



INTEGRATED RURAL STRATEGIES GROUP

Roots Revealed

Spotlighting Rural Grassroots Models of Work that are Critical to a Multiracial Democratic Future

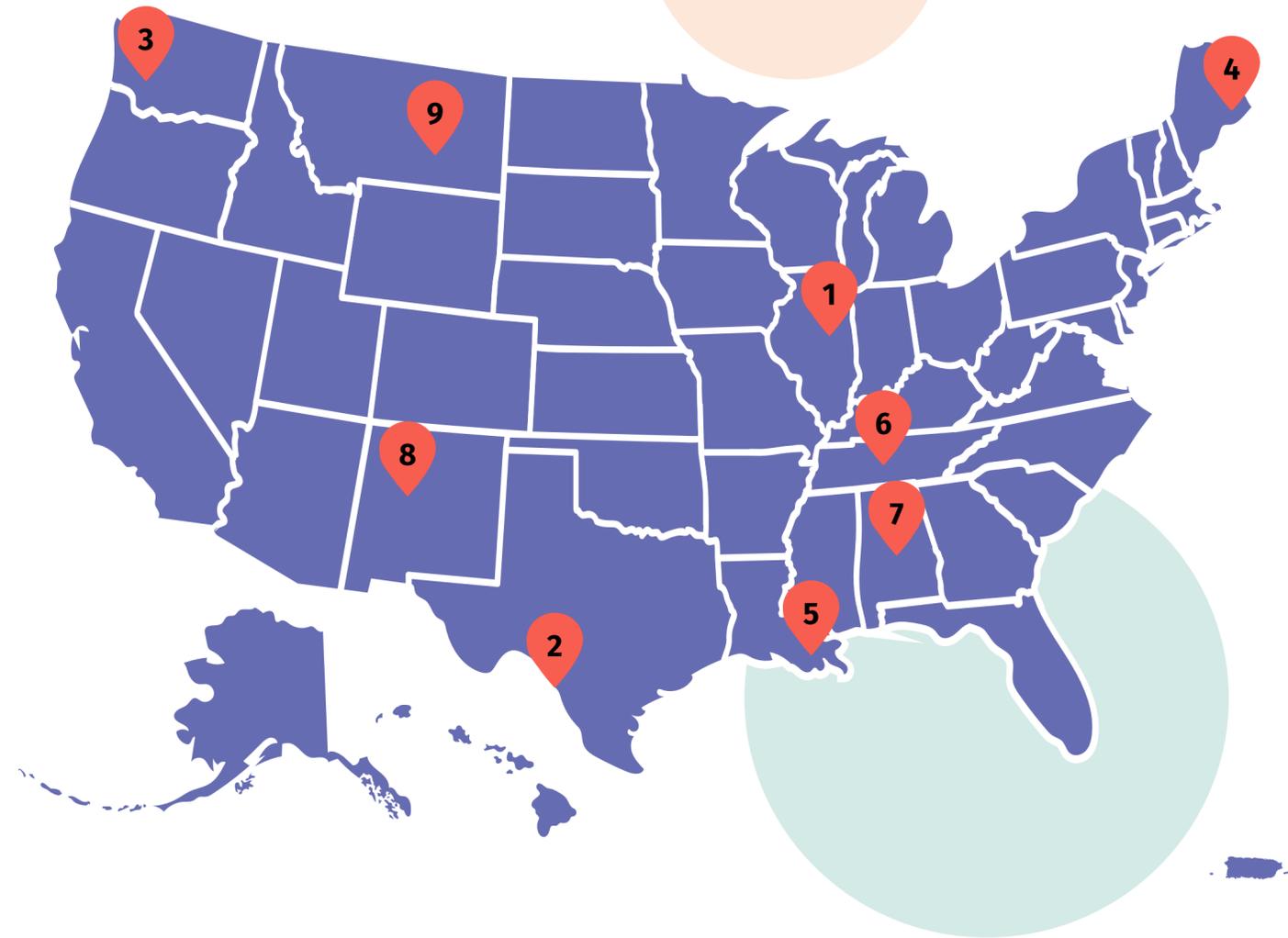
MARCH 2025



We are grateful to the grassroots organizations who provided their insights to make this resource possible



Organization Locations



- 1) Black Oaks Center
Pembroke Township, Illinois
- 2) Eagle Pass Border Coalition & Border Vigil
Eagle Pass, Texas
- 3) Firelands Workers United/Trabajadores Unidos
Grays Harbor & Pacific Counties, Washington State
- 4) Food AND Medicine
Brewer, Maine
- 5) Rise St. James
St. James Parish, Louisiana
- 6) Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment (SOCM)
Tennessee (statewide)
- 7) The Knights & Orchids Society (TKO)
Selma, Alabama
- 8) Torrance County Listening Project (Thriving Rural Communities)
Torrance County, New Mexico
- 9) Western Native Voice
Montana (statewide)

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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

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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.

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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.

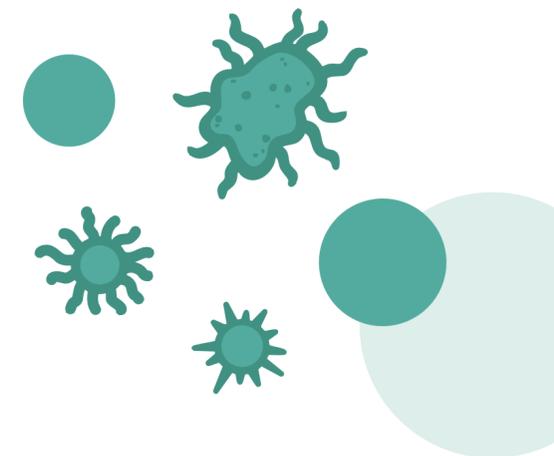
In 2025, IRSG will offer programming and dialogue spaces designed to support funders in digesting and actualizing their learnings from this report. We hope you will join us there.

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



Introductory Letters

Neighborhood Funders Group and the Integrated Rural Strategies Group

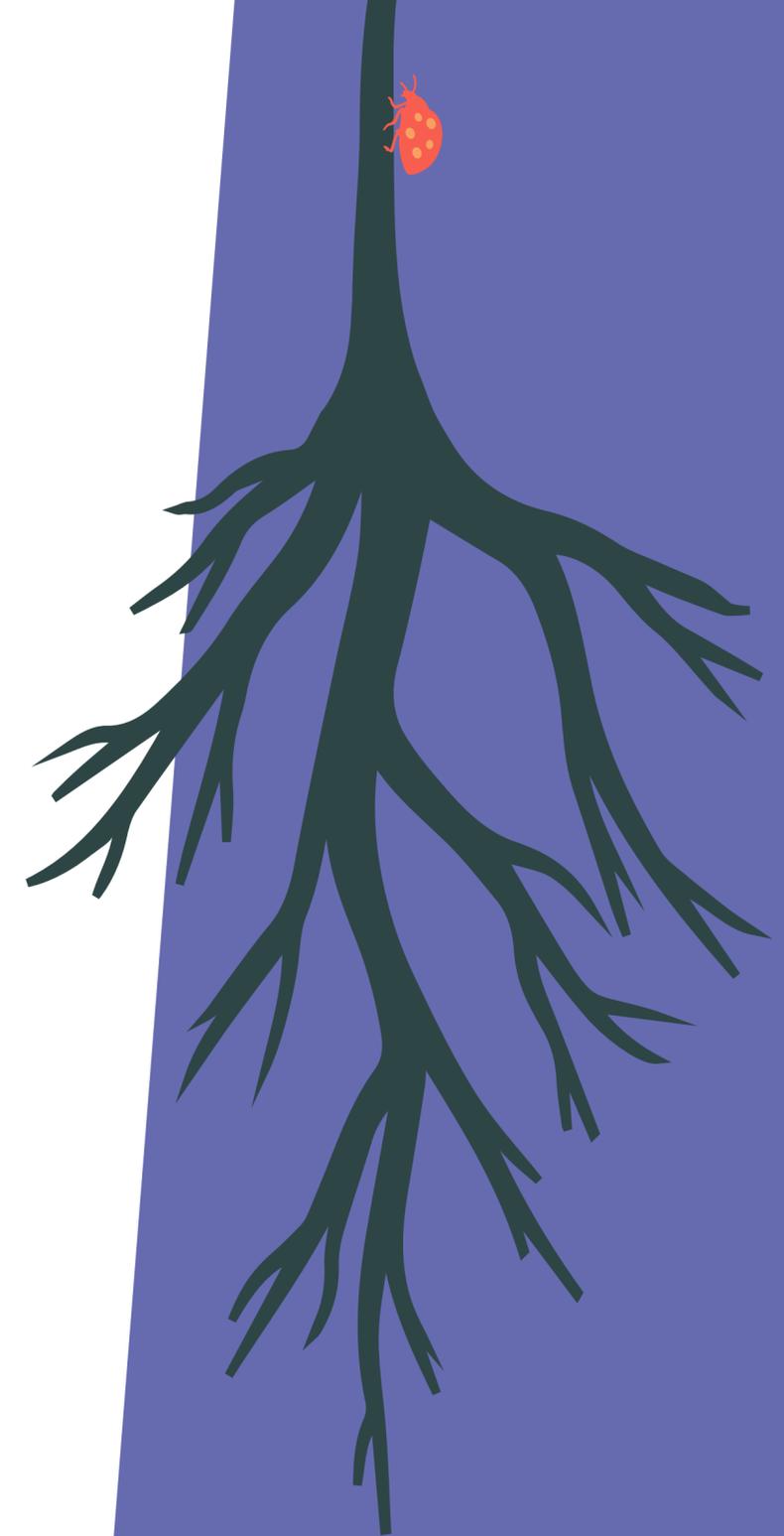
Since 1980, Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG) has organized philanthropy so that Black, Indigenous, and all communities of color and low income thrive. During our early years, NFG was one of the few spaces in philanthropy specifically focused on grassroots organizing and power building led by people of color as the key to effective social change strategies. Today, NFG is a place for meaning-making in philanthropy. We offer funders a political home: a place to connect, strategize, and take action.

Launched in 2017, the Integrated Rural Strategies Group, one of NFG's six programs, has become an impactful space for funders interested in resourcing power building within rural communities and supporting community infrastructure to advance racial, economic, gender, disability, and climate

justice. Through IRSG's resources, aligned funding portfolios, peer-learning spaces, and connections to rural community leaders and movements, we are unlocking philanthropy to build and sustain robust organizing infrastructure in rural communities across the country.

This report was conceived of and created by IRSG staff Lindsay Ryder and Stephan Oak with the partnership of consultant, Biz Ghormley. Below we share a personal note from each of us offering a glimpse into why we created this resource and what we hope philanthropy will take away from it. We invited Sarah Jaynes, Executive Director of the Rural Democracy Initiative (RDI), to do the same. RDI is a key partner and grantmaker in this work, and their strategy and theory of change boldly reflects what it means to build rural community power beyond elections. We partnered with RDI to identify some of the organizations profiled in this report, and have included several of their resources herein for further reference.

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A Note from Lindsay Ryder, Director of IRSG

I was born and raised in Southwestern Montana, in a town that at the time had a population of just over 20,000. The community was homogenous; my few non-white friends were adopted by white parents and even the Native representation in my school and town was lower than that of Montana's per capita. At the time, I did not fully comprehend what it meant when, one holiday season, living room windows displaying menorahs were vandalized. I now realize I didn't even know to recognize the LGBTQ+ classmates that, in hindsight, miraculously survived through adolescence in this inhospitable corner of the world at an inhospitable time.

These very early opportunities for my politicization were a part of what led me to stack up as much financial aid as possible and head to college in New York City. I was very unclear about what ways of life and opportunities to affect positive change existed outside of the context I grew up in, but I went to seek them out. It feels a bit ironic - and quite telling - that the path that led me to law school and policy work and international human rights ultimately looped back on itself, finding me back in my (now much busier!) hometown in Montana, working to build the ecosystem of rural community organizing.

Over ten years deep in my work in philanthropy, I can hold a mirror up reflecting my own instincts and actions to embed in an urban, coastal, academic, and highly professionalized setting from which to strive to affect progressive change to those same instincts and actions within philanthropy. I've peeled away the layers of the movement ecosystem and, underneath the research, communications, litigation, and electoral advocacy lies a core and integral layer of change: rural community organizing.

By knocking doors in my town during recent election cycles, I have seen firsthand that these spurts of engagement are not the answer to reaching and influencing community members and building durable power for progressive change. Meanwhile, I've witnessed slow-burn and deeply intensive organizing, like that of a local tenant union, gaining traction and having real impact in people's lives. This group is organizing across race, generation, gender and sexual identity, and family structure to create a unified bloc of community members that is poised to advocate for their shared needs. These are the building blocks whereby community members will be able to undergo their own politicization, where they will be able to recognize - and fight for - their LGBTQ+ neighbors, for their disabled neighbors, for their immigrant neighbors, for their single parent neighbors. These are the building blocks of a multiracial democracy.

This is the work that happens at the truly local level, outside of election cycles, and might not have the clearly defined theory of change, strategic framework, and population density impacts that philanthropy oftentimes wants to see. This is the work that might percolate to address an urgent community need and then morph into providing mutual aid and yet again evolve to advance a proactive policy campaign. In this moment, this is what rural communities will need to not only help protect hard fought wins in recent years, but to protect safety and human dignity in the time to come. So I ask, how are philanthropy's own theories of change, strategic frameworks, and impact measurements evolving to allow for this level of the ecosystem to flourish? May this resource, and the work of IRSG more broadly, support you in that evolution.



In partnership,

Lindsay Ryder

she/her | Director, IRSG

A Note from Stephan Oak, Senior Program Coordinator of IRSG

I was born and raised on the Lower Brule Sioux Reservation in rural South Dakota, a place where I learned the power of community and the innovation required to navigate systemic disinvestment. Growing up, I saw firsthand what it means to live in a rural Native community—a place defined as much by its strength as by its challenges. Limited infrastructure, lack of access to healthcare, economic opportunity, and basic resources were constants in my life. And yet, I witnessed a deep resilience, cultural knowledge, and leadership that shaped my understanding of what it takes to survive, thrive, and lead in rural spaces.

Now, as I sit in a hospital room in Ann Arbor Michigan, awaiting my daughter’s discharge, I am surrounded by the kind of lifesaving medical care that simply doesn’t exist in places like the one I grew up in. The disparity is impossible to ignore. It’s a stark reminder of the vast and unjust gaps in infrastructure that rural America—and particularly Native communities—face every day. And yet, this moment deepens my conviction: the solutions already exist in the very communities too often excluded from the conversation.

Native nations are central to both rural and urban America. As sovereign entities, they are among the few rural places where

land and resources remain protected, and they hold immense potential as models for governance, power building, and resilience. Native grassroots leaders are protecting the land, advancing multiracial coalitions, and offering frameworks that can help us address the disparities rural communities face. This work is deeply ancestral and radically future-oriented, rooted in cultural knowledge and a vision of self-determination. But for far too long, Native communities have been tokenized or ignored, and their leadership has gone underfunded, overlooked, and undervalued.

The 2024 election has once again revealed the cyclic tokenization of Native communities—last-minute efforts to secure Native voters while ignoring the long-term systemic disinvestment we face. There is great irony in this: Native communities suffer under a governance system that was shaped, in part, by the Haudenosaunee Confederacy—one of the oldest and most powerful democracies in the world. And yet, Native rural communities remain on the frontlines of inequity, while also holding solutions that are critical to the future of rural power.

I see this report is an invitation and a challenge to philanthropy. If we are to build multiracial coalitions that endure and create truly equitable change, we must start here. Native communities are not a footnote in rural organizing; they are central to it. I call on funders to go beyond symbolic acknowledgements and instead

resource Native-led rural organizing intentionally, boldly, and for the long term. This means reckoning with Native erasure in grantmaking and investing in relationships that honor sovereignty, trust Native leadership, and support the transformative power of Native grassroots organizers.

