

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Calhoun County has been selected to participate in the Rural Recovery Accelerator, a new community-oriented technical assistance program designed to help rural communities build the economic resiliency strategies they need to survive the current crisis. The Rural Recovery Accelerator is a new initiative launched by Opportunity Alabama, a statewide 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to connecting communities with capital.

Calhoun was selected from a statewide pool of applicants for the new program, which has already received national attention from [Forbes Magazine](#). The goal of the program is to equip communities in Calhoun County with the data, relationships, and strategies to recover and to thrive post-COVID-19. Opportunity Alabama is working closely with the Jacksonville State University Center for Economic Development and Business Research, City of Jacksonville, City of Anniston, Calhoun County EDC, Calhoun County Area Chamber, and McClellan Development Authority. “Right now, partnering and supporting each other is more important than ever and by working together we can make a difference for the people and businesses in our community”, said Julie Moss, the Director of the McClellan Development Authority.

“We were impressed with the capacity Calhoun County demonstrated for economic growth, even in the midst of the current national crisis,” says Opportunity Alabama CEO, Alex Flachsbart. Jack Draper, Mayor of Anniston, said, “With Anniston having two of the three declared Opportunity Zones in Calhoun County, by Governor Kay Ivey, the advent of the Accelerator Program further lends to promoting our city’s assets and potential investments to a broader and marketed sector.” Meanwhile, the City of Jacksonville is also eager to participate in the program and collaborate with the other organizations to address problems created by the current crisis. “The City of Jacksonville is working cooperatively to support the return of students to the campus at Jacksonville State University as well as supporting current and new businesses coming to the City,” says Mayor Johnny Smith of the City of Jacksonville. Leading the group is Jennifer Green, Director of Jacksonville State University Center for Economic Development and Business Research. “It is my objective in representing Jacksonville State University, through the Center for Economic Development and Business Research, to provide leadership, facilitation and directional support to the OPAL Rural Recovery team to maximize success in Calhoun County’s investments,” said Green.

Green said that the biggest thing community residents can do to support the initiative is to take this [survey](#) to help Calhoun County leaders and OPAL better understand the impact of COVID-19 on Calhoun County residents and businesses. “We will be relying on your feedback to help us set the course for economic recovery,” said Green.

Rural Recovery Accelerator operates at the county level to foster collaboration between neighboring townships and municipalities. The Calhoun County team will meet regularly with Opportunity Alabama staff to address economic resiliency in five key ways: strategy development, data analysis, network development, marketing materials, and investment

opportunities. The team already completed its first meeting with Opportunity Alabama and has already identified various projects that show real promise.

Opportunity Alabama (OPAL) is a nonprofit organization that connects Alabama communities and projects to a statewide and national network of impact-oriented investors. Though its primary focus to date has been projects in Opportunity Zones, OPAL has broadened its view to better address the needs of Alabama's rural and low-income communities. Rural Recovery Accelerator is one of the ways OPAL intends to address those needs.

"We see this moment—where communities are setting aside their differences to work together on recovery—as a chance to put lasting infrastructure in place to improve local economies," says Alex Flachsbarth. "To us, the question is not: how do we reopen over the next 2-3 months? Rather, it is: how do we leverage this moment to build a stronger economic foundation over the next 6-24 months?"

Calhoun is one of six counties statewide selected to participate in the beta version of the Accelerator. Other communities statewide selected to participate in the Accelerator include Sumter, Butler, Limestone, Jackson, and Chambers counties.