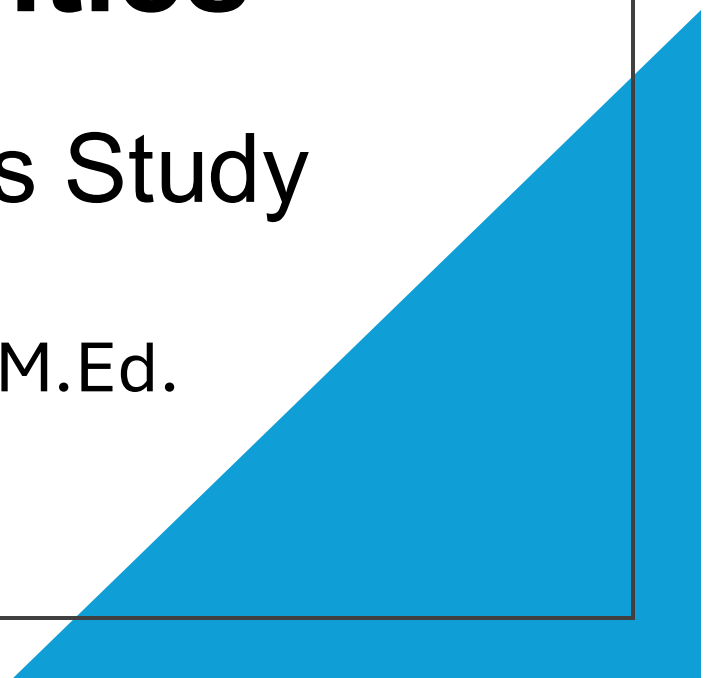


# **Rural Administrators' Facilitation of Career Development for Students with Disabilities**

An Interdisciplinary Mixed Methods Study

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# Introductions

# Who are we?



**Madison Ross, M.Ed.**

Doctoral Student UIUC  
Former SPED Teacher



**Michele Schutz, Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor UIUC  
Former SPED Teacher & Transition  
Specialist

# Who are we?



**Rachel Roegman, Ph.D.**  
Associate Professor UIUC



**Lucy Johnson**  
Undergraduate Research  
Assistant






**Kimora Woods**  
Student Research Assistant

# Objectives

# Today we will...

- Share the preliminary findings of our study on the roles and priorities of rural administrators.
- Highlight the identified challenges and needs these administrators face, along with their successes.
- Describe some initial implications for school administrators and staff in rural school communities to enhance both in-school and post-school employment outcomes for students with disabilities.
- Share some transition resources with focus on rural communities

# We encourage you to...

- Ask questions throughout 
- Share your perspectives and experiences 
- Identify ways in which these findings may inform your own practice. 

# Rationale




# Career Development and Transition

- School districts are tasked with preparing **all students** for the workplace (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).
- IDEA (2004) requires schools to provide students with disabilities with a coordinated set of **transition services** that facilitate progression toward post-secondary goals, including in employment.
- **Rural school communities** can offer unique strengths toward providing students with rich career development and transition experiences that equip them to meet their goals.

# Career Development in Rural Schools

- Despite rural cultural wealth, **longstanding inequities** have persisted for students with disabilities living in these spaces.
- In 2019, 74% of US working-age adults without disabilities were employed, compared to only **38% of those with any disability** and **18% of those with intellectual and developmental disabilities** (Winsor et al., 2022).
- These gaps are particularly pervasive among **38%** of students with disabilities who live in rural communities (Lipscomb et al., 2017).

# Career Development in Rural Schools

- Despite rural cultural wealth, **longstanding inequities** have persisted for students with disabilities living in these spaces.
  - This challenge calls for **innovative and uniquely rural, place-based** solutions.
  - There is **very little attention** to rural school communities in transition-related research and policy.
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# Roles of Rural School Administrators

- One way of addressing this gap is to **solicit the perspectives of rural administrators**, who can serve as critical arbiters of career development and transition services for students with disabilities. These individuals may include:
  - District administrators: superintendents, special education directors, career technical education directors, and other administrators
  - School administrators: principals, assistant principals, special education coordinators, and other administrators

# Research Questions

# Our Research Questions:

1. How do **administrators in rural districts facilitate career development** services for students with disabilities?
2. How do they **value** these roles among their competing priorities?
3. What factors are associated with **more extensive administrator involvement** in career development for students with disabilities?
4. How do rural administrators explain their **most pressing challenges and support needs** in facilitating career development for students with disabilities?

