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### Highlights: Conversation with First Generation Student Jenny Bunner



**Jenny Bunner** - a very active student at the University of Charleston - is a biology major, a National Science Foundation SPEC Scholar, a First2 Network scholar, an American Chemical Society member, a Student Activity Board member, and a Gamma Beta Phi member.

**Interviewer Dr. Arnett (I.A.):** “So, let’s start kind of at the beginning. I know that you are first generation. What challenges do you feel like you experienced when you were coming up through school or younger and thought like they were unique for you on your pathway?”

**Jenny Bunner (J.B.):** “I don’t know if I would call it unique, but obviously, even being first generation college wasn’t even in my mind. To me because, as always, you can’t afford it. You know, if your parents didn’t go, you really weren’t that smart. If you were on a very low income, I really didn’t even think about college when I was at the point in time where I could start applying for things. Because of the money. It wasn’t until I got an email about the First2 Network.”

**I.A.:** “So tell me a little bit more about that. Please excuse me about that initial experience because I didn’t actually know that that’s how you got engaged with everything. You just

dropped in my lap and I was thrilled to have you.” \*Dr. Arnett had the honor to interview Ms. Bunner, who was in her last cohort of First2 bridge immersion program interns, scholars, and club members while she was a professor at the University of Charleston.\*

**J.B.:** “I went and got my GD over that summer. I had applied to WVU and to Marshall, got into both of them. UC was my last pick, it really was, and one of the main things was that it was a private institution. I always heard you never get in, you don't have the grades, you don't have the money.

So, when I got the promise scholarship, that was the first thing; I was like, ‘Wow, I might be actually able to do this.’ I went to SOAR and I met Dr. J [Dr. Aida Jimenez] for the first time. And she gave me a flyer for First2. Doing the interview with immersion mentors (Grace Estep and Emily Hissom), I felt like I might be actually able to do this, like there's going to be a network of people, that do enjoy the same things as me, that are first generation low income, so I felt almost like a belonging.

You know so many people reached out to me, ‘Hey, we want you to join this. Hey, we want you to be a part of this.’ We're kind of in the same boat...we're first generation, low income. Really when I came for the summer internship is when I fell in love with UC, I fell in love with you guys [2023 First2 Network UC Fall Team], the professors, the students, like the whole atmosphere of it. And you know, I took the research I'd done there [at immersion/CURE] to Washington DC and presented it. So I started there.”



**I.A.:** “Okay so as you made this transition, from high school then transitioning out of that into the space you are now, what advice would you give to students that are coming up as first generation students and having those same kind of experiences and feelings that you experienced?”

**J.B.:** “My advice would be that you're not a statistic and you're not a number. Because that's what I thought, and even some counselors in high school. People that are supposed

to be there to help you. You might have to reach out yourself and find help if you want to do it. Don't just because somebody tells you. You know, these are the statistics that you're going to fall into that category. Keep going. Where there is a will, there is a way.”

**I.A.:** “I love that you bring up that statistics comment because I think all of us that came up that way had to deal with that and it's just a really good reminder.”

**J.B.:** “I actually had a counselor tell me basically I was a statistic. And at that point in my life, it was very discouraging and I didn't have the courage that I do now so I was like, “I can't do this, I won't be able to do this.”Even with me being in college - I still don't understand it. It's a lot being in a position where you're vulnerable and you don't know how to take the next step. It's nice to have either a network or organization or person there to help with that.”

**I.A.:** “You highlighted how you reached out yourself. In thinking about acquiring resources to make these maneuvers can you describe your experience?”

**J.B.:** “I just researched, I got online and first off I really figured out what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to do STEM. So from that point I was like, women in STEM, are there extra scholarships for women in STEM or even in West Virginia? Then I researched it and the more I got into it I found that there are certain scholarships for different things you want to major in. I think the biggest thing is researching it, and not even just as a scholarship but also career wise - what are you gonna do with your degree? What kind of job would be in between if you do want to take a year off and go back to school? I really just researched basically. First thing was scholarships. That's all I needed, a little push because the unknown is so scary, it's overwhelming, and it's easy to put off.”

**I.A.:** “How do you think that these experiences that you've had have made you a different person? And in what ways do you think that you're different for good or for not?”

“THE RELATIONSHIPS I HAVE WITH THE PROFESSORS ARE BECAUSE OF THIS [FIRST2]. I WOULDN'T HAVE THEM OTHERWISE. I FEEL LIKE I'VE NEVER HAD ANY NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE WITH FIRST2.”

