

Welcome!

IRSG Network Strategy Session



**INTEGRATED RURAL
STRATEGIES GROUP**
NEIGHBORHOOD FUNDERS GROUP

OUR MISSION

Neighborhood Funders Group
organizes philanthropy so that Black,
Indigenous, and people of color communities
and low-income communities thrive.

Integrated Rural Strategies Group

NFG's Integrated Rural Strategies Group (IRSG) is developing a shared understanding among funders at a national scale of what it takes to build community-led capacity to advance justice and equity for rural communities. Using a place-based approach, IRSG is bringing funders together to address local needs and gaps in rural organizing infrastructure and develop shared agendas to support rural organizing and justice-advancing efforts.

IRSG Areas of Focus



Civic Engagement
& Political Power



Land Justice

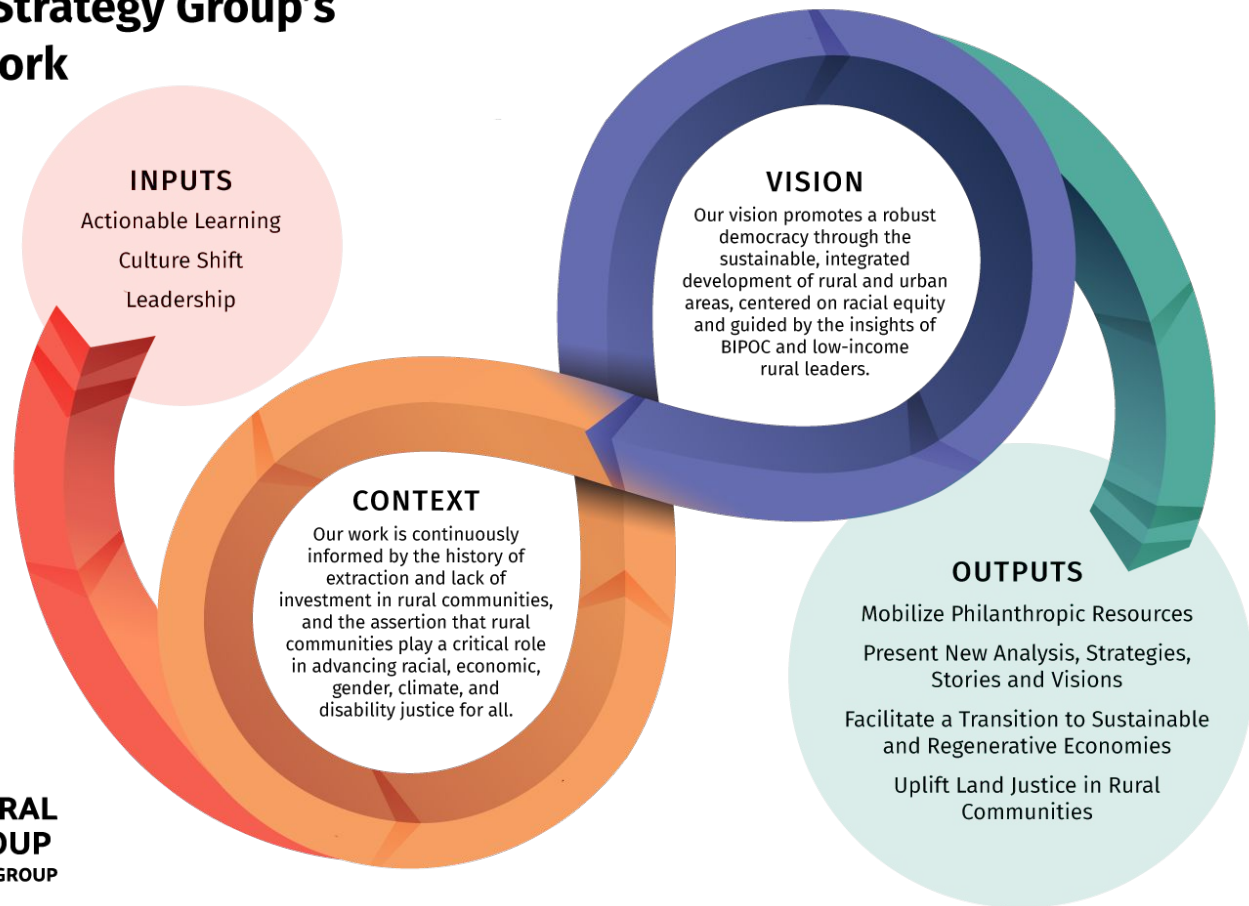


Sustainable & Regenerative
Rural Economies



Climate Justice

Integrated Rural Strategy Group's Strategic Framework



**INTEGRATED RURAL
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Planning Committee

Lindsay Ryder

she/her

Integrated Rural Strategies Group
NFG

Stephan Oak

he/him

Integrated Rural Strategies Group
NFG

Sade Dumas

she/her

Spark Justice Fund at
Borealis Philanthropy

Olivia Trabysh

she/her

Philanthropic Consultant

Sherra Bennett

she/her

Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation

Joaquin Uy

he/they

Magic Cabinet

Corinne Connor

she/her

Heinz Foundation

Biz Ghormley

she/they

Colmena Consulting

Agenda Preview

Hour 1: Grounding & Connection

Getting to know each other, building trust, and setting shared intentions

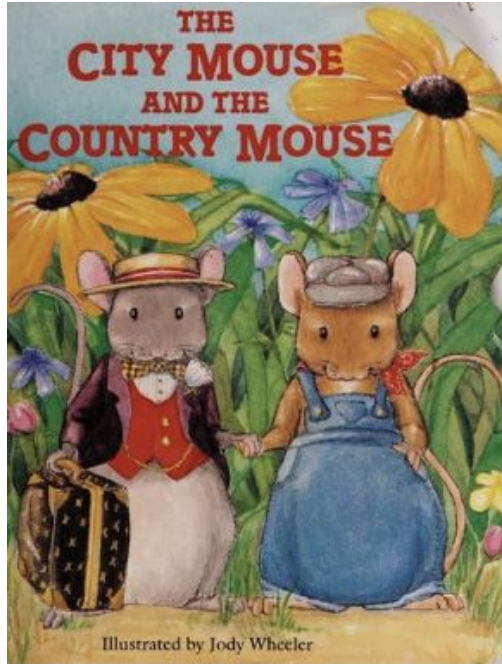
Hour 2: Reflective Dialogue & Exploration

Digging deeper into the barriers, breakthroughs, and possibilities in our funding practices

10-minute break

Hour 3: Activation & Commitment

Turning insight into action, together



“Country mouse, city mouse” Pair Share

