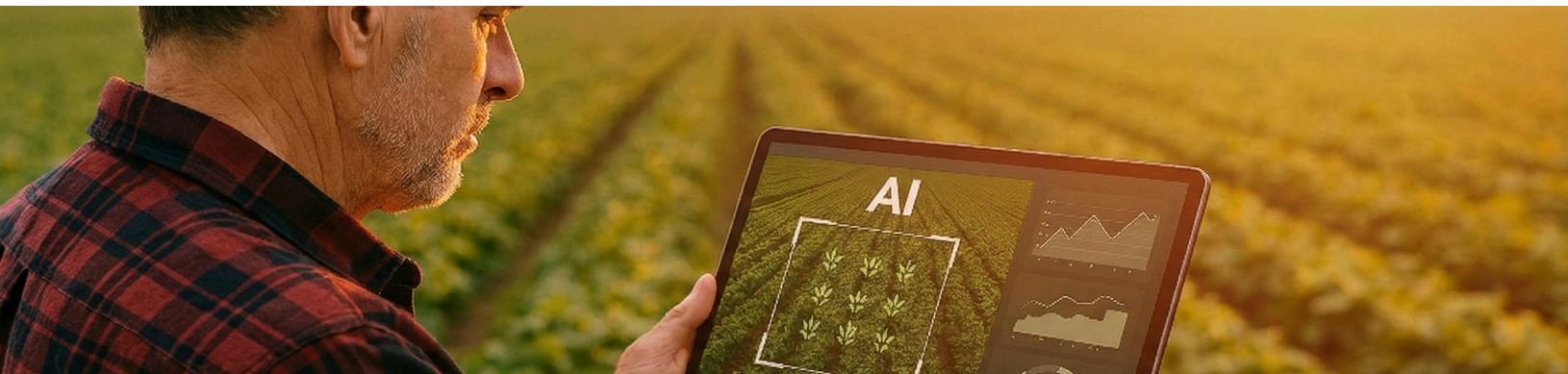




The Center for Rural AI

Building Rural Capacity in the AI Economy



THE OPPORTUNITY

Rural America is Underrepresented in the AI Economy

The Center for Rural AI (CRAI) is a newly formed 501(c)(3) nonprofit focused on a structural economic disparity in the United States: the lagging participation of rural communities in artificial intelligence. Rural America comprises a significant portion of the nation's population and economy, yet it has historically lagged in access to digital infrastructure, tech jobs, and innovation networks. The rise of AI has exacerbated these challenges.

60M+

Citizens live in rural areas

~10%

Of U.S. GDP from rural ecosystems

\$T+

AI-generated value projected by 2030

CRAI exists to shift this trajectory by building the institutional capacity rural regions need to adopt, deploy, and influence AI systems in ways that create economic opportunities and enhance community outcomes.

Andrew Aitken

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Advised the U.S. White House, Microsoft, and Capital One; served on Boards of numerous technology foundations

Adam Markham

TECHNOLOGY ADVISER

Directed AI research and systems engineering in government and critical infrastructure contexts

Marc Nager

ADVISER

Co-founded Startup Weekend; led programs at Techstars; partner at a VC focused on rural ecosystems



CRAI and the AI Institute at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado, a rural public institution advancing comprehensive AI education and engagement, have initiated discussions on collaborative pathways. This provides direct insight into the opportunities and constraints rural institutions face. In parallel, CRAI is engaging with frontier AI companies so that rural use cases inform product design while the technology is still evolving.

WHY NOW

The Investment Thesis

Rural regions possess underutilized competitive advantages, including lower operating costs, stronger long-term community retention, and rich real-world data environments in agriculture, healthcare, and logistics that are relevant to AI use cases. While rural communities have strengths, persistent training, infrastructure and digital adoption gaps curtail their ability to participate at scale in the emerging AI economy.

