



July 21, 2026

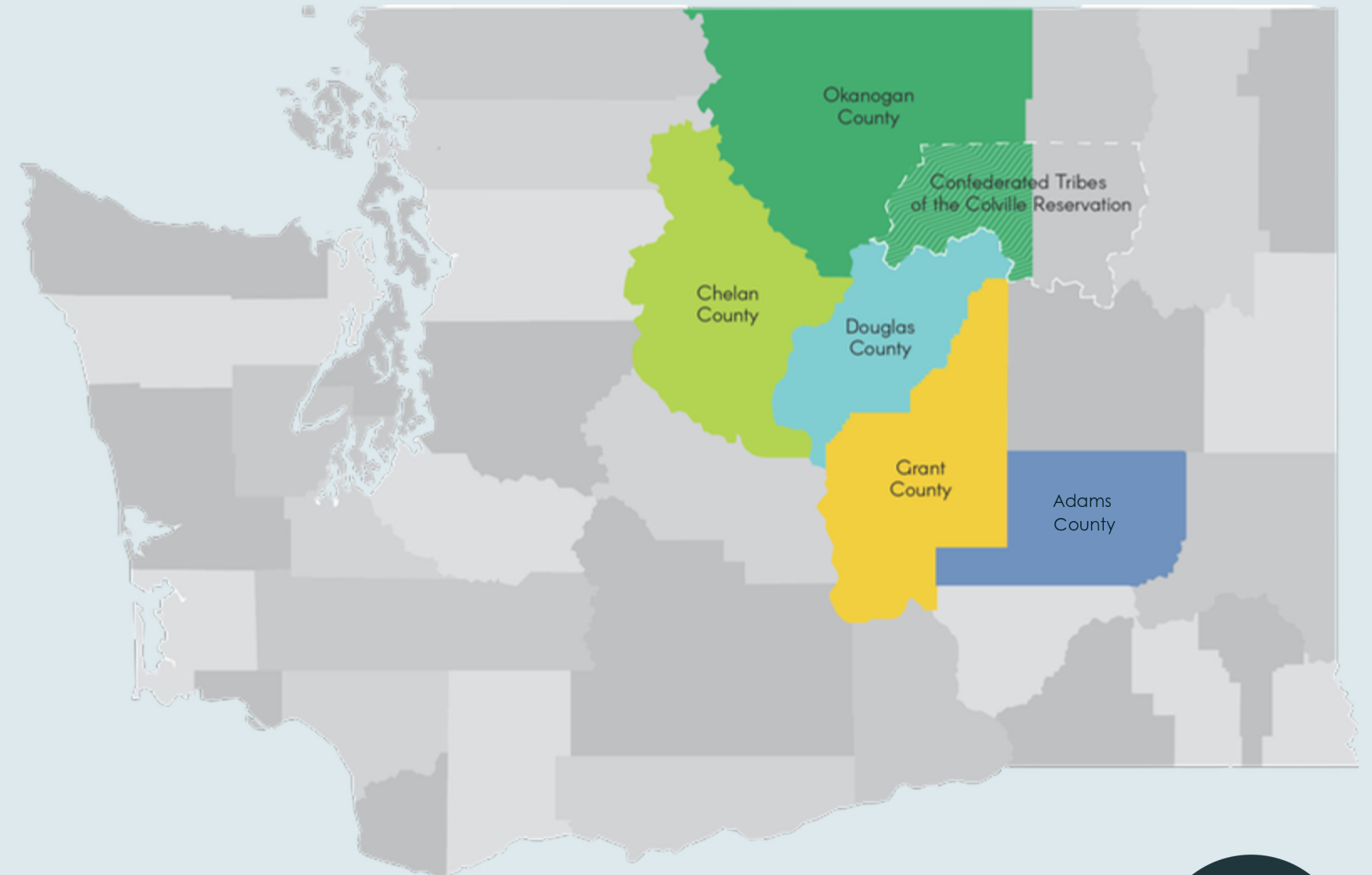
# RETHINKING REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR A CHANGING ECONOMY

