Pathways' theory of change

Pathways' current Theory of Change provides a jumping-off point. How do our programs need to grow and change to reflect what we've learned about rural and DEI work?



Strengthened nonprofit sector in WNC



PATHWAYS IS A COLLABORATION OF FOUR FUNDERS:

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United Way of Asheville & Buncombe County | Mission Health

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