



# **2021 ANNUAL REPORT**

*25 Years of ACU*

# INTRODUCTION:

## 25 Years of Striving for Health Equity

### A Message from Our Executive Director

In 2021, I was continually inspired and humbled by the incredible healthcare professionals and organizations we were privileged to work with and support. The pandemic placed unprecedented strain on our healthcare workforce, but our network demonstrated incredible commitment to the greater good, vision for a more equitable future, and a tireless dedication to the underserved which shone through at each step. That spirit was the hallmark of our **25th year** of transdisciplinary work to achieve health equity for underserved communities.

In this monumental year, the **Association of Clinicians for the Underserved** (ACU) grew exponentially as our staff and network raised our organization to new heights. We expanded programming to support **workforce recruitment and retention** and build resilience—and we returned to our roots with a new initiative to help prepare **National Health Service Corps** members to work in underserved communities. We doubled down on our commitment to health equity, weaving justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion into all that we do. And we intensified our advocacy, ultimately securing **historic funding** for the National Health Service Corps in 2021.

This growth is just the beginning of where we can and will go. For 25 years, ACU has been a **professional home** for those dedicated to caring for the underserved, to health equity, to growing and improving our nation's healthcare system, and to transforming underserved communities into thriving communities. We recognize the incredible work that you, our members—our advocates, partners, and colleagues—are doing every day to care and advocate for the underserved, and we will continue to build our programs, services, and advocacy to better support your efforts..

In our next 25 years, our vision—a **robust and diverse healthcare workforce to help transform communities to achieve health equity for all**—will continue to unite our work. So, too, will the spirit you have shown this year.



**Amanda  
Pears Kelly**  
ACU Executive  
Director



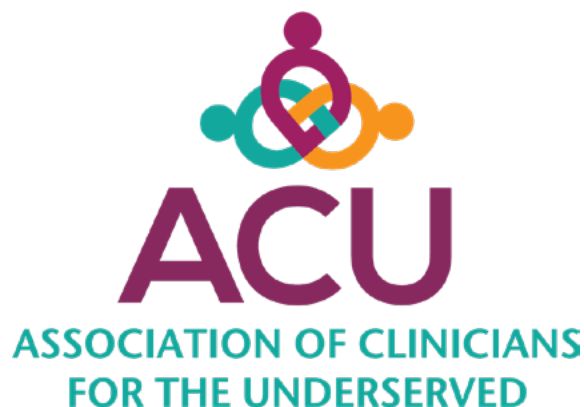
# WHO WE ARE: OUR COMMUNITY

## A Transdisciplinary Network

For a quarter of a century, the **Association of Clinicians for the Underserved** (ACU) has strived to improve the health of America's underserved populations and to enhance the development and support of the clinicians who provide care and services to them. Incorporated in 1996, ACU's network arose from alumni and members of the **National Health Service Corps** (NHSC).

Today, ACU has risen to become the leading advocate for the NHSC and a national voice for the health center workforce.

A transdisciplinary **membership organization**, we support clinicians across the U.S. with training, technical assistance, clinical tools, and programs. Based in Washington, D.C., ACU celebrated our 25th anniversary in 2021, and our membership has grown by leaps and bounds.

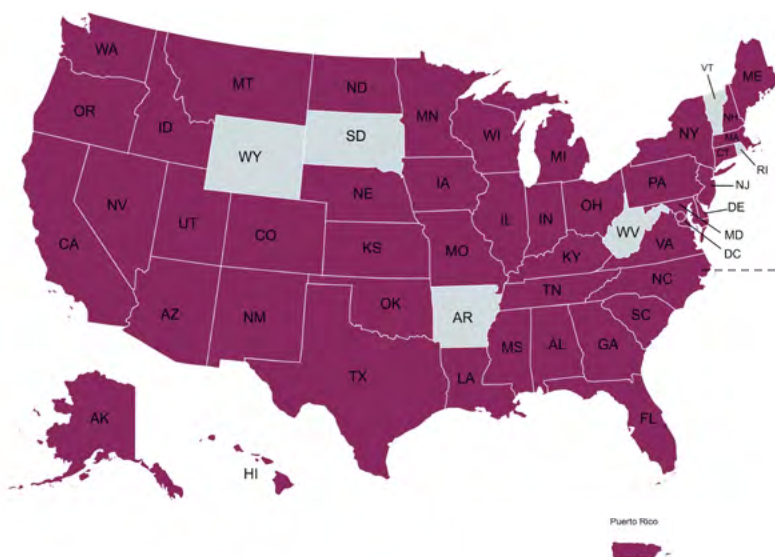


## Our Collective Community Includes

### Organizations, Individuals, & Advocates

ACU unites a **diverse community** of health centers, primary care associations, and health departments, as well as healthcare professionals, students, and health equity advocates from across the U.S.

