



# Investing in Rural Virginia



**Jason Smith; Maria Saxton**  
VML Rural Conference  
May 2026



**RURAL INVESTMENT  
COLLABORATIVE™**  
Small towns, big opportunities.™

# Session Objectives

- Identify resources provided by the Richmond Federal Reserve
- Understand the Community Investment Training and opportunity to apply for 2027
- Hear real-world application through CIT graduate training experience and project progress

The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the presenter and do not represent an official position of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond or the Federal Reserve System.

The Richmond Fed does not fund or otherwise award grants, participate in the selection of grantees or selection of communities receiving training or technical assistance.

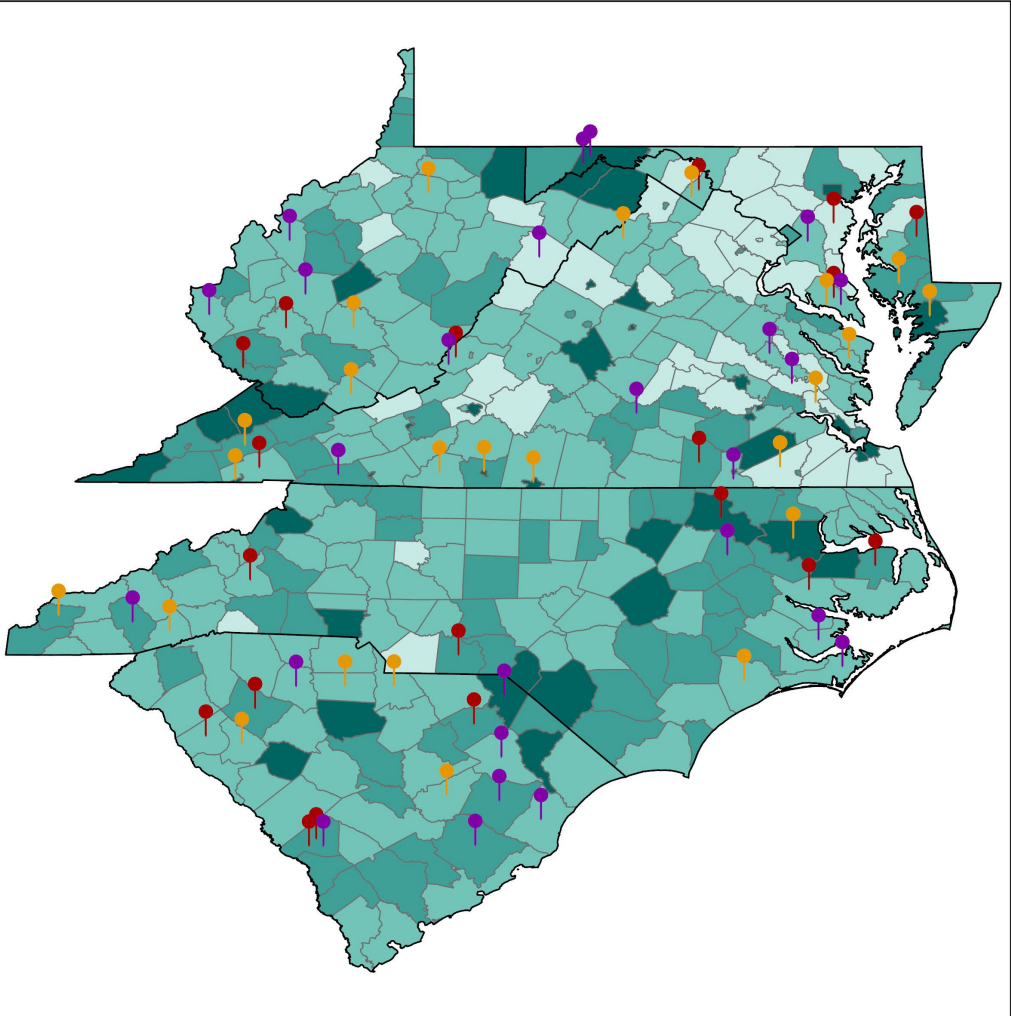
# My Rural Story



# Why does the Richmond Fed care about rural?

- Monetary policy mandate (set by Congress)
  - The Fed's "dual mandate" is maximum employment and price stability
  - But systematically worse employment outcomes in some communities suggests there's more we can do to lift barriers to employment
- Community development mandate
  - Support employment and credit outcomes for low-to-moderate income (LMI) communities
  - Rural areas have a high concentration of LMI residents