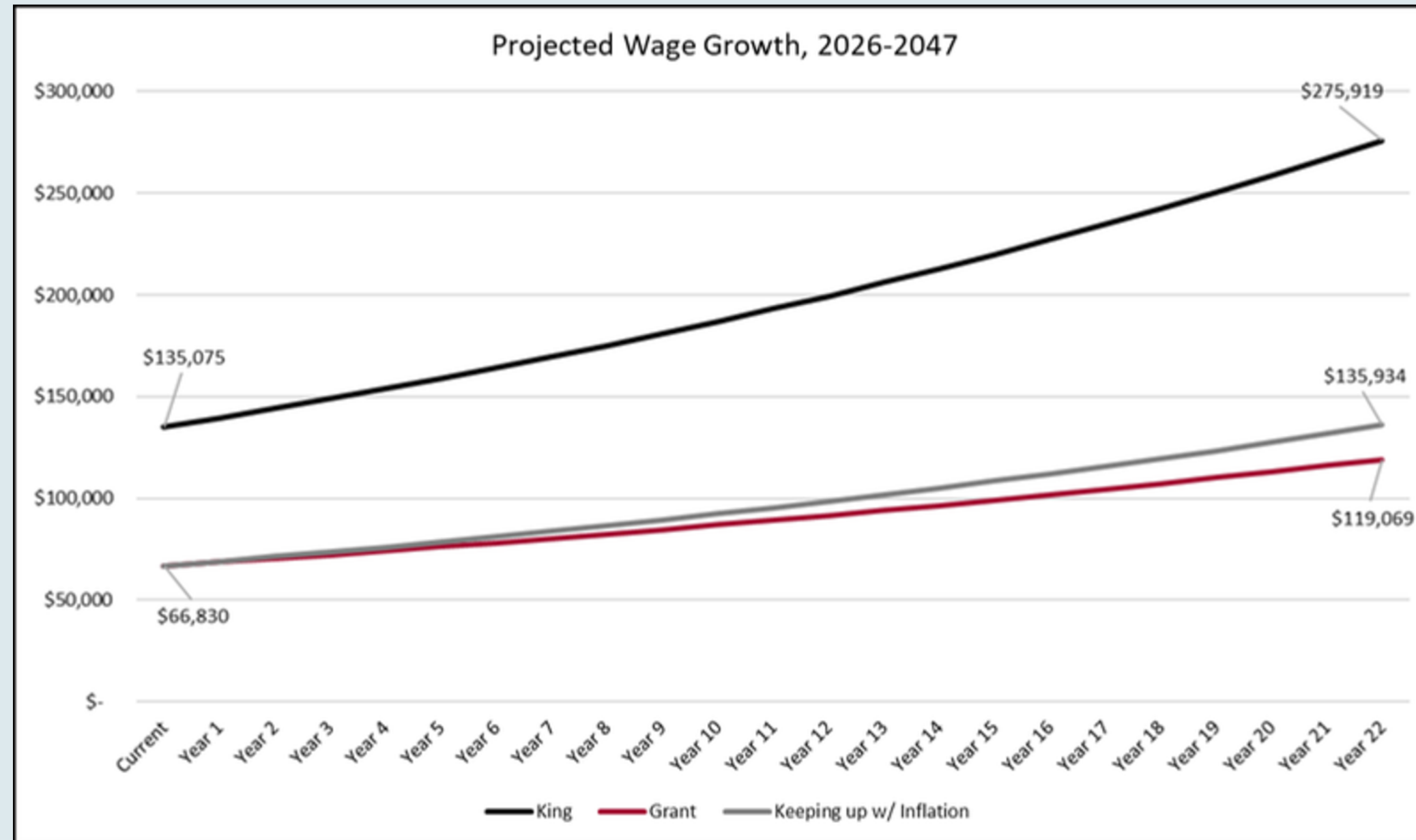
*Dr. Sue Kane, CEO  
NCW Tech Alliance*





**Washington's  
future depends  
on the strength  
of all its  
regions.**





Living Wage, 2025 \$82,664

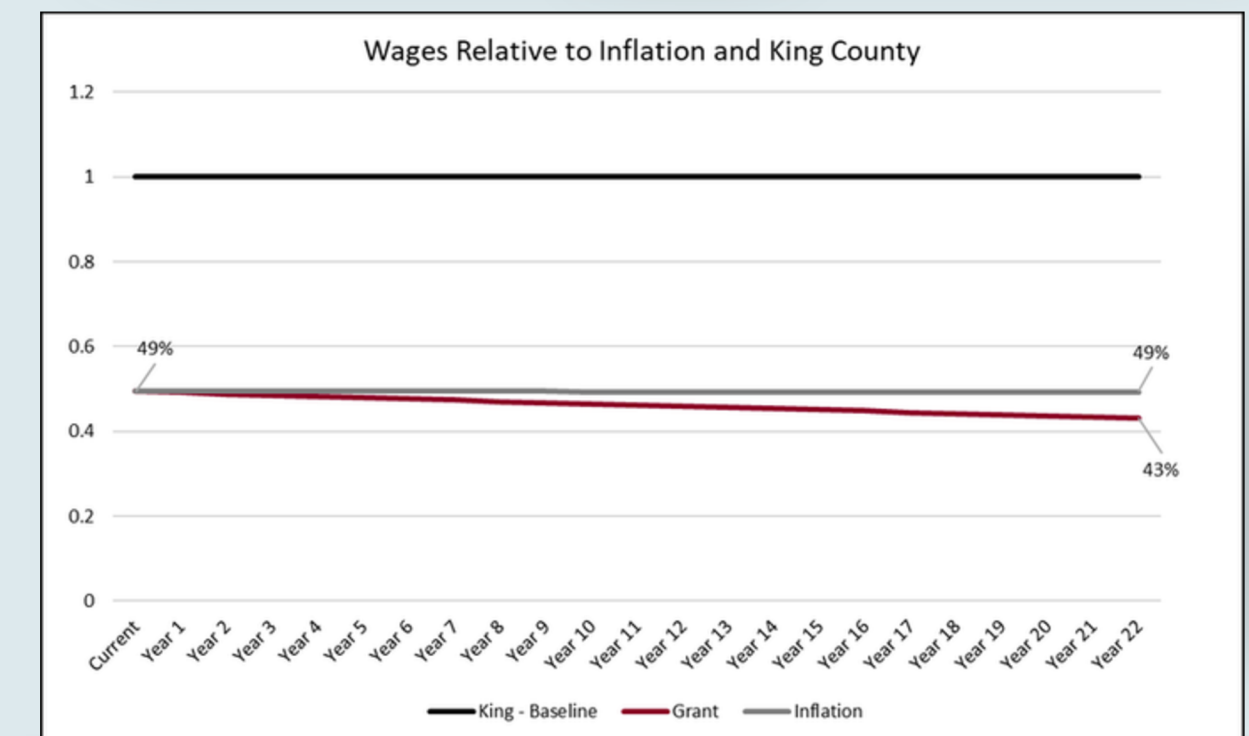
Median Annual Wage\* \$65,208

Annual Wage Growth, 2013 – 2023\* 1.75%

\*Most recent WSESD Wage Data, 2023

## The Rural Wage Gap

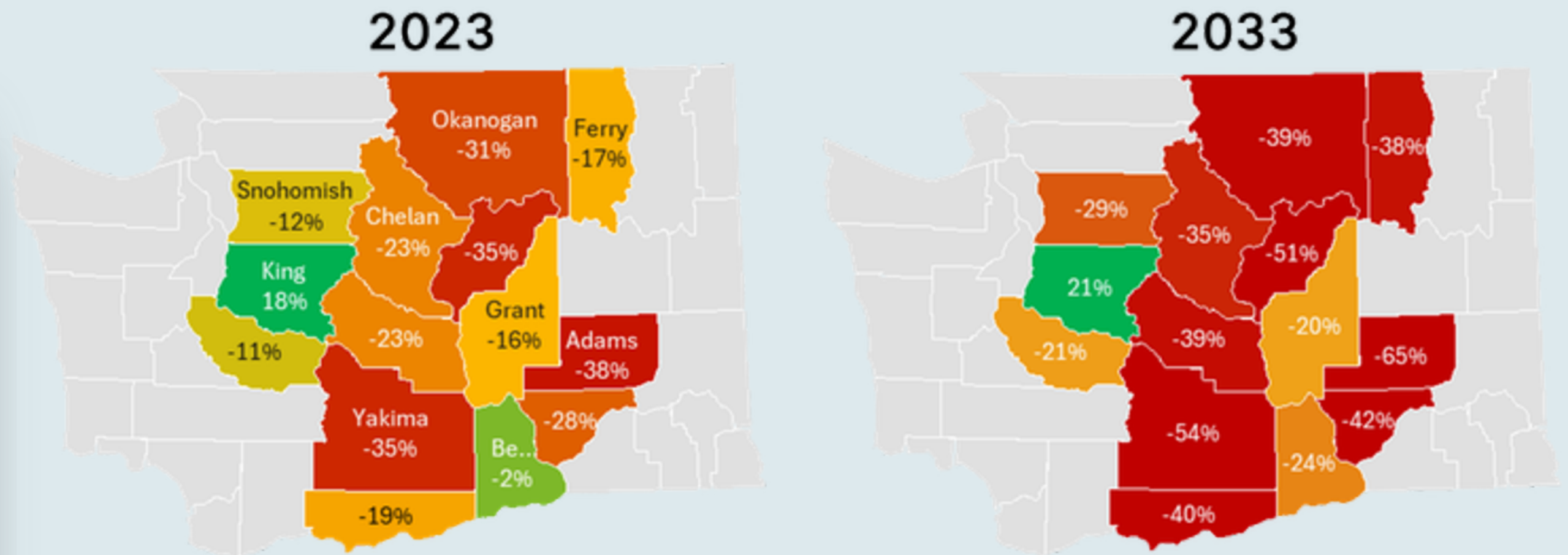
- Grant County Example
- Purchasing power loss by age 22: 12%
- Average wage projected to fall from \$32/hr → \$28/hr (inflation-adjusted)
- Cost of one year of inaction: \$141,489 lifetime earnings lost per child



