



Rural Policy White Paper

“By Rural For Rural”

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I. Executive Summary

The “By Rural, for Rural” Radically Rural (RR) white paper contains select policy recommendations brought forward by many talented and dedicated individuals in our national RR network. These individuals represent rural voices from across the country who experience the everyday challenges facing their communities. Though these challenges are ultimately also national, complex, and large-scale in nature, they have come together to collaborate on solutions for how these problems might be best solved. This should not be seen as a comprehensive list of the challenges and opportunities facing rural communities; however, the themes included are what “bubbled up” for us this year, and we look forward to sharing more in the future. This year, we are focusing on four challenges with accompanying suggested solutions:

1. **Streamline Federal Resources:** The network identified structural challenges concerning access to federal dollars and the need to provide sustained support geared to a more regional approach. Unless these two foundational needs are addressed, the impact federal investments can make toward implementing local solutions to challenges, which are largely the result of external forces beyond their control, will diminish.
2. **Customize Support Specifically for Rural Communities:** In a world that grows more complex and specialized by the minute, rural communities increasingly need and desire to work collaboratively and regionally to support vibrancy, yet the infrastructure to support this way of working is largely outdated or nonexistent and must be built in a way that values the diversity and distinctiveness of rural communities.
3. **Address Population Decline, Workforce Loss, and the Affordable Housing Crisis:** Many communities have been experiencing a decline in population, a shortage in workforce, and a lack of affordable housing options. The network identified that the funding and resources currently available to rural communities are not flexible enough to overcome these barriers due to EDA/USDA language and policies, lack of regional infrastructure, and other key factors.
4. **Expand the Federal Sustainability Plan:** We need a comprehensive national plan that gets to the roots of the climate crisis. Clean energy industries and jobs are absolutely vital, but as long as we have an economy whose health is measured and determined by exponential growth, regardless of the wellbeing of earth and people, we will continue to face the same challenges. We will speak to this more in future papers, but in this paper we highlight some specific issues brought to our attention including, but not limited to, an imbalance in subsidy programs that tend to favor larger farms and the consolidation of land over smaller farms, a lack of investment in and policies that support the circular economy, and funding to re-engineer infrastructure that is continuously negatively impacted by natural disasters.

Each of these challenges, along with the corresponding solutions, are explained in greater detail in the *Recommendations* section of this packet. Thank you for considering this approach forward to establishing and strengthening local communities across the country, which was created *by rural for rural*.

II. METHODOLOGY and COLLABORATORS

The content of this paper was gathered from three primary sources: 1) Two focus groups that took place during the 2023 Radically Rural Summit in Keene, NH. These groups were facilitated by Tony Pipa with the Brookings Institution. 2) Interviews conducted with dozens of attendees of the summit by Keene High School senior English students. 3) Collaborative online working sessions following the summit. We asked our community and did our best to pull out common themes, but the work is a compilation and represents many viewpoints.

While the ideas communicated in this paper represent hundreds of rural practitioners and community members, Radically Rural is grateful for the written contributions of the following:

- Cadie Bergan, *Director of Member Recruitment and Selection*, American Connection Corps/Lead for America | Author
- Christopher Berry, *Teacher*, Keene High School | Keene, NH | Organized students to conduct interviews with attendees
- Lillian Chase, *Programs and Development Coordinator* at the Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship | Keene, NH | Editor
- Dani Delaini, *Entrepreneurial Economy Program Director*, and Zach Hobbs, *Regional Advocacy Coordinator*, Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA), Saranac Lake, NY | Author
- Julianna Dodson, *Deputy Executive Director* of the Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship | Westmoreland, NH | Author
- Chris Estes, *Co Executive Director* of the Aspen Community Strategies Group | Washington, DC | Keynote speaker and whose works are referenced
- Mary Ann Kristiansen, *Founder and Executive Director* at the Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship | Sullivan, NH | Author
- Matty Leighton, *Enterprise Center at Plymouth Ops and Facilities Coordinator*, GRDC | Plymouth, NH | Author
- Rebecca Levy, *Extension Field Specialist, Community Development*, UNH Extension, Sullivan County, NH | Author
- Dawn Mandt, *Executive Director*, Red River Regional Council, Grafton, ND | Author
- Tony Pipa, *Senior Policy Analyst* with the Brookings Institution | Washington, DC | Facilitated focus groups
- Lisa Rotvold, *Executive Director*, Red River Community Housing Development Organization, Grafton, ND | Author
- Taylor Stuckert, *Executive Director*, American Connection Corps/Lead for America | Author

III. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Streamline Federal Resource Structure

Federal programs are complicated to identify, navigate, and comply with. This leaves a gap in equitable access to funding as only those with the capacity to seek them out and manage them can access them. The funding opportunities heavily favor towns and organizations with the size and capacity to employ specialized staff to identify, apply for and administer the extraordinarily confusing, antiquated and complex aspects of these funds. Small towns and organizations are exhausted by spending more time on administration than on doing the work, and ultimately it leaves out those who need them the most.

1. **Solution One: Simplify compliance.** Communities and organizations do not have the capacity to manage these funding sources, and therefore need to pay for services from regional planning commissions (RPCs) - largely because regional organizations have non-profit business models and are not funded to provide free technical assistance. Further, most small-town elected leaders do not have space to create long-term strategies and do not understand the rules of federal funding.

Compliance can be simplified by:

- a. Creating simplified, universal applications and compliance requirements for all federal funds, regardless of agency. *We believe that even if this one piece of the puzzle was taken to heart out of this paper, it would have a profound, lasting impact on rural communities.* We also believe that this would ultimately be of benefit to the US Government as well.
- b. Shifting some of the compliance responsibility to the administering agency.
- c. Modifying compliance documentation requirements based on community size. Examples provided by our community:
 - c.1. Davis Bacon & Section 3 - Consider allowing communities under 5,000 to get a waiver or exemption from certain federal regulations. There could also be other triggers like unemployment rate.
 - c.2. Regional funding from the Federal government to help our rural municipalities enter the state and federal funding landscape.
 - c.3. Waiver for audit requirement for federal expenditures of \$750,000 or more within a fiscal year. It is a huge burden for small nonprofit organizations already under the audit threshold having to pay out \$20,000-\$30,000 for a single-year audit.

2. **Solution Two: Structure Federal funding in a way that allows municipalities and organizations to grow predictably.** This includes:

- a. A longer runway to sustainability; 1-3 years is not enough to become self-sustaining.

- b. Tailored and localized funding opportunities; Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) are a good example; it was recommended that the next evolution of this be explored.
 - c. Flexibility in federal measurements for grants; jobs created and retained should not be central measurement. Consider reducing or eliminating such requirements in rural communities where job creation and retention may not be as demonstrative of success. Further, in the “Measure Up” report from Aspen Community Strategies Group (CSG), CSG recommends allowing percentage measurement from a self-proclaimed starting point, which would increase access and equity.
 - d. Clear, consistent definitions of standard metrics; as an example, one of our community members highlighted lack of clarity on items such as whether a solopreneur or micro-enterprise can be counted when considering jobs created.
 - e. Updated definitions of qualifying geographies in the legislation, keeping in mind those who do not have counties.
 - f. Eliminating match requirements; many organizations and places do not know about match waivers, and many funding sources do not have the options for a waiver. Further, there should always be an option to get an advance rather than a reimbursement. Tony Pipa’s recent paper titled, *What’s in it for Rural? Analyzing the Opportunities for rural America in IJA, CHIPS, and IRA* states that, “Of the rural-significant programs appropriated in this legislation, over half require or show a preference for matching funds, and less than one-third offer flexibility or a waiver. Almost 95% of the rural-exclusive funds are being distributed through programs that require or prefer a match.”
3. **Solution Three:** Perform an audit on current regulations to ensure they are not just urban regulations expected to “shrink” to fit rural, and an assessment of current policies and programs for efficacy in small communities, getting feedback directly from those who are implementing initiatives on the ground. Examples provided by our community:
- a. Davis Bacon and Section 3 regulations ensure that jobs created and supported by federal dollars are available to low-income workers, and that they are paid a fair wage. The intent is good, and we unequivocally support well paid laborers. However, the way it works in a small town with full employment (2% unemployment) is that workers are already earning the Davis Bacon wages or higher, and if any Section 3 qualified worker wants a job they will be hired due to a labor force shortage. The intent of the regulations is being met, but the administrative requirements of documenting weekly payrolls for the general contractor (GC) and every subcontractor, as well as documenting outreach efforts to hire Section 3 workers to verify compliance is a burden, and a deterrent to bidders who already have plenty of work that does not carry these extra requirements. The compliance burden affects the GC, all subcontractors, the owner/municipality, and the agency that granted the funds. The time, energy, and cost of