# Proportion of Low- and Moderate-Income In Rural Areas



## Legend

Share of people who are LMI

- Less than 35 percent
- 35 - 43 percent
- 43 - 50 percent
- Greater than 50 percent

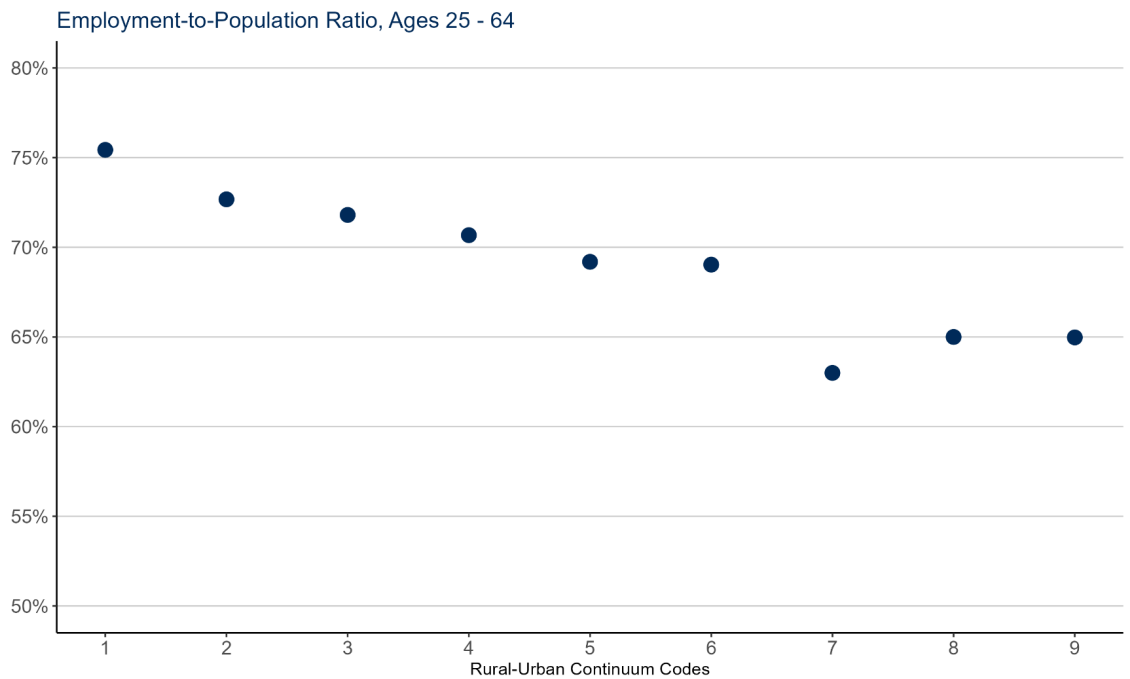
## Cohort

- 2024
- 2025
- 2026

Note: "Rural" is defined by RUCC 3 – 9 in this map.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau 2016-2020 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year estimates, U.S. Department of Agriculture 2023 Rural-Urban Continuum Codes

