

# Human Services Programs in Rural Contexts

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# Overview

- Introduction and relevance for equity
- Study description
- Mixed-methods research design
- Defining rural
- Purposive sample of 12 rural communities
- Work so far

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this presentation do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of OPRE, ACF, or HHS

# Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government

- **Sec. 2. Definitions.** For purposes of this order: (a) The term “equity” means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; [persons who live in rural areas](#); and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/>

# Human Services Programs in Rural Contexts

- Goal: better understand human services programs in rural contexts
  - The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) contracted with 2M Research and the Urban Institute
- Rural contexts present unique opportunities and challenges for administering human services programs
  - Rural communities have many assets, but some can struggle with access to economic opportunity, transportation, broadband internet, and health and human services.
  - Disparities in access to services and benefits can leave basic needs unmet.



# Study Description



# Primary Goals of the Study

1. Provide a rich description of human services programs in rural contexts
2. Determine the unmet need for human services in rural communities
3. Identify opportunities for strengthening the capacity of human services programs to promote the economic and social wellbeing of individuals, families, and communities in rural contexts

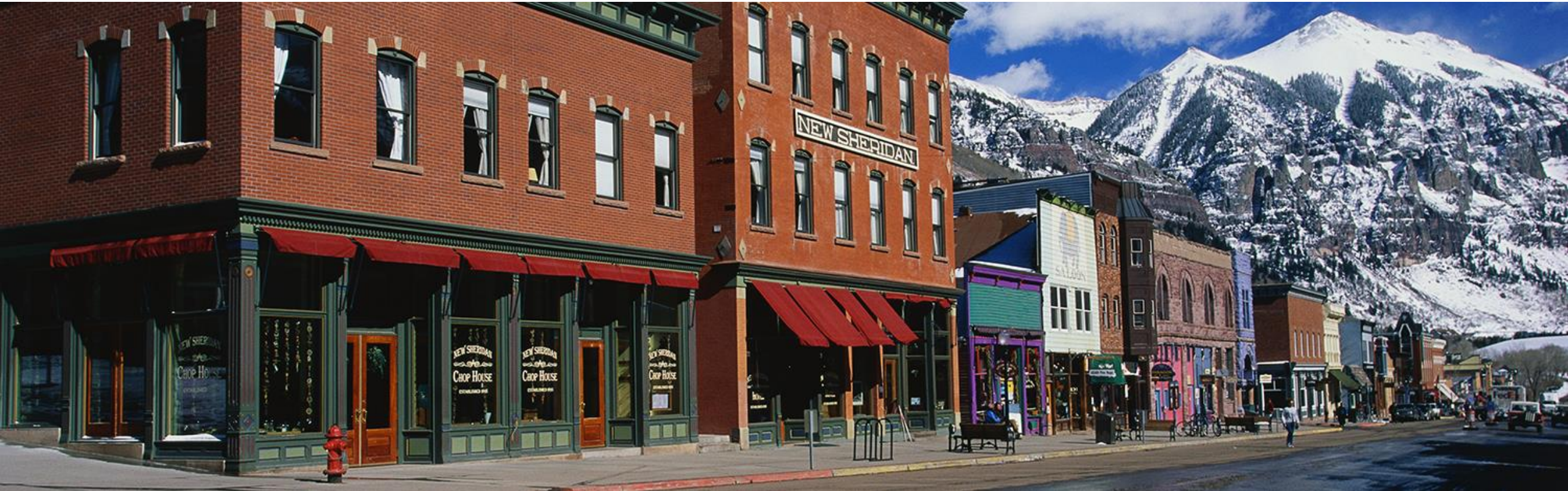
# Programs of Focus

- Human services is a broad, interdisciplinary field of diverse programs serving a variety of populations
- This study includes :
  - Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF)
  - Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG)
  - Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV)
  - **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)**

# Stakeholder Engagement

- This study engaged three stakeholder groups to inform design:
  - Human Services Practitioners from an array of human services programs in rural contexts
  - Subject Matter Experts in rural contexts, diverse human services programs, and research methods
  - Technical Working Group - selected individuals from the other 2 groups.