Resourcing rural Native communities is not just an act of inclusion—it is an act of justice. It is about centering the land, the people, and the leadership that are already doing the work, often without the resources they need. It is about recognizing that the roots of rural power—and the pathways to a thriving, equitable future—are already here.

The call is clear: Move the money. Move it boldly. Move it now. Invest in Native leadership, strengthen rural infrastructure, and build the relationships necessary to create durable, multiracial power. At IRSG we have the privilege and honor to say loudly that solutions are already here. It’s time to meet them.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephan Oak'.

Stephan Oak

he/him | Senior Program Coordinator, IRSG

Photo from Food AND Medicine



A Note from Biz Ghormley, Consultant & Lead Report Author

In 2020, I moved to the Deep South. With the exception of a semester of high school spent in rural Vermont, my life was anchored in the cities and coastal regions that also host the largest pools of institutional progressive philanthropy.

The early pandemic was a challenging time to build community in a new place, of course. And so I made an effort to connect and build with the movement folks who held a vision for equity and justice, for an anti-oppressive and anti-racist future, for intersectional and collective liberation. I found myself in relationship with folks in the Southern cities, but also many organizers working and living in rural areas of Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, and Mississippi. Organizers who were pushing against and past the top-down narratives driving incarceration and the development of new prisons, as well as exploitative and extractive land practices for growing food and forcing inhumane labor. Climate justice organizers at the intersection of it all. Organizers living LGBTQ+ lives in rural America, healing, building, and creating with each other in the face of legislative and cultural attacks. Black-led, Native-led, and multiracial work. I was grateful to meet these folks through

networks like SURJ, Hometown Action, and others—some of whom you’ll meet in the following pages.

Arriving at these conversations with my decade of experience working in national progressive philanthropy organizations, it was clear the money, solidarity, support, and partnership that institutional funders could offer was not making it here, at least not in ways that reflected the trust, analysis, or investment that was possible. Some national groups were present in pockets of rural work, or regional support. Some had come and gone—claiming the rural areas and region were “unwinnable”. Some hadn’t even considered the existence of progressive rural power.

I submit that we must transform our definitions of “winning” if we are going to realize our dreams in the face of what’s ahead. The voices of movement leaders on main stages and in conference rooms at the philanthropy conferences and conversations I attended over the last decade echo out in my heart and mind. When asked what they need from funders, a consistent refrain—despite variation in experience and environments—is offered. It includes, “move the money, move it without restriction and in abundance, for multi-year grants, and adaptively to the attacks communities are facing.” As Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson has said, “Fund movements like you want us to win.” Whether you’re at a funding institution that is ready to formally and fully make those kinds of moves

or working to bend your way into these calls with an internal challenge ahead, there are ways to integrate this wisdom into your grantmaking and financial support now.

IRSG and the NFG team have been great partners in my understanding of how philanthropy is rising to meet the power of rural organizing, and how ecosystems of progressive power building and transformative change are woven together. IRSG programming has connected me with nodes where philanthropy is funding or is building relationships toward supporting the critical leadership of grassroots rural communities.

Movement leaders have a vision, plan, and capability to win. Grassroots leaders are holding complexity and nuance that reflect the humanity of our greatest threats and the vibrancy and possibility of our greatest visions for a future. It's inherent in their job, and honed in the fight and flourishing of their work. In the midst of election cycles and great threats to democracy, this report has given us a chance to re-ground, re-root, and re-affirm these truths.

My greatest hope is that these pages help us all reorient to the leadership and power of grassroots rural organizers as we face this moment. That we follow the leadership, power, and the models and examples profiled here to illuminate not only their work but so many more folks who are possibly

even unconnected in the “landscape”, currently unknown to you, but there, as we lean on the frameworks to find fresh perspective. I hope we can honor the critical power of community, the clarity offered by those most under attack, in defining what dignity, safety, and liberation look like, and the pathway forward we can all join to make a better world possible. I hope we do this by deepening into relationship, offering financial support, and more—to powerfully and meaningfully build that future together.



Biz

Biz Ghormley

she/they | Consultant
& Lead Report Author

A Note from Sarah Jaynes, Executive Director of Rural Democracy Initiative

I grew up in rural Washington's fishing and timber country, near a large navy base and the Suquamish reservation, surrounded by people deeply connected to each other, the land and water, and our traditions. We worked hard to take care of our families and our neighbors. That's an asset of rural communities, and it's also a necessity.

Small towns like mine have faced decades of corporations using their outsized power to push out small businesses, drive down wages, and extract our resources. All the while, corporations get more powerful, and when they make more profit elsewhere, they disinvest and move operations. Pair this pattern with the contraction of government and philanthropic support for rural places, and now rural residents lack access to good jobs, quality and affordable housing, healthcare, broadband, and other essential services. People in rural places are more likely to live in poverty, have higher mortality rates, and have higher rates of incarceration.

Yet, these challenges have made us more resolute and creative. We are ready for solutions that center working people and give us decision-making power to contribute to the places we call home. We have good reason to distrust programs claiming to benefit us but are conceived without

our participation. That's why at Rural Democracy Initiative, we are investing in rural groups who listen to their neighbors, reflect back the language and priorities of their community, develop trusted leaders, and drive improvements.

Supporting over 150 organizations, we've seen how with the right resources groups can increase civic participation and pass and implement life-saving policies. For those of you interested in bridging divides and engaging working-class people, you can look to rural groups because that's the basis of rural organizing.

Our grantees will be quick to point out that organizing starts with listening. They form deep bonds across the political spectrum through shared values, shared villains, and shared experiences. They build long-term power with an ambitious vision through a series of short-term, pragmatic wins. And their work draws on the unique strengths of their region. Several of our grantees are spotlighted here in *Roots Revealed: Spotighting Rural Grassroots Models of Work that are Critical to a Multiracial Democratic Future*, and all nine profiled organizations are inspiring examples of how rural people are driving solutions.

We do this work for rural people, and we also know that everyone benefits. Without rural and small-town people, you can't achieve broad consensus or hold governing power. At Rural Democracy, we focus our grantmaking where

rural investment can have the most significant impact on uniting people to improve statewide outcomes. Beyond the battlegrounds of the current electoral cycle, we fund in 26 states, emphasizing ten. With this specialization, we form strong relationships with local partners, deep knowledge of the landscape, and practical strategies to support our grantees with capacity-building tools. We support groups to participate in state and federal coalitions that unify and build power across geography.

Every state and every place needs support. We commend Neighborhood Funders Group and the NFG philanthropic network for your commitment to listening to and responding to the call for rural communities. This report showcases rural work that has long been under-resourced and is a call to action for thoughtful, strategic, and bold philanthropic support for rural and small-town power building.



Sarah Jaynes

she/her | Executive Director,
[Rural Democracy Initiative](#)

Why This Report?

Whether you are a long-time rural funder, or come with new curiosity about the possibility of engaging in rural communities or efforts bridging rural, suburban and urban areas, we hope this report will offer you affirmation and pathways for collaboration. Any commitment to empower or serve marginalized communities must include rural realities. Whether this report is affirming or revealing to you, we hope it will be a tool to connect with the abundance of effort, and need.

This report holds the following 5 assertions:

1 Rural Grassroots Spotlight

Organizer voices were central to the

participatory research in IRSG's recent report, *Resourcing Rural Organizing Infrastructure: A New York Case Study*. When asked what truly supports rural communities' gains, they were clear: **To build community power that is both impactful and durable, centering the leadership of grassroots work is critical.** These grassroots groups operate as part of a larger system of players - including statewide tables, capacity builders, technical assistance groups, and philanthropic partners - and are critical in ensuring that change is both equitably designed and implemented, and that it can last. This is particularly true in the rural context where, without the trust and power built through grassroots community organizing, rural communities can too readily be left out.

This report follows these insights, both elevating examples and attributes of diverse power building work, and by naming networks, coalitions and partners who play some of these critical additional roles. These spotlights and attributes invite us all in expanding our relationships and awareness of existing and "seedling" work, to guide investment. We invite readers to lean into the chance to even be a first or second funder for burgeoning work, to offer money, trust and support for it to take root.

2 What You Focus on Grows

Our chance at a shared future that is safe, healthy,

and thriving for all communities requires us to hold focus together on what that will look like, not only respond to the threats and attacks against it. Holistic readiness for attacks, disaster, and crises do not come from only funding or supporting in moments of acute harm (or moments of apparent strategic opportunities for the "quick win"). We must also create channels for sustained, longterm, unrestricted funding for durable paths to a new future.

So much potential for deep and impactful rural organizing goes untapped because philanthropy isn't seeking out and resourcing truly nascent, responsive, sometimes "under-the-radar" work - that is or that *could* be happening - in rural communities. **We place the focus on grassroots organizations, community groups, and leaders who are working in a myriad of ways, places, and ecosystems to help us go beyond dominant corrosive narratives**, and embrace what we don't know. There we can build new partnerships, lean into wisdom we haven't previously truly centered, and offer awareness and attention to reorient our energies into that potential.

3 No Matter Who Wins...

To support the resilience and dignity of rural communities, and to build local-level democracy, we must resource rural organizing regardless of the influence they might wield federally. In developing this report, we looked beyond the electoral maps **reorient to the daily democracy work beyond elections, and the urgency of resourcing this work.** As you'll see demonstrated in the profiles to follow, daily democracy takes many shapes outside of specific campaigns or election cycles, is the long arc work that can forge new realities.

For so many of the groups we've profiled, the work has an element of life making, life saving, and life giving that goes way beyond electoral politics, and is deeply democratically political. **This is where mutual aid happens, where disinformation is combatted, where immigration raids are stymied, and where other forms of state violence, disaster response and recovery, public health emergencies, and more converge.** It's where true and local democracy is built. We realign to a definition of "winning" that is accountable to grassroots communities, not elected officials.

4

Opening and Expanding Our Relationships & Collective Networks for Progressive Rural Power Change

Adding to the layer of grassroots, community-based work profiled herein, networks of grassroots orgs are also knit together with other elements of civil society as part of the movement ecosystem. These include bridge-building and multiracial organizations. They also include network support and capacity building and coordination provided by the likes of People's Action and Native Organizers Alliance. We focus further on these in the "Coalitions & Networks," as well as the "Partners & Resources" sections.

And while each of these layers of the movement ecosystem are critical, we assert that **durable, trust-based collective progress and action happens at the local level—the power and impact of these networks is directly tied to the grassroots.** Whether around food systems, arts and culture, education, or environmental health, the local arena is human and powerfully mobilizing. There, folks come together to protect each other, fight on the frontline to safeguard democracy, fight the many tropes of authoritarianism in school board meetings, town halls, and development conversations. Community is a powerful tool to fight against disinformation and polarization. These are the pathways through which rural communities can organize around shared concerns that add up to collective power at more regional and statewide levels.

Across the profiled groups and frameworks, you will see examples that likely resonate with work or needs in the geographies and issues in which you fund but have been unfolding beyond the apparent purviews or your grantmaking focus. We hope to broaden our relationships and connections to meaningfully fortify these unique and united efforts.

5 Philanthropy is a Critical Player in the Future We Need

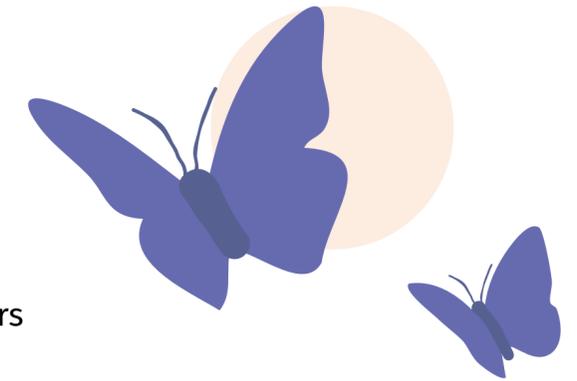
To build new realities, we must leverage power and dollars in ways that transform what is possible, including action on the part of funders who have historically opted out, as demonstrated by the current typical channels of resource flow. Currently, philanthropy holds some of the least regulated capital, with the most self-determination in how it moves. Compared to vulnerable and marginalized rural communities and the groups working with them, philanthropy bears the lowest risk. Philanthropy can make uniquely critical investments. Philanthropy is a critical part of the rural ecosystem, and needs to move itself out of its typical channels of resource flow.

We are calling in funders of all kinds to **resource true democracy building work in rural America, not only through monetary resource distribution, but also through the power of connecting folks across strategic alignment or heeding grantee partner requests for support in convening or building networks with other grassroots groups.**

The partnerships forged through trust and multi-year general operating and capacity building funding is irreplaceable in actually giving space for progressive rural leadership to grow. We have learned from our rural community partners that building organizing infrastructure requires greater levels of flexibility and trust on the part of funders; this work is not always clear - particularly at its beginnings - and can too easily fall apart and fade away without sustained support from the outset. Relationships are at the core of the work, and depend on the individual and organizational willingness to lean into new connections and unknowns, and find new footing together.

We offer this report alongside calls from other key players in philanthropy for funders to meaningfully give beyond election years, to invest in small-d democracy, and to center the communities most impacted with sustained, long-term, multi-year support for their work.

This report aligns with other offerings and calls to action within philanthropy, including [Democracy Fund's *Everyday to Election Day* campaign](#), to which IRSG is a signatory. We join voices like [NCRP, whose fall journal issue](#) "encourages grantmakers to prioritize funding democracy movement groups." It reminds its readers that communities of color, queer communities, impacted communities are often the ones doing the work on the ground to move the country forward. They have the knowledge and insights but without real sustainable support, their work and by effect democracy will be delayed." We support the calls raised by [Fundors for LGBTQ Issues to increase funding to queer and trans communities](#) now and going forward. Our pointed call to focus on rural groups echoes across the calls into philanthropy, expansively.



Unearthing Rural Community Power

Profiles demonstrating what it looks like, how it happens, who's a part of it.

We are grateful to partner with nine power building grassroots organizations in this report to draw forward powerful examples of the work. They represent and demonstrate a diversity of approaches and strategies. They represent a diversity of communities, entry points, calls to action, ways of working. They represent a diversity of geographies, tenure, scope, budget, staff size, and organizational structure. Their diversity is a taste of the wider diversity that is encompassed in the umbrella of “rural grassroots power building organization.”

To guide shared understanding we begin with a set of terms, definitions, and central concepts to root our offerings in shared frames.

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Terms & Definitions

For the purposes of this report, we have leaned on the work of Lead Local and their glossary from *Leading Locally: A Community Power Building Approach to Structural Change*, created with the support of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to define key terms, adapting their definitions to ground in the purpose of this report.

Community Power: Community power is the ability of communities most impacted by structural inequity to develop, sustain, and grow an organized base of people who act together through democratic structures to set agendas, shift public discourse, influence who makes decisions, and cultivate ongoing relationships of mutual accountability with decision-makers that change systems.

Community Power Building: Community power building is the set of strategies used by communities most impacted by structural inequity to develop, sustain, and grow an organized base of people who act together through democratic structures to set agendas, shift public discourse, influence who makes decisions, and cultivate ongoing relationships of mutual accountability with decision-makers that change systems and advance equity. A community's power can be built through organizing that community, which includes uncovering and aligning a sense of shared interest and

interconnectedness amongst community members. In rural communities, building power will necessarily have a different scale and scope to building power in more densely populated communities.

Community power building is particularly critical for underserved, underrepresented, and historically marginalized communities who have been excluded from decision-making on the policies and practices that impact their health and the health of their communities.

We situate “power building” in this report in reference to both of these definitions, as well as their often shared goal of structural change, outlined by Lead Local as being about the development, implementation, and protection of policies, practices, and cultural norms that provide all people equal opportunity to make choices and overcome disparities in power and influence. We also offer that community power is a necessary precursor for progressive change to be advanced and for equity and justice to be achieved. Similarly, community power is necessary for these “wins” to be equitably implemented (i.e., the benefits to be applied to and experienced by all community members) and durable (i.e., to be preserved over time).