**Organizational and Individual Members** in 2021 hailed from the following states:





# PROGRAMS

# THE STAR<sup>2</sup> CENTER

Working closely with the Bureau of Primary Health Care, our **Solutions, Training, and Assistance for Recruitment and Retention (STAR<sup>2</sup>) Center** is the leading national organization working to build and sustain a robust health center workforce by providing resources, trainings, and technical assistance for health centers, primary care associations, health center-controlled networks, and other organizations.



Highlights of the STAR<sup>2</sup> Center's 2021 activities include:

## Virtual and In-Person Trainings

73

Trainings

THOUSANDS

Attendees

4.4/5

Satisfaction Rating

## Learning Collaboratives

16

Sessions

404

Attendees

Including the Recruitment Boot Camp: Mental Health Staff Edition Learning Collaboratives (two cohorts) and Oral Health Workforce Learning Collaborative

# THE STAR<sup>2</sup> CENTER (Cont.)

## Selected Resources & Publications

### Recruitment & Retention Data Profile Dashboards

Newly updated, these comprehensive resources help FQHCs assess their data, compare against state and national trends, and reach their recruitment and retention goals.

### Definition of a Comprehensive Workforce Plan

This robust document provides a definition and essential components of a comprehensive workforce plan that have been approved by the Bureau of Primary Health Care.

### New Publications

Including [The Evolving Role of Nurse Practitioners in Health Centers](#) and [Considerations for Job Satisfaction, Effects of Virtual Care Delivery on Health Center Clinician Engagement and Burnout](#), and more.

### Webinar Series

Series included [Managing In the Time of COVID-19 and Beyond](#), [Building Back Better: Utilizing Lessons Learned During COVID-19 for Inclusivity and Retention](#), [Special Considerations for the Retention and Recruitment of Mental Health Providers](#), and more.

### New Micro-Learning Courses

Housed on a newly updated [LMS platform](#), these free, self-paced courses explored “Retention of Mental Health Providers” and “Recruitment of Mental Health Providers.”

### STAR<sup>2</sup> Center Talks Workforce Success Podcast

Soon to be accompanied by a new season on self-care, this podcast’s second season examined the impact of COVID-19 on the health center workforce.

### Workforce Self-Care Resource Repository

This resource compilation provides strategies to incorporate self-care at the individual and organizational level.

## Resource Downloads

at  
[chcworkforce.org](https://chcworkforce.org)



THOUSANDS



600

Views & Downloads  
since late Oct. 2021

of  
The Definition of  
a Comprehensive  
Workforce Plan



# NHSC PIPELINE READINESS TA INITIATIVE

## Supporting National Health Service Corps Clinicians

In 2021, ACU partnered with Abt Associates on a **new Bureau of Health Workforce initiative** to prepare National Health Service Corps (NHSC) pipeline participants to improve care for underserved communities. The **NHSC Pipeline Readiness Technical Assistance Initiative** supports NHSC Scholarship and Students to Service Loan Repayment Program members by building their capacity to address root causes of health inequities. The initiative also works to build resiliency in participants by addressing causes of burnout and stress both during and after public health crises.



“Community advocacy and partnerships are critical to address social determinants of health. In addition to understanding local resources to help patients, this initiative will help participants better work with community leaders to address issues driving poor health and to advocate for systemic change,” said Amanda Pears Kelly, ACU Executive Director.

The program also uses educational materials, case studies, and mentorships to prepare NHSC pipeline participants for the demands of working with underserved populations. Through this initiative, participants will better know what to expect when they begin working at NHSC-approved sites with crucial self-care skills to ensure that they remain in a healthy space throughout their career.

## Areas of Emphasis Will Include

### Social Determinants of Health

With a focus on medication management, disability determination, homelessness, food insecurity, and social isolation.