How has a rural place informed you / shaped who you are? 2 mins each



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Why Rural



- Stark regional and racial patterns of poverty, high rates of incarceration, and disproportionate impacts of climate change.
- Decades of lack of investment in — and even divestment in the form of economic and environmental extraction of rural communities — have resulted in these inequities.
- More than half of all Native American and Alaska Native people live in rural areas, and 24% of rural Americans are people of color, a proportion that is growing.

79% of high-poverty counties in America are rural, with histories of extraction and divestment perpetuating disparities.



IRSG Movement Advisor Jamie Arredondo, Executive Director of CAPACES Leadership Institute serving food.

Philanthropic resourcing of rural communities is low – estimated at just **6%** of philanthropic giving.



IRSG Movement Advisor Angel Garcia of California for Pesticide Reform and CAPS (Coalition Advocating for Pesticide Safety) stringing a trellis.

70% of American land is rural, and more than 60 million Americans—one in five people—live in non-metro areas.



Movement Advisors Brandi Mack of the Butterfly Movement and Eowyn Corral of National Sustainable Agriculture Fund tending some earth!

2025 Budget and its impact on Rural Communities

Gutting Rural Health Care - NRHA - [RuralHealth.us](https://ruralhealth.us)

- Estimated 13.8 million Americans lose healthcare.
- In many states 50% or more of rural children rely on Medicaid.

Slashes Food Assistance - [Food Research & Action Center](https://www.foodresearch.org/)

- 186 billion cut from SNAP through 2034 and could be more depending on states reducing or changing their snap programs rather than paying new costs.
- More than 15% of families in small towns and rural areas rely on this support to feed their families.