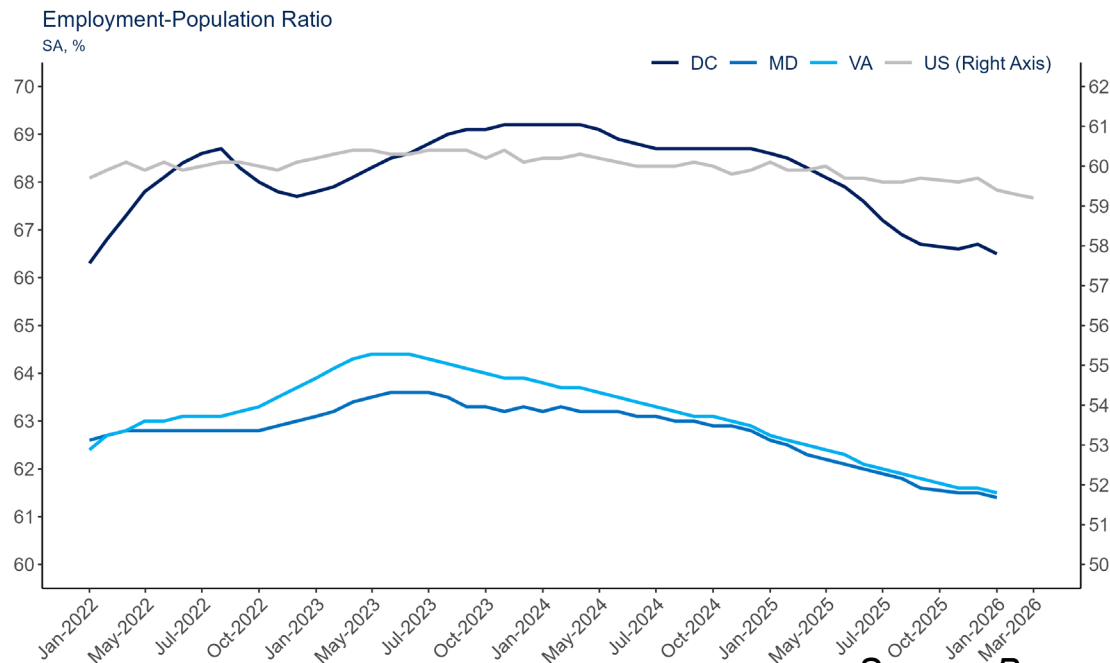
# Employment to Population Ratio, Ages 25-64



Sources: Census Bureau American Community Survey 2023 1-Year Estimates, United States Department of Agriculture 2023 Rural Urban Continuum Codes.

# Employment-Population Ratio

- Recent sign of labor market weakness is the decline in the employment-to-population ratio and labor force participation. EPOP is down 2.1 percentage points in DC and 1.2 percentage points in MD & VA over the past 12 months. The LFP rate dropped 1.5 percentage points in VA.