# Mixed Methods Study Design



# Participants



# Recruitment

## Outreach to organizations

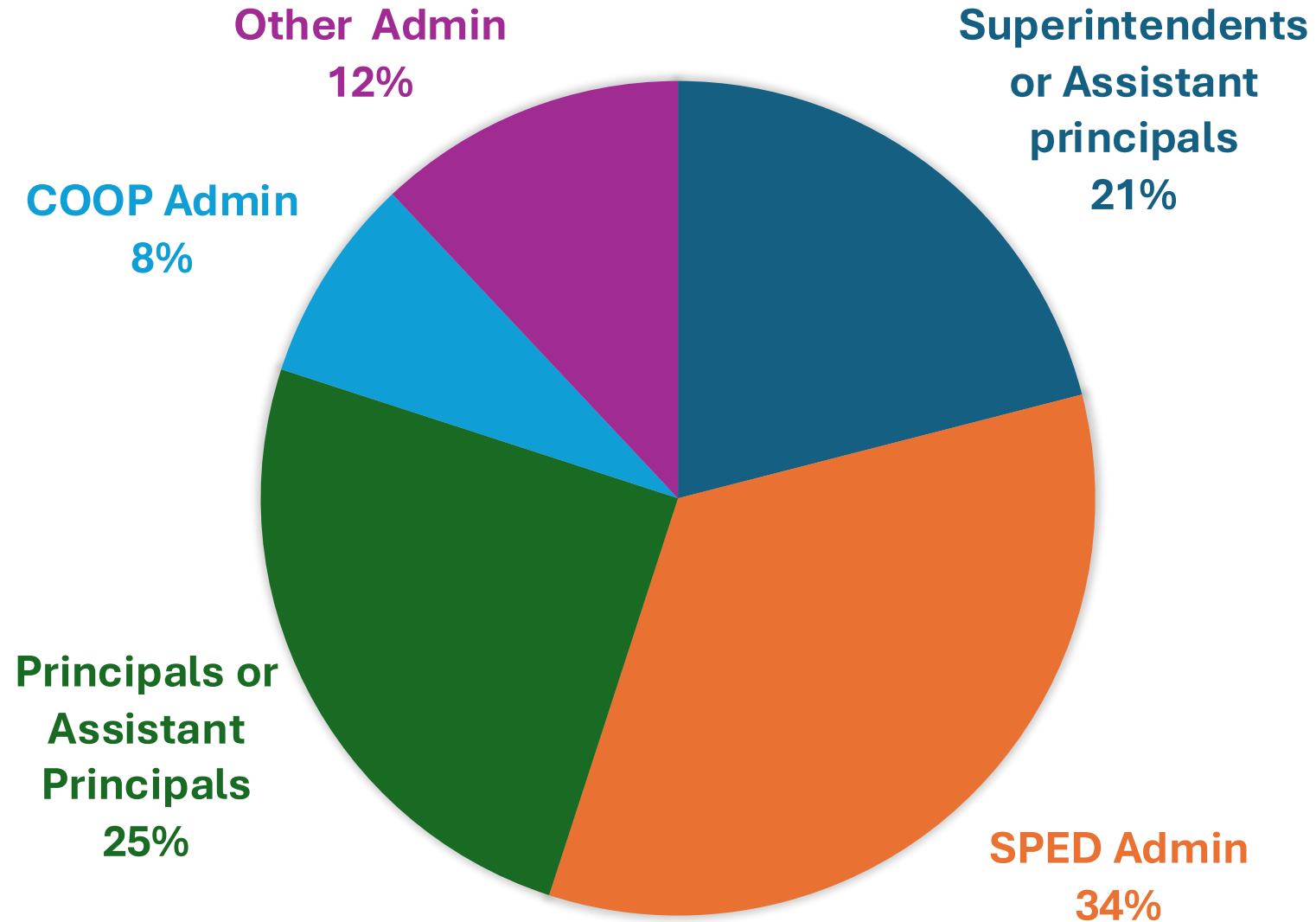
### Examples:

