

# Community Strategies Group



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Bonita Robertson-Hardy  
Chris Estes  
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A Connecting Hub for Equitable Rural Community and Economic Development



# Community Strategies Group

aspen institute



Hub of Hubs

Peer Learning

Field Development

# Opportunities for Rural

- **Rural Development Hubs** - focus for capacity investments
  - **Thrive Rural/WealthWorks** - local wealth & systems change
  - **Reorganize federal** rural programs in wake of recent expansion and existing morass
  - **How to Measure Success** in Rural
  - **Climate Change/Disaster/Energy** - connect it to rural, especially essential minerals - new ways of **Disaster Resilience**
  - **Outdoor Rec Economy**: link environ & local asset building
- 



# Interdependence & Interconnectedness

# Why Measurement is Important



A fundamental reassessment of how we measure rural development progress and who defines success



Funding pipelines from all sources will have far greater impact



There has to be mutual respect, and I think oftentimes communities value what funders bring to the table because of the connection to the financial resources that will come along with them. But that same respect isn't always given or shown by funders who walk into a space acknowledging the [local] work. . . If you don't demand that, it doesn't happen.



**Felicia Lucky**  
*President, Black Belt  
Community Foundation*

3

Measure progress relative to the rural effort's starting point at its current stage of development - not against an ideal "success" standard.

**More progress is made when communities are allowed to assess progress from their own starting points.**

“

How you perceive is how you proceed. I believe this and I witness misperceptions about Native America all the time. These misperceptions limit our opportunities and we use a lot of resources to break down these misperceptions just to get to a starting point with funders.

”



**Lakota Vogel**  
*Executive Director, Four Bands  
Community Fund*

5

Identify, value, and measure effective collaboration as progress toward rural prosperity.

**Collaboration must be built on trust, shared understanding and goals, broad participation and decision-making across stakeholders**

“

[In rural America] nobody has the resources to go it alone. One of the things it takes to do better – that almost no funding streams are willing to pay for – is collaboration. They’re willing to pay for that particular project, but the glue that holds it all together is just probably the most difficult piece to find support for in rural communities.

”



**John Molinaro**  
*Principal,*  
*RES Associates, LLC*





Identify, value, and measure signals of local momentum as progress toward rural prosperity.

**Youth engagement is a particularly good indicator of momentum - it increases young adults' belief that they can find a way to stay in the community.**



Our native youth, of the ones I was able to survey on Cheyenne River, feel optimistic that they can do better than what their parents had access to. That is a direct reflection of how recently colonization happened to us. You can tell from your grandma going to [non-Native] boarding school that "I'm going to have a better access to education or better opportunity access than what my grandma did." I think that optimism from youth could be a good measurement of success in rural America.



**Lakota Vogel**  
*Executive Director,  
Four Bands Community Fund*





# Health Equity & Measurement

Using a community's own understanding of identity and measurement of health is critical for equitably addressing health conditions and supporting community prosperity.

Principles to  
Move from  
Natural  
Disaster to  
Prosperity in  
Rural  
Communities

1

Understand and address the underlying conditions unique to rural affecting disaster vulnerability, response, and recovery

2

Advance worldviews that restore balance and relationships among rural communities and natural systems



# Principles to Move from Natural Disaster to Prosperity in Rural Communities

3

Use disaster response to  
advance equity and increase  
regional prosperity

4

Build local and regional capacity to  
address disasters

5

Provide flexible and responsive  
funding for disaster preparation,  
response, and recovery



1

Advance local, equitable, sustainable ownership and control of outdoor recreation assets.

**Equitable development prioritizes resources that are owned locally and/or advised by stakeholder community members.**

“

There's going to be a big transition of wealth over the next 15 to 20 years as boomers age out of business ownership. And in a lot of rural communities, sons and daughters are not interested in taking over these companies that are anchors in the community. If there was a model to transition that could create more cooperatives, it would give a new destiny and opportunity to the community as a whole.



**Merald Hollaway**  
*Founder, NC 100*

”

2

Build resilient infrastructure that supports a flourishing community, including diverse outdoor recreation businesses and workers.

**Equitable rural prosperity necessitates an inclusive development process and steps to avert challenges before they become intractable.**

“

Our Chamber of Commerce promoted the National Forest as a place for folks to come up and recreate in the winter. That was great, except our highways and city roads weren't prepared for the traffic. People lined up along the highway out of town and backed up traffic through town, creating hazardous conditions for visitors and people just trying to get through town. It had to be pulled back and rethought with more partners, which took a lot of resources.

”



**Emery Cowan**  
*Program Manager, Rural Voices for  
Conservation Coalition*

3

Work regionally to build trust, achieve scale, and meet shared outdoor recreation challenges and opportunities.

**Regional action allows localities to address shared challenges and opportunities together and achieve outdoor recreation outcomes at a productive scale.**

“

Don't pit small communities against each other. Instead, encourage them to come in together on a grant. Funders shouldn't make it too prescriptive. Every landscape is different. To make it work, a program or grant has to be specific to a rural place, considering its culture, needs, and assets.

”



**Ta Enos**  
*Founder and CEO,  
PA Wilds Center*

5

## Design for equitable access to and participation in outdoor recreation activities.

Practitioners expressed fear around engaging with federal funding, given the high stakes involved with potentially making a mistake in project administration or reporting.

“

We need to invest in capacity in the community itself. Thinking about health, kids that get outdoors are much more resilient in the future when they're struggling at home. And so, how do we start doing that in our community? Even these rural youth are not getting outdoors.