compiling and reviewing all the documentation are paid at all four levels - in a situation where we know that workers are being paid adequately and the opportunity to work is available to anyone who wants to work. There are many times that when putting out a project to bid, there are no responses at all, or the same couple of contractors come around. This means that the communities who need the most development investment are the ones that are missing out. ***We recommend significantly reducing the reporting requirements for Davis Bacon. This would reduce barriers for GCs so that they are more likely to accept projects that use federal funding, while still keeping the spirit of the regulation.***

b. Federal housing funding is not useful in many small towns as currently structured. The below examples were provided in the context of Red River Valley, North Dakota.

b.1 Example – Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) investors will not invest in small towns due to perceived risk and will not make small investments (for small projects) due to the high cost of deal packaging.

b.2. Example - HOME funding is too restrictive for small places; the compliance burden is unreasonable for just a few units.

b.3 Example – United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development (USDA RD) - very little if any new funding for rental housing is available; rental assistance contracts tied to existing RD 515 multifamily loans go away when the loan matures, leaving low-income tenants without the assistance they have relied on; access to single family direct loans is poor as RD offices around states have consolidated and they no longer have a visible presence. From Lisa Rotvold, *Executive Director*, Red River Community Housing Development Organization, “In one 4-county service area, only 1 USDA RD Direct Loan (the one that offers a reduced interest rate) per year has been made over the past 10 years. This is not an effective program even though it has a rural focus. It is also underfunded.”

b.4 Create a rural “set aside” in the LIHTC Program to create a market for the sale of smaller credit allocations.

b.5 Allow smaller projects in rural areas to be underwritten with a higher vacancy rate to build a better financial cushion and maintain long term viability.

b.6 Create a community population floor under which HOME funds have a lower threshold for compliance to lessen the burden of operating small projects.

b.7 Consider allowing HOME funds to serve households up to 100% of Area Median Income (AMI) in small communities with lower average incomes.

b.8 Change the 515 rental assistance rules to decouple rental assistance from 515 mortgages.

b.9 Fund better marketing of USDA Rural Development Housing Programs so that people in rural areas know about them.

b.10 Provide adequate compensation to third party contractors to help market homebuyer programs and assist homebuyers with application paperwork when no local RD staff are available to do so.

b.11 EDA, HUD, and USDA need to communicate more effectively and work better together for main streets and rural communities in general.

B. Customize Support Specifically for Rural Communities, Not Just “Small Urban”

(See Appendix A for detailed notes on rurality)

Towns work in silos due to miles and distance and regional organizations are often not adequately funded to address complex issues and forge strong regional alliances. Often state funding can be distributed based on population or per capita formulas - sending even more resources to the larger communities that are already well-resourced. Larger communities have well-funded political advocacy organizations leading legislative policy and reaping great rewards - rural places do not have any equivalency. Some states are getting left behind. For example, according to studies by the Aspen Institute and Headwaters Economics, North Dakota is ranked last in the country for rural development capacity. Rural communities often provide significant contributions to the larger communities (ie., half the sales tax revenue) which fund infrastructure and Convention and Visitors Bureaus at high levels - without a sense of reciprocity. Again, quoting Tony Pipa's *What's in it for Rural?* paper, he states, “The opportunities in the IJJA, CHIPS, and IRA to support and strengthen rural communities are significant, yet almost all of these resources are just that: opportunities. Only a small fraction of the resources appropriated in the combined laws were exclusively set aside for rural places. The extent to which rural communities are able to take advantage of these opportunities will depend in part on the sensitivity of federal agencies to the specific and unique constraints of rural places, which are generally governed by volunteer elected officials and have limited staff. This will be especially important in reaching the most marginalized and vulnerable rural places and turning this baseline of opportunity into reality.”