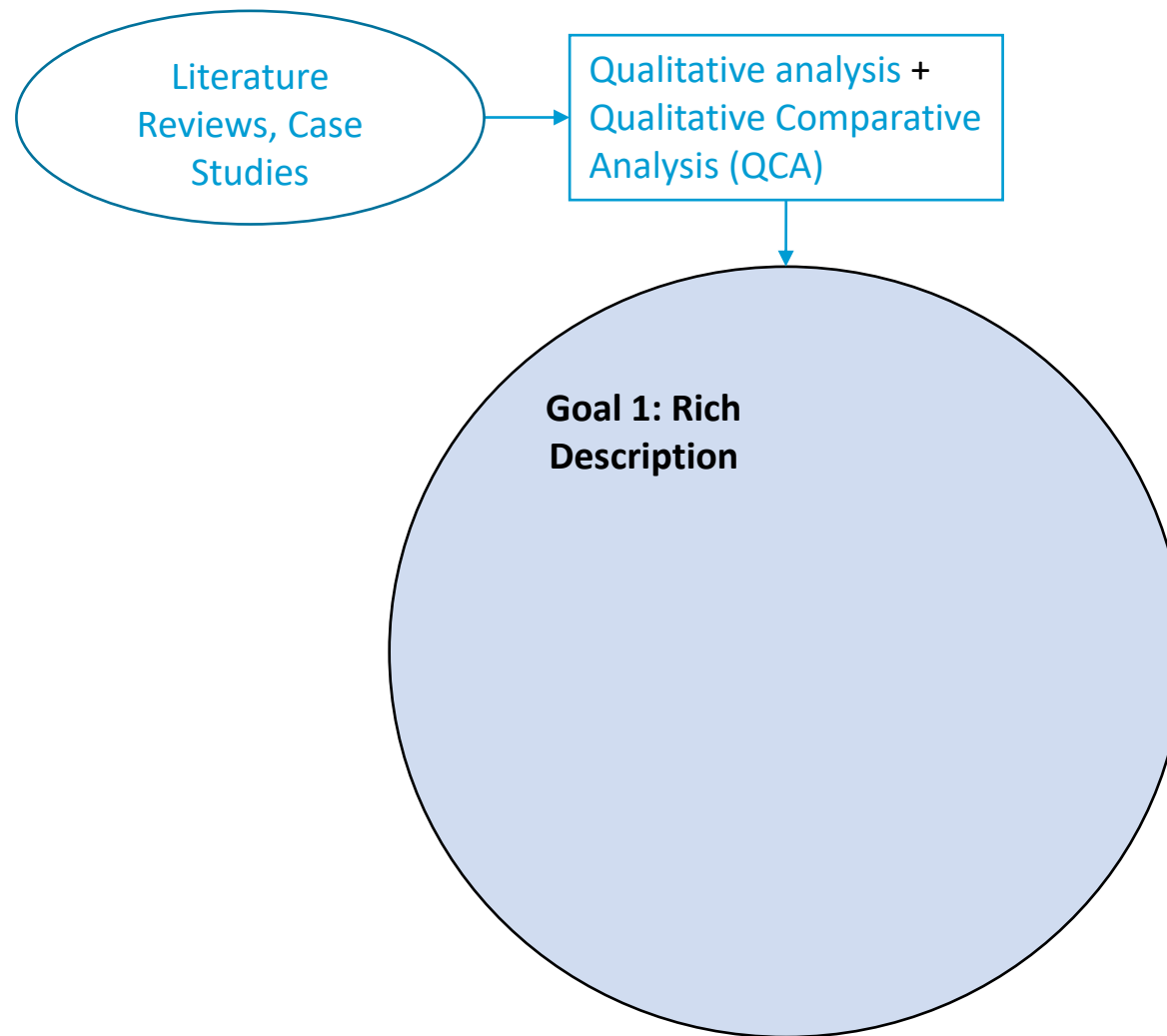




# Mixed-Methods Research Design

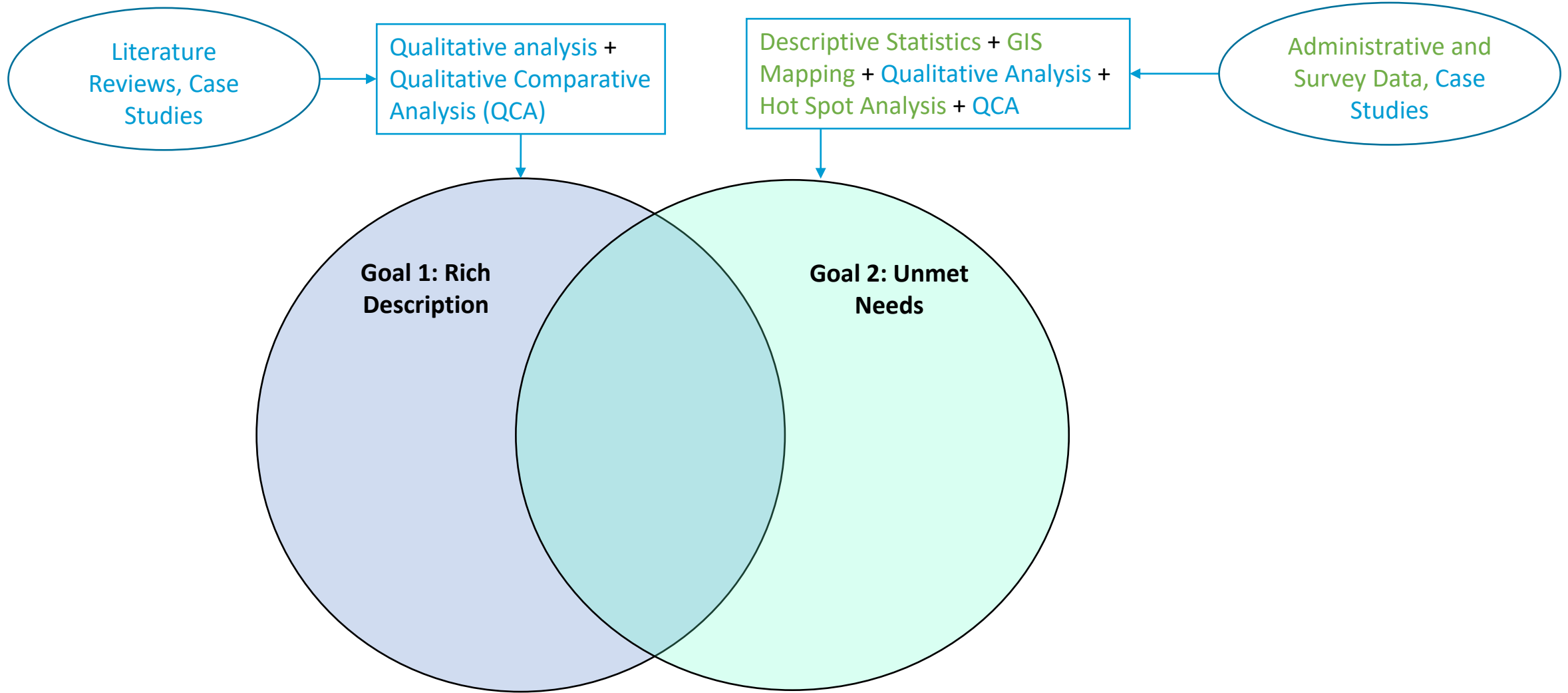
# Mixed-Methods Design to Achieve the Study's Goals

- Combines representativeness and generalizability of quantitative methods with in-depth contextual nature of qualitative methods
- Draws upon relative strengths of quantitative and qualitative methods while offsetting the shortcomings
- Uncovers unique insights and findings through synthesis and triangulation



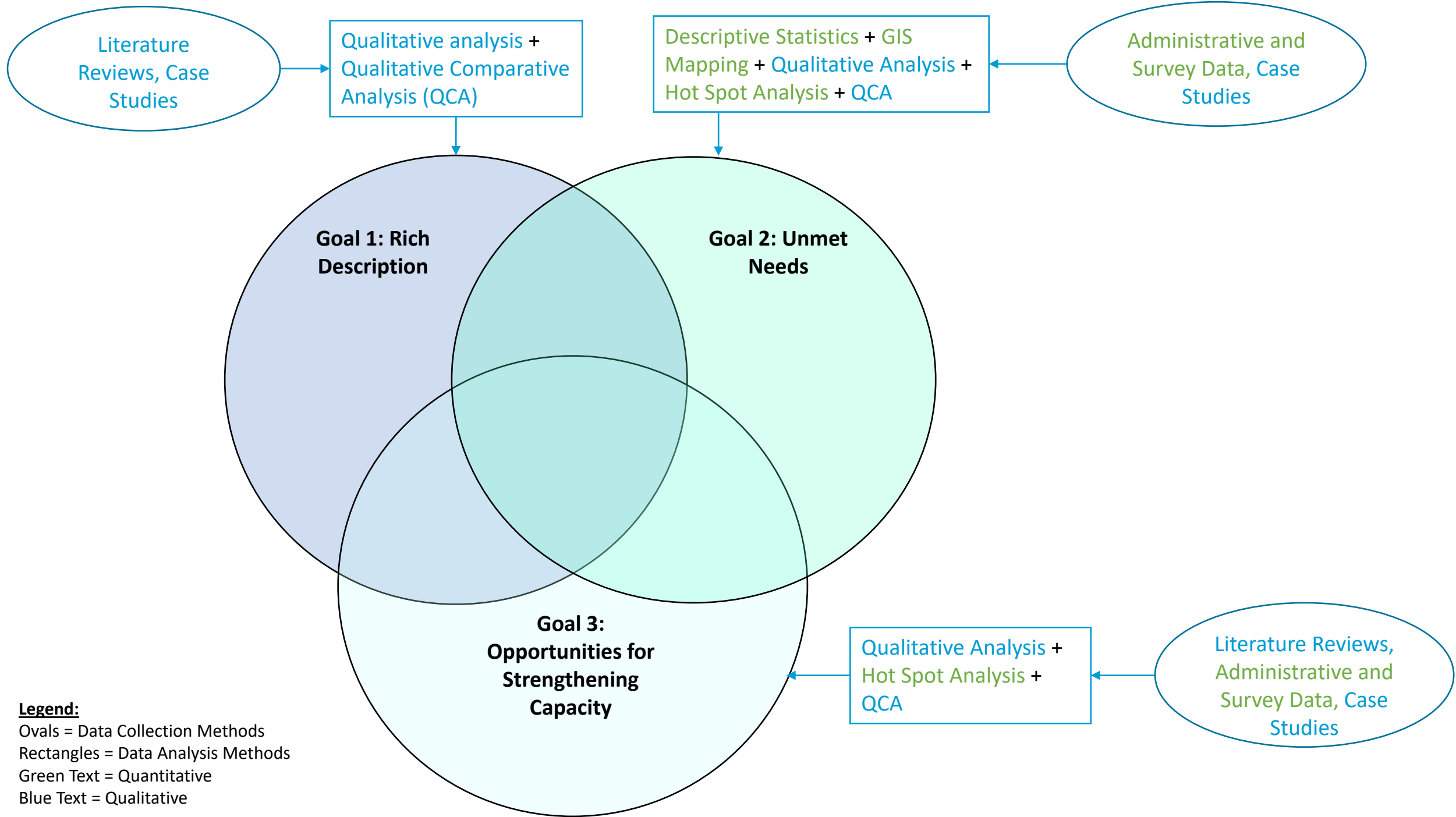
**Legend:**

- Ovals = Data Collection Methods
- Rectangles = Data Analysis Methods
- Green Text = Quantitative
- Blue Text = Qualitative