## Structural pressures are reshaping Washington's economic Landscape

- Wage gaps widening
- Inflation regionalizing
- Talent flight accelerating
- Industry modernization pressures rising
- Communities feel the strain

## Living Wage to Individual Median Wage Gap



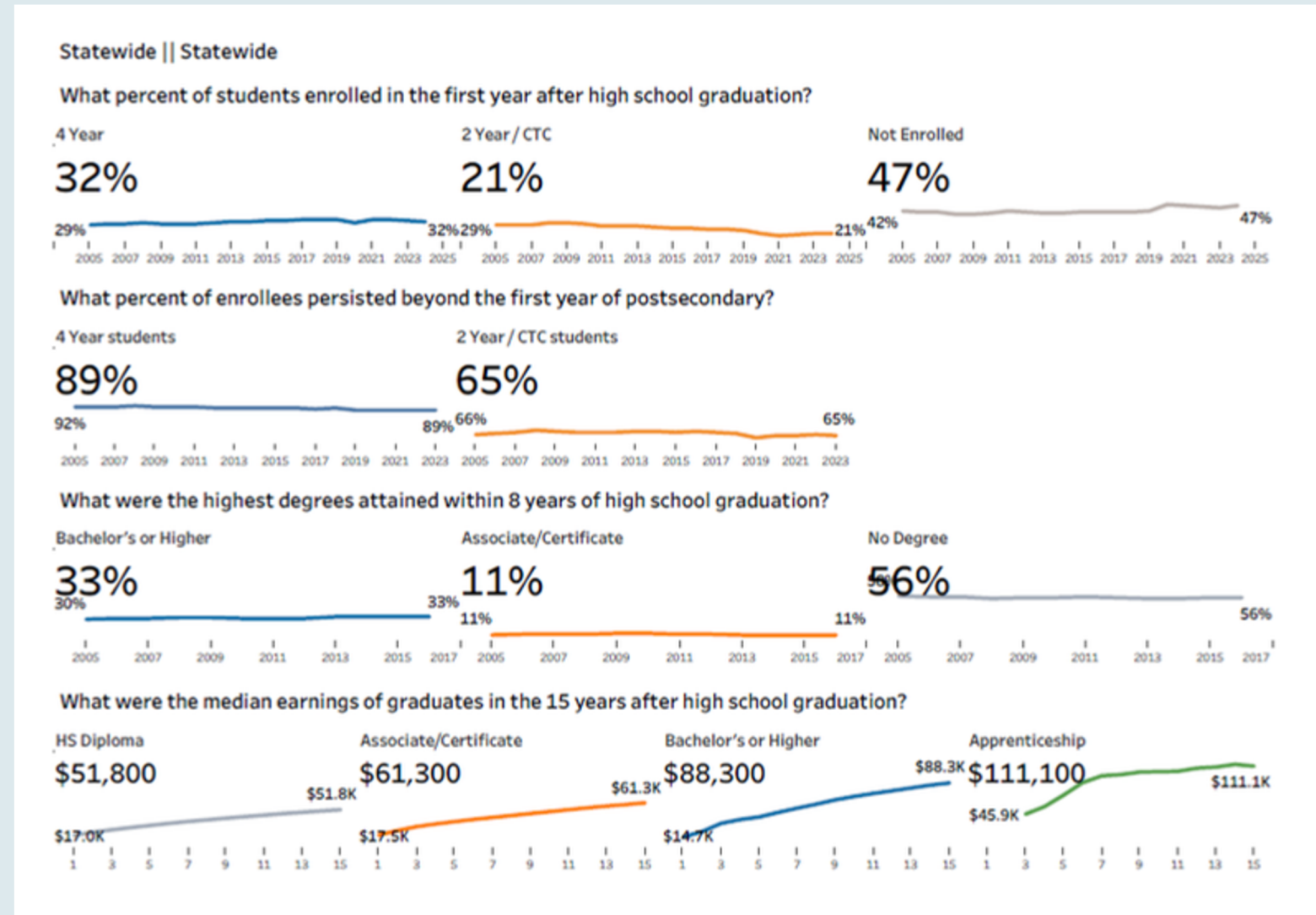
Data Sources:

- WA State Employment Security Department:  
<https://esd.wa.gov/jobs-and-training/labor-market-information/employment-and-wages/median-and-hourly-wages>
- LED (Local Employment Dynamics) report from the US Census Bureau and State Databases
- MIT Living Wage calculator  
<https://livingwage.mit.edu/>



## Postsecondary Outcomes

About 70–75% of Washington’s family-sustaining, high-demand jobs require a postsecondary credential.



Statewide

### 4-Year Enrollment

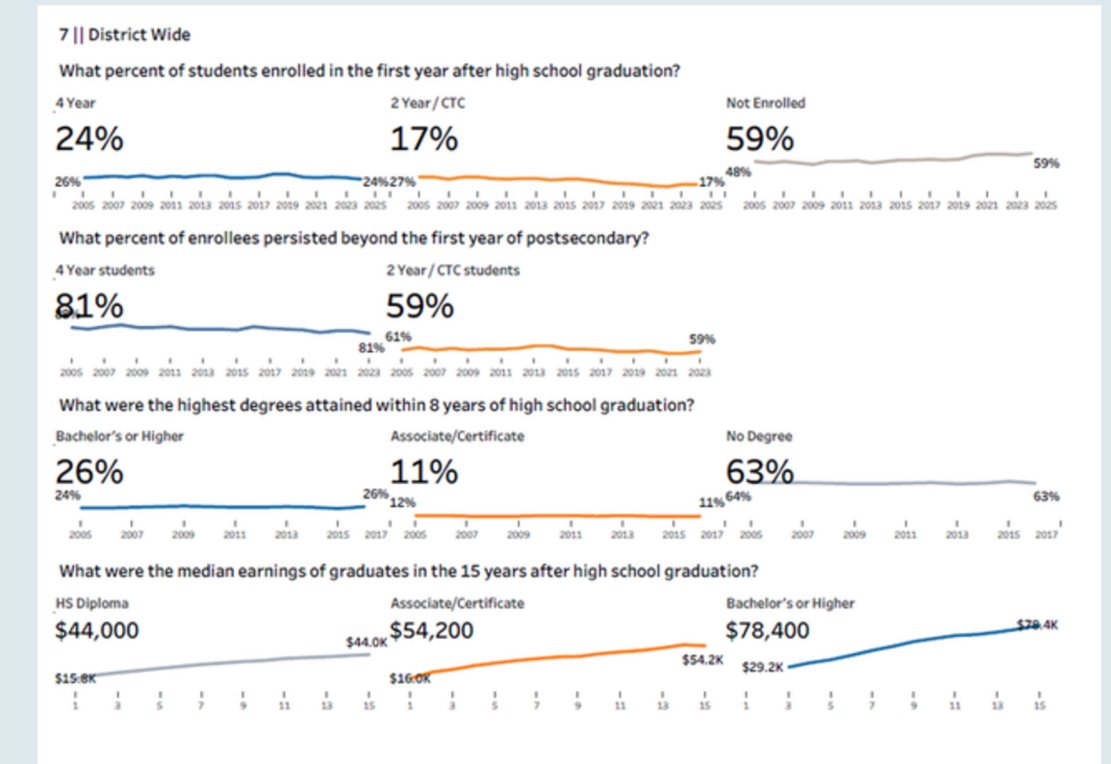
- Statewide: 32%
- Rural LD7: 24%
- Seattle LD34: 41%