Relationships

At the core of this report is Relationship. Since its inception in 2017, IRSG has built a network that interconnects funders and rural community-based organizations (CBOs) leading the work. Across this eight-year span, the network has grown through relationship. As focal points have been co-created with IRSG's Coordinating Committee, Funders and Rural CBO Partners, the IRSG network has deepened. Focal points like worker justice in the Pacific Northwest to land access in the Midwest have led to new connections in the fabric of the IRSG community, revealing with every inquiry of "who is doing this work?" leaders, communities and campaigns who are active in the effort. From there, the fabric grows with folks connecting us in relationship and revealing to the larger community what was there all along.

Relationship is also at the core of the nine profiled organizations' work, and often tied to the systems of harm and systemic solutions they offer for change. For example, at some point, each of these organizations has named the role of food. They gather around it to build community and do deep listening, they gather around it to celebrate and find joy. Many organizations grow food, or partner with local farmers, bringing food as a resource to help offset the threats of hunger in many of the communities where they

exist. The relationships to each other, to resources and through mutual aid, to the systems of harm and the systemic solutions for change offer a perspective to understand both the outcomes and practicalities, alongside the systemic change and power-building work.

Profiles Overview

For this report, we have leaned into those existing relationships to intentionally pull a diverse group of organizations together. In the profiles that follow, you are invited to learn (or revisit if these are folks you know!) what they are doing, how they came to be, and how we can all join their work now. We are grateful they have also drawn from their networks to spotlight other partners and collaborators in the work, helping us expand our networks, connections, and models of the work even further.

We lift them all up here as leaders, who deserve our attention, solidarity, and support.

Each profile includes a bit of the origin story and history of the work, a list of modalities and approaches they are taking, and a focus forward on what is ahead in their specific work. Alongside, a short list of organizations and leaders the profiled group invites us to research and learn more about is shared to "pay it forward" and expand our shared lens on the Work. The coalitions and networks, as well as the partner resources sections, following the profiles, also offer more insight into this essential interplay.

Inherently driven by and accountable to community, the work comes in shapes and sizes reflective of the community in which it happens. Rural organizing groups might share similar attributes but no two are exactly the same. Moreso, their work will move through various modalities, approaches, and strategies as needs and opportunities dictate.

Grassroots leaders are doing the Work. And sometimes — oftentimes? — and particularly in rural communities, the work might be hard for funders to see, make sense of, and certainly fit into their grantmaking structures.

We lift them up as instructive examples, illuminating what's going on even when we are not seeking it. To help tune our attention to examples of power building, learn by example and expand our shared awareness of what the work is, and how we partner with it to reach our shared goal. A better world is not just a priority in theory, but these profiles embody its critical, life-saving, and future-forging expressions now across the United States—and point us toward more folks we can all connect and build relationship with to help us push forward together.

Note that as a 501c3, Neighborhood Funders Group does not engage in partisan electoral activity, including supporting or opposing candidates. Some of the work profiled in this report includes the work of 501c4 organizations. We are only highlighting their non-partisan work.

PROFILE

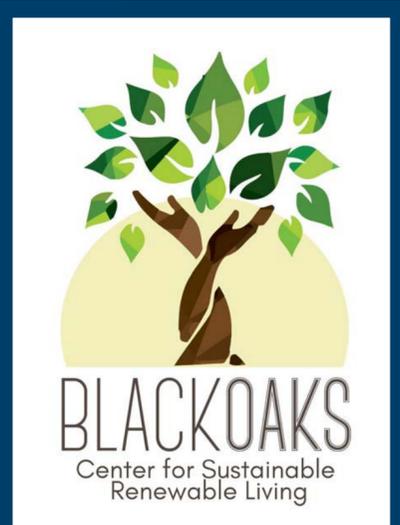
Black Oaks Center

Pembroke Township, Illinois

Black Oaks Center (BOC) believes in embracing the process of building Resilience and Sustainability. It provides ways to cultivate the next generation's future with the bare hands of community members who come together to navigate the unknown and transition towards a world of boundless opportunities. It honors the sacredness of life by creating networks of micro-climates with education, practice spaces, and connection to the land and systems of the place and legacy of Black farmers there.

The organization was first established by the family in 2006, as a non-profit with a mission to equip youth and families with sustainable skills, turning them into beacons of resilience for the future. Before they received any funding to sustain the work, the vision and “magical strong community commitment” of “lots of dedicated people supporting our work for free” brought it to life.

A combination of COVID and fighting the [NICOR pipeline](#) pushed the organizing and work to a whole new level in the last five years. As the work grows, it highlights a critical role for rural power builders like BOC going forward in helping us all to overcome the false sense that urban and rural are separate. Their continued and deepening working in circular, regenerative economics, from urban to rural is integrally tied to serve food demands, services, and build a regenerative and resilient future for all.



501c3
5 Staff + Volunteers
2024 Budget approx. \$500,000+
18 Years in Existence

Volunteers participate in CommUnity Learning Days. BOC serves as fiscal agent to Renewable Pembroke Alliance, an aggregate of residents and descendants of Pembroke who want the best for Pembroke, IL. And they work to bridge divides between rural and urban communities and realities, calling all those who show up in the work and space into an awareness of interconnected systems and economies - across history and into the future.

“Be courageous, be bold, and be part of our journey to thrive in a post-carbon world. Explore how we can design a resilient, sustainable, and ecological life, one step at a time. Let us harness the power within us to make a difference. Discover the skills of sustainability and unlock the potential of a clean, green, and plant-based economy.”

Learn More & Connect

Check out the beautiful history and honoring of the land & history on the website!

W BlackOaksCenter.org

IG [@BlackOaksCenter](https://www.instagram.com/BlackOaksCenter)

F [EnergyDescent](https://www.facebook.com/EnergyDescent)

Primary Modalities

- 4 Skills Building Tracks:
 - Sustainable Agriculture Track
 - Sustainable Building Track
 - Renewable Energy Track
 - Resilience Track
- Virtual and on site education and training in apiary, homesteading, and more
- Healthy Food Hub
- Land Restoration
- Power building
- Land sovereignty & food sovereignty
- Ecosystem justice
- Regenerative local economies

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

We are named after the dwarfed black oaks, an endangered species that thrives in the remnants of the once vast black oaks savanna. This unique area, formed by retreating glaciers during the last ice age, serves as a transition zone between forests and prairies. The sand dunes and ridges created by the proverbial west winds now provide a habitat for various rare and endangered plants and animals. Alongside the dwarfed black oaks, the savanna is home to 22 other rare plant species, including the endangered orange fringed orchids and yellow false indigo. Additionally, you can find the western glass lizard, race runner, and plains pocket gopher here.

The residents of Pembroke Township/Hopkins Park have been the dedicated stewards of what is now known as the Kankakee Sands, one of the most cherished ecosystems in Illinois. This tradition of stewardship dates back to the Indigenous people, the Potawatomi, who carefully maintained the savanna through controlled burns.

Hopkins Park, located in Pembroke Township, holds a significant place in history as one of the oldest Black rural townships. Its founding dates back to before the Emancipation Proclamation by a courageous runaway enslaved person named Pap Tetter. In 1861, Tetter and his family of 18 children escaped from North Carolina and settled on



Photo from Black Oaks Center

Vision for the Future

- “Embrace the Future: Navigating a Climate Uncertain World with Resilience. As we face a future of climate uncertainty, it's crucial to adapt, mitigate, and build resilience to the global changes that lie ahead. While we can't return to the nature we once knew, we have the power to shape a brighter tomorrow.”
- Facilitating Communities in Being Resilient. Embrace the Future: Navigating a Climate Uncertain World with Resilience. As we face a future of climate uncertainty, it's crucial to adapt, mitigate, and build resilience to the global changes that lie ahead. While we can't return to the nature we once knew, we have the power to shape a brighter tomorrow.
- Continuing to raise funds for land loss prevention, the restoration of farming in this historic agricultural hub, the establishment of a sovereign energy coop to bring more power and possibility to the multigenerational impoverished town

42 acres of land, known today as Old Hopkins Park. This became a safe haven not only for those running away from enslavement but also for the Potawatomi people who chose not to go to reservations. Hopkins Park played a vital role in the underground railroad as a terminal, offering refuge to those seeking liberation. Over time, it became a diverse community, attracting indigenous people and migrants alike. In fact, during the northern migration, Pembroke became the largest black farming community north of the Mason Dixon Line.

While Pembroke has often been labeled as one of the poorest areas in the nation, it is undeniably rich in history, heritage, and generations of individuals

Call to Philanthropy



Do not limit your organizing to philanthropy focused on rural areas. To the contrary, help urban focused philanthropy get the connection we all need to create local economies and improve quality of life and resilience.

Recommendation Spotlight

Renewable Pembroke Coalition: An aggregate of residents and descendants of this historic Black farming community who want the best for Pembroke, for it to be renewed.

CRAFT: a three-generation organization that supports rural Black youth to pursue careers, give scholarships etc

PHP Grocery Service - **Tomika Talley West**, partnering with this organization to resolve food insecurity in Pembroke



Photo from Eagle Pass Border Coalition & Border Vigil

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

PROFILE

Eagle Pass Border Coalition & Border Vigil

Eagle Pass, Texas

“ There is a stretch of the river that still flows like it did before—still wild, you can see different animals and grasses and it’s peaceful there in a way that helps to reset.

The attacks on the land, people, culture, and safety of Eagle Pass, TX are so drastically violent that ecocide, genocide, and extreme humanitarian crisis are all fitting descriptions of the impact of local and federal government political attacks on immigration here through Operation Lonestar—efforts by the Texas military and governmental effort to politicize, criminalize, and stop migration across the Rio Grande.

The mission of the Eagle Pass Border Coalition (EPBC) is to celebrate, enrich, and protect the vibrant culture of our border communities. Through education and empowerment, EPBC inspires action and fosters initiatives that enhance the quality of life for all residents, ensuring a thriving, just, and sustainable community.



Volunteer-Based Organization
0.5 Staff Supported by Partner Org + Volunteers
Community Organization (not formally incorporated)
2024 Budget approx. \$70k
4 Years in Existence

Started by community members of the area, the organization was formed in direct response to the border wall initiatives of the first Trump administration. The "zero tolerance" Family Separation policy led to the separation of thousands of children from their parents at the border, causing significant trauma and distress to families. Coupled with aggressive deportation policies, this created fear and instability within immigrant communities, undermining the sense of security and belonging that EPBC strives to foster.

Learn More & Connect

- [f Eagle Pass Border Coalition](#)
- [f Border Vigil](#)

Vision for the Future

- Support the community in Eagle Pass while immigration detention and criminalization, as well as anti-immigration campaigns are set to soar under Trump
- Build organizational infrastructure to support growth of efforts and stabilization of operations
- Expand leadership development & skill-building to develop alternative career paths beyond border enforcement work
- Environmental monitoring equipment to support research and fight against the degradation of the land and weaponization of the river

Primary Modalities

- Fostering cultural cohesion with joy, arts & culture;
- Public Awareness campaigns;
- Countering the jobs provision narrative of Lone Star and building alternative paths with Leadership training & Skill development in community;
- Economic Development and job creation;
- Social Justice - Empowering marginalized communities,

promoting equality, and addressing systemic injustices;

- Narrative Change - Elevating the voices of the community of Eagle Pass and migrants;
- Environmental Justice - Protecting our natural resources and promoting sustainable development;
- Facilitating inter-connection between academic research and experts focused on policy and the impact of the river;
- Civil and Human Rights - Advocating for the dignity and well-being of migrants, asylum seekers, and border communities, while combating racial profiling, discrimination, and unjust law enforcement practices;
- Honoring those lost with the monthly Border Vigil in partnership with faith and other community leaders, the cross-border memorial events, and through collaborative support of efforts to identify those lost in the river and local lands, and even able to find folks still living;
- [Petitions & public fights like this.](#)



At the Eagle Pass Border Coalition, we believe in the power of community and compassion. The policies of the first Trump administration have caused immense harm, but we remain steadfast in our mission to protect human rights and promote environmental sustainability. Our fight is not just for today, but for the future of our children and the integrity of our border communities. Together, we can build a more just and thriving society.

Recommendation Spotlight

[The Border Organization](#) - Sandra Fuentes has led decades of work with low investment
[National Network for Immigration and Refugee Rights](#)
[Operation ID](#)

[South Texas Human Rights Center](#) - ED just passed away and all volunteer run right now because the need doesn't stop

[Immigrant Legal Resource Center](#)
[Texas Human Rights Center](#)
[ACLU of Texas](#)
[Loredo Immigrant Alliance](#)

PROFILE

Firelands Workers United/ Trabajadores Unidos (c4)

**Firelands Workers Building Community Power /
Trabajadores Construyendo el Poder de la Comunidad (c3)**

Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties, Washington State

“ *It’s all solidarity
at Firelands...* ”

It all started by flyer-ing and connecting with folks in big box parking lots, with door knocking, tenants’ rights workshops, and shared meals. Officially formed in 2019 amidst the triple threats of the climate crisis, poverty, and decades of disinvestment, backlit by escalating white nationalism and authoritarianism politics, Firelands built itself through 1:1 conversations and hosting community dinners with hundreds

of working-class people in Spanish and English. Organizers built the foundation of what has become Firelands through relationships, care, and rigorous strategic commitment to organizing across race and language.

The member-directed and member-driven community at the core of Firelands built a vision for an economy that works for working people and protects the land and waters of timber country, and mapped out the path to power to make it real. Now, five years later, the organization is leading and growing a resilient, multilingual, multiracial, movement of working class people, rooted in rigorous organizing, sharp political strategy, love for our communities, and a fire in the belly.



Multi-Entity: c3 & c4
13 Staff + Volunteers
2024 Budgets: c4 - \$652,812;
c3 - \$895,128

A power building organization made up of workers in the natural resource and care sectors – the backbone of rural Washington’s economy – Firelands members are loggers, cannery workers, house cleaners, childcare and healthcare providers, grocery workers, mill workers, seniors, veterans, homeowners, renters, parents, and more. Firelands brings people together across race and language to win a healthy and fair economy for all in rural Washington. They organize workers across race, language, and sectors of the economy to win good jobs taking care of their communities, homes, land, and water.

Primary Modalities

- Popular education-based leadership and political training;
- Deep local democracy activations, including statewide policy campaigns to win green jobs, child care, health care, workers' rights, immigrant rights, and healthy homes;
- Deep-listening canvassing; and door-to-door conversations;
- Worker-led and focused class-based organizing across race and language;
- Political advocacy - supporting members offering their voices as testimony in local and state political arenas;
- Rallies & direct action;
- Strategic campaigns, and narrative strategies that shift the common sense in rural communities.

Volunteer leaders are the heart of Firelands. Their bilingual popular education trainings cultivate powerful leaders with knowledge of history, sharp political analysis, and an abundant vision for the future. Leaders at Firelands advocate, tell their stories, plan events, serve on the board and hiring committees, and help design campaigns.

Firelands is growing. In the last year the organizer team grew from three to seven folks. They are leaning into strategic experimentation and institution-building that honors their

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

core focus and values in practice. Learning and growing is an intentional and rigorous part of the work in community as well as inside the organizations; with so much amazing robust organizing in rural communities, learning is inherent to the work and growth.

“One of our strengths is we are both strategy and heart-driven, so the ‘experiments’ are always transparent. If we try something that creates conflict or dissonance, organizers know.” Part of staff weekly meetings are a base alignment check, asking, “are we in right relationship to the leaders, are we in alignment?” That kind of rigorous practice makes learning integral into the organization and makes space to hold the needs of the whole.