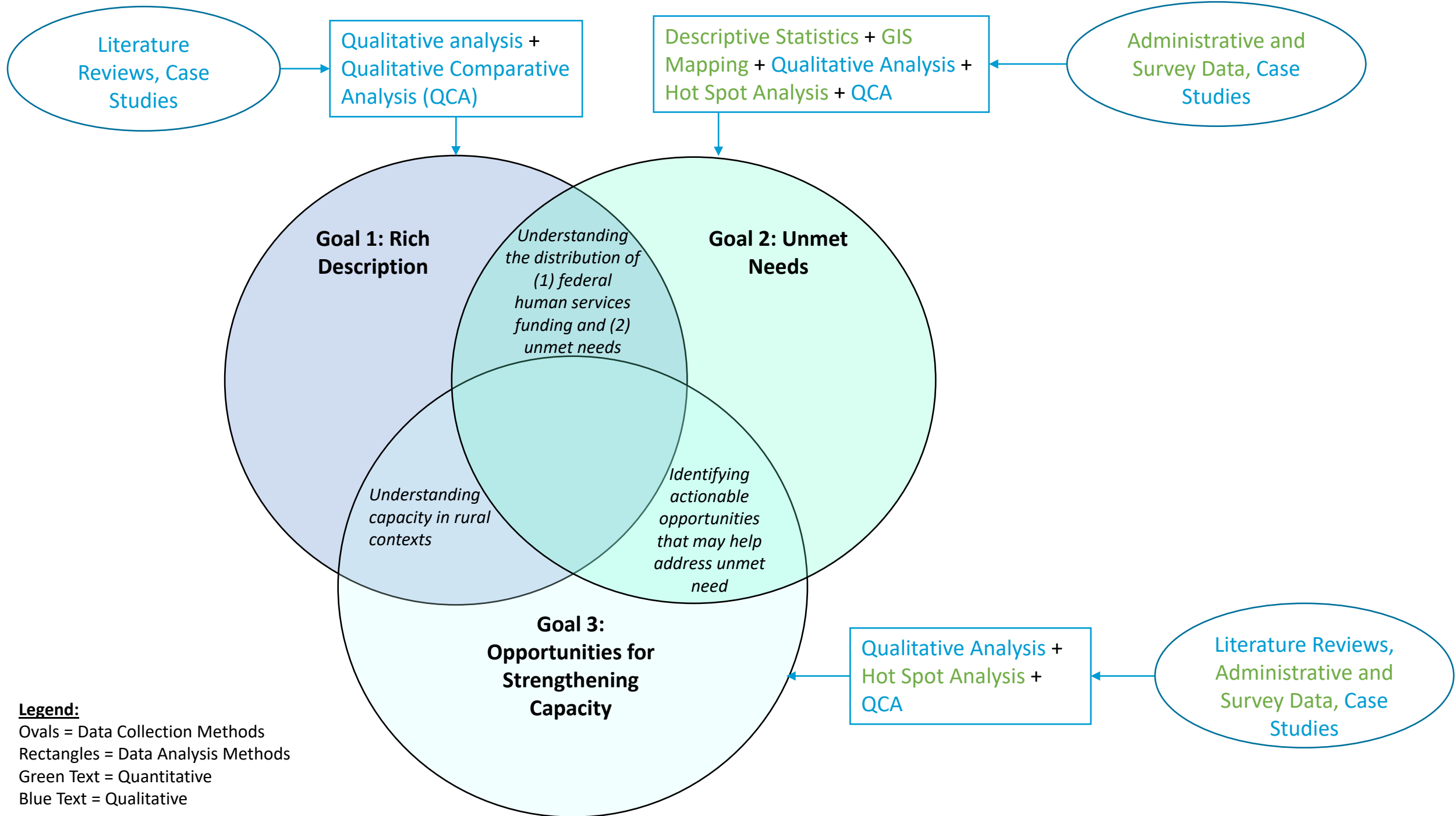


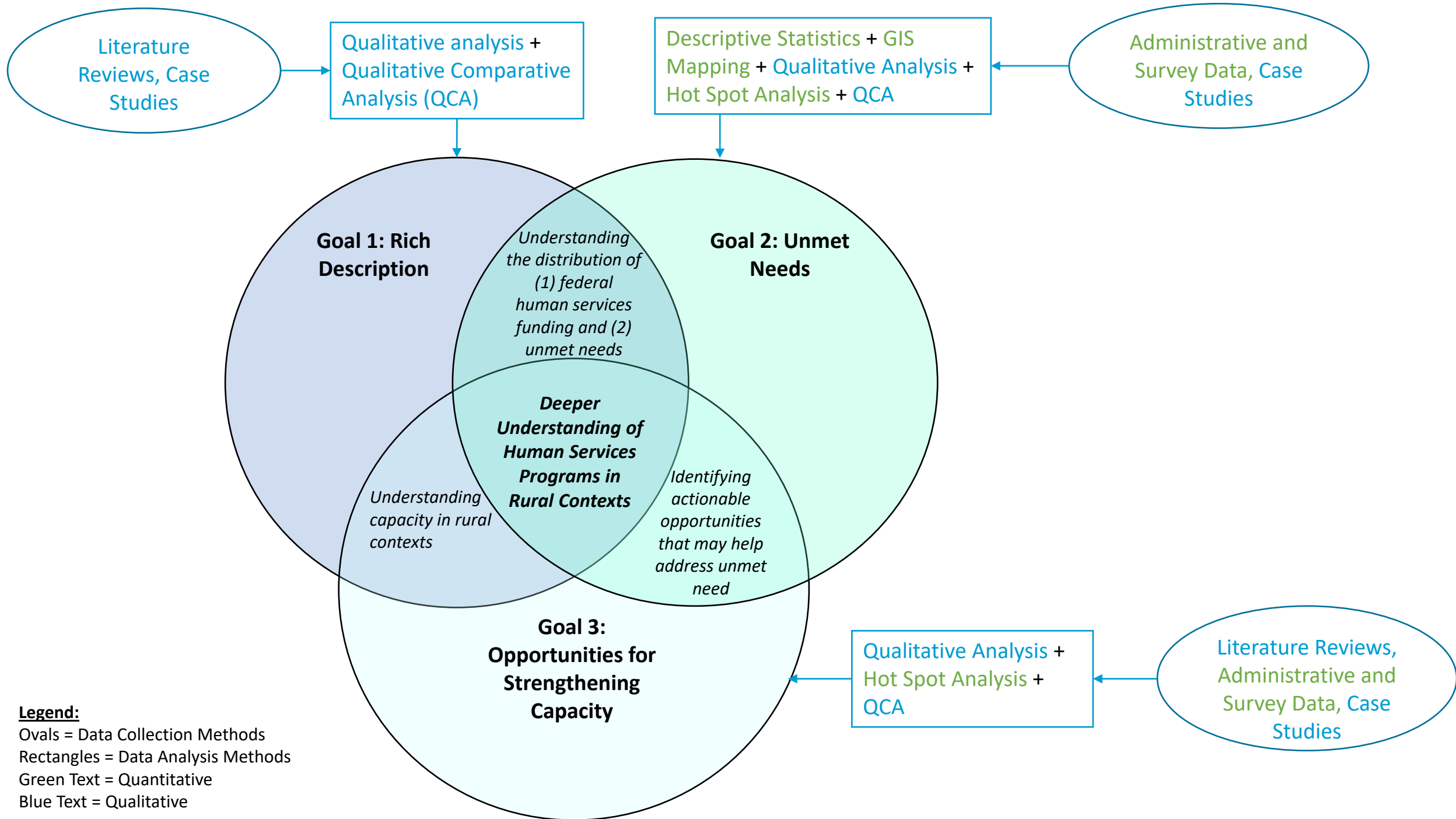
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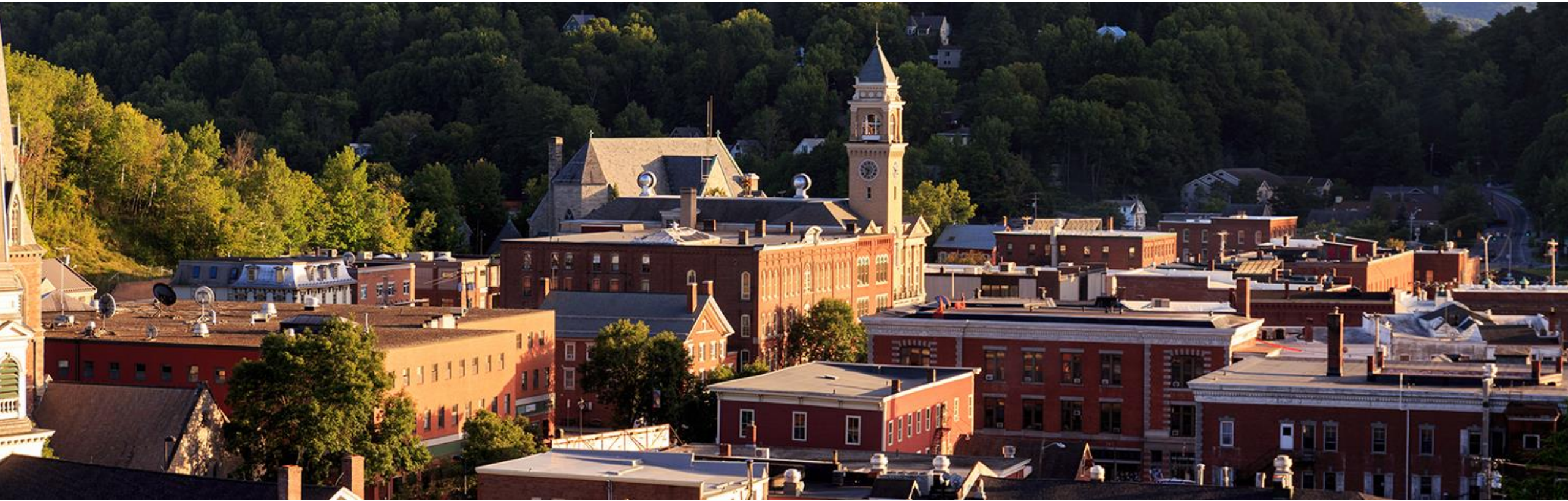