JENNY BUNNER  
Student at University of Charleston

**J.B.:** “I would say they are for good and for bad. The hardships at the time do not feel like they're for good. But when you step back and look - like in my situation if I would have just stopped and not gone on and explored different schools and scholarships - I probably wouldn't have gone on to go to college.

I am grateful that I did have those few speed bumps to get me in the right direction. I think honestly, it's changed me for the better. Taught me patience. Although it might not seem like it at the time, the hardships that you are going to face will be worth it in the end because I feel like the hardships make you stronger.”

**I.A.:** “Thinking about the many different roles that you've had the chance to take on, which role was the most valuable to help prepare you?”

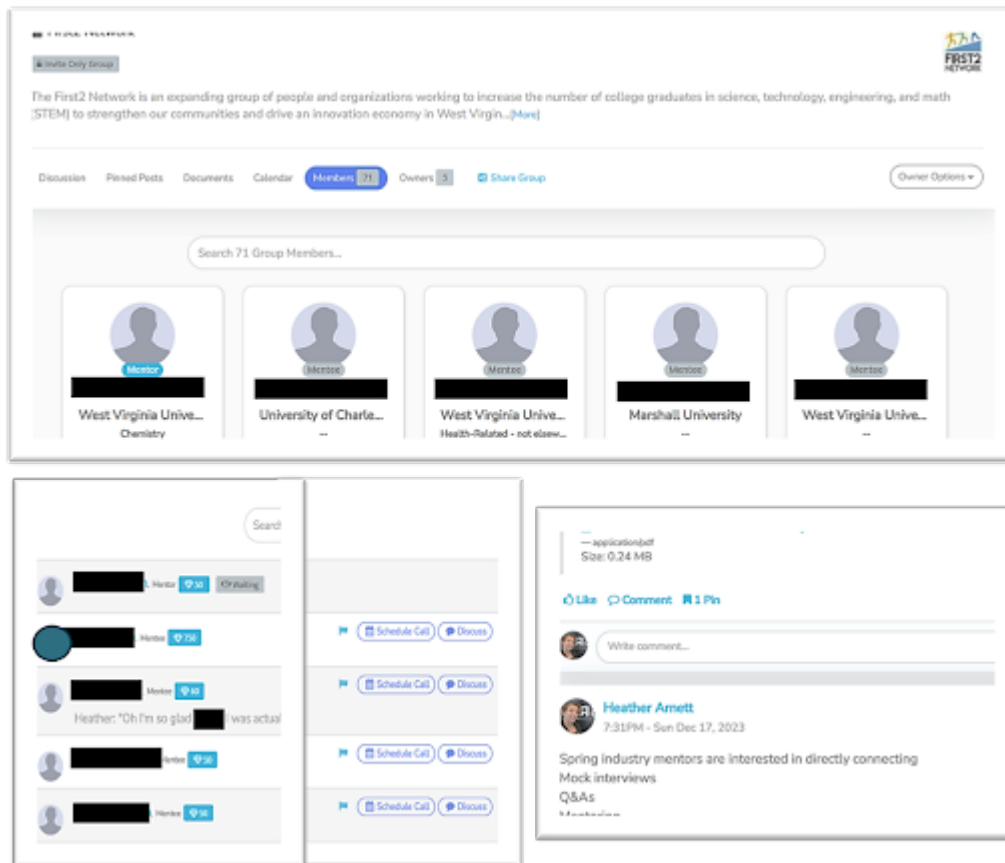
**J.B.:** “I feel like scholar might be the most...productive role maybe? Because I feel like I'm more into the organization, like going to the meetings and being able to talk with everybody that's part of the organization no matter if it's in Morgantown or elsewhere. So many different people and so many different dynamics. There is a wide difference in how they do a project on their campuses that we're able to take part in and do our roles in.

I feel like as a scholar that I can help and almost guide. New people are coming in and I still hold my position. And I have that experience that I can speak on. I try to help freshman or other people that have been at our institution trying to help them.”

*Dr. Heather Arnett has a Ph.D. in ecology and evolution. She worked at the University of Charleston specializing in gateway courses and establishing the First2 Network. She now works as the First2Network Program Coordinator at the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission.*

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**NRMN: New Mentoring App Connects First2 Further by Dr. Heather Arnett**



**Top Panel:** First2 Network on NRMN - we can display our mission and explore the many members that share that cause.

**Bottom Left Panel:** My Connections - very similar to a social media “friend list”; you can view your connections, direct message, and set up a scheduled video call.