Shifts Costs to States

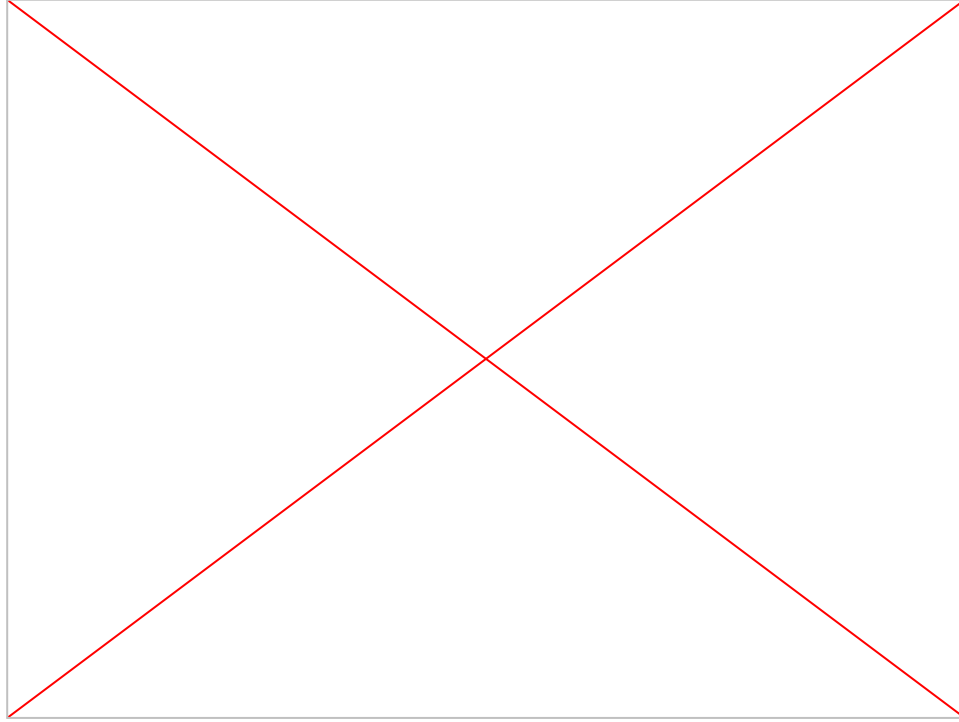
- Rural States will bear new costs for healthcare, transit, and emergency services.
- Many rural state budgets already face structural deficits.

Biden Era Clean-Energy Tax Credit Phase-Out - [Barn Raising Media, Rural Democracy Initiative](https://www.barnraisingmedia.com/)

- \$262 million rescinded in funding for energy efficiency and conservation grants as well as transportation infrastructure.
- Projects face a 57-72% drop jeopardizing the \$522 Billion in clean energy and manufacturing facilities and installations.

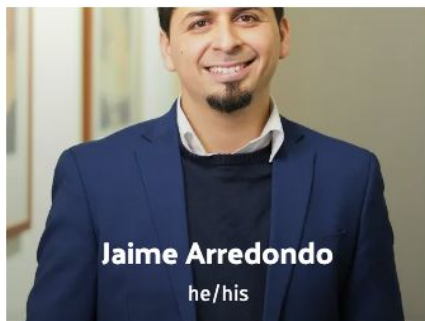
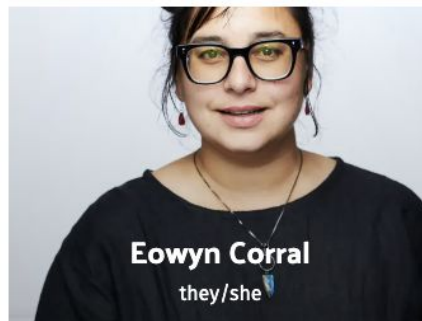
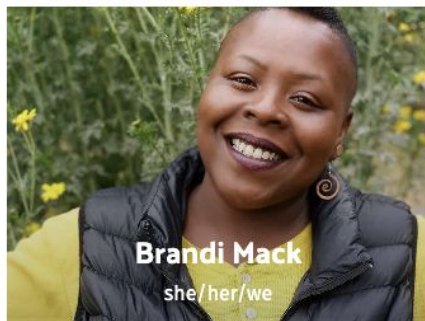
**(and this is just the budget! ICE, EPA, CDC, FEMA, USDA...)
How are rural communities anticipating and responding?**

Building rural community power in the West



IRSG Movement Advisors

These Advisors 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. 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.



