

Strengthening Rural Futures: CEDA Team Showcases Expertise at Compeer Financial's Rooted & Rising Event

Rural communities thrive when local leaders are equipped with actionable tools, innovative funding strategies, and practical solutions. At this year's **Compeer Financial Rooted & Rising** event, CEDA team members took center stage to share best practices, case studies, and insights across community leadership, rural housing, and small business development.



CEDA's Jordan Grossman & Amy Schaefer before presenting.

The event, which was designed to bring together community leaders, advocates, and partners dedicated to rural vitality, offered a collaborative platform to discuss both the challenges and opportunities facing rural America today. CEDA was proud to have had several team members lead key breakout sessions. CEDA team members lead breakout sessions on Cultivating Local Impact: Community Leadership, Invisible Infrastructure: A Case Study in Rural Housing Development, and Beyond the Bottom Line: Case Studies in Supporting Rural Businesses.

The Experience Blue Earth program, headed by CEDA's Macey Becker and Amy Schaefer, was highlighted. The program focuses on the storytelling initiative that highlights two local businesses each month through short, engaging social media spotlights; aiming to help people see more than just a storefront by sharing stories behind the businesses and the people who run them. The campaign also included themed community giveaways that were built around local experiences to create excitement and encourage residents and visitors to explore what the community has to offer.

Housing remains one of the most critical puzzle pieces in rural communities. CEDA's Laura Qualey and Hillary Tweed presented on the "invisible infrastructure" that is necessary to move rural housing projects from concept to completion. During this session, participants explored real-world case studies of communities that took an intentional, proactive approach to housing by investing in site readiness, infrastructure, and planning to attract private development. Practical examples of how public investment in land development, utilities and coordination were shown, demonstrating how rural leaders can reduce risk for developers and accelerate housing outcomes within their communities.

Small businesses are the economic heartbeat of rural America. Jordan Grossman and Amy Schaefer delivered an impactful presentation exploring what it really takes to help small businesses grow and stay in communities. This session provided attendees with a hands on case study session, where they walked through both real and scenario-based examples of rural businesses facing critical workforce challenges and growth decisions. Attendees learned how to develop a holistic support plan for three common rural business situations: the new entrepreneur just getting started, a business that is profitable and looking to expand or acquire additional space, and the main street businesses that are the heart of the community. From workforce planning and capital access to workforce housing, childcare, and community connection - the session showcased how rural communities can help companies grow and retain talent locally.



Pictured: Jan Johannides (Renewing the Countryside), CEDA's Laura Qualey, Hillary Tweed, Amy Schaefer, Macey Becker, and Corey Hepola (My Town)

CEDA's active presence at this event reflects our ongoing commitment to sharing knowledge, testing innovative models, and partnering with organizations like Compeer Financial to empower rural regions.

We want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Compeer Financial for hosting an inspiring event, as well as a round of applause to Macey, Amy, Laura, Hillary, and Jordan for representing CEDA and championing the future of rural communities.