**Bottom Right Panel:** familiar style Feed with the ability to “PIN” key posts (e.g. internships, courses, etc.)

Confirmed! Confirmed! Confirmed! Luckily a peek at my face caused a few of my former students to use my profile as their choice to try and connect on the application program we were workshopping. I was flush with excitement-not only were the attendees able to access our new site well, but many of my old students were connecting and exploring the different messaging features. Success and joy!

You’ve made a connection! First highlighted in a workshop in the First2 Network Fall 2023 Conference, NRMN is a social and professional application that actively works to connect mentors and mentees by needs, discipline, and location. In its simplest form that can be all you do, use it like a more relaxed version of LinkedIn, where the goal is to get advice and meet new people, rather than get a new headshot.

Katie Stinson (MLIS, Sr. Program Mgr Vanderbilt University Medical Center) led a workshop where individuals had the opportunity to be pre-registered in NRMN and the First2 Network Group (you were also able to do so during the workshop). This group was specially created to connect industry with students as well as faculty. This should both bolster local pathways but grow experiences, confidence, and accessible opportunities for students in WV. Katie led attendees through the torments of inane tasks such as profile set up but then engaged us all in the many facets of the social media package. Beneficially, many of the components of the app work similar to other large social media and networking platforms so after a little navigation, features such as making connections, sharing information, or chatting with a mentor/another mentee feels quite familiar (see photos and descriptions above).

Recently the top posts have been about incoming research and internship opportunities. In addition, the Industry Advisory Board (IAB) has taken a particular interest and made this part of their project. They are advertising mock interviews and site visits on NRMN. Additionally, based on the first few requests, they are also actively recruiting BMS members for NRMN as well.

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"First2 Network"



If you are interested in joining NRMN (or have completely forgotten about it and want to get back into your profile) check out this link (<https://bit.ly/3Rkpyrd>) or the QR code (left)! You can always connect with me first, I'm happy to help.

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## Institutional Updates

### **Blue Ridge Community and Technical College**

Their First2 campus club is working on setting up their first club meeting and brainstorming ideas for the spring semester.

### **Fairmont State University**

Jay has been preparing for a presentation at the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) next summer; Jay has also been accepted to present at the American Academy of Forensic Science and is a STaR Grant recipient. Jefferey Bennet arranged for a financial aid representative to speak at a club meeting about the FAFSA changes. In December they held an Institutional Team planning meeting for the spring semester. Their First2 institutional team met January 23rd and another institutional team meeting is

scheduled for later this semester. All seven of their PDSAs have been approved and are underway!

### **Glenville State University**

Their First2 campus club will be holding bi-weekly meetings for the spring semester; they are close to receiving approval from their Student Government Association (SGA) and will be attending the next SGA meeting to show their support for this. Their institutional team met in January to discuss starting their club PDSA. Their team's PDSA on math anxiety from fall 2022 is completed; their PDSAs on math anxiety and metacognition are in progress for spring 2024 pending coaching. They are planning a faculty retreat for sometime in March.

### **Marshall University**

Their First2 institutional team has started working on their PDSAs and their campus club will be holding meetings soon. They are also working on student ambassador projects.

### **University of Charleston**

Before winter break, the First2 campus club handed out their annual finals goody bags. Two First2 students will be taking the MCAT in January. Some of their First2 scholars and directors are planning their college readiness visits. Their institutional teams' campus club PDSA from last year has been completed; their campus club and impromptu lecture PDSAs have received initial coaching. Their Directors expect to finish their 2023-2024 PDSA this semester.

### **West Virginia University**

Their First2 campus club will be holding their first event, a hot chocolate social, in January and they will be continuing their workshop PDSA this semester beginning with a workshop on Excel skills; the First2 Directors expect to finish this PDSA this semester. Their institutional team's Fall 2023 Listserv and Enhance Student Voices PDSAs are complete through the Act stage and their CHEM 115 Embedded Student PDSA is in the Study phase. They are planning to attend the Buckhannon-Upshur Middle School Career Exploration Extravaganza on March 7th to represent First2 and WVU Chemistry and hope to have 1-2 First2 Students assist with this. They will be working on two additional PDSAs with Tier 2 Scholars, Donuts with the Deans and Mentors. They are planning to have a First2 table at the statewide Science Bowl that will be held on Saturday Feb 3rd; Rita Rio is working on this project. Lori Ogden has agreed to work on a PDSA involving informal connection between Scholars and instructors of large-enrollment classes. Of the 23 Directors and Scholars funded during Fall 2023 (4 funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission), 20 will continue for Spring 2024. Two Directors (Oscar Enriquez and Garrett Bender) graduated in December. One Tier 1 Scholar was promoted to a Tier 2 Scholar.