### Bachelor's Attainment (8 years)

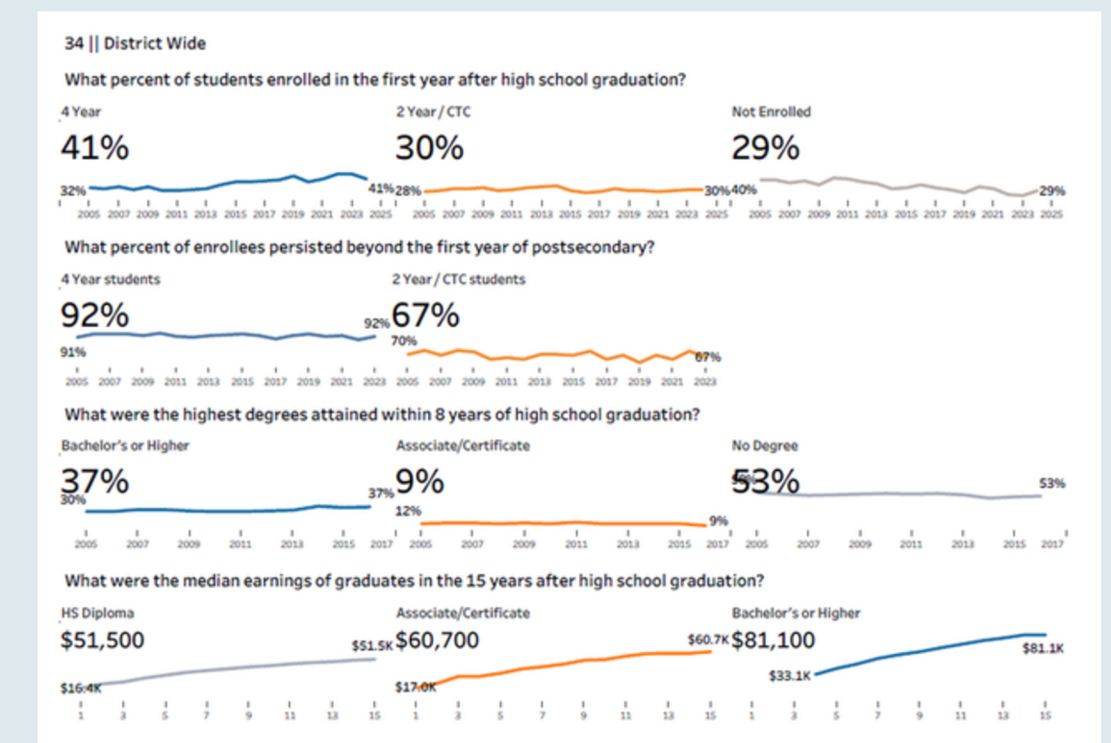
- Statewide: 33%
- Rural LD7: 26%
- Seattle LD34: 37%

### Median Earnings (15 years)

- Statewide: \$52K–\$88K
- Rural LD7: \$44K–\$78K
- Seattle LD34: \$51K–\$81K



Rural Region (LD7)



Seattle Region (LD34)

## The Core Challenge

Rural regions lack enough family-sustaining industry



**COMPETITIVE WAGES**



**TRANSFERABLE SKILLS**



**LOCAL REINVESTMENT**



**UPWARD MOBILITY  
& TALENT RETENTION**



## To maintain economic stability...

- 250 high-skill jobs per year
- \$100,000 average wage
- 10 consecutive years = **2,500 jobs just to keep pace with inflation**

## Dynamic Agency



**Extractive**

Characteristics:

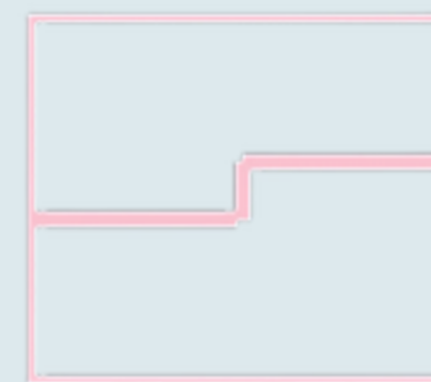
- Profit flows leave the region
- Limited local reinvestment
- No improvement in local skill base or infrastructure



**Retentive**

Characteristics:

- Primarily serve local markets
- Often small, independently owned
- May provide modest job creation but limited wage growth



**Additive**

Characteristics:

- Expand the economic base
- May rely on relatively low-wage or low-skill labor
- Provide positive but modest contributions to long-term prosperity



**Accelerative**

Characteristics:

- Improve workforce skills and technology sophistication
- Generate or attract complementary firms
- Foster R&D and knowledge spillovers



**Multiplicative**

Characteristics:

- Attracts, Starts, Nurtures primarily accelerative enterprises
- Tech Transfer

Business Models are Rigid  
Extractive/Commoditized  
activities  
Limited Positive Externalities