1. Solution One: Build regional economic development infrastructure by:

- a. Implementing “rolling up” systems, such as multi-state and multi-jurisdictional, which can be beneficial particularly for the states that do not have county seats since municipalities do not have the capacity to access federal programs.
- b. Creating rural “hubs”, which could include paid internships and remote learning structures for degree seeking students in Master of Public Administration, planning, nonprofit, civil engineering, public policy and other public sector degree tracks.
- c. Creating regional partnership models that encourage sustained connectivity across rural places and sectors. Citizens' Institute of Rural Design is a national model for this.

2. Solution Two: Provide technical assistance by:

- a. Establish State Ombudsman positions to provide technical assistance and support.
- b. Funding and technical support for project management, design, and engineering.
- c. Funding leadership development and conflict mediation. One area that was highlighted by many individuals in our community was working with local bodies of government who are resistant to change.

- d. More operations funding to support those already living and working in rural communities. These people know what they need and how to do it, they just need to be funded. We need stable, healthy organizations that can pay competitive wages.

C. Address Population Decline, Workforce Loss, and the Affordable Housing Crisis

It can feel like a vicious cycle when we are losing people, but we need folks to live in rural communities to build a culture and community that is attractive to young folks and families and makes people want to stay. Further, we do not have enough housing and what is there is not affordable. There is a significant gap between average household income and median house purchase and rent prices. In NH, all employees would have to make \$26 an hour to afford the median rent cost. Some small towns have not seen new home construction in many years and have essentially broken real estate markets. If there are no comparable sales, appraisals are low and people experience difficulty financing, which continues to perpetuate the problem.

1. Solution One: Turn the tides on population and workforce loss. We can do this by:

- a. Providing flexible funding both to retain and grow small businesses and to attract new talent. Providing critical jobs and services to rural communities, even if the job retention/economic impact metrics are very small. Examples of uses of the funding include: tech support for owners and entrepreneurs and support for transitions of businesses from exiting/retiring owners to new ownership.
- b. Continuing to invest in broadband infrastructure, which supports every area of well-being (access to health, education, employment, etc.).
- c. Fundamentally improving the process of welcoming and integrating new Americans. This topic area could have its own paper, but among other critically important issues, faster processing time for paperwork and simplification of the process. Examples:
 - c.1 Work visas for immigrants and asylum seekers can take years to be approved and often have to be re-applied for after only a year. This leaves new Americans without options to contribute and earn a living if they want to remain in compliance.
 - c.2 Pathways to earn-and-learn programs for new American worker skills training. This could be combined with goals related to the energy transition.
 - c.3 Adding multi-lingual education to rural schools. This was recently highlighted in the Daily Yonder by Rossina Sandoval, Southwest DuBois County School District's director of community engagement.

2. Solution Two: Support additional housing units and affordable housing. We can support housing solutions by:

- a. Providing tools and resources to towns who want to overhaul their zoning regulations to be friendlier to manufactured housing, multi-unit housing, Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), cluster housing, up builds, and more.
 - b. Providing more funding for non-income restricted housing.
 - c. Auditing the language and policies of agencies like Economic Development Administration (EDA) and USDA. Their housing policies should support mixed use development. Several community members noted that USDA should expand its language in support of housing, though they did not provide specifics. They also commented that “rural” should be set aside in the LIHTC program, which would help create a market for small projects.
 - d. Building regional infrastructure. For example, we need heavy investment in water/sewer systems so that solutions like cluster housing become possible.
 - e. Providing incentives for more quality long-term rental housing to remain competitive with short term rentals (like Airbnb or VRBO). This could include land tax credits, permit & licensing fee waivers, or competitive loan rates. We also see a lot of second homes being bought in rural communities, which limits the inventory for primary homeowners, so incentives could be considered for primary homes as well.
- 3. Solution Three:** Lastly, there is a solution that is hidden in plain sight—shared housing. It is by far the least expensive, most quickly implementable, and most environmentally friendly option, and it also doubles as a solution to the recognized loneliness and social isolation epidemic. Americans are by and large living in single family homes, and homes that are much larger than is needed. Hud.gov defines shared housing as, “A single housing unit occupied by an assisted family and another resident or residents. The shared unit consists of both common space for use by the occupants of the unit and separate private space for each assisted family. The unit may be a house or an apartment”.