Intentionality and rigor as they move through any given campaign means that the lessons received moving through neighborhoods can influence and improve their scripts, paving the way for more connection that is responsive to the people and places where they show up. The work is always in relationship to learning, asking what’s working and what’s not, and structuring evaluation and refinement of tactics through the flows of any of their campaigns. Their adaptive reflective nature is also a rigor that is applied through the values and into the core of the organization’s internal work.

Photo from Firelands
Workers United

Learn More & Connect

 [FirelandsWA.org](https://firelandswa.org)

 [FirelandsWA](https://www.facebook.com/FirelandsWA)



Vision for the Future

“ We are fighting for a future where our homes are affordable and healthy, where we can work with dignity and safety in jobs that pay us a living wage and enable us to care for our families, our communities, and the lands and waters we call home. Where we—a multiracial community of Black, white, brown, and indigenous working class people—have each other’s backs, no matter where we were born, what we look like, or what language we speak.”

The growth of the organization and community has happened in parallel with wins and increasing clarity on priorities driven by community voice. For a recent door-knocking and canvassing research campaign, trained canvassers went door to door and attended public local events to ask working-class people, including immigrants, about housing, jobs, childcare, healthcare, taxes, and more.

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

Respondents were primarily workers within rural Washington State’s backbone industries of shellfish, timber, healthcare, childcare, hospitality, and other sectors. By prioritizing low-income working families, low-wage workers, and immigrants, the survey reached people often underrepresented in research and polling. The work made clear “working families in rural WA are ready to dream big and work together to create the future our communities need.”

Firelands works on multiple issues that emerge directly from the priorities of the base. Their core campaign now is to Rebuild Timber Country, a multi-year campaign at the intersection of climate justice, economic justice, and housing justice. The campaign seeks to dramatically scale up the state’s weatherization and healthy home program to rebuild crumbling housing while generating large scale good union jobs for rural working people. Firelands reports through their research that “at the current pace of weatherization it would take 200 years to meet the need, and that workforce is a major roadblock to expansion.”

In addition to the Rebuild Timber Country Campaign, Firelands works in coalition with partners to win material improvements in the lives of their base and leaders. Priorities include rent stabilization for tenants and mobile home owners, ecological forestry, expanding equitable



access to affordable and quality health care and child care, protecting workers' and immigrants' rights, and more.

Holding solidarity and partnership at the core of the approach also extends into donor relations and how funders are invited into the work. Firelands shared that one of the individual donors who was particularly key to their growth through an early, significant gift has been not only

a financial supporter but a solidarity partner. That has meant strategizing together about reaching more donors and building deeper solidarity connections with donors and showing up as a volunteer on the canvass or at a training, actively bridging urban and rural, and cross-class differences in a spirit of learning and solidarity.

Recommendation Spotlight

Rural People's Voice - Our sister organization who we work closely with on narrative and power building strategies, RPV builds multiracial working people power in North Central WA

Pacific County Voices Uniting - A BIPOC-led organization building civic engagement of immigrants, Indigenous peoples, and People of Color in Pacific County

Pacific County Immigrant Support - An immigrant-led organization in Pacific County mobilizing to meet the needs of immigrant communities.



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

Photo from Firelands Workers United



Photo from Food AND Medicine; meeting with Senator Collin's state Director.

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

PROFILE

Food AND Medicine

Brewer, Maine

“ *In the richest country in the world, no one should be forced to choose between food, medicine, and other basic necessities.* ”

In the early 2000s, outsourcing and plant closures resulted in over 4,000 jobs across Maine being evaporated, with few services or viable opportunities arising in the wake. The lay offs created situations where whole communities were choosing between being fed and getting medical care. Folks came together to meet basic needs and grow a path forward. There, Food AND Medicine was born.

Laid off workers, unions, and allies organized as a group to fight outsourcing and the lack of affordable healthcare for those laid off, and to give voice and organization to huge parts of the communities abandoned and betrayed by elites. Putting shared values directly into the name, the



Solidarity, not charity

501c3 and 501c4

8.25 Staff + Volunteers

2024 Budget approx. \$644k

23 Years in Existence

group capitalized the “AND” in their name to reflect the non-negotiable baseline of having folks’ needs meaningfully met.

Food AND Medicine’s mission is to organize, educate, and empower workers and communities in the struggle for economic and social justice. FAM has shown that by working together with unions, farmers, community groups, small businesses—across race and faith faith-based organizations—they can create solutions and positive change. A grassroots member-based organization, they work to address the root causes of poverty. They prioritize people’s ability to form a union, build coalitions for racial justice and equity, have affordable healthy food, access quality public transportation, and make a living wage.

Learn More & Connect

 [FoodandMedicine.org](https://www.foodandmedicine.org)

 [FoodandMedicineMe](https://www.facebook.com/FoodandMedicineMe)

Member-driven and organizer-led, the work of Food AND Medicine has sustained for decades. The work has not returned to the factories, but the community has endured and adapted to meet each other's needs, grow food, and create paths forward together. Currently, the organization has 525 members, active in many different committee structures to carry the work including 15 folks on the board, 15 on working with the Central Labor Council, 10 Transportation for All, ten Solidarity Harvest, 15 Food Access Committee, and 175 at FAM's 35 Collective Community Gardens. Over 300 people participate in FAM's annual programs Legislative Breakfast, Labor Day, and Solidarity Harvest.

The foundational focus on basic needs - Food AND Medicine - has created and sustained a community engaged in mutual aid, community care, resourcing each other in many ways. This sturdy foundation supports training, storytelling and capacity building, fostering regenerative, sustained efforts to meet community needs, and direct political engagement. In strategically engaging community members to elevate

demands and advocate for the larger membership to hold electeds accountable and encourage civic engagement, the power building has developed a successful and long track record on this side as well. The hybrid model involves direct organizing as much as community engagement, providing an entry point to people of all types and ideologies.

Primary Modalities

- Food Justice, Food Production, and Food Service - including 1675 Thanksgiving baskets per year;
- Organizing campaigns, and creation of alternative economic and cultural structures;
- Collective community gardens + Farmer Relationships building partnerships and investing in small local farms to bring food to the baskets = much of the food basket contents;
- Empower and involve those directly affected to take an active, leadership role in bringing awareness and change;
- Organize those directly affected to build collective power and to take an active, leadership role in bringing awareness, liberation, and change;
- FAM members successfully mobilized to improve public transportation, more humane and practical policies for the use of public parks, and local elections policy to increase civic participation;

- Run a service navigator program where they connect people to healthcare and other available services;
- Door-knocking, community listening, and building knowledge of the community through research and outreach;
- Facilitate and sponsor events and educational programs, legislative and workplace organizing campaigns, and creation of alternative economic and cultural structures;
- Educational work at service of meals and events driving shared political insights, and growing both the advocacy team and greater membership;
- Storytelling - self expression through media opportunities have offered powerful ways to shape the local agenda and support the agency of members. Stories shared are a powerful organizing tool;
- Political Advocacy in many shapes and sizes including a weekly senator office "show up" to build strategic accountability with Senator Collins;
- Through the c4, elected official accountability;
- Civic engagement - encouraging civic participation and political advocacy;
- Build deep and long lasting relationships with local, state and national labor organizations, the local recovery community, various local housing agencies, and the regional CAP organization. These partnerships aid FAM in building effective programs to deliver positive change for its primary constituents.

Vision for the Future

- Continue the mutual aid and direct service work meeting basic needs
- Continue education, engagement, and member development work
- Reactivate elected accountability work with a renewed vigor, including weekly senator office show up, advocating to Collins + Congressional Push

Adaptability and endurance of FAM’s work have both been fed by the relationships and networks at the core of their model. Existing as a grassroots organization with such a broad and sustained membership across more than two decades is no small feat. Leadership talks about making focused, strategic choices, and “picking good fights” as being core to that sustained existence. And, “just keeping our eyes on continually doing things that make a difference for people and not tilting at too many windmills.”

Recommendation Spotlight

Local Housing Authorities
Bangor Area Recovery Network & Community
Wabanaki Public Health and Wellness

Partnership for Working Families

Central Labor Council
National Jobs with Justice
AFL-CIO / IBEW, NNU, SEIU, UAW
ME Equal Justice

Relationships and dignity remain at the core of Food AND Medicine. By coming together over food and shared goals, the membership and community has grown steadily over time. Partnerships with the local Housing Authorities have meaningfully opened opportunities for Collective Community Gardens and on site activities to be in service to the community in multiple ways. Deepened partnership and relationships with the recovery community have allowed the medicine frame to come in expansive forms. Those relationships create fertile cycles of mutual support and honed goals in the policy and legislative fights FAM leads, as well.



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

Photo from Food AND Medicine

PROFILE

Rise St. James

St. James Parish, Louisiana

There are two chemical plants just upriver from Sharon Lavigne’s home. They are two of the 140 oil refineries and chemical facilities along the banks of the Mississippi River between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. These petrochemical plants are major economic drivers of the region, along with prisons and detention centers, in the place of what were plantations with enslaved labor and sharecroppers for much of the colonial history of the land. The region has been called “Cancer Alley” by environmental groups for its high rates of cancer among residents in the largely low-income and Black communities.

“Sharon Lavigne, a special education teacher turned environmental justice advocate, has worked with community and allies to successfully stop the construction of a \$1.25 billion plastics manufacturing plant alongside the Mississippi River in St. James Parish, Louisiana.” As founder of RISE St. James, Lavigne mobilized grassroots opposition to the plant construction, educated community members, and organized peaceful protests to defend their community. Rooted in connection, relationship, and faith, the effort stopped the plant that would have created an estimated one million pounds of liquid hazardous waste annually in the production of ethylene and propylene, key chemicals in the manufacture of plastics.

The effort began because of a horrific, unnatural smell. When she would go outside her home, the smell would flood Sharon Lavigne’s nose. Having grown up and lived in the parish her whole life, the assault to the senses was alarming, but she explains, “I didn’t know anything about these plants,”... “It was like, ‘all my life I’ve been breathing this stuff, not knowing where it was coming from.’ I thought it was all over the world that we were breathing dirty air.”



Fiscally Sponsored by Earth Island Institute
About 10 Staff + Volunteers
2024 Budget approx. \$1M
6 Years in Existence

“We didn’t choose to fight environmental injustices—this fight landed on us, just as it has on so many others. We shouldn’t have to beg for clean air, clean water, and clean soil—but we’re humble enough to do it. Standing in solidarity with communities across the South facing these challenges is not just our calling—it’s our discipline and our purpose.”

Learn More & Connect

[RiseStJames.org](https://risestjames.org)

[RiseStJames](https://www.facebook.com/RiseStJames)

As reported “That all changed when Lavigne got wind of a plan by Taiwan-based Formosa Plastics Group to build one of the world’s largest plastic factories – a \$9.4 billion facility with 14 plants on 2,400 acres upriver from Lavigne’s house.” Miss Lavigne explained to reporters that, ‘Nobody talked about it until we went to this health association meeting, and that’s how we found out about all these plants.’

“Lavigne’s epiphany fueled her righteous anger. After that meeting, Lavigne hosted a small gathering of 10 people inside her home on River Road, and then she held another a few weeks later in her garage for more than 20. ... ‘I made a big, old pot of gumbo to draw a crowd, and it worked,’ Lavigne said, creating with a unanimous vote ‘Rise St. James,’ comprising residents of the civil parish’s Fifth District.” The fight has not been easy, and even with victories along the way, very much continues with the focal point on ‘fighting for our community, children, and health’.

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

Primary Modalities

- Community Gatherings & Education;
- Advocacy - in US courts, with local and all levels of government, at the UN, and in partnership with groups like Tulane’s Environmental Law Clinic and others;
- Public Hearings and showing of community support - standing up against plans for an ammonia plant & other threatened additional chemical exploitations of the region, as well as calling attention to interconnect health and safety issues;
- Scientific research and legal partnership with Tulane, Center for Biological Diversity, Deep South Center for Environmental Justice led by Dr. Beverly Wright, and others;
- Rallies - like the recent Rally for Climate & Environmental Justice on the steps of the Louisiana State Capitol;
- Joyful gatherings like the community FORESTival environmental justice festival and celebration;
- Reckon with shared history, suffering, threats - Home for the Holidays - reparations and history work connecting with regionally connected fellow descendants to honor the lives and resilience of those who endured slavery and helped shape the foundation of their community.



Photo from
Rise St. James

Vision for the Future

- Continue the fight across all arms of the work
- Black History Program launching in 2025
- Environmental Justice Office Hours to empower frontline and fence-line communities with ideas, strategies, and partnerships that drive real change.
- Looking forward to welcoming new interns who will support the work, and always welcoming more volunteers
- International connections, including travel to Brazil to teach a class to youth on how to be advocates

Community power, community wisdom, and a safe, healthy future for the community are the core of the work. Scientists and experts of many stripes have collaborated with the group, elevating academic research that confirms the community's knowledge of the danger of the plants and petrochemical industry. The research and community wisdom spiral together to develop awareness on a whole new level — not just in St. James Parish, but across geographies, expertise, identities, and more.

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

A 2021 report by Kimberly Terrell, a research scientist at the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic, “indicated nearly every census tract between Baton Rouge and New Orleans ranks in the top 5% nationally for cancer risk from toxic air pollution and in the top 10% for respiratory hazards. Moreover, Terrell said, exposure to high levels of toxic air pollution is estimated to cause 85 cancer cases per year in Louisiana.”

And the wins in court are also perpetually challenged by appeals, rerouted corporate effort, and new attempts to build additional plants. But RISE St. James and the community, allies and collaborators, partners, and others keep coming together to stand up, speak out, and raise voices from across the community to fight.

And they are contributing to the fight in the ways it's interconnected with other issues across the globe and history. Recently, RISE St. James joined efforts calling for reparations at the U.N. Headquarters as part of the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent session focusing on reparatory justice. There, Sharon C. Lavigne, amplified the voices of frontline communities and called for accountability and action to combat environmental injustices.

Lavigne has been recognized for her leadership by groups including the American Geophysical Union, the University of Notre Dame extended their highest honor, the Laetare Medal, for her grassroots organizing of a faith-based coalition. She was awarded the [Goldman Environmental Prize](#). And amidst all the recognition, the fight continues.

Looking ahead, the work will grow. To help support the effort and meaningfully drive toward RISE St. James' goals, they hope to be resourced to meaningfully expand the volunteer community, and invest in an advertising budget to support all arms of the work.

Recommendation Spotlight

[Concerned Citizens of St. John](#) - who are at the forefront of this work, and started their org two years before RISE St. James

PROFILE

Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment (SOCM)

Tennessee (Statewide)



Multi-Entity - 501c3 & 501c4

5.5 Staff + Volunteers

2024 Budget approx. \$586k

53 Years in Existence

“Extraordinary change is rooted in the power of ordinary people.”

In 1971, Tennessee’s poor, isolated coalfield communities suffered from a lack of funding for schools and roads, and were suffering the negative environmental impacts of the coal industry. Residents banded together to research the problem. They discovered absentee land corporations owned a large amount of the counties’ mineral-rich land, but paid no taxes. In 1972, residents won an appeal that required this taxation. Building on lessons learned, SOCM was founded as a member-run, grassroots organization focused on developing the power of ordinary people to shape local and state level policy.

Now after over five decades, the work still holds at its core the voices of members, chapters, committee, and the communities they represent. SOCM members work towards a Tennessee where all people are treated with dignity, where the environment is preserved and protected, and where corporations and public officials are held accountable to the needs of the people.

Members are the ones on the front lines “doing the work” in their own communities. SOCM responds to local interest with training, mentorship, and practice. Members learn skills to

Photo from Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment

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

build local groups, identify issues that are deeply felt in their community, understand dynamics of local and state power holders, and create campaigns to address issues together. Together, they shape the sustaining long-term, democratically run, and locally rooted SOCM chapters in communities throughout Tennessee, now active in seven counties. The organization's 12-person board is elected from membership from each chapter along with "at large" representatives and an executive committee and guides bigger picture strategy, budget, etc.