## Community Dynamic Agency

Enterprises build  
transferable skills  
Expand future options  
for community

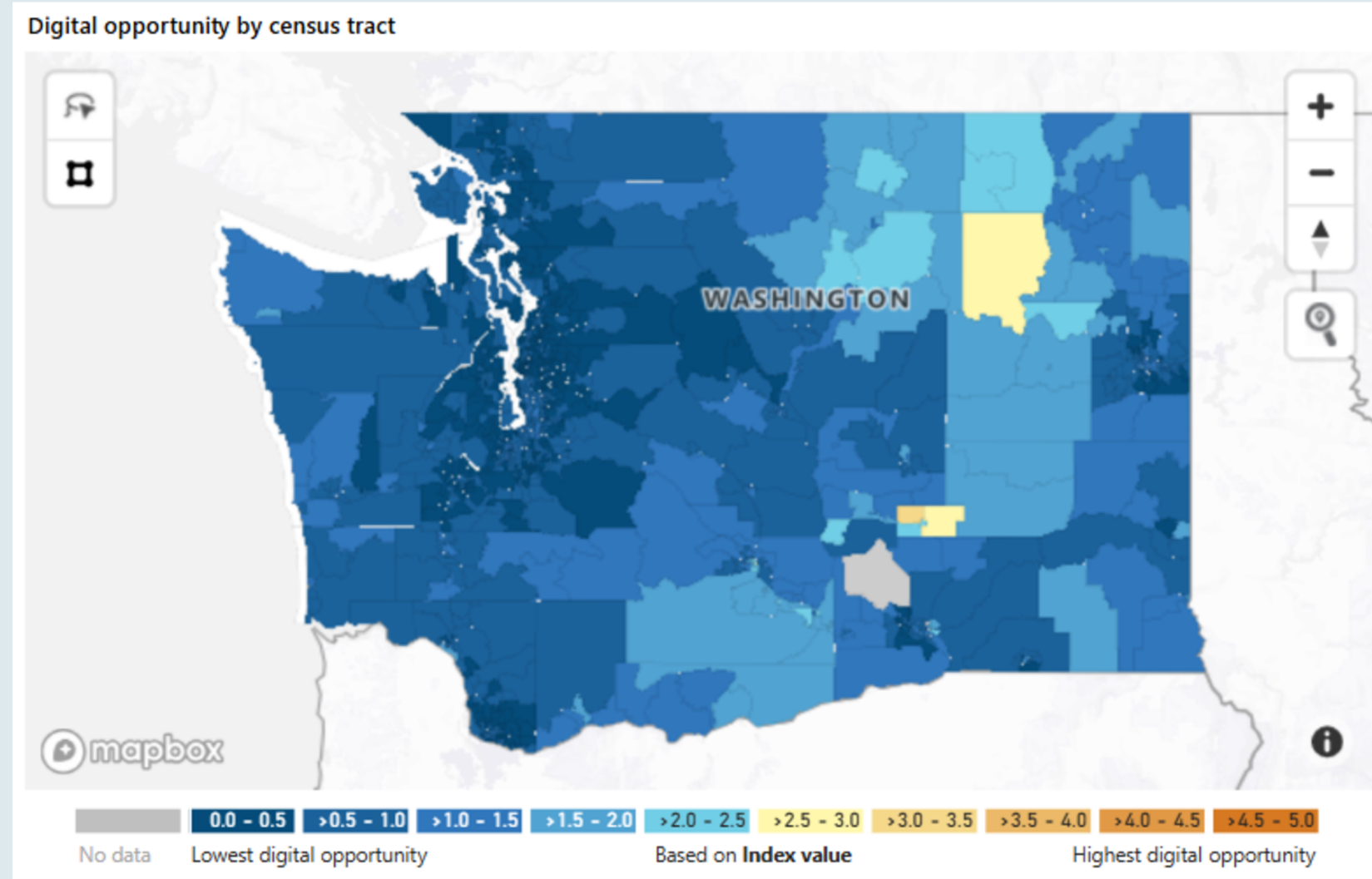


**Read the White Paper**

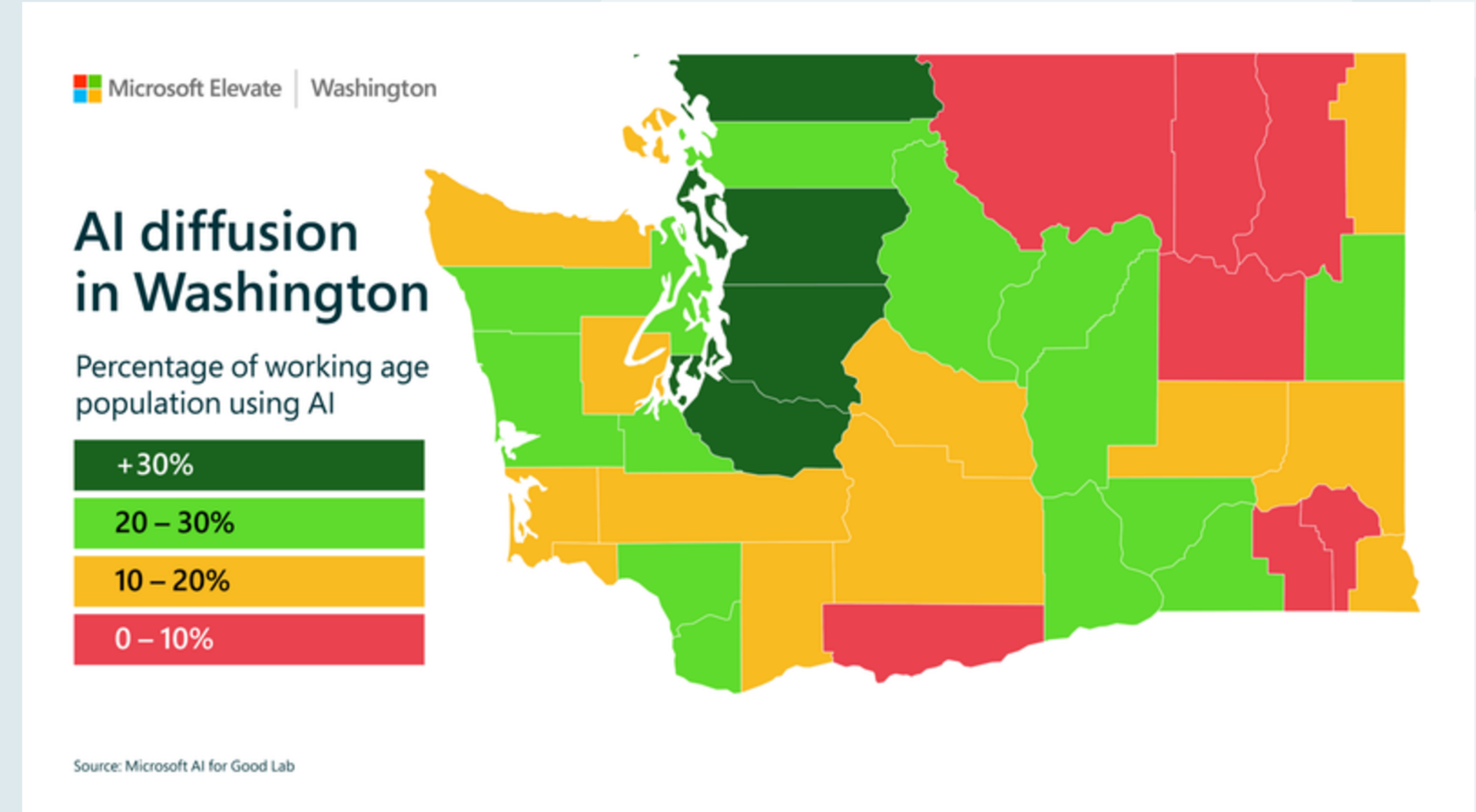
<https://ncwtech.info/dynamic-agency-CWU>

## Systems Problems, Not Program Problems

Rural regions face interconnected conditions



Digital Access Barriers



AI Literacy & Diffusion





A 501(c)3 non-profit organization with a mission to **bring people and technology together** through skilling and workforce development, technology adoption, and entrepreneurship in North Central Washington.

We are passionate about digital transformation and access in rural Washington so people can live and work in the communities they love. We offer high-quality programs that inspire, empower, and connect our community.