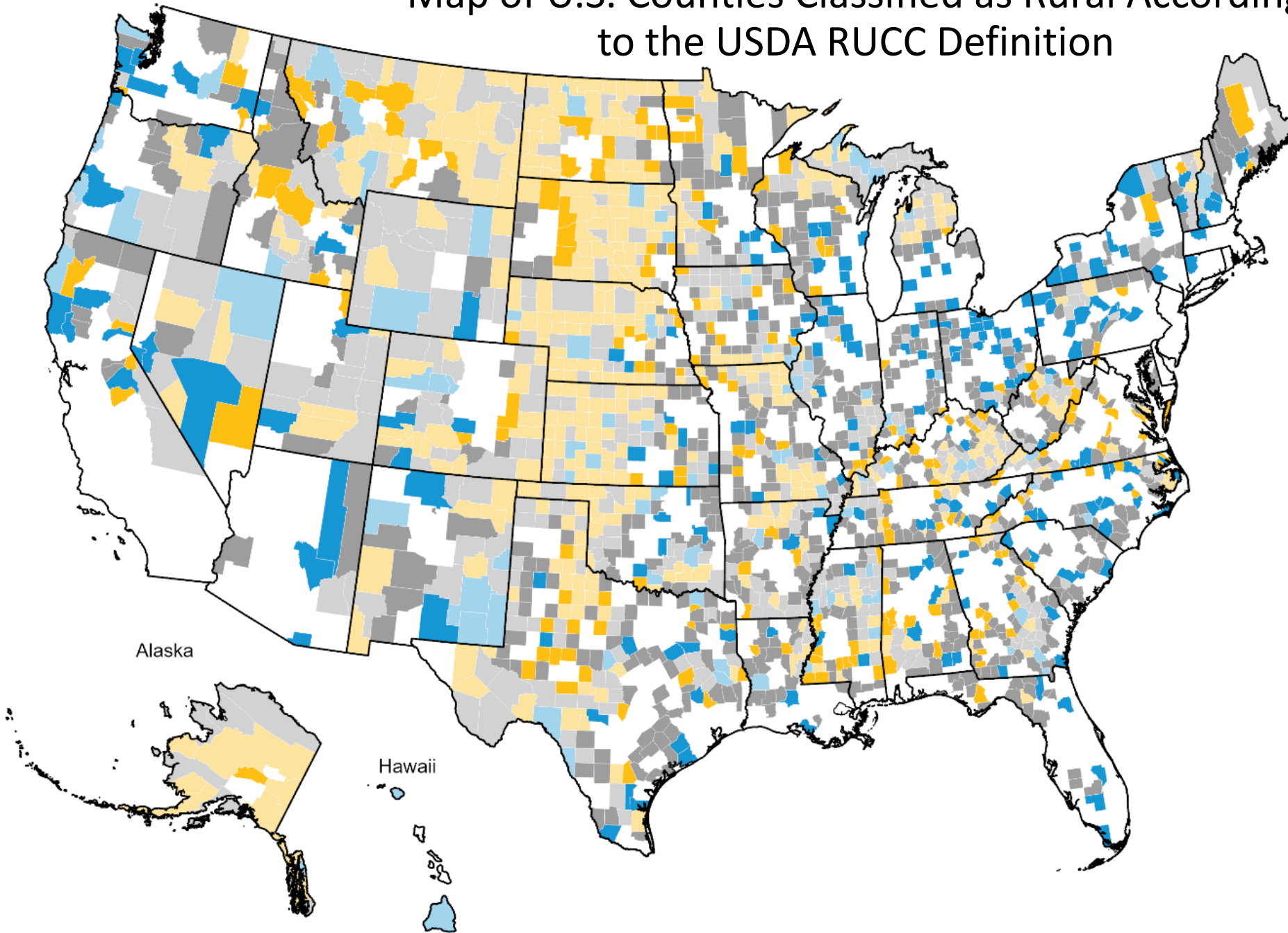
# Defining Rural

# Defining Rural

- Considerations
  - Needs to inform quantitative measurement of unmet need in rural counties
  - Needs to be sufficiently nuance to represent the diversity of rural contexts
  - *Challenge:* In rural areas, most data are suppressed for geographies smaller than a county
- Selected Definition
  - The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural-Urban Continuum Codes (RUCCs).
    - RUCCs subdivide nonmetropolitan counties by population size, population density, and adjacency to metro areas.