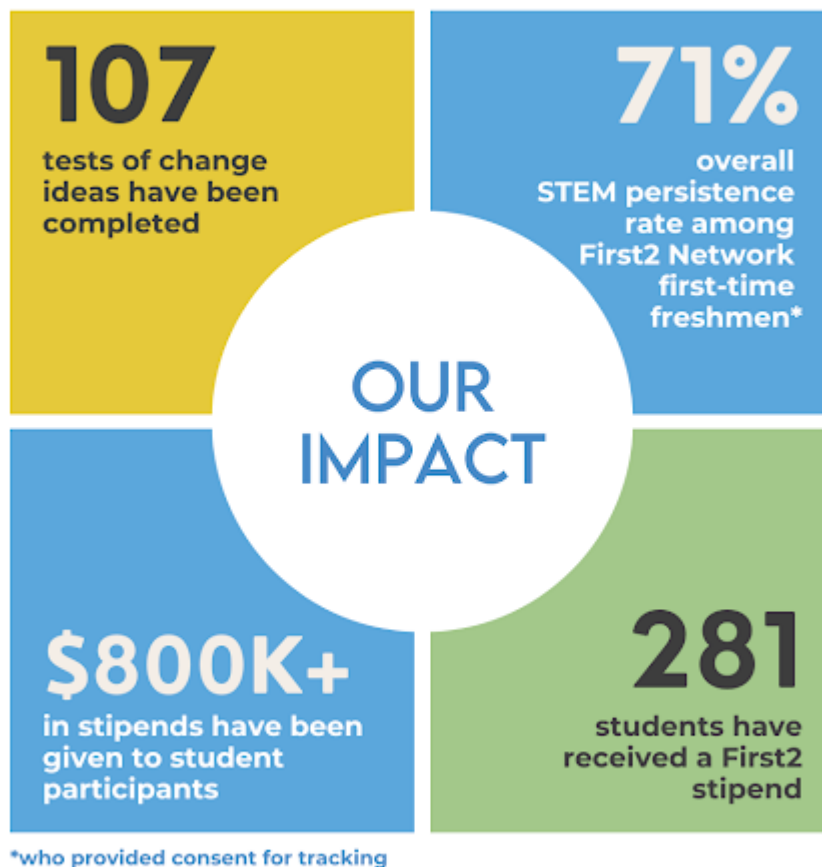


## **West Virginia University Institute of Technology**

Before the winter break their First2 campus club practiced their PDSA abilities by putting together Mr. Potato Head figures as fast as possible to show the reiterative approach of PDSAs. Fayth Laxton is now the President of the WVU Tech campus club and Kaleb Cole is the Vice President. Kaleb received the NASA Space Grant Scholarship to conduct research into an Augmented Reality-based Interactive Android Mobile Application to Promote Sustainable Tourism in West Virginia Using Computer Vision and Deep Learning; he will present at WVU's Annual Research Symposium on April 21st with his research findings. Their campus club has held two meetings so far this semester and they are starting several PDSAs. They have an overall focus on increasing connectedness within their campus network this semester and therefore will be participating in bi-weekly group bonding activities. Several First2 students will be completing Hometown Ambassador/College Readiness presentations this month. Their institutional team has begun closing last semester's PDSA on Campus Resources. Additionally, they are starting several PDSAs regarding undergraduate research, faculty awareness of factors first-generation college students face, and increasing STEM major variety.

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## **Celebrating Network Successes**



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### **PDSA of the Month: Marshall's Student-Faculty Networking Dinner**

This month we are featuring Marshall's completed Student-Faculty Networking Dinner PDSA; click [here](#) for a summary and click [here](#) to view their completed template.

The Marshall Institutional Team had a major success with their Networking Dinner. They were able to increase belonging among First2 students and encourage interactions with students and faculty. They also over performed their expectations, in engaging more students and faculty to participate. This will help these students persist in their majors and encourage the faculty to connect with students.