Roots Revealed

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

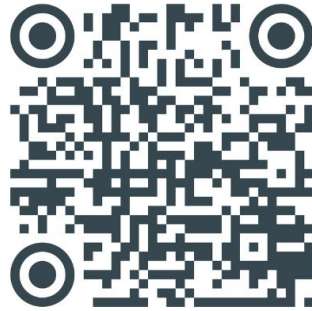
MARCH 2025



INTEGRATED RURAL
STRATEGIES GROUP



Roots Revealed Report



Key Context Backdrop

- **Boom & Bust GOTV top-down funding magnifies Inequities**
- **Misunderstanding of Rural Diversity & Reality**
- **Incredible need for philanthropy to resource at hyper-local level**
- **Distraction of winning in context of Infinite Game**
- **IRSG relationships with powerful orgs not known to many funders**

**Centering
organizations
doing the
work to
elevate that:**

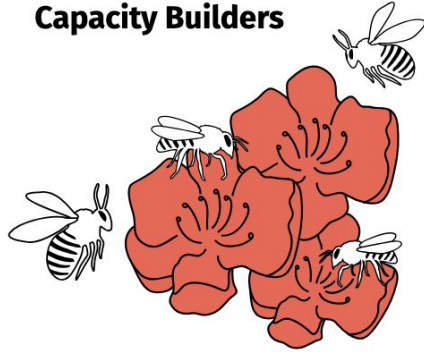
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Rural grassroots organizations are the frontlines protecting some of the most vulnerable communities - now & always.

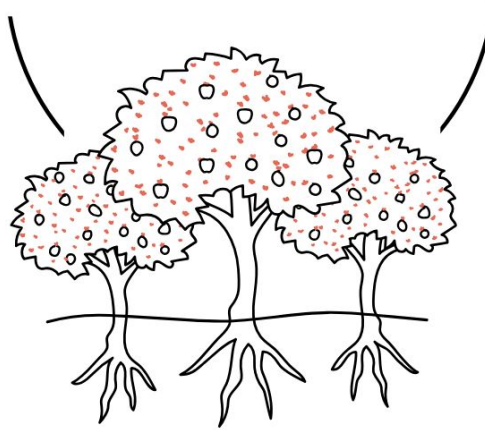
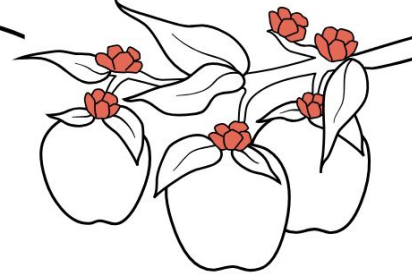
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Diverse grassroots approaches to building rural community power through organizing are key to a true multiracial democracy.

Capacity Builders



Networks & Coalitions



Grassroots Organizations

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)

Attributes of the Work

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.



Attributes of the Work



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 the Work

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.

Attributes of Funding the Work

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.

Calls to Action

Rapid Response Grants



Start building relationships, or fortifying the ones you have with grassroots rural leaders, now.

Trust

and follow the
leadership of
this work



Multiyear General Operating Grants



center ease for
the grantee
partner
in the experience
of proposals &
reporting

Connect.
Fund.
Learn Together.

Now...





Context in Ecosystem

- **2028 & 2026 Electoral priority emerging in base building orgs**

How much is this a strategic focus driven by community?

How much a response to funding focus?

- **Misunderstanding of Rural Diversity & Reality**

What are you seeing, hearing, sensing, building that counters the reduction of rural?

Roots Revealed Report