# Map of U.S. Counties Classified as Rural According to the USDA RUCC Definition



Completely Rural  
or Urban Pop.  
< 2,500, Adjacent

Completely Rural  
or Urban Pop.  
< 2,500,  
Not Adjacent

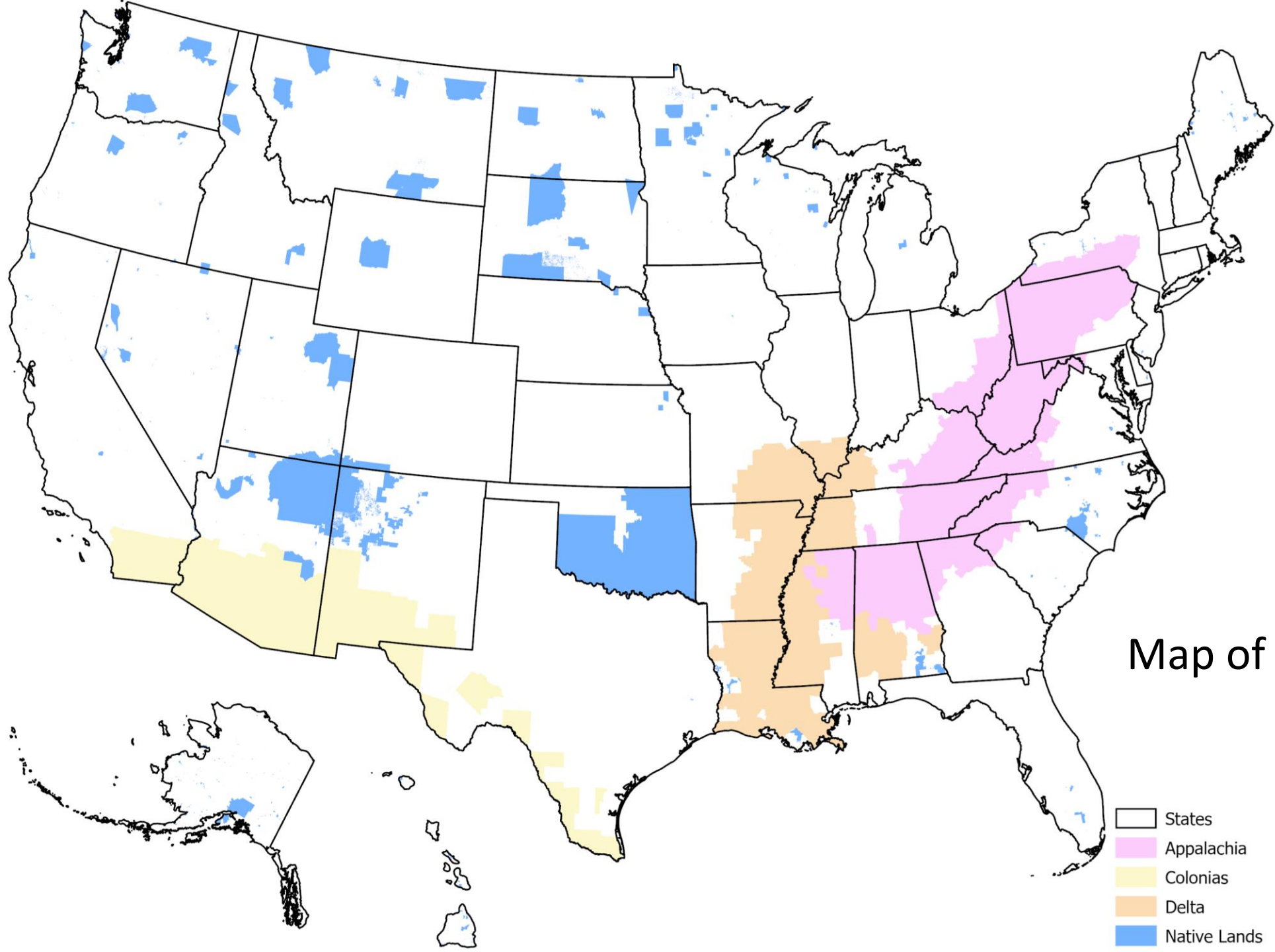
Urban Pop.  
2,500 to 19,999,  
Not Adjacent

Urban Pop.  
2,500 to 19,999,  
Adjacent

Urban Pop.  
> 20,000,  
Not Adjacent

Urban Pop.  
> 20,000,  
Adjacent

Excluded  
Metropolitan  
County



Map of U.S. Rural Regions

- States
- Appalachia
- Colonias
- Delta
- Native Lands





# Purposive Sample of 12 Rural Communities

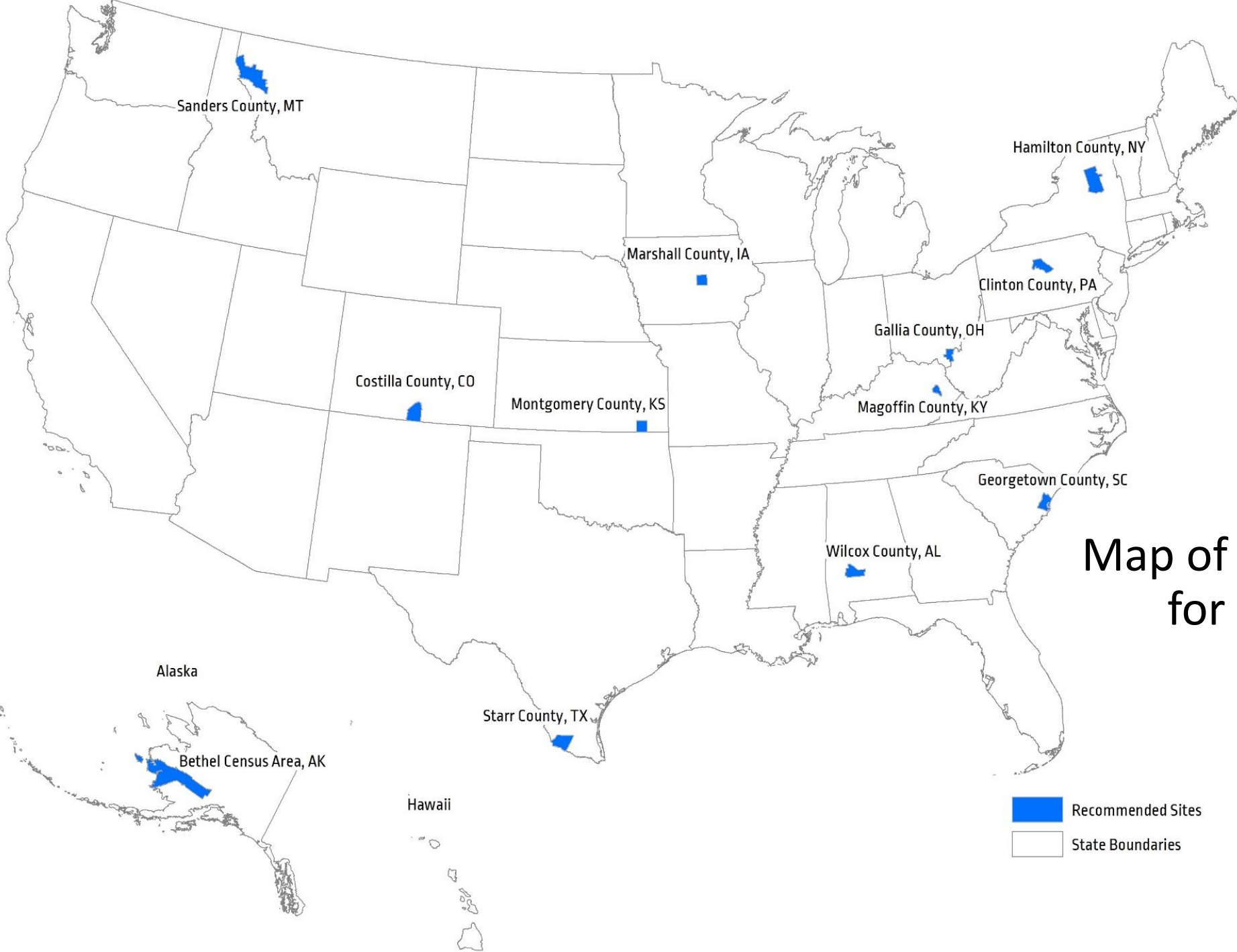
# Site Selection Process

- Engaged stakeholders in virtual meetings to facilitate a purposive sample of 12 site visit counties from universe of 1,976 rural counties
- Priorities included:
  - Presence of the four programs of focus
  - RUCCs codes, rural regions
  - Presence of populations of color
  - Persistent poverty, unemployment, lack of access to a vehicle, housing cost burden
  - Populations with poor physical health
  - Lack of access to high-speed internet
  - State supervised, county-administered systems
- Stakeholders made 145 recommendations (consisting of 117 rural counties)
- Study team then identified a purposive sample of 12
  - Prioritized counties recommended by 2+ stakeholders and counties in which stakeholders had personal or professional experience
  - Ensured counties were representative of key variables

