



TENNESSEE  
VALLEY  
AUTHORITY



## TVA Topic Brief

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# Workforce Development

as a Tool to Build More  
Connected Communities



### What are Connected Communities?

Connected Communities are towns, main streets, neighborhoods and cities that use data and technology-driven innovations to offer new and improved services to people and businesses. TVA’s Connected Communities initiative offers resources and connects communities with funding opportunities to help them leverage technology- and data-driven solutions to improve residents’ lives, deliver environmental benefits and scale economic opportunities.

For more information on Connected Communities, please visit [tva.com/connectedcommunities](https://tva.com/connectedcommunities) or email: [connectedcommunities@tva.gov](mailto:connectedcommunities@tva.gov)

## Purpose and Background

TVA set out to assess the preparedness of communities in TVA’s service region to pursue Connected Communities-related projects – those that enhance broadband and digital literacy, economic empowerment, energy and environmental justice and community resilience. In the area of **economic empowerment**, the team looked at a variety of strategies communities are using to advance their local workforce to better serve a technology-driven future. The following pages contain highlights from this research.

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## Workforce Development

### What is workforce development, and why is it important to communities?

Rural, southern communities are faced with varying challenges including out-migration, aging population and declining economic development activities; the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges. To combat these increasing economic challenges, many communities have incorporated workforce development programs as an essential element in their economic development planning. Workforce development refers broadly to activities, policies and programs that aim to create, sustain and retain upskilling of residents to support current and future business success within a community.<sup>1</sup>

Workforce development programs can offer numerous benefits to communities as they seek to leverage technology and data-driven solutions in the form of increased human capital, lower unemployment rates and increased living wages for community residents. As communities look to attract small or large businesses, one of the key aspects in their pitch is the availability of human capital. Programs that provide training in high demand and high paying jobs can transform a community or provide it with the edge it needs to become or remain an attractive location for a potential employer.



<sup>1</sup> Helpful sources of information on workforce development include: U.S. Department of Labor, Workforce Development Solutions, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/employers/workforce-development-solutions>; Education Commission of the United States, <https://www.ecs.org/workforce-development-and-education-glossary/>



## Mississippi

Communities are attracting and retaining businesses with a skilled workforce.

Tupelo is leveraging data analytics and data visualization tools to provide key data to prospective companies considering locating in the municipality. The Community Development Foundation (CDF) of Tupelo/Lee County is one organization leading this initiative by linking talent with potential employers in emerging fields through various partnerships with colleges and universities, coordinating job fairs and using data analytic research.<sup>2</sup>

While CDF focuses on promoting highly skilled individuals, two other organizations - the Tupelo WIN Job Center and Christian Women’s Job Corps and Christian Men’s Job Corp - are focusing on assisting those re-entering the job market after serving prison sentences. Communities’ ability to incorporate former offenders in new, emerging fields offers a wide-ranging benefit to the community in the form of lower unemployment and underemployment rates. The Tupelo WIN Job Center offers clients the ability to learn new skills in solar and wind technology through on-the-job training programs for former adult and juvenile offenders.



**Communities' ability to incorporate former offenders in new, emerging fields offers a wide-ranging benefit to the community.**

<sup>2</sup> Community Development Foundation Tupelo / Lee County Mississippi, <https://www.cdfms.org/>

## Alabama

Rural communities are emphasizing upskilling younger workforce participants.

Decatur placed an emphasis on developing the community’s future workforce through collaborative partnerships with the local school districts and community colleges. The Quality Education Committee is one resource the city uses to train high school students in technical skills. One example of the committee’s work is the Summer Welding and Electrical Technology camp for girls in 9th-12th grade where participants are given hands-on experience in welding and electricity for free. This program promotes a diverse and talented workforce while equipping young workers with the skills necessary to compete in rapidly evolving sectors.