Primary Modalities

- Committee and chapter structures to allow hyper local, as well as statewide campaigns;
- Storytelling and celebration through the Sentinel newsletter;
- Annual meetings and gatherings across chapters;
- Base building with a low barrier to entry;
- Listening;
- Tabling, outreach, digital surveys to drive data collection to understand Tennesseans priorities for local school districts;
- Training and leadership development;
- Strategic guidance to focus campaign building across the network;

- Advocacy and representation at local and state government meetings, hearings;
- Digital organizing for education and advocacy;
- Direct Actions including press conferences, community town halls, virtual town halls led by most affected folks;
- Meeting relationship-building with elected allies to open pathways for influencing the shape of policy;
- Media engagement and narrative strategy;
- Coalition with organizations and communities united in common goals;
- Rallies in collaboration with other folks fighting for shared goals.

Chapters and committees welcome trained members into the ranks of multiracial, intergenerational community organizing on three main topics:

1) PublicSchoolStrong: Building a base of active parents, educators, students, and community members advocating for fully funded schools through local and state level campaigns. The most recent example of this work was focused on combating Gov. Lee's Voucher Bill designed to move public school dollars to private education! SOCM and their "Tennessee for All" (TN4All) coalition partners, played a major role in winning the fight and stopping

Learn More & Connect

- 📄 [SOCM.org](https://www.socm.org)
- 📄 [New SOCM Strategy](#)
- 📺 [SOCMTN](#)

the bill in the last legislative session. The multi-pronged campaign involved: research and base-building element that pulled together over 128 people from across 22 counties to commit to be #PublicSchoolStrong in urban, rural, and suburban communities. Over 800 people from across Tennessee completed the SOCM/TN4All education issue survey. Electronic advocacy engaged 18,000 voters through texting campaigns and sent over 3000 emails to legislators regarding federal funding and the universal voucher scheme. Many member-led actions were hosted across six counties (Blount, Knox, Davidson, Rutherford, McMinn, Anderson, and Shelby), including press conferences, community town halls, and virtual town halls. These were led by teachers, parents, and neighbors in response to vouchers and the threat of loss to federal funding. SOCM collectively attended 25 constituent legislative meetings and built relationships and a good reputation with ally representatives on both sides of the aisle, leading to invitations to help craft legislation for the next session. The bill was defeated in the legislative

Vision for the Future

SOCM's primary focus is building multiracial, working class power with people in rural and suburban counties. Focused forward on deepening and building meaningful coalitions with Black- and brown-led organizations whose goals and strategies align with SOCM.

Continue to focus on running campaigns that have LOCAL targets and goals but also have the potential to build towards STATEWIDE targets and goals.
Fight the Voucher bill—again!

In addition to fighting threats to community around these topics, SCOM is committed to using the focus to build comprehensive community-driven solutions.

- For example, for development, this could mean thinking about what are policy models that can be won through grassroots organizing that are focused on implementing policies that allow communities to have more decision-making power in a development house.
- In public education, it might look like both STOP the Voucher Bill AND building toward fully-resourced classrooms, restorative accountability, and whole-child learning across all schools and communities.

session in 2024, but is slated to return in 2025. This network will be activated again with a fresh approach to fight for “Tennessee for All”.

2) Community Driven Development: Rural members fighting for local and state policies that allow more resident decision-making when extractive development projects are proposed. This work includes resisting corporate land grabs for mining, extraction, or other dangerous use and elevating communities affected to have more ability to have say so in the kind of development that happens to them. Currently centered in their Grundy, Marion, and Franklin County chapters in response to two particular developers trying to build sand mines and sand quarries in unincorporated communities, where there's very little teeth in the law for communities to be able to have any sort of control about development happening. So far, SOCM efforts have been able to beat back two of these quarries and stop the permit process through community engagement and feeling to the county commission and some policies we put in place, but that work is ongoing.

3) Housing and Renter Rights: Local/statewide campaign to expand access to legal protections for working class tenants. Knox County chapter is leading these efforts post-COVID through canvassing and listening to build

the effort. They've established a court watch program, are working towards right to counsel for tenants, and SOCM is developing a state legislative platform with coalition partners.

Recommendation Spotlight

Tennessee for All: Statewide labor-based community coalition

Housing for All Tennessee: New coalition of 5 organizations

Alliance for Appalachia: Environmental issues, federal-level work

Photo from Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment



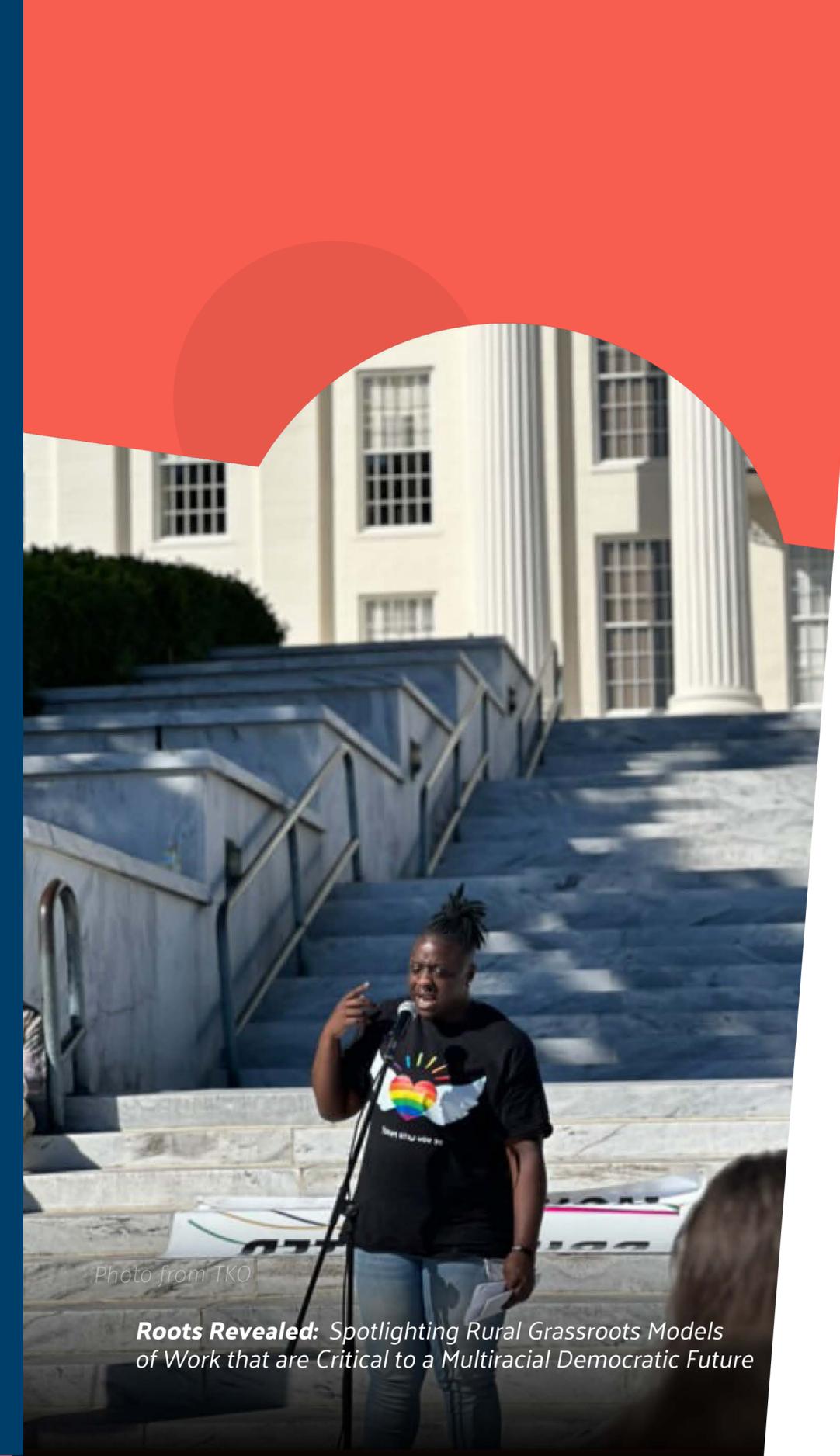


Photo from TKO

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

PROFILE

The Knights & Orchids Society (TKO)

Selma, Alabama (with Ties to Montgomery & Across the Region)

“Black Trans Joy saved my life.”

TKO was founded in 2012 and became the first and only AIDS Service Organization (ASO) and STD/STI clinic in the state of Alabama founded and led by Black Trans and LGBTQ people. The work reaches from community care to advocacy and beyond, offering space for people to live and be, gathering for joy and community, while educating and supporting folks who have not always felt welcome.

With a vision for a future where Transgender, Queer, Bisexual, Lesbian, and Gay (LGBTQ+), where Black people are empowered to live full and healthy lives free from harm, TKO’s mission is to build the power of LGBTQ+ Black people across the South by providing a spectrum of health and

501c3
 12 Staff + Volunteers
 2024 Budget approx. \$1.56M
 12 Years in Existence

wellness services. They are “community people serving the communities that we represent. Our goal is to help more Black trans, same-gender-loving, and Black queer folks access high-quality primary care and endocrinology services.”

The work grew out of community, medical need, resourcefulness, and a commitment to not leave each other behind. It is still rooted in a collective willingness to create the resources folks need not just to survive, but to thrive.

Starting as an ASO, the work has benefited from the comprehensive care model and peer-driven approach that includes medical, and holds an individual who walks through the door at TKO with all their needs and dreams. This welcoming and rich offering has made it a multiracial community space where folks know they can be safe to be who they are, in a region where it is not always safe to be out, to be trans, to be Black, to be so many of the things the community and organization are.

Learn More & Connect

🌐 TKOsociety.org

📘 TKOSociety

📷 @tko_alabama

Primary Modalities

- Comprehensive care and community offerings start with a client intake;
- Medical and mental health care - Primary care doctor on staff and plugged into a network of mental health providers that is growing;
- Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) that can be life saving;
- Support safe hormone access, use, levels monitoring and access to clean needles;
- Testing + safer sex resources & education;
- HIV and STD medical support and resources;
- Housing security supports - the housing offering is still able to support folks in getting access to affordable housing and making their transitions toward sustainable housing;

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

- Food - Garden for produce, and grocery shopping support off season, and meals at events and gatherings;
- Stipends and financial support for folks' time and investment in the work - including getting paid for testing;
- Youth Ambassador program - organizer training and capacity building to help young people "reach back and bring their people along" and has done pop up resource sharing and educational programs at HBCUs;
- Leadership development and pipeline for job creation - most of the TKO staff came initially to the work as clients and there are supports to help folks who don't work at TKO look for jobs, do work more safely in the case where folks are doing sex work;
- Healing spaces;
- Support Groups like Diva 2 Diva for trans femmes and women, and a program for trans masc folks led by and designed for those served by the efforts;
- Joy - celebration, open mics, poetry sessions, writing groups, parties for people to come congregate in a safe community and get fed there, too;

- Policy advocacy around TGNC issues and broader issues impacting the community, including medicaid expansion;
- Partnerships and referrals to other programs if needs go beyond what we can support;
- Mutual aid and community support in crisis.



Vision for the Future

- Continue the life saving and life giving work
- Expand program on HBCU campuses bringing safe sex kits and emergency contraception for trans masc folks
- Expand housing programs and access - especially under threat under Trump
- Continuing to expand the Youth Ambassador organizing work

Queer culture and houses are at the core of the origin story, in a place where being LGBTQ+ is often not safe for folks. Queer joy has been fundamental to the work throughout. The culture of holding folks wholeness and dignity TKO provides is a beacon and powerful offering. Celebrating and having joyful gatherings that also have food so no one has to come and say “I’m hungry, I need food” but will be resourced. Folks can find what they need and be whole and dignified as part of the TKO community.

The extensive work really went to the next level when COVID hit. With the comprehensive care model and mutual aid DNA, TKO was able to respond and support folks in the pandemic. Selma is a predominantly Black area of rural Alabama and was hit hard. “So many folks were going without in the supply chain scramble, and so many folks were getting sick and couldn’t help their families.” TC explains, “Folks needed diapers, needed wipes, needed the basic things to get through the day, needed food, needed medical care, and we were able to help. We were providing groceries, cleaning supplies. The line went around the block. ... People can't be out down there. But nobody gives a damn about a rainbow flag when they're hungry or when they're fighting COVID. We were able to slip our information into these bags. And then you get a call like a day or so later like, ‘Hey, can I come hang out with y'all?’ It was beautiful to witness.”

When tornadoes ripped through Selma in 2023 and destroyed huge swaths of the community, “it was devastating, but the first line of defense most people—cis and queer—were like can we go to TKO because we know them.” There was trust built that allowed TKO to support the community in immediate response to the disaster, and serve as a bridge with national interest groups moving resources and support into Selma in the wake of the destruction.

Recommendation Spotlight

[Black Trans Futures & Black Queer Visionary Summit](#) with the ACLU of Alabama
[Cover Alabama Coalition](#) - medicaid expansion coalition TKO participates in
[Montgomery Pride United](#)
[Five Horizons Health Services](#)
[Yellowhammer Fund](#)

PROFILE

Torrance County Listening Project (Thriving Rural Communities)

Torrance County, New Mexico

“ *What would our community look like if it was thriving? If working in detention centers wasn't the only path for so many folks? If our water was not sent away, our land not depleted? If an ICE contract wasn't our main source of development?* ”

The Torrance County Listening Project is an effort to center community voices in answering these questions with residents and community members of Torrance County, New Mexico. The team is patchworked together in an initiative including nine volunteers, two staff members rooted at Innovation Law Lab, and other community ties.

The core group all have different relationships to immigration detention and Torrance County. Some worked for nearly ten years in ICE detention centers, coordinating massive

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



Campaign Piloted within a 501c3*
Possibly on Path to Fiscal Sponsor Delineation

2 Staff Part Time + Volunteers

2024 Budget approx. \$250k

2 Years Campaign in Existence

collaborative legal representation, and advocacy. Others spent years organizing volunteer visitation teams to provide accompaniment to people in ICE custody. Folks in the group grew up in Torrance County, moved there recently, or live nearby. All the folks involved have people in their lives who are subjected to or are vulnerable to immigration detention. The group is grounded in the belief that thriving Torrance County communities need economic and social opportunities that do not rely on the Torrance County Detention Facility.

Folks have heard stories from detention center guards about awful experiences at work, how much they resented their



Photo from Torrance County Listening Project

Learn More & Connect

🗨️ [TCLP via InnovationLawLab.org](https://www.innovationlawlab.org)

work, and wished they could find any other job to pay a living wage without “hurting my soul so much”. With Law Lab’s work, the [voices and demands](#) of migrants detained in the notorious [Torrance County Detention Facility \(TCDF\)](#) have been shared widely. Efforts were almost successful in shuttering TCDF in 2022. Though the facility stayed open, the objections to the “value” of the detention center and possibility to build alternative paths ripened and momentum to ask what else could be—through participatory research models—continues.

VIDA and Law Lab came together to launch the Torrance County Listening Project. Law Lab agreed to fund a pilot project, based on the belief that thriving rural communities do not rely on prison economies, and that for rural communities to thrive, rural residents have to be empowered to collectively envision and build the future they want for themselves. In July of 2023, the Torrance County Listening Project was formed and began knocking doors in communities in Torrance County, to ask people what they love about their communities, what makes life hard, and what would make their lives better. The work began to weave a picture of transition for the overall community, away from a reliance on prisons and extractive industries.

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

Primary Modalities

- Door-knocking to open long porch conversations & deep listening;
- Targeted outreach and relationship building + following recommendations to grow network of engaged community members;
- Mapping and visioning sessions to engage students in elementary and middle school in envisioning the future they want for their communities;
- Mapping and visioning sessions with adults to engage in the same;
- Refining priorities with surveys and interviews with more than 130 resident respondents;
- Listening sessions, community presentations, potlucks to share, discuss, seek support for Torrance County People’s Platform - here’s what your neighbors are saying, what resonates, what’s not quite right, what’s missing;
- Honing community priorities with local institutions and civic groups;
- Building support in Torrance County for A People’s Agenda to create more economic and social opportunities for rural New Mexicans and transition communities away from reliance on prison economies.