The First2 Network uses improvement science (a systematic approach to testing high-impact practices in education) to test high-impact practices — “change ideas” — that improve retention of first-generation and other under-represented college students in STEM fields. First2 has developed a theory of change that identifies [four primary drivers](#) of success for these students. Institutional teams within the First2 Network plan, conduct,

study and act on change ideas using a Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) cycle, then share their findings throughout the Network.

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## **On the Road with First2: Legislative Ambassadors**

Each year during the legislative session, we embark on a meaningful visit to the West Virginia Capitol, strategically timed to coincide with Undergraduate Research Day at the Capitol. This hands-on experience will equip students with the skills to efficiently navigate the Capitol building, identify and engage with state representatives, and schedule appointments to address pertinent issues in higher education influenced by legislative decisions. Sharpening our advocacy prowess, students will craft and deliver impactful elevator speeches.

While at the Capitol, we look forward to thanking our legislators for passing the [West Virginia AmeriCorps Tuition Waiver](#) which enables individuals to be eligible for up to 8 semesters of tuition waivers for undergraduate or graduate programs at public colleges and universities in West Virginia for completing a term of national service in West Virginia. We hope to provide information to our legislators about the value of asking for first-generation student status on college applications as well as provide feedback regarding the PROMISE scholarship, how this scholarship positively impacts STEM students, and the importance of providing pathways for students to regain this scholarship (particularly for students that may be enrolled in rigorous STEM programs). For more information about pending bills related to the PROMISE scholarship, visit the [West Virginia Legislature](#) website and search bills by Short Title: PROMISE).

This immersive experience will also afford students the opportunity to witness the legislative process firsthand, including being acknowledged on the house and/or senate floor. Additionally, we aim to enrich our understanding of West Virginia's history by dedicating time to explore the WV State Museum.

There will be a preparation session held on February 21st at the Embassy Suites in Charleston, WV and then we will spend the entire day of February 22nd at the WV Capitol Building.

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## **Events and Opportunities**

### **Transparency In Learning and Teaching (TILT) Webinar**

Wednesday, February 21, 2024 1 p.m. ET via Zoom

Registration Required: [Zoom Registration Link](#)

“Improve college students' success in STEM classrooms using a transparent framework for assignment design. Presented by Jade Metzger-Riftkin, PhD., Research Assistant with the [Institute for Human Development](#) at Northern Arizona University.

- ASL and CART provided. If you require other accommodations please contact Eric at [ericwt@uw.edu](mailto:ericwt@uw.edu). The TILT Webinar will be recorded and accessible versions of the recording and teaching materials will be made publicly available.
- Sponsored by the [TAPDINTO-STEM](#) and [AiiCE](#), alliances of the [Eddie Bernice Johnson INCLUDES National Network](#), funded by the National Science Foundation:
  - [The Alliance of Students with Disabilities for Inclusion, Networking, and Transition Opportunities in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics](#) (TAPDINTO-STEM) #HRD-2119902;
  - [Alliance for Identity-Inclusive Computing Education](#) (AiiCE) #HRD-2118453).
- Any questions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed are those of the presenter(s), author(s), and/or participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of the federal government or the University of Washington.
- For any questions: Eric: [ericwt@uw.edu](mailto:ericwt@uw.edu).”



### **Women LINK (Leading, Innovating, Networking, Knowing) Conference**

Morgantown, WV March 20, 2024

“The inaugural Women Leading, Innovating, Networking, Knowing Conference will feature a robust lineup of speakers, presenters and panelists from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. March 20 at the Morgantown Marriott Waterfront Place. The PowerPoint-free event aims to create a support network across the state that empowers women to lead. A panel of three women leaders working in higher education will discuss imposter syndrome while panelists from NASA and other industries examine male-dominated occupations and solutions to these issues. Participants will also learn how to use the results of the CliftonStrengths® assessment as women leaders. All women or anyone interested in exploring ways to bridge gender gaps are encouraged to attend.” [Click here for the full schedule or to register.](#)

## **Introduction to an Inclusive Professional Framework (IPF)**

March 21, 2024 from 2-5 p.m. ET online via Zoom

“The Inclusive Professional Framework for Faculty ([IPF: Faculty](#)) is a research-based approach that helps faculty become more inclusive and equitable in their teaching, advising, and research mentorship roles. The framework focuses on three key domains: identity, intercultural awareness, and relational and communication skills. Join this session to explore the identity domain of the IPF: Faculty with time to think about the wheel of privilege/identity wheel, the cultural wealth model, and initial applications to your faculty role. Personal identity work is fundamental to being able to apply the IPF effectively, authentically, and with confidence. There is room to deepen the conversation as participants wish in this workshop. The exercises will help you begin to develop a transferrable equity mindset, and apply these skills to promote more inclusive classrooms and equitable advising and mentoring relationships.”