- Rural Schools Collaborative
- ISBE (rural schools)
- Illinois Alliance of Administrators of Special Education

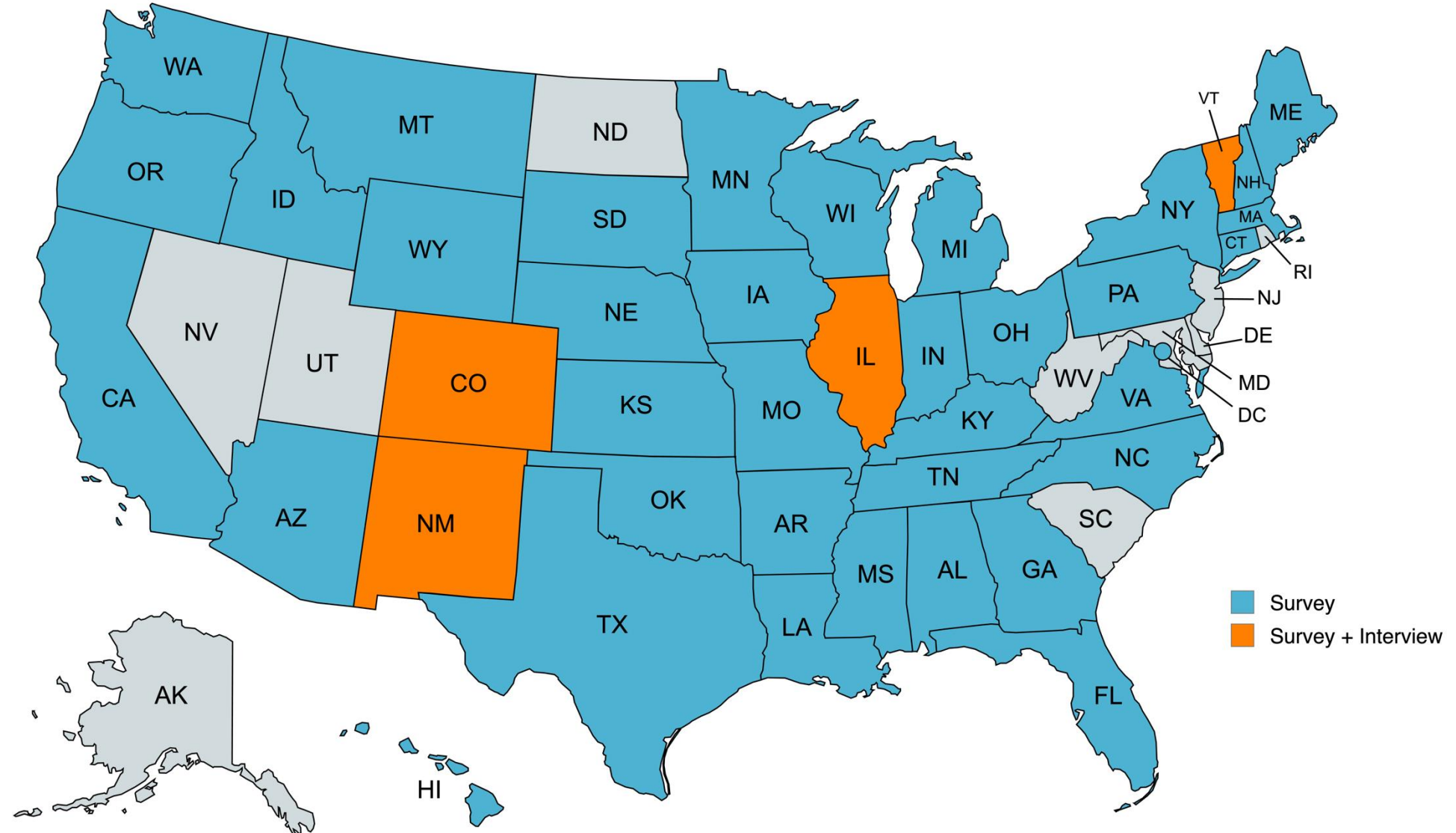
## Direct emails to district personnel.