There are two primary recommendations to widely normalize and incentivize this solution:

- a. Federal funding for research and pilot projects into what makes shared housing work for Americans, including:
 - a.1 Identify the legal barriers that inhibit this option (How do I get rid of a bad housemate? Will I lose my benefits? What are the rent lease arrangements?) and how to address them.
 - a.2 What it takes to message “normalizing” this option, possibly through a national information campaign.
 - a.3 Rigorous quantitative and qualitative research on the benefits for home sharers.

- b. A tax exemption for the income of shared housing, preferably for all homeowners, but especially for those on Social Security.

Annamari Pluhar, Founder and Executive Director of Sharing Housing, Inc., states in a letter to one of her Vermont Representatives, Becca Balint, “Currently in Windham County, 20% of all households are occupied by seniors living alone. 27% of all households in the United States are single occupancy. We know that solo-agers use our healthcare and social service systems at higher rates than others. It’s good for people to live together, whether old or young, single mother or separated parent. There are so many empty bedrooms, already built, that could house people. If we can help more people live together it would be good for our country. We need to prove it.”

D) Expand the Federal Sustainability Plan

We need a comprehensive national plan that gets to the roots of the climate crisis. Clean energy industries and jobs are vital, but as long as we have an economy whose health is measured and determined by exponential growth, regardless of the wellbeing of earth and people, we will continue to face the same challenges. A significant diversity of voices should be brought to the table to develop the plan. It should then be broken down by region and simply/quickly implemented to circumvent local capacity crunches. We will continue to expand on this concept in future papers, but for the time being here are some related implementable suggestions that were presented by our community:

1. **Solution One:** Resilience funding to re-engineer infrastructure that keeps being washed away by flooding or burned up in fires. This also includes local capacity for parks/natural resource management. Funding to assist in the prevention and mitigation of negative impacts from potential natural disaster hazards on public infrastructure and to prevent inadequately designed development in high-risk areas.
2. **Solution Two:** Investment in and policies that support the circular economy (or circularity) including large scale recycling and composting facilities, refillable bottling and packaging, and more.
3. **Solution One:** Job-retraining support to add important sectors to the job market, such as jobs that combat planned obsolescence (menders, cobblers, repair tradespeople, etc.).
4. **Solution One:** Audit current agriculture investment. Examples provided by our community include:
 - a. Reduce subsidies on petrochemical-based production (crops requiring chemical fertilizers, pesticides, fossil-fuel intensive machinery), and shift subsidies instead to farms utilizing organic practices and machinery alternative energy sources.
 - b. Consider income levels of farm households in allocating subsidies for crop insurance. Establish income limits above which farms no longer qualify for certain subsidies (or do so at far lesser rates than those with lesser incomes). Larger farms tend to have greater per acre subsidies than smaller ones. Those rates should be in better balance.
 - c. Ensure that conservation programs such as the Conservation Stewardship Program and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program are equitably allocated to small and mid-size farms

with lower income levels than large farms, perhaps with graduated rates based on farm household income. Provide more subsidies that support proactive practices that promote climate resilience, helping smaller farms especially to underwrite work that might prevent loss and lessen dependence on crop insurance after the fact.

- d. Provide more resources specifically intended to support local marketing efforts. Much of the support for the marketing of crops is tilted towards larger farms producing commodity crops, done at a national level.
- e. Past and current farm subsidy programs have led to consolidation of agricultural land into larger and larger lands. Reorganize subsidy programs that ensure that smaller and mid-size farms can compete on a more level playing field and not have to "get big or get out".

IV. Appendix A

Notes on Rurality

The following notes were gathered during the focus groups and subsequent working sessions. It was important to the RR community to provide this context for Congress, not only for the issues presented in this paper, but also for any rural legislation on which they may be working.