Through these participatory efforts, TCLP has woven together a list of six priorities:

1. We want to **protect the water** that makes life possible in the Estancia Valley.
2. We want **good jobs with good pay**, opportunities to learn new trades, and time to rest and be with our families.
3. We want **accessible healthcare and emergency services** including primary care, substance abuse treatment, and EMS and fire fighting equipment and personnel.
4. We want to be able to **afford to live in our communities** and pay reasonable prices for housing, utilities, healthy food, and transportation.
5. We want **vibrant and welcoming communities** with social outlets for people of all ages, fully funded senior centers, and after school programs.
6. We want to **keep the things that make rural life beautiful** - to be able to see the stars and keep our open spaces.

Investing in social and economic opportunities for rural communities allows them to push back against the use of rural land and labor for industries of suffering, like immigrant detention. Rural community power means rural residents can demand jobs with dignity and find real solutions to the real problems they face.

Vision for the Future

Long-term dedicated funding would allow expansion to build power with our neighbors to realize a thriving Torrance County that doesn't rely on the suffering caused by the Torrance County Detention Facility.

Partnering with additional communities to bring the model and impact potential to other communities around ICE facilities in other geographies

Shoring up TCLP as it exists now: \$250k/year

- Two permanent staff to support the Torrance County Listening Project's local outreach and organizing, developing regional and state partnerships, policy work in line with A People's Platform for Torrance County, and conduct prison visitation to support Freedom Campaigns in collaboration with other local legal service providers
- Earmark and administer funds for local contractors and stipends for volunteers conducting community outreach and engagement

Launching two other rural listening projects: \$500k/year

- Maintain team above + hire two rural organizers to strengthen work in Torrance County and begin outreach in two other prison counties
- Hire a full time comms/legislative strategist

Recommendation Spotlight

New Mexico Dream Team, a statewide network committed to create power for multigenerational, undocumented, LGBTQ+, and mixed status families towards liberation. Law Lab and NMDT have collaborated in piloting a Listening Project in Chaparral, NM, where the Otero County ICE Processing Center is. Support for that project would strengthen rural organizing against carceral economies and ICE detention in New Mexico.

Somos Un Pueblo Unido, a statewide, immigrant-led organization with over 3,500 members across eight counties is dedicated to advancing worker and racial justice, originally founded in 1995.

TCLP is a member of the **Dignity Not Detention** coalition, building community power to end immigration detention in the state of New Mexico. Member organizations include the New Mexico Immigrant Law Center (NMILC) and the New Mexico Dream Team

NMILC empowers low-income immigrant communities through collaborative legal services, advocacy, and education. NMILC is building relationships with community leaders in Cibola County and exploring the economic role of the Cibola County Correctional Center in the area to better inform efforts to support economic development that does not rely on human suffering and terminate the ICE contract at CCCC.

** Innovation Law Lab anchors and sponsors the Torrance County Listening Project, a collaborative project to build a thriving Torrance County with economic and social opportunity for all, without participating in immigrant detention.*

PROFILE

Western Native Voice

Montana (Statewide)



Empowerment begins with engagement; by championing the voices of Native communities, we pave a path toward a world where equality reigns, opportunity abounds, and every individual thrives without barriers.

Western Native Voice works to nurture and empower new native leaders and impact policies affecting Native Americans through community organizing, education, leadership, and advocacy. Established in 2022, Western Native Voice, Inc. (WNV) is a domestic Montana Nonprofit Corporation and social welfare nonprofit. They are engaged on all seven Montana Indian reservations and in major Montana urban centers, as approximately half of Montana's native population lives off the reservation. They are a multiracial, membership organization, with their Board of Directors being elected directly from the membership.

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



501c4
17 Staff + Volunteers
2024 Budget approx. \$3M
2 Years in Existence

The work strives to protect the rights of Native American tribes and individuals through leadership development, education, advocacy, and civic engagement to promote social, racial, gender, economic, and environmental justice to preserve native land, culture, and way of life for future generations. WNV advocates for community-driven initiatives and inclusive decision-making.

Volunteers and community members at Western Native Voice play crucial roles such as organizing voter

registration drives, advocating for policy changes, hosting community events, and serving as ambassadors. They empower Native voices through grassroots leadership, fostering civic engagement, and building stronger, more connected communities across Montana. Four Programs pillars focus on Civic Education; Civic Engagement; Leadership Development; Advocacy and take on a wide variety of shapes and sizes.



Photos from Western Native Voice

Primary Modalities

- GOTV campaigns including the "Snag Dat Vote Tour" and "Make Voting a Family Tradition";
- Civic Education / Know Your Rights work;
- Policy Advocacy on a wide swath of issues pertinent to native communities, and "confronting anti-Indian sentiment in Montana legislature";
- Community gatherings events - family friendly gatherings and social events that include celebration, community, food, education, meeting electeds, and folks organizing. Topical conversations on landback, climate change, healthcare and medicaid, etc. Policy implications for felons. Mapping the impact of government and electeds into daily life. Everything from Bingo nights to road races, parades to a Mother's Day co-ed Volleyball tournament, a "Bear Grease" play production, and more;
- Special focus on educating young people;
- Social media - inspiration, arts and culture collaborations with hip-hop and other artists, make voting a family tradition campaign, technical information customized to needs and considerations of the community.
- Path to voting for a felon. "Voting feels like it gives me one step closer to freedom." Head on conversations about anti-voting perceptions and challenges and really specific stakes

for different parts of the native community Interviews with elected Native folks shining light on the work and impact potential (legislation on land and MMIW, boarding school recognition work);

- Podcast - Coffee with Keaton - profile Native leadership & inform native communities & hold electeds accountable + Western Native Voice Community Spotlight, designed to highlight grassroots organizing and individuals creating change from across Montana and in Indian Country. Tell their history through people's stories and family histories while spotlighting inspiring community leaders of many different kinds and with many different focus areas.

Meeting folks where they are—whether online or in community, in celebration or in education, in creative and artistic spaces, at bingo, or over meals—WNV consistently lives into their commitments to invite Native folks into community, into civic engagement, into an expanse of possibility.

In June 2024, Western Native Voice marked the 100 year commemoration parade for Indian Citizen Act 1924 with the community, hosting a parade through the streets of Billings, Montana. The top five floats won prizes, and the community turned out to celebrate and honor the history, the community, culture and tradition.

Learn More & Connect

- 📄 WesternNativeVoice.org
- 📺 [WesternNativeVoiceOfficial](#)
- 🌐 [Link Tree](#)
- 📺 [Making Voting a Family Tradition](#)

Their work with Native American communities building political and personal power to impact policies affecting their communities is enacted through so many spaces. In celebration, by drawing forward the history and unique challenges around civic engagement, and unique and specific ways that policy and elected officials can shape native life and futures is woven across all kinds of gatherings, campaigns, storytelling, and training in their work.

The rich collection of videos and interviews, elevating the actual voices of native folks across Montana, from leaders in culture, wellness, business, government, or other kinds of work and expertise, to the folks volunteering, organizing, and getting started in the work echo across their campaigns. "Every year is an important year for Native American voters." "We need our voices heard more now than ever for the future generations." "When we don't vote, we surrender."

Vision for the Future

- The 2024 election has provided valuable insights into the successes and challenges of mobilizing Native voters. While the increased turnout is encouraging, the uneven results across communities signal a need for continued investment in outreach, education, and barrier reduction.
- Western Native Voice is committed to using these lessons to refine its strategies and strengthen its impact. By focusing on long-term goals, the organization is working to ensure that Native voices are not only heard during elections but also hold enduring influence in shaping the future.

For Montana's Native communities, the work

- continues. The progress seen in 2024 is a foundation to build upon, driven by a collective determination to create a more inclusive and equitable democratic process.

This year's voter turnout in Montana reached 68.09%, a notable increase from 61% in 2016 and slightly higher than the 66% achieved in 2020 during an all-mail ballot election. Reservation precincts showed particularly strong participation, with absentee ballot returns exceeding 75%. These numbers reflect the commitment of Western Native Voice to engaging communities, even in the face of systemic barriers.

"One significant outcome of the 2024 election was the election of ten Native leaders to the Montana legislature: Sen. Jonathan Windy Boy, Sen. Jacinda Morigeau, Rep. Thedis Crowe, Rep. Tyson Running Wolf, Rep. Frank Smith, Rep. Mike Fox, Rep. Jade Sooktis, Rep. Shelly Fyant, Rep. Donavon Hawk, and Rep. Sidney Fitzpatrick. This milestone represents meaningful progress, but it is also a reminder of the ongoing need for greater representation and equity in government. The success of these legislators highlights the importance of advocacy organizations in cultivating a pipeline of Native leaders. By engaging communities, Western Native Voice is helping to ensure that Native perspectives are represented in decision-making spaces."



Watch the movement grow...from the reservation to the rural land...Western Native Voice got the plan, civic education leaders in the mix empower the people... Native American Movement...in the heart of Montana...funding these dreams...No Vote Left Behind...

[Foreshadow honoring the work of Western Native Voice](#)

Recommendation Spotlight

[North Dakota Native Vote](#), a sister organization to WNV.

[New Mexico Native Vote](#), a WNV partner.

[Arizona Native Vote](#), also a WNV partner.

Patterns & Attributes

In spotlighting these organizations leading various power building rural work, we have noticed patterns that can be guiding for funders and partners to understand both the nature of the work itself, and the qualities of support that are most useful.

We offer these patterns and notes here to invite deeper alignment, honest celebration of what this all really takes, and focus toward meaningful funding and approaches to support and solidarity. Each organization deserves celebration and support for its unique offerings and challenges, and their shared qualities are instructive.



Attributes of the Work

We noted commonalities, shared characteristics, and qualities of the community groups, organizations, and coalitions we've featured on the following pages:

All In

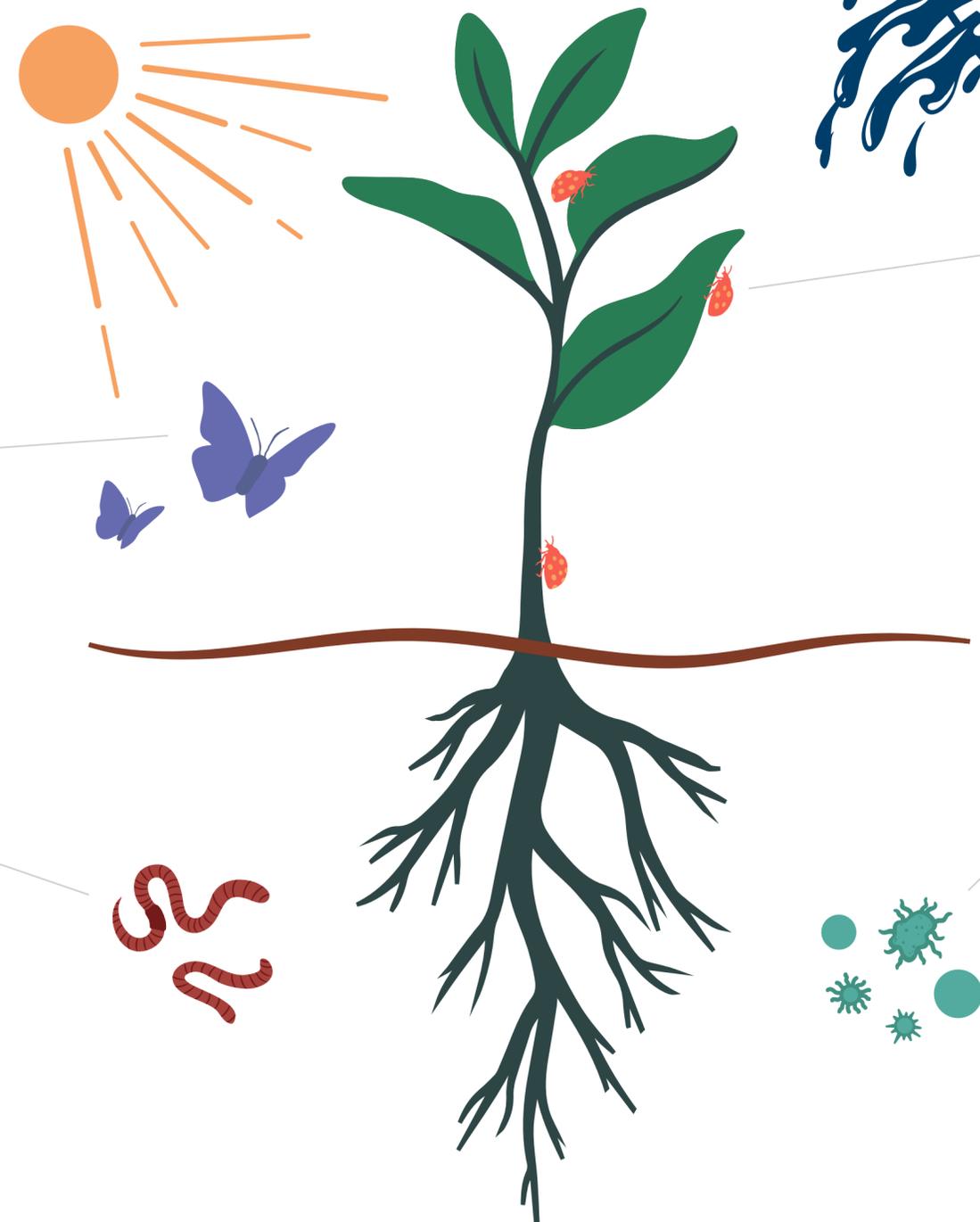
Heart and soul drive the work. It is personal, powered by lived experience, and connection to place. It holds folks holistically in deep need, wrapping around to preserve dignity and lives. Basic needs are part of all these groups' work in one way or another.

Holding Complexity

The work doesn't fit neatly in boxes. It is definitively multi-issue, often intersectional. Systemic threats necessitate complex solutions. These groups hold humanity, offering solutions that regeneratively resource community while building paths forward.

Absolutely Adaptive, Organic, & Alive

Enduring the pressure of opposition demands adaptability. Holding humanity at the core requires organic, adaptive approaches. Each of the profiled organizations is doing multi-pronged work, facing attacks and counter efforts.



Joy & Celebration

Whether it's through community festivals, celebratory education sessions, parades and games, parties and performances, shared meals and connection, retreats and gatherings, or other spaces—joy and celebration are critical to community, connection, and endurance.

No One Goes it Alone

All the groups interviewed shared gratitude for partners, members. Communities come together to center humanity in the midst of corporate forces. Many root their approach in the natural ecosystems they exist within, the histories and legacies they join. This is multi-dimensionally interconnected and interdependent work.

Reclaiming & Forging Narratives Rooted In & Serving Community

False narratives about rural communities are rampant. Many groups do narrative strategy work to challenge this. Some collaborate with academic researchers to ratify community knowledge. Many interview folks to elevate community voices. They fight interventions like detention centers and toxic industry, especially where political players suggest they are a desired economic solution.

Attributes of Funding that Work

Our conversations and analysis show that funders with these attributes and practices make meaningful partners to grassroots leaders.

Courageously engage in risk. Reframe from risk to philanthropy to a frame of understanding the risk of not not funding the grassroots work.

Multi-year funding to help groups endure and build.

Flexible, unrestricted grants that can meet the complex and adaptive needs of the work. Trust, flexibility, and relationships are so core to this work because the attacks and threats require adaptation and iteration that bends from “plans” and roots in principle and creativity.

Cultivate trust, so the groups can share honestly about their work and situation. Funders follow the lead of the groups, rather than the other way around.

Support the wholeness of both leaders and their work.