### Burnout & Resiliency Tools for Individuals and Organizations

Examining self-care and coping, understanding provider stress during crises, building resiliency, and supporting provider wellness.

### Community Assessment Guide

This guide will assist NHSC program participants in identifying and building bridges with community-based stakeholders.

### Health Disparities

Exploring how local health disparity data can be accessed and analyzed to support community-based strategies to improve health equity

# JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, & INCLUSION

## An Organizational Commitment

ACU strives to achieve justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) both internally and throughout the health center workforce. Integral to our mission, ACU's JEDI program developed a new train-the-trainer curriculum to build JEDI champions at health centers with the support of our partner, Centene, and unveiled a new **toolkit** and **webinar series** in 2021. Additionally, the JEDI initiative has established a new partnership with United Health to build engaging content and learning collaboratives for clinical leaders and will formally launch in early 2022.



**National  
Webinars**



**PCA  
Trainings**



**Organizations  
Represented**

## Selected Trainings & Publications

### Building an Inclusive Organization Toolkit

This publication provides information and resources to support health centers in their journeys to achieving a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workforce. It also addresses common questions on workplace assessment, applicable strategies, and accountability.

### National Webinars

- **Building an Inclusive Organization:** This three-part series examined the inclusive organizations toolkit, cultural humility to support Asian health center patients, and JEDI at CHCs.
- **Clinician Perspectives on Racism in Healthcare:** This panel discussion explored clinicians' perspectives on racism in medicine, how it affects providers and patients, and strategies to build a more anti-racist, equitable, and inclusive healthcare system.





# EYE HEALTH & VISION CARE

Healthy vision is crucial to overall health, but many underserved communities have little access to eye health and vision care. ACU is leading the charge to increase access to these services for underserved populations with partners across the U.S. Supported by the Centene Foundation for Quality Healthcare, ACU provided **technical assistance and grants** to help 12 health centers start or expand services in 2021.

## Grant Support for Health Center Vision Programs



**2021 Grants to FQHCs**  
*to*  
**Start or Expand  
Vision Programs**

### *Recipients Included*

**Spectra Health**

Grand Forks, ND

**HealthLinc, Inc.**

Mishawaka, IN

**Family Health  
Services of  
Darke County**

Greenville, OH

**Columbus  
Neighborhood  
Health Center**

Columbus, OH

**East  
Harlem  
Council**

New York, NY

**Harvard Street  
Neighborhood  
Health Center**

Dorchester, MA

**Omni  
Family  
Health**

Bakersfield, CA

**Colorado  
Coalition for the  
Homeless**

Denver, CO

**Regional  
Health Care  
Clinic**

Sedalia, MO

**Cherokee  
Health  
Systems**

Lenoir City, TN

**Valley  
Healthcare  
System**

Talbotton, GA

**Treasure Coast  
Community  
Health**

Vero Beach, FL

# EYE HEALTH & VISION CARE (Cont.)

## Spotlight on Health Center Impact

### Family Health Services of Darke County

Greenville, OH

FHS extended services for patients by using their grant to help offset the cost of a retinal imaging device. The imaging has allowed better monitoring of retinal diseases, allows photo documentation of retinal health for their medical records, and helps encourage patients in receiving annual eye exams.

### Columbus Neighborhood Health Center

Columbus, OH

CNHC expanded and enhanced their ability to provide comprehensive care by using their grant to help purchase an optical coherence tomography (OCT) machine. The OCT machine has allowed CNHC to diagnose and treat glaucoma and retinal diseases in vulnerable and disproportionately affected populations.

### Harvard Street Neighborhood Health Center

Dorchester, MA

HSNHC used their grant to purchase equipment to expand their new Eyecare & Vision Services clinic. The expansion increased their capacity to meet patient needs and offer an onsite eyeglasses dispensary—a tremendous help for their low-income patients for whom glasses and eye care are often out of reach.

### Colorado Coalition for the Homeless

Denver, CO

CCH expanded their comprehensive vision services by using their grant to buy a retinal camera, visual field, and tonometer. This equipment allowed their staff to increase efficiency, reduce waits, and serve more clients—streamlining screenings for retinal diseases and offering greater community outreach.