# Overview of the Purposive Sample of 12 Rural Counties

County	State	U.S. Census Region	Rural Region	HMRP	HPOG	MIECHV	TANF	Tribal Programs
Bethel Census Area	AK	West	Native Land				✓	Tribal TANF
Wilcox County	AL	South	Delta			✓	✓	
Costilla County	CO	West	West			✓	✓	
Marshall County	IA	Midwest	Midwest				✓	
Montgomery County	KS	Midwest	Midwest		✓	✓	✓	
Magoffin County	KY	South	Appalachia	✓		✓	✓	
Sanders County	MT	West	Native Land				✓	Tribal MIECHV
Hamilton County	NY	Northeast	Northeast		✓		✓	
Gallia County	OH	Midwest	Appalachia			✓	✓	
Clinton County	PA	Northeast	Appalachia	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Georgetown County	SC	South	South	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Starr County	TX	South	Colonias			✓	✓	





Map of 12 Counties Selected for Virtual Site Visits

# Next Steps for Site Visits

- Virtual site visits, August-November 2021
- Up to 20 interviews in each county with
  - Program directors or leaders
  - Program staff
  - Staff from local nonprofit or partner organizations
- Questions will focus on
  - Experiences working in rural contexts
  - Filling knowledge gaps in the literature
  - Unmet human services needs





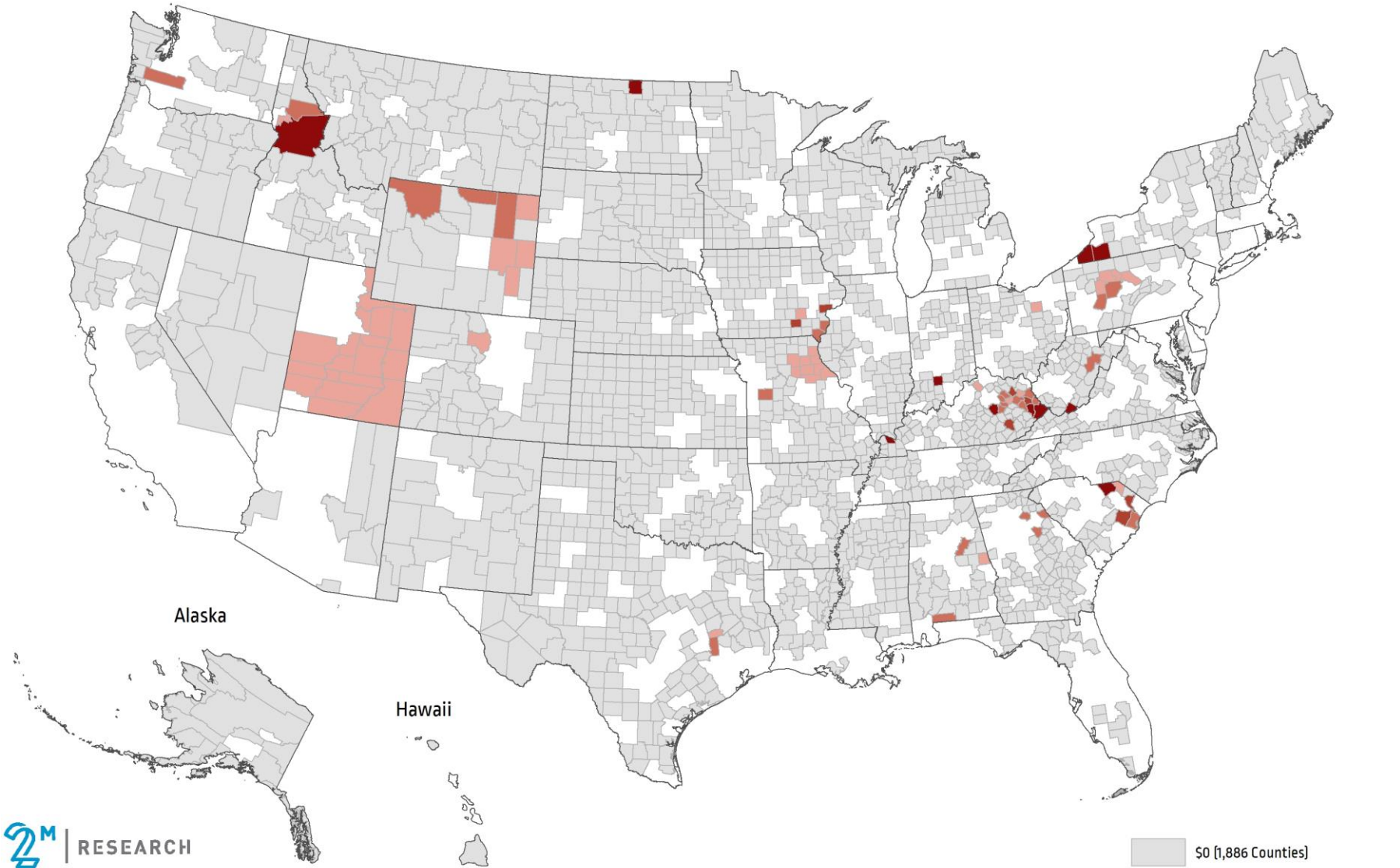
# Work So Far



# Funding Distribution of 4 Programs of Focus

Program	Overall Funding in 2018	Estimated Funding to Rural Counties	Grant Type	How Mapping Done
HMRP	\$100.1 Million	\$7.0 Million	Competitive	Grantee service areas to county level
HPOG	\$71.9 Million	\$9.6 Million	Competitive	Grantee service areas to county level
MIECHV	\$372.9 Million	\$58.0 Million	Formula at State/Tribal level	Grantee service areas to county level
<b>TANF (Basic Assistance Only)</b>	<b>\$6.5 Billion</b>	<b>\$724.9 Million</b>	<b>Formula at State/Tribal level</b>	<b>Weight State/Tribal funding by number of low-income families in each county</b>

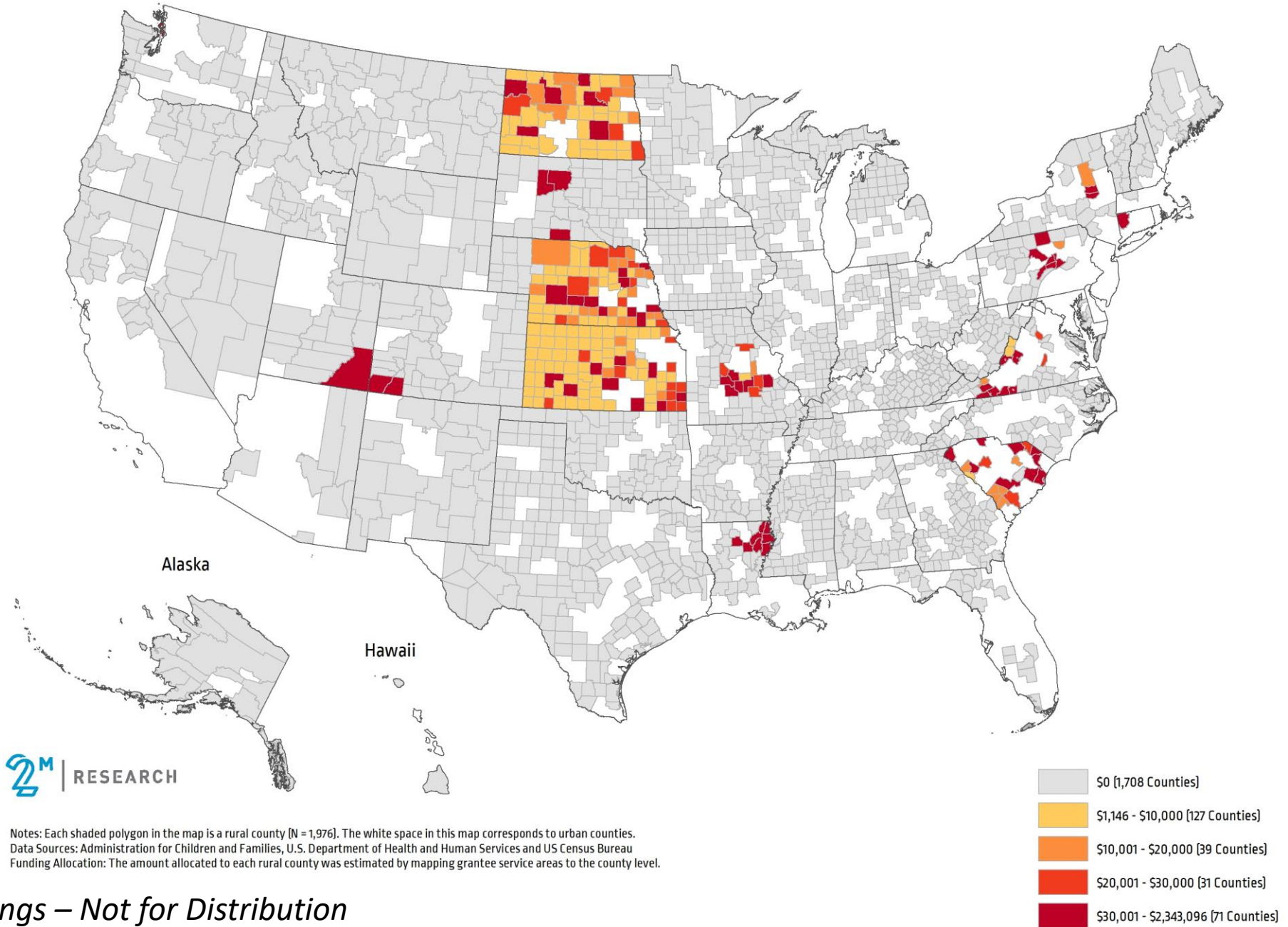
# 2018 Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) Funding Across Rural Counties