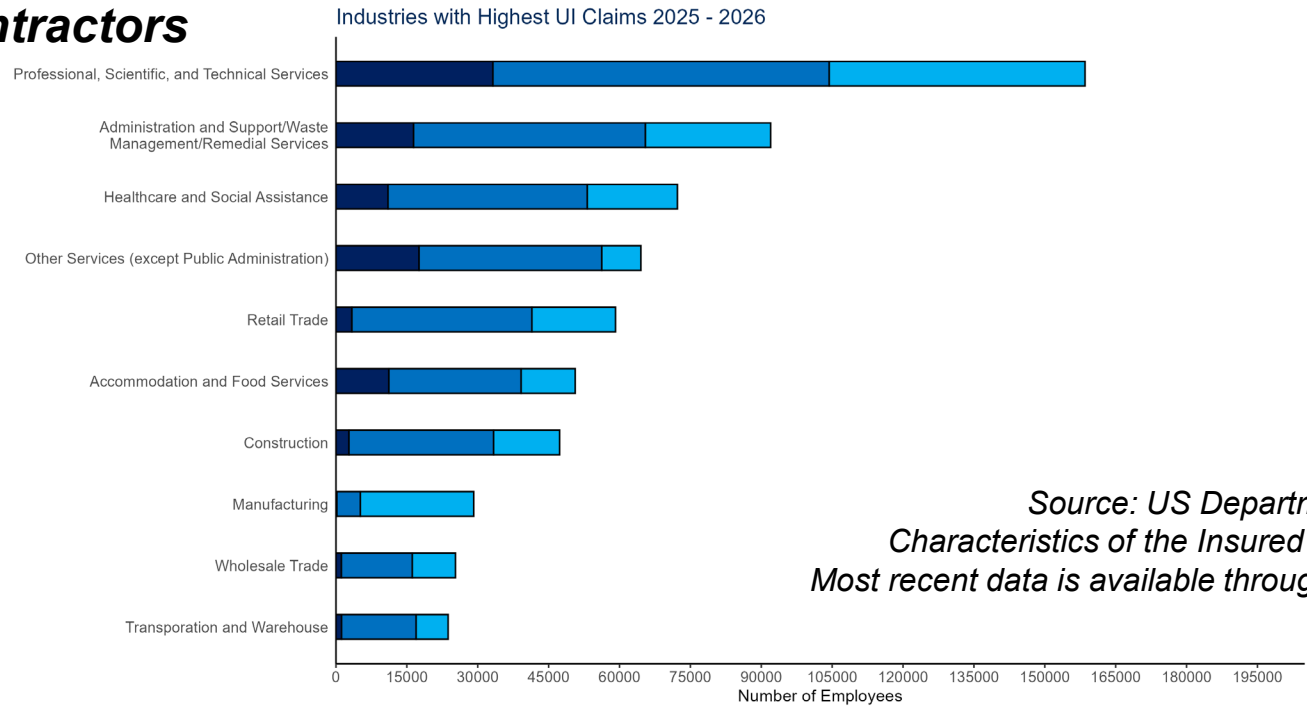
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Most recent data released 01/31/2026 for DC, MD, VA, and 03/31/2026 for US.

Note: Data for October 2025 are unavailable due to the government shutdown

# UI Claims by Industry

- **Professional services (office, scientific/technical, admin & support) are the sectors with the highest unemployment claims—reflecting cuts to federal contractors**



*Source: US Department of Labor, Characteristics of the Insured Unemployed. Most recent data is available through 03/31/2026*

## By the numbers, the economy remains solid

### **Growth continues while inflation moves to target**

- The real economy has remained remarkably resilient
- Inflation continues to head in the right direction
- By most measures, the labor market has normalized from an incredibly tight market
- Consumers continue to spend, albeit at a slower pace
- Virginia continues to perform about on par with the U.S., the Carolina's are exceeding, and Maryland and West Virginia lag

### **Risks to the economy:**

- Tariffs and federal government cuts to employment and spending add to uncertainties and disproportionately impact our District
- Sentiment indexes for consumers and businesses have declined in the last few months amidst heightened uncertainties

# There is a basic problem of supply and demand that creates capital access barriers in rural areas.



## Supply

On the supply side, some sources of capital are missing or are not well coordinated.



## Demand

On the demand side, rural regions have fewer people who can develop strong projects that are investment ready.



# CLIFTON FORGE

## VIRGINIA

*Spark something new!*



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Richmond • Baltimore • Charlotte



*Allegheny*  
HIGHLANDS



MASONIC THEATRE

1928

DOOR

DOOR

DOOR

DOOR



## Pair and Share

### In two sentences...

- What is a community or economic Development project that would build on your community's assets?
- Who is the sparkplug in your community that could make it happen with the right supports?