## National Conference Presentation

### From Start Up to Success: Eye Health & Vision Care Programs at CHCs

Presented by health center optometrists Dr. Ashley Burns and Dr. Kristin White as well as Emory University's Dr. Susan Primo, the National Optometric Association's 2005 Optometrist of the Year, this [conference session \(view\)](#) offered participants tips and tricks in implementing successful eye health and vision care programs from startup to integration.



# SUICIDE SAFER CARE

## The Largest Effort in History to Train Primary Care Providers in Suicide Prevention

In 2021, ACU in collaboration with Concert Health completed the fourth year in the largest effort in history to train primary care providers in suicide prevention—the **Suicide Safer Care (SSC) program**. Supported by our partner, Centene, the SSC program provided resources for, and instructed numerous healthcare professionals in, evidence-based strategies to prevent suicide.

In 2021, **Suicide Safer Care** explored four focus areas through national trainings and publications: pediatric suicide prevention, geriatric suicide prevention, the impact of COVID-19 on suicidality, and addressing the risk of suicide in healthcare professionals. Highlights of the program's 2021 activities include:

### National Trainings

5

Webinars Held

542

Attendees

4.4/5

Satisfaction  
Rating

92%

Attendees  
Reporting Increased  
Knowledge



# SUICIDE SAFER CARE (Cont.)

## Selected Resources & Publications

### Suicide Safer Care: A Toolkit for Pediatric Primary Care Providers & School-Based Health Centers

This detailed toolkit explores the scope and reality of the pediatric suicide crisis, common risk factors and warning signs, and screening tools, clinical pathways, and evidence-based interventions.

### Organizational Approaches to Address Suicide Risk in Healthcare Professionals

This brief explores suicide risk in healthcare professionals and provides organizational approaches to support employees and reduce suicide risk.

### Geriatric Suicide Prevention & the Role of Primary Care Providers

This fact sheet details unique concerns in suicide in older adults and how providers and their teams can help prevent elder deaths by suicide.

### COVID-19: The Need for Increased Awareness Around Risk for Suicide

This paper explores how the pandemic has affected social determinants of health and offers practical strategies for suicide prevention.



**Toolkits  
and  
Fact Sheets  
Published**

## CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Exploring Standards for CHC Excellence

In 2021, ACU began a new Centers of Excellence (COE) initiative to identify best practices and standards for health center excellence in care for underserved populations. In its first year, the COE program sought to determine frameworks for excellence and to create resources to help CHCs achieve them.

ACU's COE program explored best practices in JEDI; suicide prevention in primary care; eye health and vision care; and workforce recruitment and retention through literature reviews, stakeholder interviews, and relevant resources to develop a series of briefs which will be unveiled early in 2022.

**Briefs  
Developed**





# NATIONAL CONFERENCES

# 2021 ACU VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

## Mission: Health Equity

To safely convene our community, ACU held its second **Virtual Conference**, “**Mission: Health Equity**,” on November 1-2, 2021. The event explored innovative strategies to eliminate health inequities by addressing systemic practices leading to poor health in Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, LGBTQIA, and other minority and intersectional groups.

In addition to 23 educational workshops, the event offered two days of networking and reflecting—including general sessions ranging from a testimony on ACU’s **25-year history** presented by Dr. Barbara F. Brandt to an exploration of health inequities as a civil rights issue from Dr. Dayna Bowen Matthew.



## Key Figures

23

Workshops

3

Tracks

12

Poster Presentations

136

Organizations  
Represented

100%

Agreed that  
General Sessions Were  
Useful & Relevant



# 2021 ACU VIRTUAL CONFERENCE (Cont.)

## Conference Highlights

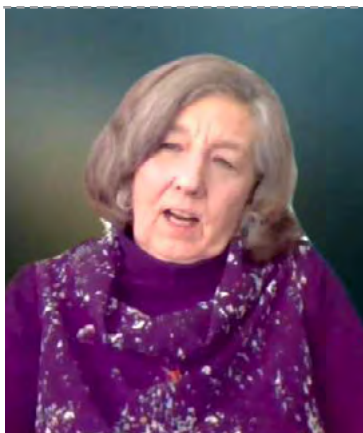
*Senator Dick Durbin addresses attendees as he accepts the 2021 Congressional Champion Award.*



*Jim Macrae, Head of BPHC, speaks in an #ACUConf keynote address on the healthcare workforce.*