Notes: Each shaded polygon in the map is a rural county (N = 1,976). The white space in this map corresponds to urban counties.  
Data Sources: Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and US Census Bureau  
Funding Allocation: The amount allocated to each rural county was estimated by mapping grantee service areas to the county level.

*Preliminary Findings – Not for Distribution*

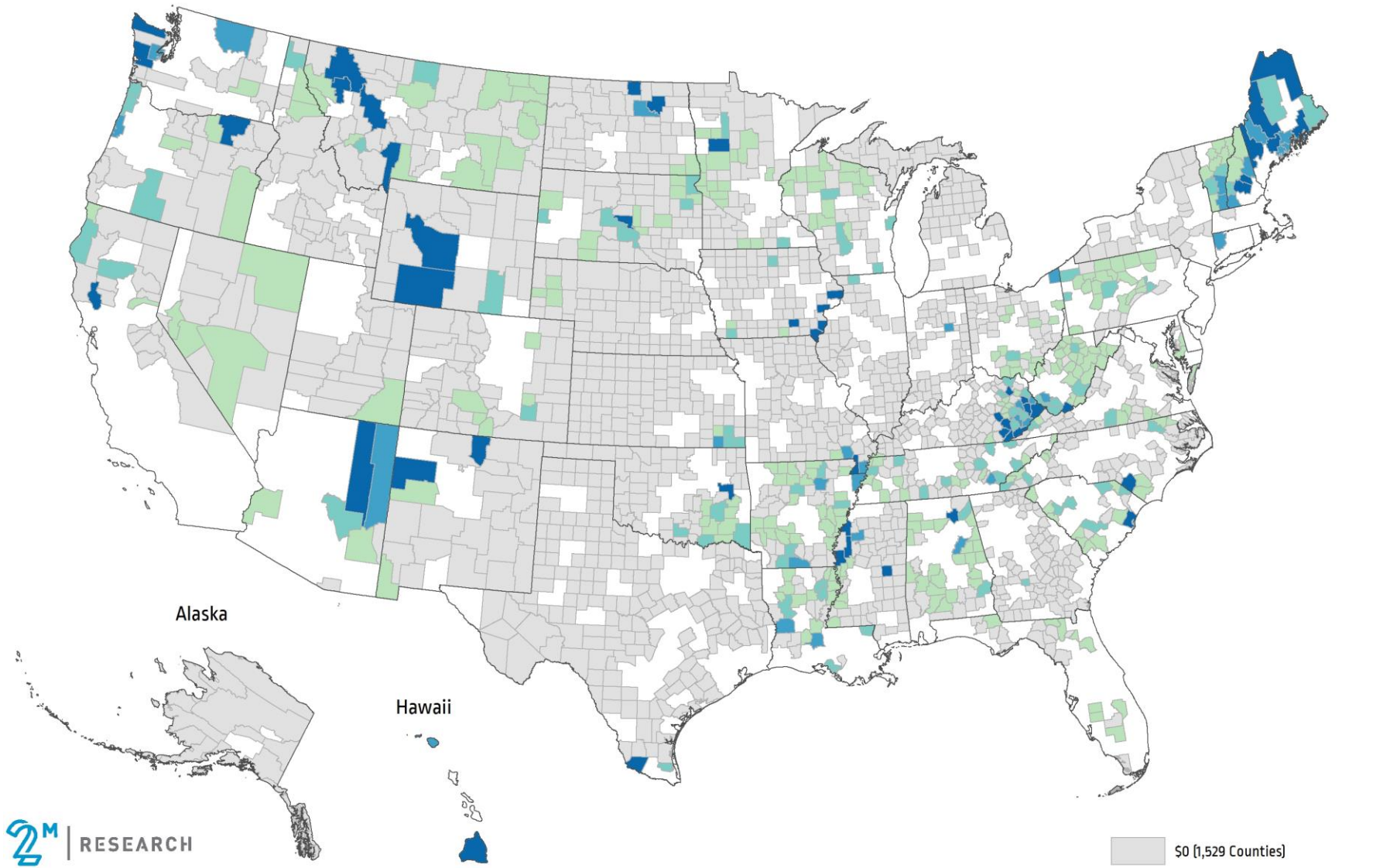
# 2018 Tribal and Non-Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Funding Across Rural Counties