---

[www.ncwtech.org](http://www.ncwtech.org)



**Sue Kane, PhD**  
CEO



**Sarah Sanford**  
Director of Operations



**Becca Freimuth**  
Director of Entrepreneurship



**David Mabee**  
Director of Marketing



**David Estrada**  
STEM Program Manager



**Rosie Martin**  
ILumina Program Lead



**Juan Servin**  
Technology Instructor



**Jennifer Walker**  
Technology Programs Manager



## Innovation Infrastructure

People

Skills

Technology

Connections



## We Build Regional Innovation Capabilities

### Technology Access

Device distribution, connectivity support, digital navigation, and community learning

### Digital Skills & AI Literacy

Workshops, employer-aligned training, educator capacity building and adult-learning pathways.

### Strategic Partnerships

Sector-aligned pathways credential attainment and employer partnerships

### Entrepreneurship and Small Business Support

Digital tools, technical assistance, and innovation ecosystem building.

### Talent & Workforce Development

AI Youth Corps, FREIT Pathway Take Flight STEM Series, and Apple STEM Network

### Cross-Sector Strategic Alignment

Use a systems change approach to coordinate policies, resource flows, and mental models via cross-sector collaboration.

## Opening Pathways



730 Participants  
in AI Skilling



1,800+ financial  
aid applications  
supported



1,400+ K-5 students &  
families reached at  
STEM Nights

## Expanding Access



220+  
computers  
distributed



100+ digital  
literacy  
graduates



125 Digital  
Navigators  
trained

## Regional Momentum



350+ Flywheel  
Investment  
Conference  
attendees



37 microgrants &  
\$100k invested in  
community-led digital  
access projects



55 organizations &  
municipalities  
made digital access  
commitments

**13,948 Miles Traveled**

Meeting communities where they are

**22,000+ individuals reached**

Connected to skills, access, and opportunity



## 2025 Digital Inclusion Proclamations



*In 2025, people across North Central Washington gained access, developed skills, and took meaningful steps toward education, careers, and economic opportunity.*

2025  
Annual  
Report





## Our Ecosystem Approach

### Ports & EDOs



### School Districts & Colleges



### Tribes & Municipalities



### Industry & Business



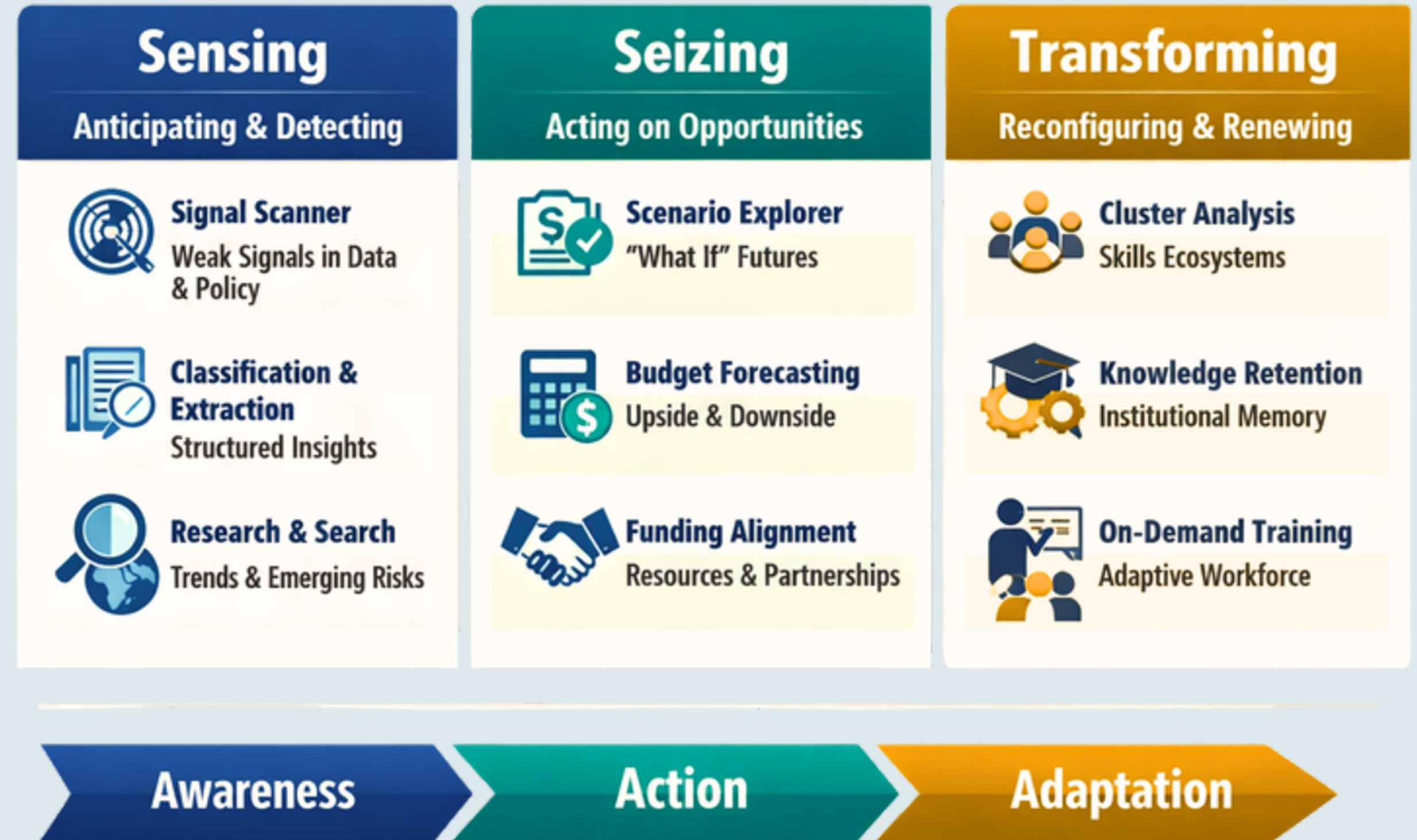
### Philanthropy & Investors



### Community Organizations



## Dynamic Capabilities



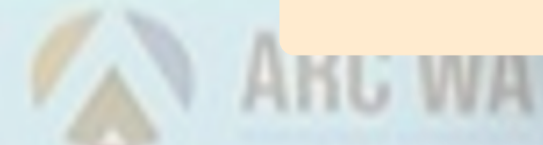
Read the White Paper

<https://ncwtech.info/dynamic-capabilitiesCWU>



## A MOMENT OF INNOVATION

Regional Innovation Roundtable  
September 24, 2025



### **We help our counties detect emerging opportunities**

- Industry modernization
- AI adoption
- Workforce shifts
- Funding windows
- Rural innovation opportunities

**Sense: Seeing What's Coming**





**Seizing Mechanism: Workforce Pathways**

**Preparing residents for  
high-skill, high-wage jobs**

- AI Youth Corps
- CSI certificates
- Educator training
- K-12 → college → industry alignment





## **Expanding who gets to participate in innovation**

- Latino Accelerator
- Digital Skills for Entrepreneurs
- Student entrepreneurship programs

**Seizing Mechanism: Entrepreneurship Supports**



## Helping existing industries stay competitive

- Technology training and summits
- AI readiness pilots
- Digital access initiatives
- Sector-specific modernization