*Dr. Barbara F. Brandt, ACU co-founder and architect, details the history of ACU in her keynote speech.*



*Dr. Dayna Bowen Matthew of GW Law discussed health inequities as a civil rights issue.*

## 2021 BIENNIAL WORKFORCE SUMMIT

### Uniting the Health Center Workforce

Held by ACU's STAR<sup>2</sup> Center, the Weitzman Institute, and the National Association of Community Health Centers, *this event* explored health center workforce issues during and after COVID-19, technology, and JEDI on May 26-27, 2021. The Summit kicked off with a special address from Jim Macrae, Associate Administrator of BPHC, Tom Morris, Associate Administrator of FORHP, and Dr. Luis Padilla, Associate Administrator of BHW, on what the "new normal" means for the health center workforce.



148

### Organizations

*Representing 105 health centers, 2 health center-controlled networks, 39 primary care associations, and 2 primary care offices.*



# ADVOCACY & SERVICE



# POLICY & ADVOCACY

## Standing Up for the NHSC & Healthcare Workforce

ACU is the nation's **leading advocate** for the National Health Service Corps, spearheading the effort to protect and secure funding for this and other vital programs to the support and strengthen the healthcare workforce. ACU also works to lift the voices of our patients and clinicians on Capitol Hill, advocating tirelessly for health equity and to make our healthcare system more inclusive, responsive, and accessible. **Join us!**



## Key Policy & Advocacy Activities

### Securing More than \$1 Billion in NHSC Funding

ACU was proud to lead a coalition of stakeholders in advocating to secure long-term, stable funding for the National Health Service Corps—leading to **more than \$1 billion** in new funding for the NHSC as part of the **American Rescue Plan (ARP)**, **FY2022 appropriations**, and **investment** from the Biden administration. The ARP bill alone also included \$200 million in funding for the Nurse Corps, \$7.6 billion in funding for the Health Centers program, and \$300 million for the Teaching Health Centers program. ACU also outlined a clear vision for strengthening the NHSC in its **“Road Map for the Future: The National Health Service Corps and New Investment for a New Workforce.”**

### Supporting Vision Care for All

ACU joined the National Rural Health Association, American Optometric Student Association, and others **in advocating** to expand NHSC eligibility to include optometry.

### Giving Voice to Clinicians

On May 20, ACU Board Member Shelley Spires, CEO of Albany Area Primary Health Care, **testified on behalf of ACU** before the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pension (HELP) Subcommittee on Primary Health and Retirement Security. **This hearing** informed the committee on the realities of working in underserved communities, of providing care to underserved populations, and of the challenges to recruiting and retaining these clinicians.

### Empowering Patients for Civic Engagement

ACU joined with Vot-ER and other key partners to **help lead the charge** to empower patients for civic engagement, submitting **a memo** to the Department of Health and Human Services that helped inform U.S. federal agencies in creating strategic plans to expand nonpartisan voter registration and engagement in response to President Biden's Executive Order on Promoting Access to Voting.



# CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF ACU



2021 marked a special milestone for the Association of Clinicians for the Underserved (ACU): the **25th anniversary** of our founding. In 1996, clinicians caring for the underserved—members and alumni of the National Health Service Corps (NHSC)—united to form our network to improve the health of underserved communities and to support the clinicians caring for them across the U.S.

25 years later, ACU has become the leading national voice for the NHSC and health center workforce—and our mission continues to be the guiding light to our work and more vital than ever before. The same can be said of what fuels our efforts each day. Our network—your work, your support, and your advocacy to improve the health and raise the voices of patients who are underserved and the clinicians who provide care and services to them—remains at the heart of all that we do.

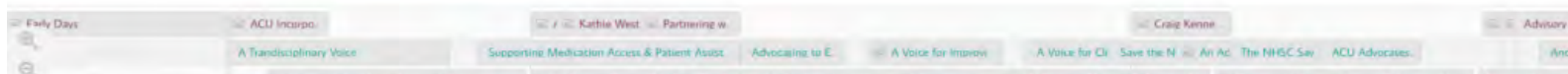
**Thank you for your passion, dedication, and commitment to caring for the underserved—it is your incredible work that powers and inspires ACU.**

*As part of our celebration, ACU created a mini-website featuring a digital exhibit and timeline, interviews with past and present executive directors, and more. Learn more about our history at [www.clinicians.org/anniversary](http://www.clinicians.org/anniversary).*



## The Association of Clinicians for the Underserved: A History

This interactive digital exhibit tells the story of ACU's 25 years of improving the health of underserved populations and supporting the clinicians who serve them. Browse the exhibit by clicking on the arrow to your right to begin your tour of ACU milestones, or click anywhere on the timeline below to jump from vignette to vignette.