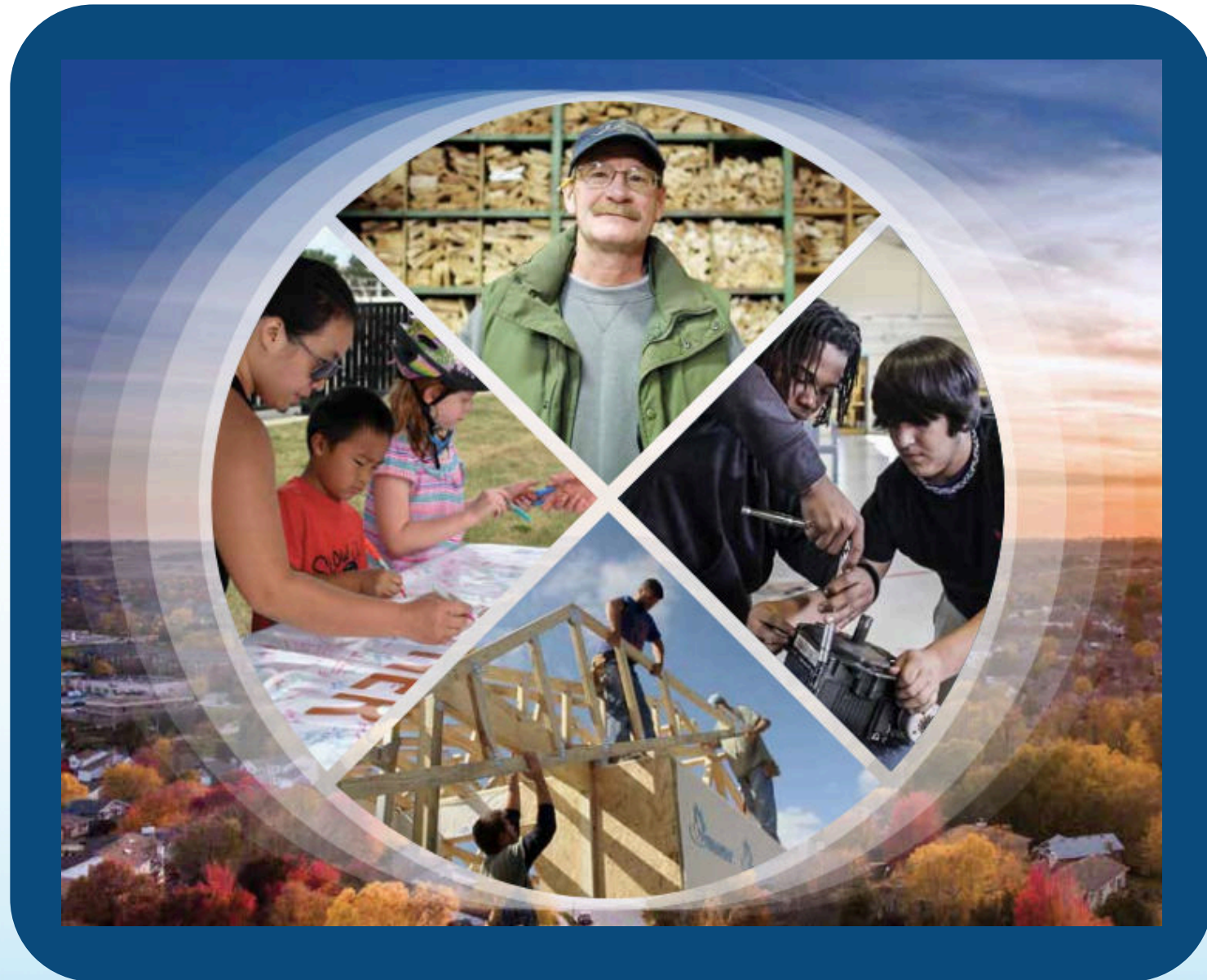
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**Oak Rankin**  
*Executive Director,  
Glacier Peak Institute*



# Qualities of Hubs



- Collaborate as an essential way of being and doing.
- Are of their region, know their region, and build trust in their region.
- Bridge issues and silos.
- Take and tolerate risk.
- Analyze at the systems level and intentionally address gaps in the systems.



# THRIVE RURAL FRAMEWORK

Rural Voice and Power

Equitable Aims and Design

Resources for Productive Action

## Local-Level Building Blocks



Welcome All to the Community



Advance Personal Well-Being



Strengthen Local Ownership and Influence



Build from Current Assets



Balance Development Goals



Design for Everyone to Thrive



Prepare Action-Able Leadership



Organize an Action Infrastructure



Act as a Region



Build Momentum

## Systems-Level Building Blocks



Rural Voice in Design and Action



Aligned Rural Fields and Actors



Accurate Rural Narrative



Balanced Development Outcomes



Cohesive Rural Policy Lens



Valued Rural Stewardship



Rural Stakeholder Equity



Ready Rural Capital Access and Flow



Rural Data for Analysis and Change




Regional Analysis and Action



The Foundational Element requires identifying and dismantling historical and ongoing discriminatory practices that disadvantage rural people and places based on place, race, & class.

# Strategies for Rural

- New narrative for rural
    - lead with opportunities, focus on local capacity (abundance vs deficit/scarcity)
  - Interconnectedness and interdependence
  - No siloed conversations
    - everything is in the regional and system
  - Non-traditional partners / think regionally (dimensions)
- 

# Strategies for Rural

- Being inclusive is more than an invitation – build trust and listen
- Understand all of your regional assets / capitals
- What it's like to be/have a Rural Development Hubs
- Gentrification vs improvement & retention
- Momentum builds community engagement



# Community Strategies Group

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 Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group

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