*Preliminary Findings – Not for Distribution*



# 2018 Tribal and Non-Tribal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Funding Across Rural Counties

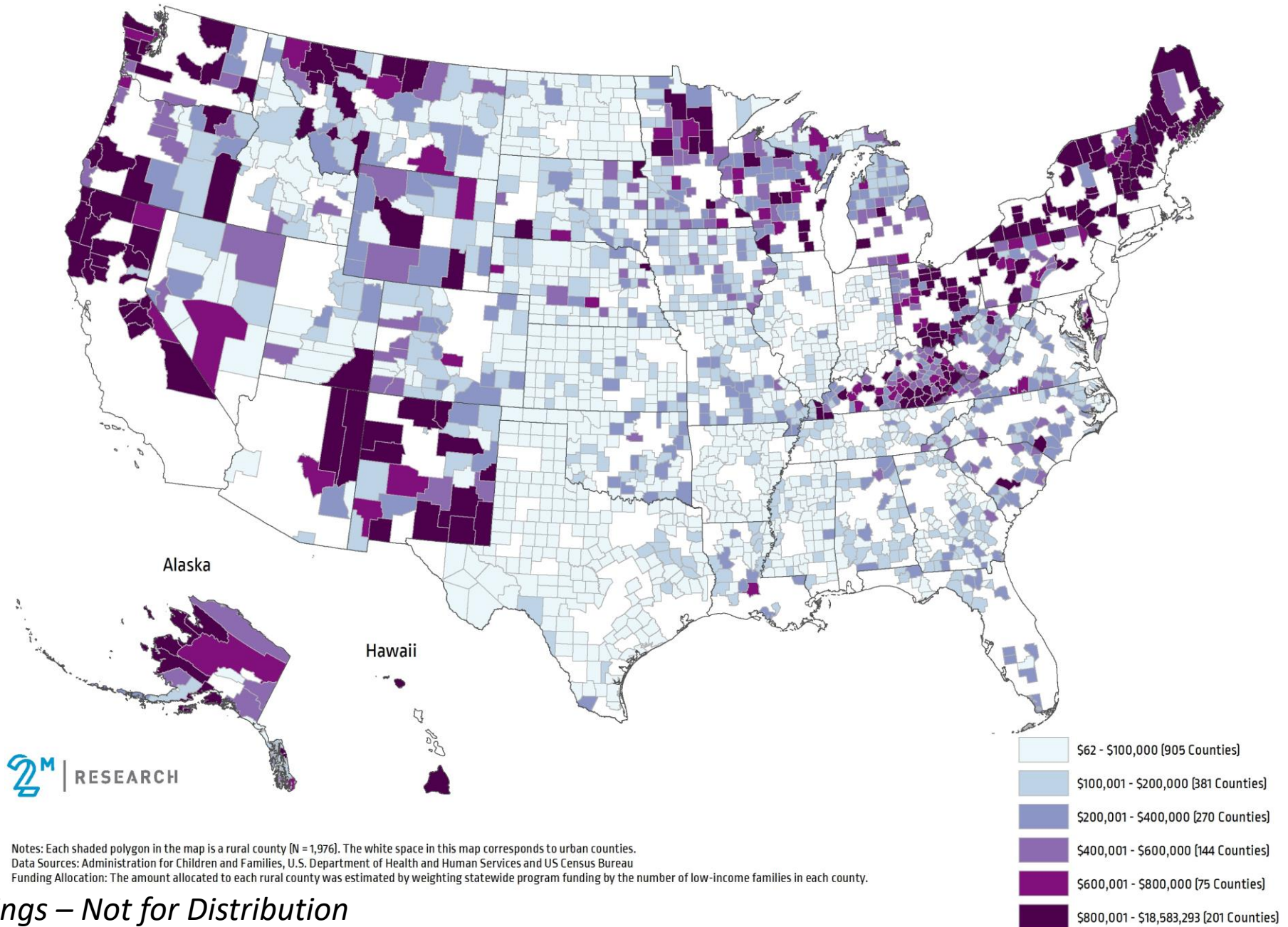


Notes: Each shaded polygon in the map is a rural county (N = 1,976). The white space in this map corresponds to urban counties.  
Data Sources: Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and US Census Bureau  
Funding Allocation: The amount allocated to each rural county was estimated by mapping grantee service areas to the county level.  
Please note that in 2018, there were four new MIECHV Tribal Grantees (covering rural counties in AK, MI, OK, and SD) who did not serve clients during that year.

**Preliminary Findings – Not for Distribution**



# 2018 Tribal and Non-Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Basic Assistance Across Rural Counties



*Preliminary Findings – Not for Distribution*

# Next Steps for Identifying Unmet Need

- Information on funding is useful, but our focus is unmet need
  - Eligible population minus population served in each county
  - Account for non-federal funding sources and community characteristics
- Utilize hotspot analysis to identify concentrations of statistically high levels (or statistically low levels) of unmet need

# Ways that our study can help advance equity in rural communities

- Describe populations often not included in other studies because of the small sample size
- Utilization of qualitative methods that focus on hearing directly from those who provide services to rural communities
- Inequities are often amplified in rural communities – this study focuses on those communities

# Hypothesized Challenges to Human Services Program Provision in Rural Contexts

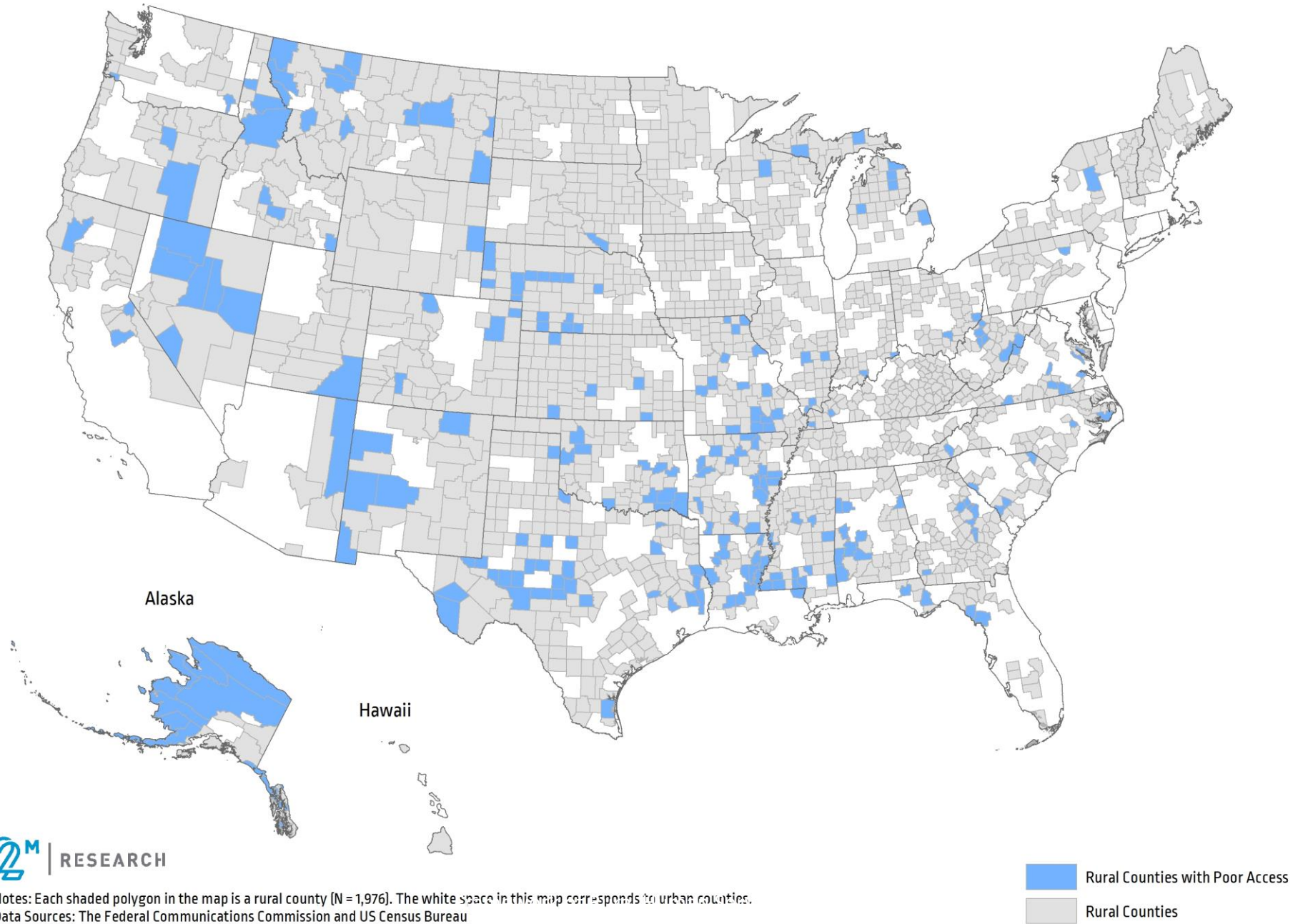
- Lack of access to high-speed internet, transportation, health services, and related issues
- Persistent poverty
- Histories of racism and inequality
- Lack of trust in government institutions, especially in Tribal locations

# Limited Internet Access

- We identified 240 rural counties with poor internet access.
- Many of these counties are in the same areas that have limited federal funding from 4 programs of focus.
- Our sample of 12 rural counties includes 3 of the 240 counties (Bethel Census Area, AK; Wilcox County, AL; and Hamilton County, NY)



# 240 Rural Counties with Less than 40% of the Population Having Access to Fixed [25/3 Mbps] and Mobile [5/1 Mbps] Internet



# Next Steps

- Implement site visits from August to November 2021
- Develop case studies from site visit and related information
- Develop Final Report in Spring 2022
- Upcoming publications
  - Mixed-methods analysis, integration, and synthesis plan
  - Rural definitions brief
- We hope to continue to learn from rural communities and enhance the focus of human services on rural communities



# Discussion Questions

- What are other ways that a study like this can help to advance equity?
- How do our hypothesized challenges align with your experiences in rural communities?
- What other challenges do you face in your work in rural communities?

# Other Questions and Comments?

# Thank you for your attention!

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