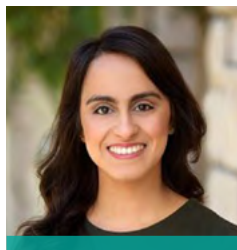
# 2022 BOARD OF DIRECTORS



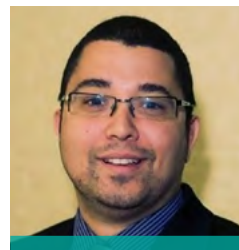
**Douglas Olson, MD**  
President  
Connecticut  
Physician Health  
Program



**Shelley Spires, MHCA**  
Vice President  
Albany Area  
Primary Health  
Care



**Nataly Diaz**  
Treasurer  
California Primary  
Care Association



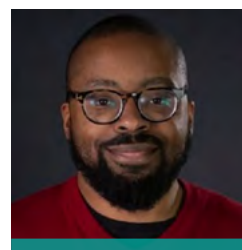
**DaShawn Groves, DrPH**  
Secretary  
DC Department  
of Health Care  
Finance



**Adrian Billings, MD, PhD**  
Director  
Presidio County  
Health Services



**Ashley Colwell, MS, PHR**  
Director  
Illinois Primary  
Health Care  
Association



**Christian Neal, MD, MPA**  
Director  
Johnson Health  
Center



**Earle Rugg**  
Director  
Health Information  
Exchanges &  
Technology



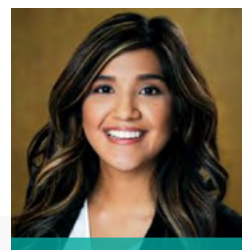
**Ellis Frazier, MD**  
Director  
Adena Family  
Medicine - Piketon



**Felix L. Nuñez, MD, MPH,**  
Director  
Molina Healthcare  
of California



**Jim Hotz, MD**  
Director  
Albany Area  
Primary Health  
Care



**Juli Hishida, MS**  
Director - HPIT  
Institute for  
Multicultural  
Counseling &  
Education Services



**Kirsten Thomsen, PA**  
Director  
Interdisciplinary  
Care, Homeless &  
Migrant Populations



**Marc Overbeck**  
Director  
Oregon Primary  
Care Association

# ADVISORY COUNCIL



**Katherine Brieger, MA,  
RD, CCE**  
Sun River Health



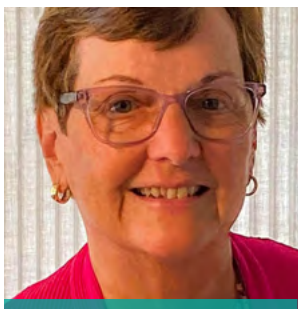
**Craig Kennedy, MPH**  
Medicaid Health Plans of  
America



**Virna Little, PSyD,  
LCSW-r, SAP, CCM**  
Concert Health



**Kyu Rhee, MD,  
MPP**  
CVS Health



**Kathie  
Westpheling, MPH**  
George Mason  
University



**Marc Wetherhorn**  
Marc Wetherhorn  
Consulting

## ACU Staff

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**Mariah Blake**  
Program Manager

**Rick Brown**  
Associate Director of Communications &  
Membership

**Sabrina Edgington**  
Senior Director of JEDI Initiatives

**Luke Ertle**  
Program Director

**Michelle Fernández Gabilondo**  
Associate Director of Workforce

**Sarah Gutema**  
Project Coordinator and Specialist

**Tanesha Jefferson**  
Administrative Assistant

**Molly Meinbresse**  
Senior Project Coordinator and Specialist

**Abby Miller-Starling**  
Director of Finance and Human Resources

**Alex Rohlwing**  
Training Specialist

**Suzanne K. Speer**  
Senior Director of Workforce Development

**Holly Vanek**  
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**Helen Rhea Vernier**  
Training Specialist





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