

Rationale: Making the Case for Rural Development Philanthropy

Why Rural Development Philanthropy?

Rural development philanthropy seeks *rural community transformation*. It recognizes philanthropy as a powerful community development tool, enabling communities to build assets that will produce community-driven results and foster an equitable development process.

As a movement, rural development philanthropy creates a level playing field where community members, development practitioners and donors can participate equally and effectively. This kind of philanthropy acts on the knowledge that strategic engagement, collaboration, leverage and inclusion are as important as the size of endowments.

Rural Development Philanthropy is a community-led approach that creates locally controlled assets and invests them to strengthen rural places. It builds a community's ability to shape a better future and promote the well-being of all community members.

Rural Matters

Building a healthy and vibrant rural America has both ethical and practical considerations. The economic, cultural and environmental health of rural communities affects all Americans. One in five Americans lives in a rural community. About half the world's population is rural. Systems that fail to serve the needs of such a large proportion of the population cannot be considered wise or just. The United States and the globe face increasingly challenging questions about how to feed, fuel and nurture the world's population sustainably and justly. Rural communities have a critical role to play in meeting these challenges. Building healthy, sustainable and just rural communities creates opportunity for everyone.

Development Matters

The question of whether to give a person a fish or teach her to catch her own is long past. Today, the question is, "Who owns the fish?" Rural communities are familiar with this question, as they grapple with the realities of outside entities owning or controlling such precious assets as forests, water and mineral rights. But whatever their circumstance, every community holds some assets in common, whether they are cultural, natural or financial resources. Today we must ask how to build and use these resources for the benefit of the community. In order to achieve a more equitable and prosperous society, effective development depends on the participation of and control by local residents. This is true both in the United States and throughout the world.

Philanthropy Matters

The spirit of giving, supporting our neighbors, and contributing to the common good are values present in all cultures and conditions. Organizing these activities in a way that benefits the entire community is an important goal for every rural community. To transform a community, having a locally governed institution for charitable investment from within and without the community is as important as having a good school, a place of worship, a bank, or any other key institution. All communities have the ability to be donors to their own projects – whether the gift is time, talent or tangible wealth.

The Time is Now

The combination of these important ideas yields a different kind of philanthropy. Rural development philanthropy combines the tools of asset-based community development with philanthropy in a way that serves the needs and desires of the community. It is based on the assumptions that communities know best and that locally grown and controlled assets lead to both community development and community empowerment. Rural development philanthropy is a tool that builds equity and opportunity from within, using place-based common-sense strategies and all kinds of local assets (financial and otherwise) to achieve a more viable community.

The time for intentional development of the field of rural development philanthropy is now. The environmental, social and economic connections between rural and metropolitan America are critical. There is innovation around public policy engagement in advancing rural philanthropy.

Rural areas have the opportunity to revitalize as active participants in the global economy and rural people are seeking tools to help them compete. Understanding the magnitude of the transfer of wealth from one generation to the next provides rural areas the opportunity to retain assets for local reinvestment.

Critical practices and better tools will help rural communities take advantage of such opportunities. New models for the aggregation and use of local philanthropic assets are emerging. Changing demographics of age, race and ethnicity make the rural development philanthropy practices of inclusivity and participation more important than ever.

Rural Development Philanthropy unites the tools of community, economic and resource development, engaging all people to come together across their differences with their voices, ideas, strategies, talents and giving.

Join the Movement

A group of rural development philanthropy practitioners are committed to building a broader base. The Rural Development Philanthropy Collaborative includes rural philanthropy practitioners, funders and intermediaries from across the world who are taking responsibility to lead, coordinate the development of the rural development philanthropy field, and grow a network of practitioners.

If you would like to learn more about rural development philanthropy and join those who work and advocate to improve its practice, contact any member of the Collaborative Steering Committee:

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| ▪ Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group | Washington, D.C. | www.aspencsg.org |
| ▪ Black Belt Community Foundation | Selma, Alabama | www.blackbeltfound.org |
| ▪ Center for Rural Strategies | Whitesburg, Kentucky | www.ruralstrategies.org |
| ▪ Humboldt Area Foundation | Bayside, California | www.hafoundation.org |
| ▪ Nebraska Community Foundation | Lincoln, Nebraska | www.nebcommfound.org |
| ▪ East Tennessee Foundation | Knoxville, Tennessee | www.etf.org |
| ▪ West Central Initiative | Fergus Falls, Minnesota | www.wcif.org |

Related Rural Development Philanthropy Materials

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| ▪ Rural Development Philanthropy Framework | ▪ Rural Development Philanthropy Critical Practice Profiles |
| ▪ Rural Development Philanthropy Competencies | ▪ Rural Development Philanthropy Bibliography |
| ▪ Rural Development Philanthropy Case Parables | |
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