Click [here](#) to register.



## **Carnegie Summit on Improvement Science**

San Diego, CA, March 24-27, 2024

“The Carnegie Foundation Summit on Improvement in Education is the landmark event for champions of educational equity. Prepare to be inspired by our keynote speaker, Dr. Brandi Hannant-Crawford, in her work to redefine improvement as a pursuit of justice. More keynotes to be announced! Carnegie Summit is a community of movement makers who are actively learning and sharing strategies to create processes that empower educators and generate lasting momentum.”

Click here for the [full schedule](#) or to [register](#).

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**News from the INCLUDES National Network**



The [INCLUDES National Network](#) is deeply saddened to share the news that Retired United States Representative and Chairwoman, the Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, has died. Please read [President Biden's statement on her passing](#). There are also many news articles that share information about her impact and legacy, such as: "[Former U.S. Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson, Black Democratic trailblazer, dies at 89](#)".

We are so honored that she joined the August 2023 National Network Convening for the Fireside Chat with Dr. Tori Rhoulac Smith to share her story. Scroll down on this page to watch a video of their conversation or view it on [YouTube](#). NSF's Eddie Bernice Johnson INCLUDES Initiative is part of her legacy, and we are honored to continue to work toward the goal of a diverse, equitable, and inclusive STEM ecosystem.

#### **From the INCLUDES National Network Blog:**

"It's a New Phase for the National Network - We're excited to share with you the specifics about our new vision and what they mean for our engagement with you. The INCLUDES Coordination Hub (Hub) partners — [SRI](#), [UC Berkeley's College & Career Alliance Support Network](#), [Quality Education for Minorities](#), and [WestEd](#) — are opening up new avenues of support for the National Network. We are building momentum for the National Network to be the nation's go-to entity for people to learn about strategies, practices, and models to create equitable opportunities for people to thrive in STEM fields. Together, we're fostering a national movement.

We're introducing a new structure to cluster projects based on the intensity of their focus on systems change. In our work, systems change refers to transforming systems that perpetuate inequities, such as fundamentally changing hiring practices or addressing mental models that may shape teaching practices. To support and elevate systems change work, we're structuring the National Network into three distinct but interconnected Clusters.

#### **Engagement Opportunities Are Coming Soon:**

What does this mean for you in the coming months? We'll be rolling out a series of ways to engage, learn, and co-create this new vision, including:

- A multi-Alliance-led webinar on the effective and equitable application of Improvement Science and Networked Improvement Community frameworks for systems change. Thank you to the [ALRISE Alliance](#), [STEM PUSH Network](#), and the [First2 Network](#) for creating this opportunity for the National Network!
- A webinar to learn about recommendations in the new [Committee on Equal Opportunities in Science and Engineering](#) (CEOSE) report , [Making Visible the Invisible: Understanding Intersectionality](#). Thank you to Dr. Ann Quiroz Gates, a CEOSE member and Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Director of the [Computing Alliance of Hispanic-Serving Institutions](#) (CAHSI) at the University of Texas at El Paso, for this opportunity to co-create this webinar.
- Webinars on collaborative infrastructure, systems change, and broadening participation. These sessions will focus on measurement and learning.
- Advisory Group and Task Force involvement. These will be opportunities to, for example, shape our research agenda and measurement plans and move learnings and recommendations into broader educational, industrial, and policy contexts. Both groups will aim to ensure that our efforts effectively support the vision of the INCLUDES Initiative. We will share more information soon about how you can join our Advisory Group or Task Force.
- Support for projects nearing completion. This support will focus on sustainability and measurement to ensure lasting impact.

### Your Role Is Integral to Our Journey

Your participation is vital in shaping our shared vision. To discuss these opportunities or share your ideas, please reach out to us at [nsfincludeshub@sri.com](mailto:nsfincludeshub@sri.com).”



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