

# Opening Overview

## Hello!

This report was conceived well before the November 2024 election. Indeed, the tendrils that informed it unfolded over many months. Rural communities — if they were lucky — were poised in 2024 to withstand the boom and bust of philanthropy’s election cycle-driven infusion of resources, and then be left to hold their communities after the dust had settled and the grant cycles expired.

Toward an alternative paradigm, we created this resource to orient funders around the *who, what, where, and how* rural communities build power to affect real and durable change—no matter the results of the 2024 election.

Both in its underpinning premises and in its invitations for action, this report transcends this political moment. Its premises lie in the enduring under-resourcing of these communities, issues, and strategies. And its invitations for action offer a path for philanthropy that is similarly enduring. As we well know, change is never *won*, but must be continually maintained. Democracy does not happen once every four years, it is a constant practice and enduring work. Communities in rural areas now face uniquely stark attacks; a significant part of rural communities are workers, immigrants,

people with disabilities, tribal and Indigenous communities, LGBTQ+ people, and others who are particularly vulnerable.

We find ourselves at another crossroads for reflection and yes, corrective action. The 2024 election leaves us with a renewed and urgent call to philanthropy to act. This report is offered to support philanthropy in shifting perspective, following community-driven expertise, and in witnessing how change is being maintained through diverse grassroots approaches to building rural community power through organizing, with an invitation to join and support this work.

The [Integrated Rural Strategies Group \(IRSG\)](#) at [Neighborhood Funders Group](#) has been doing this work since 2017, when a bold group of funders within NFG’s network came together to reflect on - and pursue corrective action around - philanthropy’s shortcomings in reaching and resourcing rural communities to be a part of our multiracial democracy, and hold the power to advance climate, economic, gender, and racial justice at the local level.

In the last few years we have seen increased funder attention to rural America, in part due to the census and elections, new opportunities under the Biden Administration, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural healthcare systems, communities, and economies. Much of this funding has been reactive to urgent needs.

Photo from Eagle Pass  
Border Coalition &  
Border Vigil

**Roots Revealed:** Spotlighting Rural Grassroots Models  
of Work that are Critical to a Multiracial Democratic Future



Long-term, proactive funding strategies are needed—particularly increased resourcing of organizing and power building infrastructure led by and serving BIPOC and multiracial coalitions and communities. This infrastructure is key to building durable power and affecting truly equitable change across states and regions.

As you'll see in this resource, philanthropy's path to do this is not always convenient or clear. This work takes different shapes, requires different relational approaches, and doesn't often fit into the deeply entrenched grantmaking practices of our philanthropic bureaucracies. We invite funders to deepen your sense of what rural organizing might look like, how it is built and grown, and how you might deepen into relationship to be part of meeting this critical moment.

The nine organizations profiled in this resource reflect a sliver of what's out there. And while they are certainly worthy of attention and direct investment themselves, we also share their work as models or examples of what rural organizing might look like, so that you can play a role in seeking it out and nurturing it at whatever level it might be within the geographies and issue areas you fund.

Over the years, IRSG has partnered with dozens of groups from across rural America. Through this, we have built a network of relationships with grassroots and frontline groups.

**Roots Revealed:** *Spotlighting Rural Grassroots Models of Work that are Critical to a Multiracial Democratic Future*

We do this by asking: “who else do you work with?”, and “where do you see community-led change percolating in your area?”. We are always met with powerful recommendations and introductions. In short - they're out there, it's just a matter of knowing what to look for, whom and how to ask, and aligning your grantmaking to meet them where they are at. It's also about leading with humanity, curiosity, and prioritizing trust.

The work we do at IRSG—and at philanthropy serving organizations (PSOs) more generally—cannot represent the totality of how communities are building power, particularly in one report. So, this report weaves together with the myriad resources, dialogues, and learning-to-action programming IRSG designs and offers alongside funders and rural community leaders. We join other sector-wide campaigns, and offer this report within the ecosystem of support for the safety and dignity of rural communities, specifically tribal & Indigenous communities, communities of LGBTQ+ people, immigrants, workers, and those on the frontlines of climate justice. In the months and years to come, scaled and sustained investment in rural organizing will be critical to support these communities and the fights they lead.

In 2025, IRSG will offer programming and dialogue spaces designed to support funders in digesting and actualizing their learnings from this report. We hope you will join us there.

Whether you participate in upcoming IRSG offerings or not, our hope is that anyone reading or using this report will hold the work in a bigger, fuller, and more interconnected way than is fully captured in this document alone.

We are grateful to those who have found their way here. We hope the resource helps you to learn, be inspired, and take new action. Let us know what you are taking away from it, what more you might need to unlock resources for rural communities, and how IRSG can continue to be a place for you to learn, connect, and mobilize.

Sincerely,

**Biz, Lindsay & Stephan**