 **Microsoft**

Digital Transformation

Digital Skills

Career Pathways

Rural Broadband

Nonprofit Support

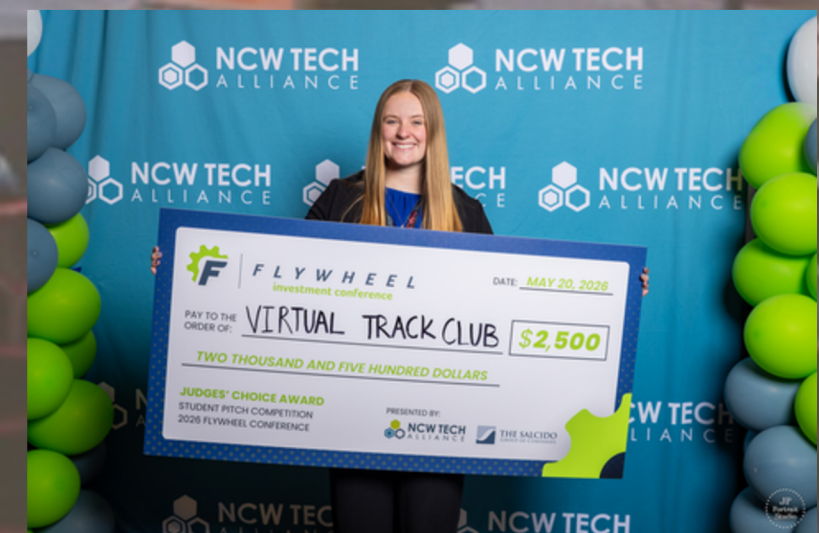
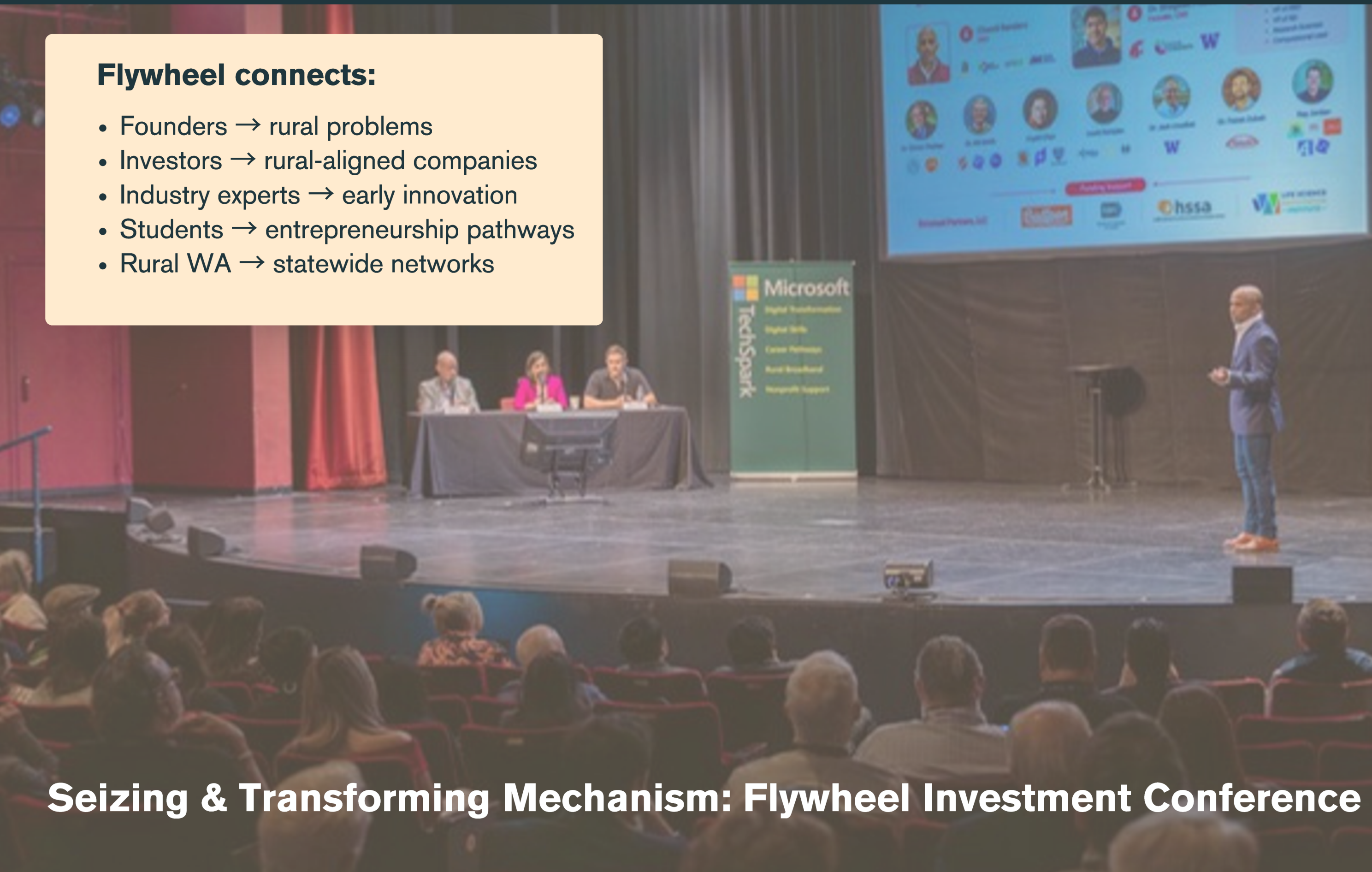
  
**THRIVING  
TOGETHER**  
NORTH CENTRAL WASHINGTON

## Seizing Mechanism: Industry Modernization



## Flywheel connects:

- Founders → rural problems
- Investors → rural-aligned companies
- Industry experts → early innovation
- Students → entrepreneurship pathways
- Rural WA → statewide networks



**Seizing & Transforming Mechanism: Flywheel Investment Conference**



**The Flywheel Investment Conference is a signature program of NCW Tech Alliance.**

Flywheel exists to build relationships, cultivate investment, and share ideas that drive forward momentum for entrepreneurs, engage community leadership, and strengthen NCW's role in Washington's innovation economy.