## Community Conversations

*Sept. 30 – Oct. 2  
Omni Grove Park Inn  
Asheville NC*

## Investing in Rural America Conference

*Sept. 30 – Oct. 2  
Omni Grove Park Inn  
Asheville NC*

## Investing in Rural America Webinar Series

*May 20 (2 PM – 3 PM)  
Demystifying Capital Investment in Rural Communities*

## Community Investment Training

*June 2026  
Application for 2027 Cohort Opens*



# Community Investment Training

- 4-month training
- Real community projects
- Practice pitch sessions
- Learning network
- Resource opportunities

# Project Themes

Main Street Revitalization

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Workforce Housing

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Small Business Incubators

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Workforce Training Centers

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Community Amenities

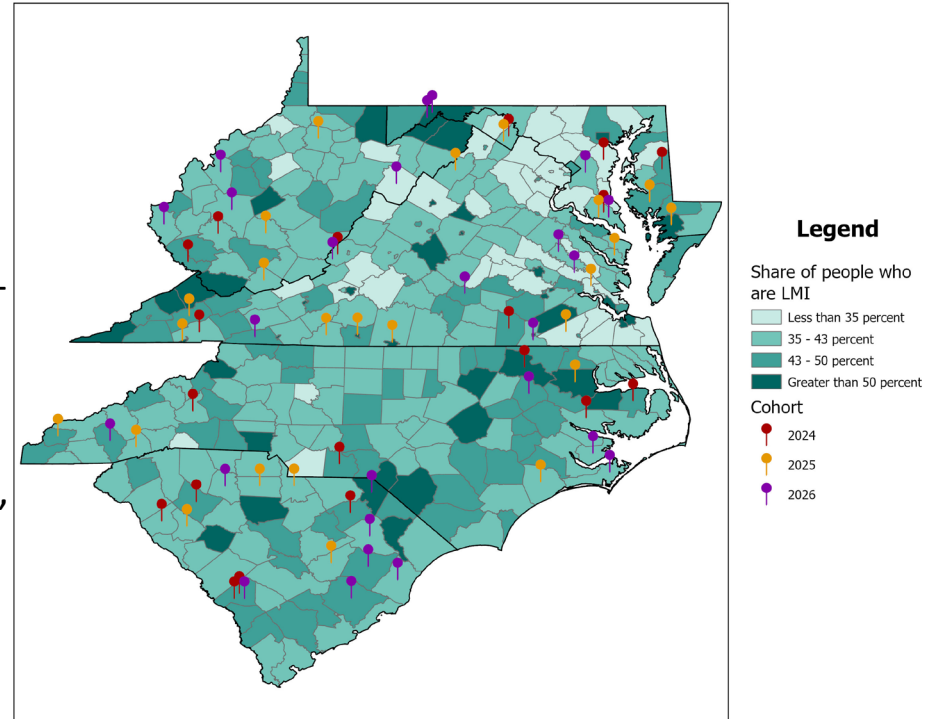
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Infrastructure



# Outcomes to Date

- 18 Leaders Completed Training in 2024
- 24 Leaders Completed Training in 2025
- 23 Leaders Completed Training in 2026
- To date, \$516,000 has been awarded for mini-grants, technical assistance, and implementation grants
- Follow on funding from local, regional and national organizations (e.g., local foundations, EPA, Opportunity Appalachia)
- Over \$650,000 of external funding has been secured by the steering group.



# Clifton Forge, Virginia (Cohorts 2024 and 2026)





Handwritten signs on a green metal door, including a blue 'P' sign and a red 'NO PARKING' sign.

PLEASE BRING  
YOUR WEAPON  
AND  
BULLETS  
TO THE  
BENTLEY ARMS  
STORE  
1100 N. 1ST ST.  
FARMER, MO.  
THE BENTLEY ARMS STORE

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**Yard Office**  
BOUTIQUE HOTEL







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# Virginia Participants: 2026 Cohort

- Molly Frey, Community Development Planner, PlanRVA with other rural partners, New Kent County
- Lawrence D. Wilder, Jr., Senior Policy Advisor, Virginia Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity, Emporia
- Kiyonda Tarrer, Homeowner Services Director, Hanover & King Williams Habitat for Humanity, King William County
- Terri Gillespie, Chief Executive Officer, Rooftop of Virginia, Grayson County
- Maria Saxon, Director of Planning & Community Development, Town of Clifton Forge, Alleghany County
- Jacob Romaine, Member, Israel Hill LLC, Prince Edward County