We used a stratified sampling process for direct recruitment through the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) dataset of public schools in the United States.

# Who has participated? (Survey)

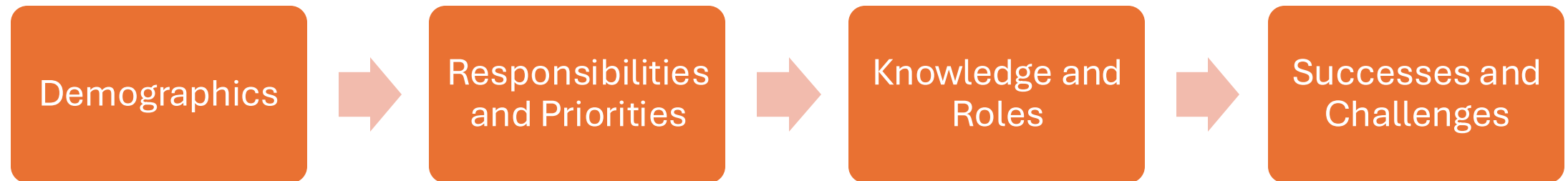


# Where are they from?



# Data Collection

# Survey



# Interviews:



- Informed by our survey data, we have conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted over Zoom (M=45minutes) with a sample of survey participants
- Two sections
  - Roles in career development
  - Challenges and support needs regarding these roles

# Data Analysis

# How are we analyzing our data?

- Survey data:
  - We have used basic descriptive statistics to understand patterns in our data thus far.
  - After closing data collection, we will use **inferential statistics** to identify factors associated with certain views, experiences, and types of involvement.
- Interview data:
  - We have informally begun to identify patterns in our data as we continue to conduct interviews.
  - We will use a **constant comparative method** to apply codes and identify themes in our data.
- Integration:
  - We will will **integrate quantitative and qualitative data** using a joint display of data to juxtapose findings and answer our research questions.



# (Preliminary) Findings

# Of those surveyed thus far, a majority tended to agree or strongly agree that...

Students with disabilities can benefit from **the same employment preparation** as students without disabilities

Students with disabilities **require different employment preparation** than students without disabilities

They have **knowledge, awareness, and partnerships** to facilitate career development for students with and without disabilities.

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**RQ1:** How do administrators in rural districts facilitate career development services for students with disabilities?

# Administrators were **most** involved in the areas of:

- Procuring curricula and materials related to career development
- Providing training to staff related to career development
- Partnering with disability agencies related to career development
- Facilitating the provision of work-based learning opportunities
- IEP-related responsibilities (paperwork, meetings) impacting career development (only for special education administrators)

# Administrators were **least** involved in the areas of:

- Providing training and support to families of students with disabilities related to career development
- Evaluation of career development services for students with disabilities
- IEP-related responsibilities (paperwork, meetings) impacting career development (only for non-special education administrators)

**RQ2:** How do they value these roles among their competing priorities?

In terms of the extent to which surveyed administrators felt their involvement in facilitating career development for students with disabilities **was appropriate for their position:**

- About 25% wished they were **more involved** in partnerships with disability agencies and community supports, especially those with non-special education backgrounds.
- About 20% wished they were **more involved** in providing training or support to families of students with disabilities.
- About 20% wished they were **more involved** in providing work-based learning and training for staff related to career development for students with disabilities.

**RQ3:** What factors are associated with more extensive administrator involvement in career development for students with disabilities?