Support rest and repair for leaders and teams. Support development of teams and capacities. Support regenerative and nurturing pathways for leaders and collaborators.

Bring openness to the likelihood that your strategic priorities are present within the work, even if not immediately clearly named.

Low-burden processes. Don't withhold funding until groups can answer all of your questions or provide the right forms. Build paths into the funding that are low-cost of time and energy and don't force contortion of the teams or work. Work into partnership, not bureaucracy.

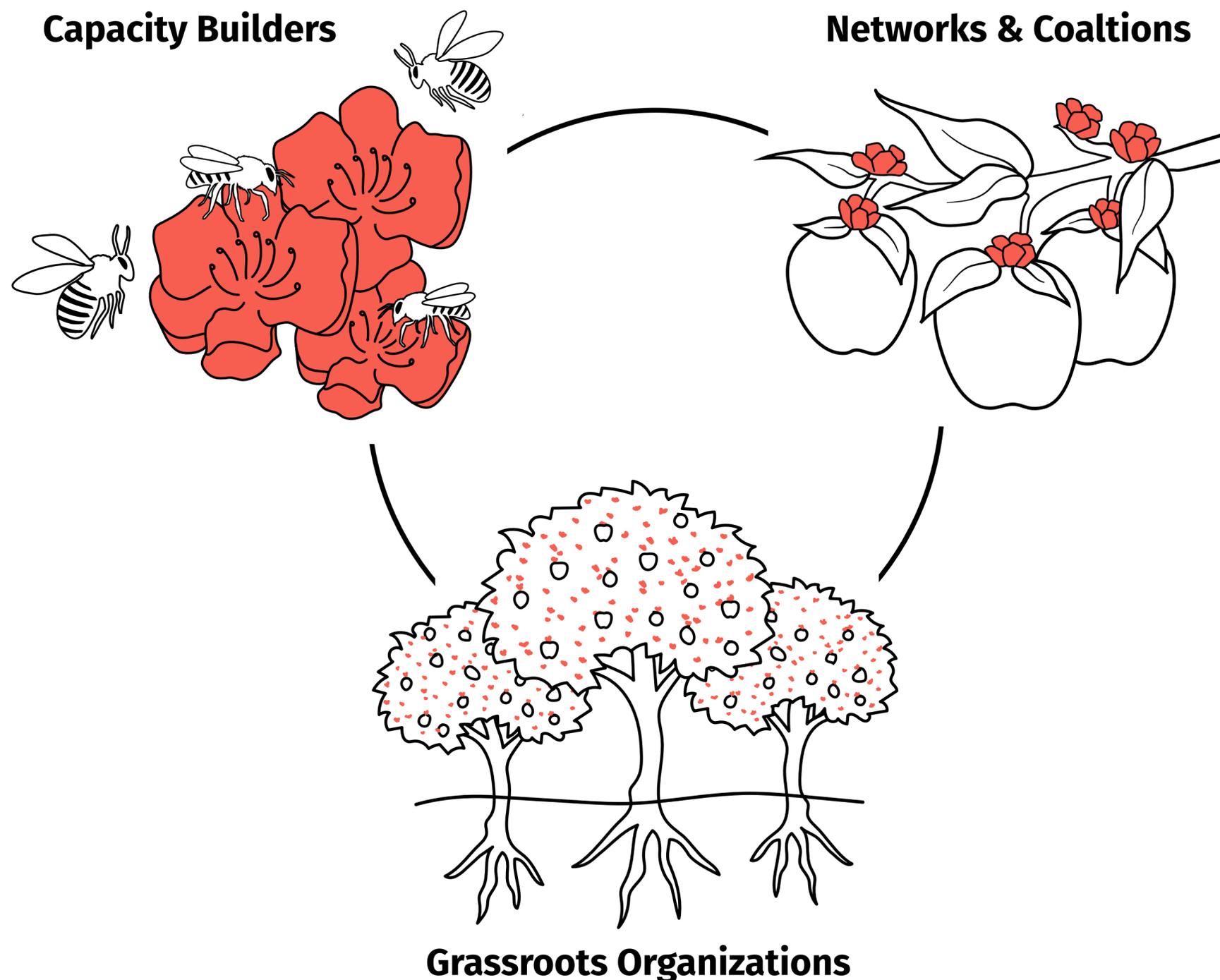
Make space for the developing forms of the work. Whether that means groups that are fiscally sponsored, seeking that kind of support and not yet incorporated, projects within a bigger org, volunteer-led community based networks, patchworked efforts, or another shape. Powerful work is not tidy.

Hold heart & humanity. Root in relationship.

The Role of Networks & Coalitions in the Rural Organizing Ecosystem

The ecosystem of rural power building work is often fortified through the relationships, collaboration, rapport, and solidarity that coalitions and networks offer. The organizations profiled in this report serve as individual examples of leadership and models of grassroots power building work in rural communities, but they rarely exist or operate in isolation. It is an ecosystem that makes this movement work a reality, with webs of coalitions, alliances, and networks that offer coordinated strategy, capacity, and critical mass.

As funders and supporters, you can view these networks and coalitions as expansive containers that illuminate both the abundance of transformative work, as well as the entry points building relationships with the folks leading grassroots power building work in alignment with your efforts. These networks foster connection and collaboration between myriad of players on the frontlines, with whom you can expand your investment in rural grassroots work and partner in solidarity to help carry the work forward.



In more strict denotation, a coalition would describe a more formal set of organizations, each with specific roles and responsibilities, working in coordination to advance a shared goal - for example a statewide legislative policy campaign; whereas a network would describe more of a set of groups who participate in sharing learnings, strategies, and capacities to build collective and individual strength of the network and its members. We use these terms somewhat interchangeably to represent a mycelium beyond individual organizations, where skills, relationships, access, and other assets are shared and amplified.

Networks and coalitions are particularly critical in rural contexts, where the work can be nascent, volunteer-led, under-resourced, and needing adaptive strategies. Networks and coalitions provide an important grounded anchor and access to resources that aren't otherwise available in a single rural community.

Ranging in their focus and organizing center, some coalitions bring a vision and infrastructure that community leaders can tap into and adapt with their communities to push forward. Whether the coalition goals are tied to formal policy campaigns, more

generalized power building, specific issues or systems of oppression, coalitions can provide critical support and open up a sea of connection opportunities for cross-pollination and supportive relationships for the often “small-but-mighty” community efforts on a grassroots level. Coalition connections can amplify member capacity and support endurance and adaptivity that grassroots work requires.

What Does this Look Like in Practice for Rural Groups?

Examples of these kinds of networks, strategically connecting chapters or member organizations, include the RISE network—which Rise St. James, profiled in this report, is part of. People's Action also serves as a national platform in this style, providing trainings, coordination, and capacity to its network of member-led, power building organizations around the country, including a cohort of rural-based network members, including Western Native Voice, also profiled above. Furthermore, People's Action works in urban and suburban areas, serving as a bridge and container that can connect and create critical mass amongst grassroots power building organizations across geographies.

The model is also focused regionally, through organizations like United Today, Stronger Tomorrow. UTST “is an organizing project working across the Upper Mid- and Mountain

West. We partner with grassroots leaders and community organizations to make sure governments and corporations are building a better future for families, friends, and neighbors.” They offer infrastructural and strategic grounding in their priorities: Community Building, Building the Bench, Government Accountability, and Local Organizing.

The webbing between grassroots organizations and groups – even in relationship with networks and alliances – is also driven forward with key partnerships with other players, including academic institutions and initiatives, capacity builders, and local financing and funding organizations. We'll spotlight some of these key players in the next section.

Three Unique Network & Coalition Models Supporting Rural Organizing



Native Organizers Alliance: A coordinating and capacity building network providing Native peoples with the training, resources, and connections that are needed to transform policy, strengthen community, and protect ways of life. The network is able to develop and share research and data to inform collective advocacy and train hundreds of Native leaders to build power and organize in their local communities.



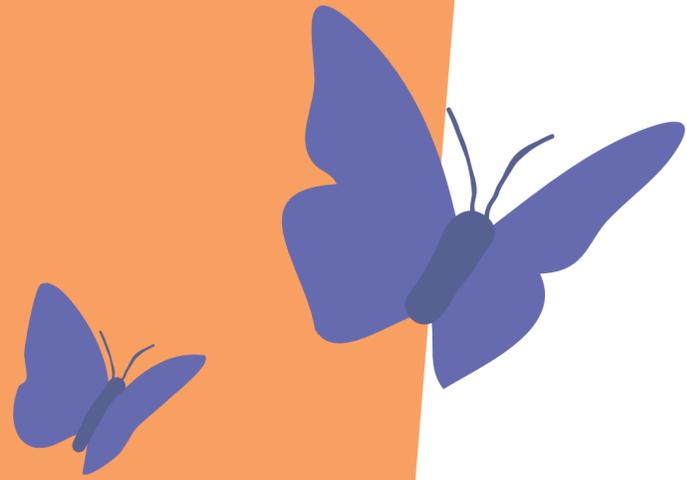
Food Chain Workers Alliance: A coalition of organizing groups with members across the food supply chain asserting collective power to advocate for a truly sustainable food system that uplifts workers, communities, and our shared environment. FCWA currently has 33 member organizations representing 375,000 food workers across the U.S. and Canada.



Detention Watch Network: A national coalition building power through collective advocacy, grassroots organizing, and strategic communications to abolish immigration detention in the United States. DNW brings together grassroots base-building organizations, legal clinics, academics, the faith-based community, national advocacy groups, and more to create a united movement.



Photo from Food AND Medicine



Partners & Resources

In the prologue of this report and throughout, we strive to make clear that this resource is but a snapshot; it is the tip of the iceberg of powerful work (including nascent and yet-to-be-established work) happening in rural communities. We offer this incomplete list of resources to support funders in more deeply understanding the context and ecosystems in which rural organizing work is taking place and, ultimately, to support funders when making the case to resource rural organizing work at their own foundation.

The information contained herein shines light on important realities including the degree and impact of historic divestment of rural communities; the overlay of race and persistent poverty in rural; the policy platforms rural communities are working to advance; the narrative strategies being utilized to build across divides in rural; and more. It also includes intermediaries through which funders can resource grassroots rural groups and the shared infrastructure that supports them.

Academic institutions, whose administrative capacities and areas of technical expertise can provide critical infrastructure to community efforts. Examples include academic institutions partnering on the EPA's Community Change Grants to support the implementation of federal funds to help disadvantaged communities tackle environmental and climate justice challenges and grants to the University of New Mexico and New Mexico State University by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to support culturally competent training and data gathering for New Mexico's rural and Native communities.

Capacity Builders, such as Community Science, which provides community-centered and participatory data and evaluation on, for example, measuring rural community power and People's Action, which provides coordination, organizing training, and collective impact to a network of

multi-issue, place-based organizing groups around the country - include a special focus on rural communities.

Local funders and community foundations

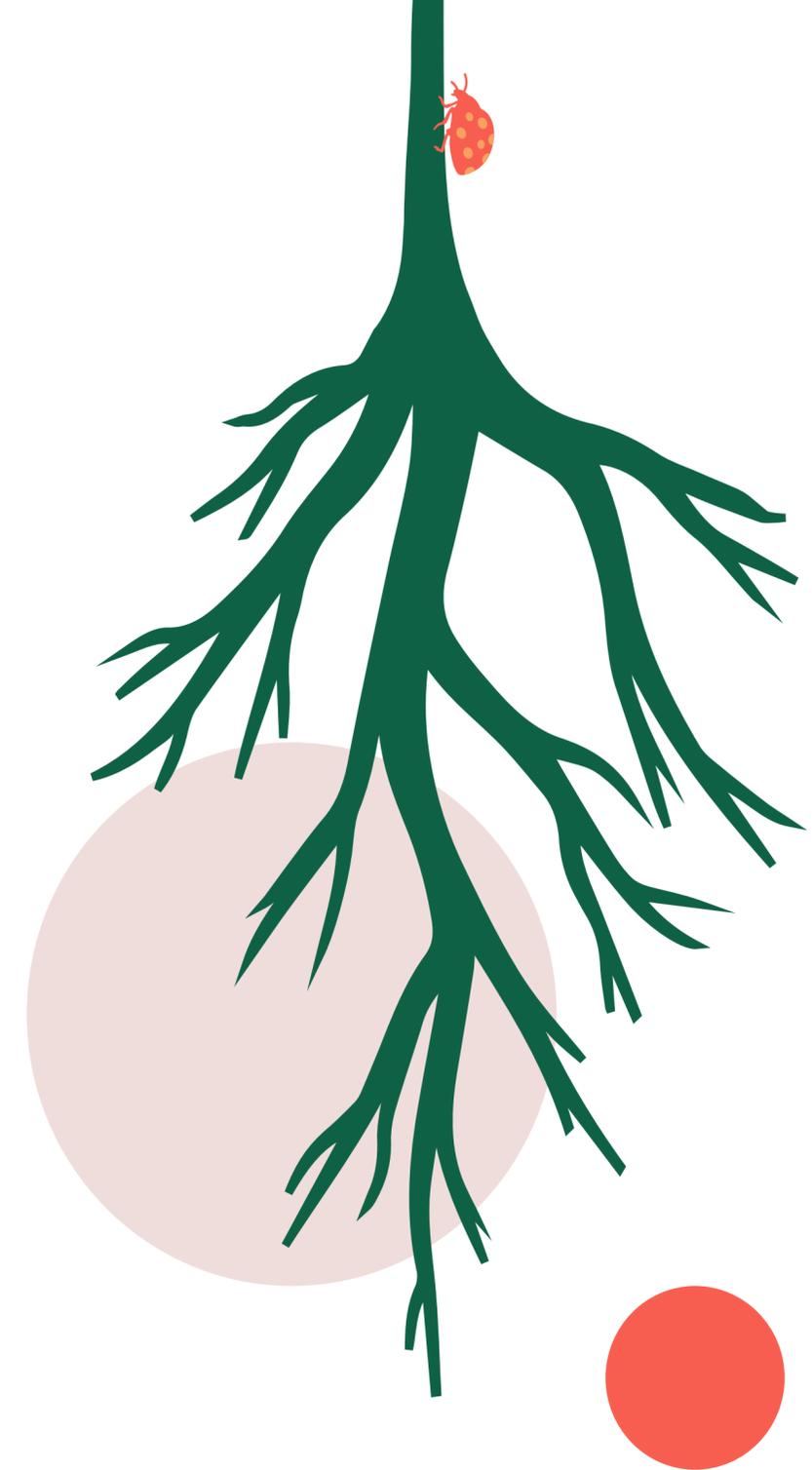
— also unlikely suspects such as values-aligned CDFIs or capital weavers, who are playing important roles in resourcing rural community organizing as the traditional ways of funding are (1) under attack, and (2) the movement for new economies grows. Examples include Invest Appalachia and Native CDFIs.

Values-aligned strategic intermediaries

who offer integrated support to resource, network weave, and build the capacity for rural community groups. In particular, Rural Democracy Initiative conducts strategic c3 and c4 grantmaking, research, communications, and network building to rural communities around the country. Some of their select resources include:

- **[Rural Battleground Polls](#)**. The polls explore rural attitudes and points toward ways to engage rural communities.
- **[Rural Policy Action Report](#)**. Featuring priority legislation and executive action that supports working families and strengthens rural communities. The report also highlights numerous policy successes and the ongoing challenges people in rural communities face.