Rural Competitive Advantages

- Lower operating costs than urban tech hubs
- Stronger long-term community retention rates
- Rich real-world data in agriculture, healthcare & logistics
- 900+ rural & tribal colleges as distributed infrastructure
- Culture of ingenuity born of necessity



Federal Policy Alignment

Federal policy is increasingly aligned with addressing regional disparities. The CHIPS and Science Act and related place-based programs authorized under it are designed to build technology capacity and innovation ecosystems outside of traditional tech centers. The Regional Technology and Innovation Hubs (Tech Hubs) program, for example, directs up to ~\$10 billion over five years to support distributed technology innovation networks across the U.S., with appropriated funding already underway. Such federal initiatives provide structural support for innovation ecosystems that include rural and underserved communities.

"CRAI exists to ensure rural communities lead—not follow—in the AI economy."

WHAT WE DO

Our Programs



AI Ignition

A capacity-building initiative for rural higher education institutions and nonprofits. It begins with AI readiness assessments to identify high-impact, low-risk opportunities and advances to focused 90-day pilots that deliver measurable outcomes in student engagement, operational performance, or service delivery.



AI Fluency

Role-specific AI education tailored to rural institutional contexts. Built around agentic content orchestration platform that contextualizes learning for real operational environments, this curriculum aims to generate usable intellectual property and scalable implementation beyond pilot phases.



Peer Council

A shared network and knowledge library where participating institutions exchange tested use cases, tools, and insights from deployments. This collective repository cultivates durable institutional knowledge within the rural ecosystem.



AI in the Mountains Summit

An annual convening hosted in rotating rural mountain towns, bringing together AI researchers, policymakers, corporate partners, and rural stakeholders to ensure rural perspectives shape national and regional AI strategies.



Hub-and-spoke model: All programs follow a hub-and-spoke approach anchored in evidence-based 90-day MVPs that prove impact before scaling. Initial investments of \$10K-\$20K per program are designed to generate early evidence required for larger donor and public funding.



WHY IT MATTERS

Why Philanthropic Capital Matters

Federal and corporate investment tends to follow demonstrated results; it rarely initiates them. Early philanthropic capital is essential to fund assessments, pilots, technology infrastructure and baseline operating capacity that generate the evidence of impact required to unlock scalable public and private funding streams. Without this initial support, promising rural AI adoption efforts may fail to reach the proof points needed to secure continued investment.

Philanthropic capital is the catalyst that transforms potential into proof—unlocking the federal and corporate investment that follows demonstrated results.

OUR INVITATION

\$5,000,000

Philanthropic partnership over 18 months

To launch core programs, demonstrate impact across 8-12 partner institutions, build foundational infrastructure, and position for access to federal funding beginning in 2027.

THIS INVESTMENT WILL SUPPORT

- AI Ignition pilots at 8–10 rural higher education institutions
- Development and deployment of the AI Fluency agentic curriculum platform
- Launch of the 2026 AI in the Mountains Summit
- Core operations and strategic partnerships

If this opportunity resonates, we welcome a conversation about how your partnership can help ensure rural communities lead, not follow, in the AI economy.

Andrew Aitken

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REFERENCES

Appendix — Source Citations

Rural Population and Economic Context

- USDA reports ~46 million rural residents (~14% of U.S. population).
- McKinsey estimates rural areas are about one-seventh of population and ~10% of GDP.

Digital and Technological Divide Evidence

- Rural broadband and device ownership lag compared with urban and suburban areas.
- Digital divide in rural communities affects access to tech resources and economic participation.

Federal Policy and Innovation Ecosystems

- CHIPS and Science Act authorized significant investment in R&D and regional innovation, incl. Tech Hubs.
- Brookings and related research highlight rural opportunities via CHIPS programs.

Rural Economic Dynamics

- Structural employment and economic composition differences between rural and urban areas persist.
- Service and retail industries now dominate rural job growth; traditional sectors remain relevant but not dominant.



Empowering Rural AI Leadership

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