# Thus, far we have noticed . . .

- Those with **backgrounds in special education** tended to more heavily prioritize roles related to facilitating career development for students with disabilities more than those with different backgrounds.
- Participants have cited living in the rural communities in which they work and/or intentional connections with staff who do to facilitate more extensive involvement.

\*Upon completing data collection, our planned inferential statistics will further address this question.

**RQ4:** How do rural administrators explain their most pressing challenges and support needs in facilitating career development for students with disabilities?

## Challenges & Needs

Across surveys, the majority of administrators identified the following barriers to facilitating services that prepare students with disabilities for employment:

- Limited time
- Lack of funding or resources
- Not enough staffing

## Challenges & Needs

Administrators most frequently emphasized that **they wished for** the following resources and supports for preparing students with disabilities for employment:

- Expanded opportunities for students
- Funding for work-based learning experiences
- Supports for inclusive career technical education
- Locally focused professional development
- Increased partnerships with local employers and Vocational Rehabilitation
- Connection with other rural districts

## Success & Resources

Administrators reported that they **currently accessed and utilized training and resources** for facilitating career development for students with disabilities, including:

- Professional organizations
- From state leaders
- From other administrators
- Others:
  - Collaboration with disability agencies
  - Local/regional professional development
  - Online resources
  - Special education cooperative training and support
  - Supports for work-based learning experiences

# (Preliminary) Implications

# Implications for Policy and Practice

So far, our findings suggest that:

- School and district administrators in rural schools play **a wide variety of roles** in facilitating career development for students with disabilities, including direct roles for students and indirect roles to support staff who serve students
- The allocation of roles and responsibilities is **different across every rural district**, but many administrators rely on and trust their staff in this work

# Implications for Policy and Practice

So far, our findings suggest that:

- Rural administrators cite **supports from other rural schools** to be crucial, whether that be through structured entities (e.g., special education cooperatives, regional boards of education, state leadership supports) or informal connections they have forged themselves
- Rural administrators yearn further opportunities to learn from one another



# Implications for Research

So far, our findings suggest that further research is needed for:

- Understanding how rural administrators can connect with and learn from one another (as well as how state and national systems can facilitate such)
- How administrators can leverage rural cultural wealth toward career development and transition for students with disabilities

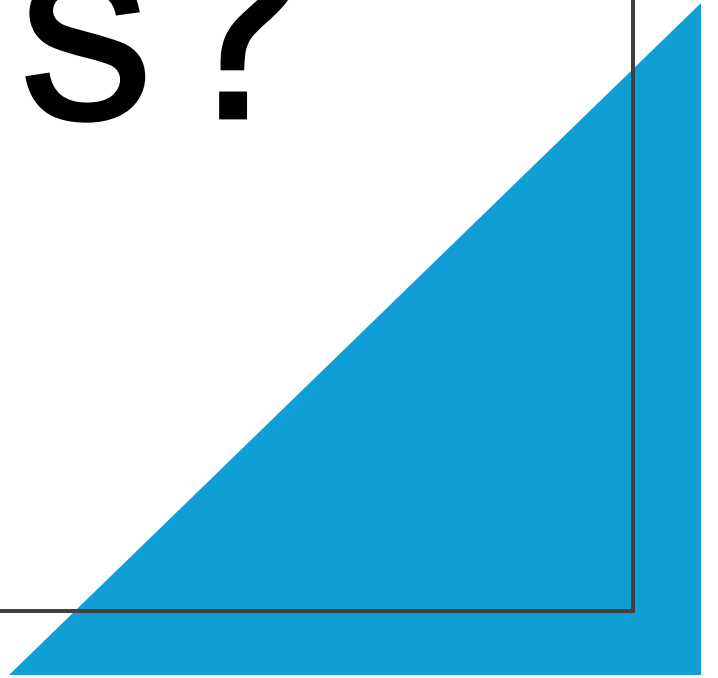
# Resources

Scan here or email us  
for some rural-focused  
resources that may  
support you in career  
development and  
transition:





# Questions?



# We are still recruiting! Interested or know someone who might be?



- Printed flyers available as well!

# Contact Us!

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