- » Flywheel Angel Network
- » Flywheel Investment Conference
- » Latino Founder Day



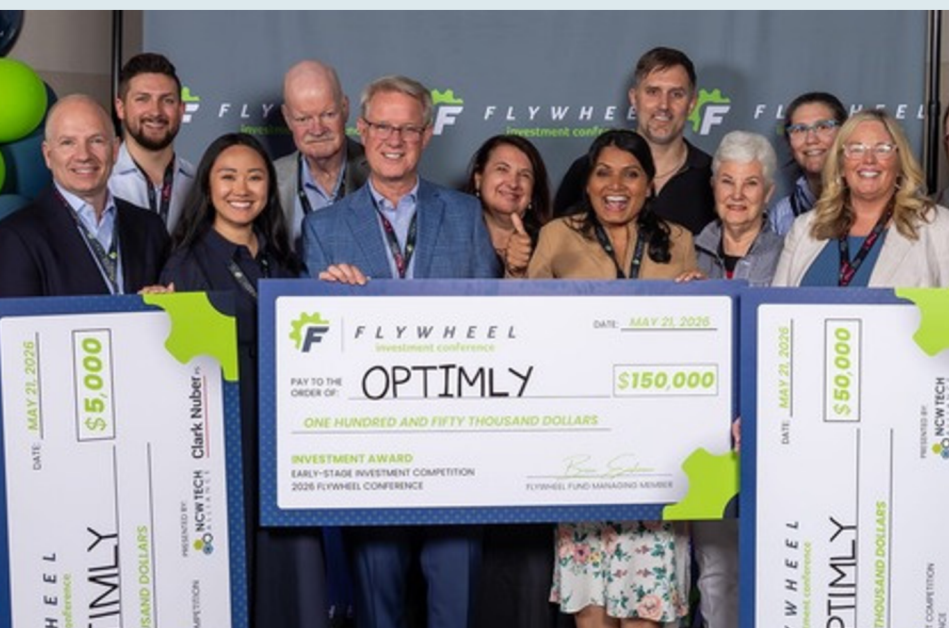




**Rooted in North Central Washington. Connected Statewide.**

**Flywheel began in North Central Washington to ensure that innovation should be unbounded by geography, because good ideas happen anywhere.**

Each spring in Wenatchee, hundreds gather to share insights, fund companies, and strengthen the relationships. By bringing people, capital, and ideas together, Flywheel helps entrepreneurs grow, strengthens regional innovation, and positions North Central Washington as a leader in shaping Washington's economic future.



**9+  
years**  
*building  
connections*

**\$1.8  
million**  
*invested  
in startups*

**350+  
attendees**  
*annually from 100+  
organizations*

**97% of  
attendees**  
*of attendees make  
valuable connections*



## Flywheel Angel Network Thesis



Build rural innovation by bringing founders, investors, industry leaders, and students together.



Develop rural investors, set the stage for new and experienced investors to back Washington companies.



Accelerate company growth by connecting entrepreneurs to networks, expertise, and early-stage support.



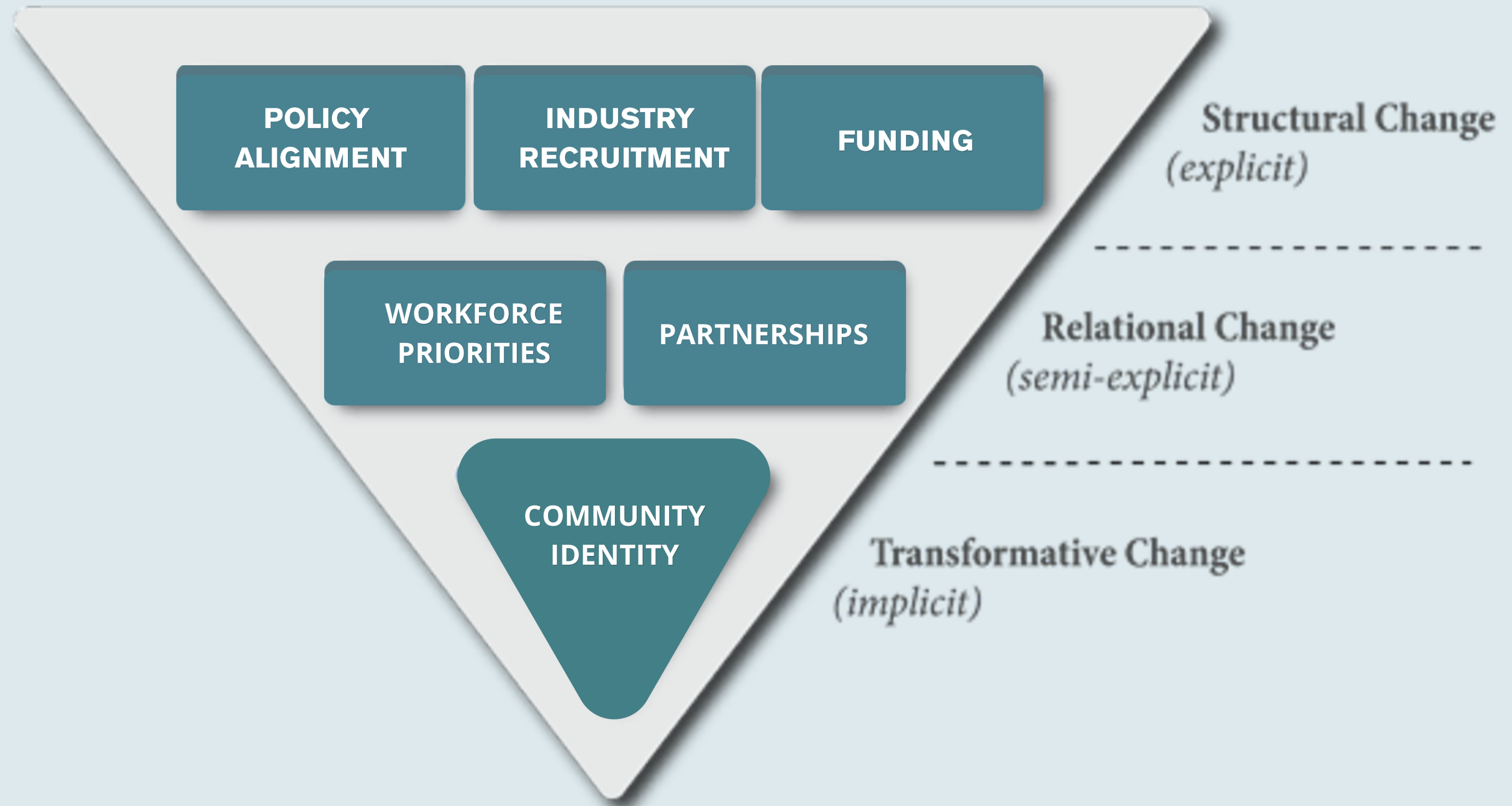
Strengthen regional competitiveness by positioning rural WA as a place where high-growth companies can thrive.



Foster collaboration and community by creating a fun, energizing atmosphere that supports early-stage companies.



## Transform: Reconfiguring Systems





## How Counties Can Accelerate Transformation



Adopt systems-change lenses



Align with regional efforts



Invest in digital access & AI readiness



Co-design workforce pathways



Support entrepreneurship ecosystems



Champion family-sustaining industry



## The future we are building is a connected, capable, innovative Washington



People shape  
their own futures



Young people can  
chose to stay,  
grow, and lead



Industries invest in  
local talent



Innovation by  
design



Counties move  
together





**Questions?**





 509-661-9000

 ncwtech.org

 info@ncwtech.org

 3 N. Worthen St. Ste. 202  
Wenatchee, WA 98801

1000 Bolling St NE, Room 1002  
Moses Lake, WA 98837

Today's  
Slides



2025  
Annual Report







**NCW TECH**  
ALLIANCE