1. ‘Agriculture’ and ‘rural’ should not be used interchangeably. While rural life often incorporates agriculture and associated factors, many other areas of rural life are essential, such as thriving main streets, local journalism, entrepreneurship, the arts, community health, clean energy, and more. Agriculture may have become the lesser employer as farm sizes have grown and therefore have necessitated the existence of many other sectors in rural communities.
2. Although definitions vary, it is important to recognize that rural communities and their accompanying strengths and challenges are incredibly diverse in every sense of the word. An example of the diversity of access challenges: 34 of 53 counties in North Dakota have food deserts, while other rural communities may not have the same challenges. Further, some of the most remote geographical areas are sometimes known as “frontier” communities, which include many Native Nations. These areas often experience challenges that are both different in nature and greater in intensity. Engaging these communities in meaningful ways is essential to the good of our world.
3. While rural communities do experience unique barriers as compared with our urban counterparts, rural is a place of exponential opportunity. Changing the narrative about what it means to be rural is a big priority for the RR network.
4. Rural is not just “small urban”. Federal regulations designed to work in urban settings do not translate well in small rural places.
5. There is, and has always been, great diversity of all kinds within communities. Therefore, rural communities have a great deal of economic and cultural potential.

V. Appendix B

What is Radically Rural?

Throughout the history of the United States, rural areas have been the generators of democratic institutions and innovators of industry. Rural and frontier communities today remain places where appropriate systems are developed because of need. The creativity and effectiveness of these locally customized solutions have often influenced communities of all sizes and regions across the continent. Rural living can also provide a high quality of life whether through enhanced close relationships, proximity to land and open spaces, or a very frequent willingness to collaborate.

Even so, development in rural regions can be hampered by lack of population density, under-investment, and programmatic structural barriers, which makes implementation of new ideas challenging. Radically Rural, as a summit, started in 2018 as a partnership between the Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship and The Keene Sentinel. The 2018 summit drew more than 500 registrants from 24 states. Since then, it has grown every year, and typically hosts close to 600 people from 40+ countries and Canada.

In addition to the annual September summit, RR is building a community of practice in the state of New Hampshire, the Northeast region, and throughout the US and Canada. The RR network, which includes other rural support organizations and networks, is both creating capacity and social infrastructure to address needs as well as working for policy changes that eliminate structural barriers and facilitate equal participation by communities of all sizes.

No one needs to reinvent the wheel, and no one should work in silos. RR generates cross-sector collaboration radically, and freely shares the ideas shaped in the network so that good work can be augmented, and impact multiplied for the good of all.

Finally, the RR community is constantly elevating and generating innovative grassroots solutions to address all the issues named in this paper; we in no way think that it is only the responsibility of the government to fix them. However, we do believe that support for the conditions in which we are working and living will be essential to success, particularly at the rates that we need to see change.

For more information about us, please see <https://radicallyrural.org/mission-vision-values/>

VI. Appendix C

Sessions and Topics Explored in 2023 Through RR programming

- **Reimagining Rural Through Local Storytelling, Framework Building, and Policy Influence:** through storytelling of local leaders, we build a narrative that elevates rural as a place of opportunity and gives attendees a common understanding of the importance, history and current state of rural policy.
- **Reimagining Your Welcome to Rural Artists:** besides just trying to attract artists to move in and “do their thing,” what can help creatives thrive in rural communities?
- **Creative Community Engagement: Using Theatre to Develop Community-Based Solution:** practice a new technique to support your community engagement, problem solving, and feedback processes.
- **The Agrarian Collaborative:** by rooting our minds in nature’s standards, we alter our foundations—our cultures, our economies, our households, our ethics. In this light, agrarianism is not simply a concern for farmers and rural folks. We all have agrarian responsibilities.
- **The Social Value of Agriculture:** farms, organizations and municipalities are exploring the values of agriculture as a form of social service, therapeutic practice, a community-builder, economic bridge and so much more.
- **Climate, Clean Energy, and Public Health:** the public health impacts of climate change are increasingly evident, from an increase of conditions such as asthma and greater exposure to ticks to the psychological effects of dealing with the climate crisis.
- **Resident-Owned Communities (ROCs): Where Naturally Affordable Homeownership, Neighborhood Self-Empowerment, and Renewable Energy Meet:** addressing the housing shortage will require a variety of approaches. ROCs are a particular model that demonstrates success but is often overlooked in conversations about rural housing policy. A resident-owned community (ROC) is a manufactured housing neighborhood owned and operated by the people who live there. ROCs provide a stable and high-quality homeownership option that is financially self-supporting.
- **Empowering Communities by Understanding Clean Energy Investments:** grasping the benefits of the IRA energy savings and how to share that widely with other communities.
- **Folks Helping Folks: From Crisis to Preventative Care Outside the Traditional Medical Setting:** rural health innovation is often thought to be limited to mobile health vans and telemedicine. The challenges, including provider shortages and limited resources, are often thought to be insurmountable. By leveraging paramedical and non-medical community members these rural areas have used their greatest resource, themselves, to support the health of their communities.
- **Folks Helping Folks: Using the Community Paramedicine Model to Support a Community’s Unique Needs**
- **Strengthening Rural Communities Through Welcoming New Arrivals:** Many small towns and cities across the country are facing similar demographic headwinds: an aging population, out-migrating young people, and a shrinking workforce. Given these challenges, some communities have recognized the power and promise of opening their arms to community members with immigrant backgrounds, including refugees.
- **Reimagining Rural Philanthropy:** conversations on the most pressing issues and solutions in rural philanthropy.
- **Trailblazing a Path to Funding: Fresh Models Meeting the Capital Needs of All Entrepreneurs.**