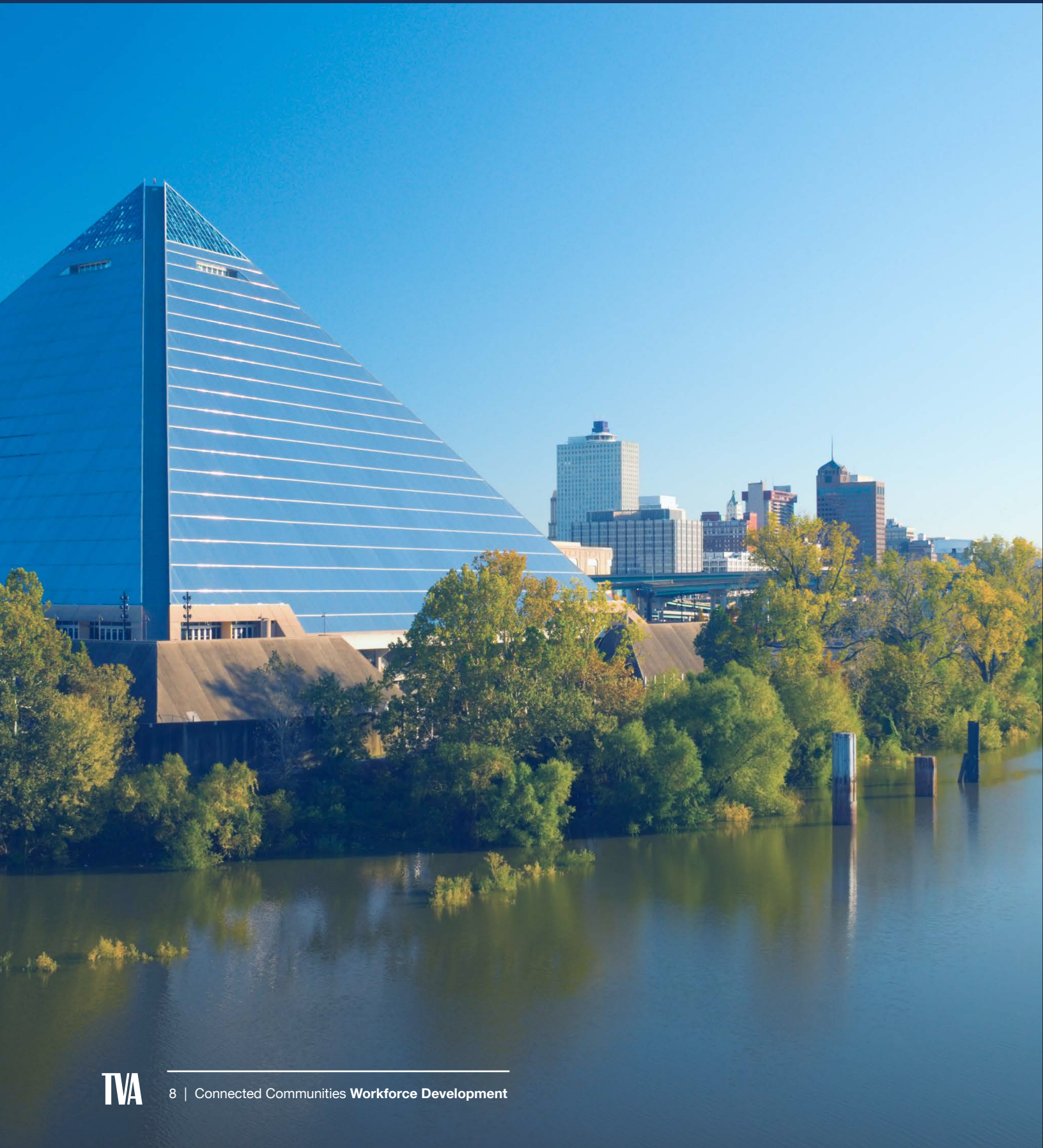


**9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders**

receive hands-on experience for free through the Summer Welding and Electrical Technology camp for girls.

### COMBATING OUT-MIGRATION

The average age of residents tends to be higher in rural communities due in part to the out-migration of younger residents seeking more lucrative job opportunities in cities. Rural communities can address this challenge by focusing on upskilling younger residents so the community will be more attractive to prospective employers seeking to either hire remote workers or considering launching a rural location.



## Tennessee

Communities are using federal funding to reimagine workforce development programs.

Memphis has actively applied for grants to cover costs associated with workforce development programs. Utilizing federal dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Good Jobs Challenge, Memphis’ workforce development programs saw a \$30 million boost to help train residents for employment.

- Persevere is an information technology training program that received a \$15 million grant to provide on-the-job training in the technology sector. Once students complete the program, they are hired by partners.
- Workforce Mid-South is an accelerated skills training program that received \$22 million to train students in Arkansas, Mississippi and Tennessee for multiple professional fields.

Memphis’ success in obtaining these funds highlights the city’s ability to procure the resources and labor necessary to pursue federal funding. Unfortunately, multiple municipalities throughout the TVA region may not have the resources available to obtain the staff and/or monetary assistance to create proposals and compete for funds. Memphis is an excellent example of what the municipalities served by TVA could potentially achieve.

  
**\$30M**

**in federal funding**

was awarded to Memphis' workforce development programs through the ARPA Good Jobs Challenge.



## Key Takeaways

Workforce development is a crucial component in helping rural and urban communities create a strong and vibrant 21st century workforce. Building a vibrant workforce takes commitment and support at the federal, state and local levels in the form of policies, funding mechanisms and effective programs. Communities can play an active role in improving their human capital and making their workforce more attractive to prospective employers. As rural communities continue to experience challenges with declining and aging populations, the ability to train current and future generations for the workforce will become increasingly important. The ability to combine funding with data analytics to identify and address workforce shortcomings will help communities increase human capital, provide more residents with access to living wages and improve overall community quality of life.



**Business, academic, non-profit and public sector stakeholders can play an important role in the success of workforce development efforts.**

See the Connected Communities Workforce Development implementation guide [here](#).



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[tva.com/energy/technology-innovation/connected-communities](https://tva.com/energy/technology-innovation/connected-communities)