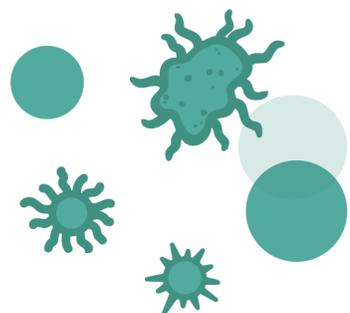
- **[Winning Jobs Narrative](#)**. A narrative framework for working to reach and organize people across race and place.
- **[Rural Map and Dashboard](#)**. Rural classifications to the country's census tracts, counties, congressional districts, and states.
- **[Investing in Rural and Small-Town Voters \(2021\)](#)**. Voting trends show the importance of rural voters and inform effective strategies for funding rural civic engagement.
- **[All the People, All the Places \(2020\)](#)**. A valuable landscape analysis for funders and other partners focused on the challenges and opportunities facing our small cities and rural areas.
- Other intermediaries of note supporting rural communities to organize and build power include: [Headwaters Foundation for Justice](#), [Social Justice Fund NW](#), [Pride Foundation](#), [Southern Partners Fund](#), [Native Voices Rising](#).



Call to Action & Looking Ahead

Thank you for making it this far with us. Rural power building work that is community-driven and grassroots is doing life-saving and system-changing work right now. We invite you to support in whatever way you can. It's about money, and more than money.

We hope you will engage these pages and calls to action from your own humanity and individual capacity, within your role in philanthropy, and at an institutional level.



Start building relationships, or fortifying the ones you have with grassroots rural leaders, now. Especially as the new administration takes over, **rapid response grants** and reactive support will be vital to protecting communities against explicit attacks.

What is most critical, though, is to find low threshold ways to fund, resource, stand in solidarity and in partnership with folks in **relationship**, and with **multi-year general operating grants**.

When it comes to the logistics of your grantmaking, right size to meet standards and **center ease for the grantee partner in the experience of proposal and reporting** to allow leaders to focus on the critical work and not be bogged down in philanthropic systems. **Trust and follow the leadership of this work.** Internally, set course to understand that the risk is so much greater for not funding this work, than it is for making the investment. Philanthropy is positioned to hold risk, to take risk, and to transform the framing of risk from being about loss of money, to loss of people, communities, freedom, safety, health, and democracy.

What can you do now? We turn to you to ask **what immediate action will you take?** Personally fund some of this work? Reach into your networks to re/activate relationships with

IRSG Can Help You Connect Further!

If you'd like to get in touch with a group or network listed, please reach out to Lindsay@nfg.org to help make introductions or connect the dots wherever useful. Let us know what questions or stories are coming up for you and as you respond in action.

rural grassroots leaders? Begin to understand how this report can help you reveal opportunity in your own geographies or focus areas? Reflect on current rural organizing grantmaking at your organization—why or why not? Release rapid response grants to folks now. Attend IRSG programming!

How do those immediate actions give way to a different way of interacting with this report in six months time? What rapid response grants can pivot to general operating and multi-year grants by your next grant cycle? What RFP process changes can you launch within that window? What cultural shifts are necessary at your organization to align with these possibilities and calls to action? Who can you align with to build structural power to influence policy within your organization?

We Invite You To →

Connect. Email the orgs featured, or us to help build bridges between you and this work.

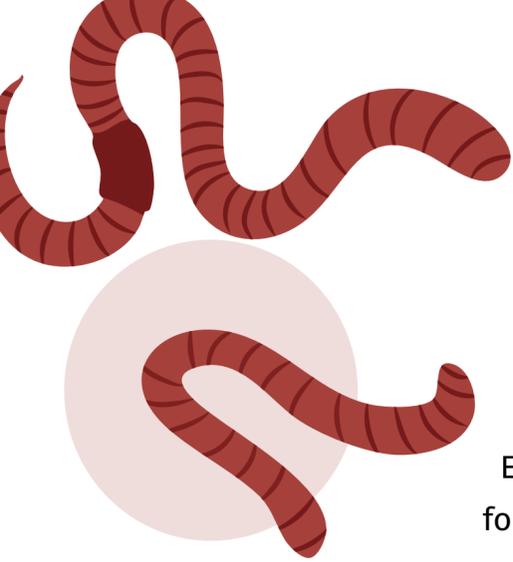
Fund. What money can you move now? Give yourself? Call in other funders to support?

Learn Together. We want to hear how this lands, is resonant, or raises questions for you.

And in one to five years, what can be possible? What does it look like to have a “beyond the ballot” approach to grantmaking that honors the intersections of issues at a rural grassroots level, locates your strategy within the realm of the complexity these leaders hold, and moves into real and right relationship—based in mutual respect, trust, and accountability—with groups to build a different future?

The 2024 election was an igniting force for this report, created leading up to, amidst, and in the immediate post-election period. Within that context, we are joining efforts





like the [Election Day to Every Day campaign](#) and [People's Action Organizing Revival campaign](#).

Elections are an important tool for assessing power. What has been revealed about where power is sitting?

What has been revealed about where we have given up power by disconnecting from these longer term strategies and pathways? How do we relate together around what is happening now as you read this?

What's clear in this moment is that more and different types of philanthropy need to be investing in this work outside of election cycles both to build for longer term power and to support these communities in the frightening urgency of this moment.

Philanthropy can never be perfect. Let's move together assuming it won't be. Take action now—whether it's something like resourcing a profiled group today, or learning into changes you can make across your systems and processes.

Let us know what you are thinking of doing, what you need, how we can support your efforts, how to learn from your relationships and work, and be on this path together. This is our offering to you and to continue with integrity in this work, being in relationship with you and collectively moving forward in ways that hold us all is fundamental.

If your organization is not currently an NFG member or IRSG participant, please join! Sign up for the newsletter. Attend programming. Ongoing opportunities to connect more deeply with this work and the groups and leaders making it happen, as well as the funders figuring out how to resource it.

Grantmaking Changes →

- 1 Reconsider your RFP process:** Really review who you're reaching and who you're not. Are there ways you can be putting feelers out into community around things that might not even be in existence to the end purpose of being able to respond to an RFP. Call or reach out to folks.
- 2 Risk and Measurement Reconsideration:** How are decision-making processes blocking the chance to resource this type of work now? What adjustments will change that?
- 3 Iterate and learn through participatory process:** deepen into relationship and build mechanisms for feedback to fortify your efforts and truly support grantee partners.

Report Sources & Approaches

The ongoing work of grassroots organizers and power-building efforts, led by community, was the seed for this project as much as its final focus. To be in relationship with this work is to be inspired, to be awed, to feel the pressures on it, the need for it, and the ways it is limited by forces beyond its control. The depth of the inspiration and appreciation, activated against the frustration at the limitations, was amplified in the context of the election. Conversations and curiosity sprouted into the inquiry and offering this is.

The inquiry was nourished by [IRSG's Movement Advisors and its Coordinating Committee](#), and was informed by the network of funders, grassroots organizations, capacity builders, coalitions, national organizing infrastructure groups, and those who have said yes, participated, or built relationships with IRSG and the network. Partners including

Rural Democracy Initiative and People's Action were pivotal in joining the effort, affirming the calls to action, and helping to expand the network even further with connections to their partners.

These groups offered recommendations and reflections on groups doing “the work”, creating a long list of folks to understand and research. With an intention to draw forward diversity of communities and geographies represented, exemplify various models, structures, sizes, strategies, origin stories, leadership approaches, we selected a group of organizations to engage. Our intention was to elevate the power and presence of Black, Native, immigrant, LGBTQ+, working class, multiracial, and other groups both as a defiance of the false narrative that denies these folks and their spaces in rural communities, and in reflection of the powerful work these communities lead across complex issues and multiple entry points.

The nine organizations completed basic surveys about their work, and shared their stories through conversations or writing to aid in the development of their profiles. These exchanges informed the attributes and characteristics section, in effort to draw forward guidance on how to go beyond the limitations of the report and lean into its offerings in connecting meaningfully with other groups doing this work.

In resonance with the insights presented in the IRSG Report, [Resourcing Rural Organizing Infrastructure: A New York Case Study](#), the leaders of the organizations profiled often shared their critical partnerships or coalitions they collaborated with that are critical to their overarching strategies and endurance. To acknowledge the larger ecosystems they are situated within and powerful interplay of these relationships, the sections on Coalitions, Networks, and Partnership were developed and honed.

This piece was knit together by the IRSG team, Lindsay Ryder and Stephen Oaks, in partnership with Biz Ghormley, founder and principal of Cera Studios. The team is grateful to all contributors and readers.





Thank You & Closing Notes

Huge gratitude to the profiled organizations for your investment of time and story sharing with us and for all you are doing in community. To Dr. Wright-Carter, Amerika, Siobhan, Jack and Melissa, Miss Sharon, Austin, TC, Ariel, and Ronnie Jo—thank you.

We also extend gratitude to all the organizations and leaders, communities coming together to do this work on the frontlines - including those who we weren't able to include this time and/or who we don't yet know.

There are so many powerful examples of the work, happening in locally-nuanced but interconnected ways. We were overwhelmed by the list of organizations we could draw the spotlight to, and hope that this will serve to stretch the revelation and resource to so many more of the folks doing this work. We found that when you look for this work, you find it. We hope you will illuminate more of the folks in power-builders at the grassroots to continue to meaningfully expand our shared network and flows.

We acknowledge and appreciate funders who have invested early, flexibly, boldly in this work to come to this point, as well. Much of the work profiled in this report is still waiting for early, flexible, and bold funders. We invite you to take up the helm.

We offer gratitude to the support and insights offered by IRSG's Movement Advisors. These folks deepen IRSG's work to increase philanthropy's accountability to rural movement leaders. These seven rural leaders reflect the powerful and broad diversity of rural communities, representing a range of geographies, issues, races, cultures, and more. What these leaders and their organizations all have in common is that they are organizing and building power in rural areas. Their work is core to building and preserving a true multiracial democracy and protecting the health, safety, economic opportunity, and ability for rural communities to thrive. They are Angel Garcia, he/his, Co-Director, [Californians for Pesticide Reform](#) & CAPS (Coalition Advocating for Pesticide Safety); Brandi Mack, she/her/we, National Director, [The Butterfly Movement](#); Eowyn Corral, they/she, Grassroots Co-Director, [National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition](#); Fabiola Ortiz Valdez, she/her/ella, Lead Organizer, [Food Chain Workers Alliance \(FCWA\)](#); Jaime Arredondo, he/his, Executive Director, [Capaces Leadership Institute](#); and Juli Ray C. Joy, she/they, Founder, [Black Joy Oregon](#).

And we are grateful for the support of IRSG's Coordinating Committee of funders, supporting strategy-setting, governance, and recruitment, and organizing amongst their peers in philanthropy. They represent trusted and aligned voices of philanthropic leaders committed to resourcing rural organizing work. The Coordinating Committee brings forth a diversity of strategies/issue areas of focus to guide IRSG. They are Hester Dillon, she/her, Director, Indigenous Communities Program, The Schmidt Family Foundation/ 11th Hour Project; Sade Dumas, she/her, Director, Spark Justice Fund, Borealis Philanthropy; Olivia Trabysh, she/her, Philanthropic Consultant; and Vickie Walsh, she/her, Program Officer, Mertz Gilmore Foundation.

Thank you to Stephanie Johnson, Michael Chameides, and Sarah Jaynes at [Rural Democracy Initiative \(RDI\)](#) for your support of the project and in interconnecting us with amazing organizations we hadn't known before. And to People's Action for joining us in the shaping of the vision for this resource.

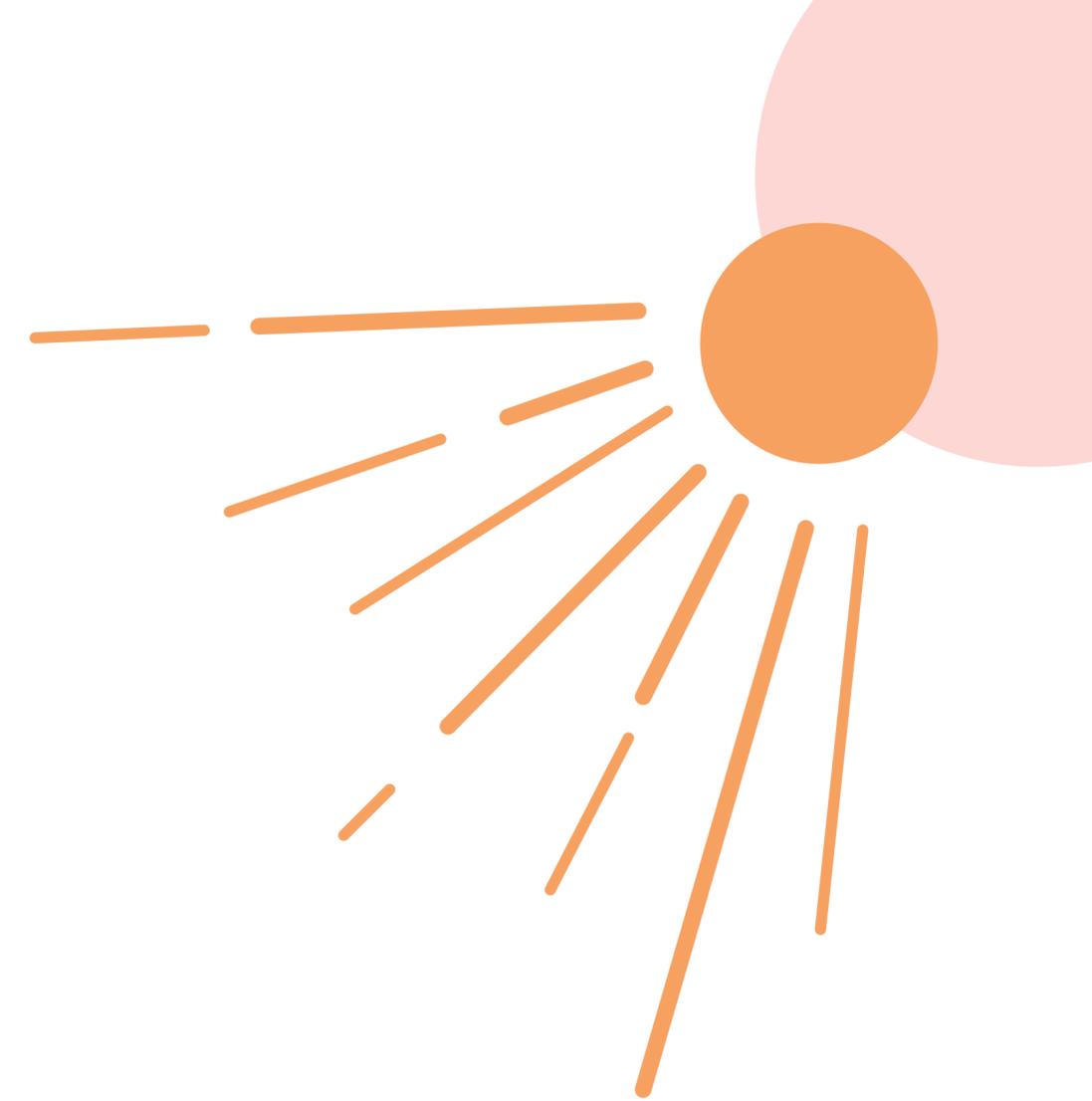
And thank you to Karla Flemming, whose bold artistry and heartforward design transformed these words into a beautifully digestible presentation.

This project grew out of the rich offering of relationships, and the recommendations and insights of folks who share a deep commitment to rural power building community-led organizing. We are grateful to the community of funders, grassroots groups and partners that make up the mycelial network of the IRSG membership and comrades really made this exercise in reflection and revelation possible. Thank you.

In 2025, [IRSG](#) will offer programming that continues these reflections in conversation. 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.

With gratitude that you've made it this far, we turn to the work together. In rural areas, we know workers, immigrants, people with disabilities, tribal and Indigenous communities, LGBTQ+ people, and others now will face uniquely stark attacks. And we know the vision and roots are there to build safety, health, dignity, power, and liberation.

Let's get to work.





INTEGRATED RURAL STRATEGIES GROUP

NEIGHBORHOOD FUNDERS GROUP



Cover image: collage of photos from Firelands Workers United/Trabajadores Unidos, Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment (SOCM), and Torrance County Listening Project (Thriving Rural Communities).

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