- **Growing Rural Entrepreneurs:** rural entrepreneurs and their stories.
- **Taking it Home:** workshop to diagnose the challenges faced by entrepreneurs in your community and identify the assets and strategies that could help us make progress.
- **PitchFork Challenge:** provides money and momentum for rural entrepreneurs in the form of a friendly business pitch competition. Rural entrepreneurs are coached to create a compelling pitch describing their business opportunity in pursuit of a cash award. Ultimately, one business owner is chosen to receive a \$10,000 cash prize every year.
- **Kansas Press: The Fourth Estate in the Heart of America:** Jeremiah Ariaz, a professor of art at Louisiana State University, took a sabbatical in 2022 and visited 115 newspapers in his home state of Kansas. He set out to document the challenges facing both democracy and newspapers, seemingly joined at the hip these days in their respective futures. In his exhibit, *The Fourth Estate*, his photographs present vivid and stark images of the decline facing newspapers, offering a grim retelling of several that have closed but suggesting hope for those who persevere.
- **How'd They Do That? Building Sustainability:** insights into how three news organizations have evolved their operations to secure a bright future.
- **How'd They Do That? Generating Audience Revenue:** successful rural news organizations are building revenue through fundraising, membership and paid readership. Best practices among for-profit organizations and non-profits alike.
- **How'd They Do That? Groundbreaking Journalism:** a deep dive into how three journalists — from Mississippi to North Carolina to Maine — reported powerful stories that have deeply impacted the rural communities they cover.
- **Three Rural Policy Focus Groups and Working Sessions**
- **Reimagining Communication:** for millennia, humans have used voice, gesture, art, written word, and more to communicate. Recently, letters are shifting to emails, telephones have become smartphones, and other forms of communication are constantly evolving at an ever-increasing pace. Have we lost anything along the way? How can we reimagine moving forward?
- **Radically Joyful: Strengthening Communities Through Joy:** share joy as movement leaders.
- **Reimagining Rural: Connecting the Dots with a Rural Framework:** explore a framework that prioritizes human well-being and a sense of belonging to help rural communities collaborate.
- **Woodworking as Rural Revitalization**
- **Seriously Fun: Envisioning the Potential of Your Community Through Play:** the future of our communities is often discussed and decided in settings that are intimidating, uncomfortable, uninspiring, and not fully accessible or inclusive. Public hearings at town hall, for example, leave little room for the creativity and collaboration that local challenges often demand. We end up getting boxed into the same old ideas. The alternative approach that we will be experimenting with at this session grants permission to reimagine and dream.
- **Updating Your Town's Master Plan: Growth & Development:** conversations about the benefits to strategic planning and updating town master plans regularly.
- **Coworking: Rural Style:** lessons from Nova Scotia's Mashup Lab and how coworking can work in rural communities.
- **Finding More Volunteers: Beyond the Same Ten People Who Try To Do It All Now:** the secret to finding volunteers in small towns today is to let go of old ways that no longer serve us.