

FIELD BASED RURAL PLACEMAKING: WHAT WORKS FAST, NOW, AND ON A SHOESTRING

This event is supported with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The views here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

Community Strategies Group **RURAL LLSC** 

aspen institute

 **HAC**
Housing Assistance Council

 **RCAP** Rural Community Assistance Partnership

 **INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL**

About this ROAD session

Rural placemaking, arts, and local design can be catalysts for renewed community and economic development in our small towns and rural places. Placemaking celebrates and invests in the uniqueness of each community.

This ROAD session, hosted by the [Housing Assistance Council \(HAC\)](#), focused on concrete placemaking strategies and takeaways relevant to rural communities of every size—even the most isolated and least resourced. Three rural-rooted placemakers shared context around projects they’re currently working on and their related design challenges. With the participation of two guest consultants, as well as engagement from all who attended this session, this group worked through creative placemaking design solutions in real-time. This document harvests the questions, ideas and insights, and resources emerging from the following conversations.

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The following community examples include a visual reference to ideas named and grouped together during the conversation, with full transcription of those ideas typed out below each image.

Sarah Ayers Marcellus, MI

Project Background

beginning stages of the plan

agricultural community

1,000 population

Design Challenge Questions

Great natural assets - trouble translating this into downtown successes

How do we fund a project once a plan is developed?

How other communities and projects were funded through alternative funding sources?

What is your year round vs seasonal population? Apologies if you noted that already!

Are there community colleges that could be good partners?

Do you know what the community wants? Who is at the table?

what local philanthropic partners do you have? community foundations?

Ideas & Insights

transient tax build/diversify funding

intentional meetings with stakeholders/c community members -

Find what we have capacity for!

find sources/services of income

We have hotel/motel taxes here that are often used for this type of work.

1. I have an idea for a community center that could be used for a variety of purposes. I would like to see if there are any other ideas that could be combined with this one. I would like to see if there are any other ideas that could be combined with this one.

put some effort into shared housing options for those that cannot afford high rentals but can add to cultural diversity

put some effort into shared housing options for those that cannot afford high rentals but can add to cultural diversity

How many people have you spoken to? How many people have you spoken to? How many people have you spoken to?

create a team you are the minority in

Conducting tours of the community history, architecture, public art might be a source of earned income.

getting national forest service involved

put some effort into shared housing options for those that cannot afford high rentals but can add to cultural diversity

How many people have you spoken to? How many people have you spoken to? How many people have you spoken to?

taxes in your community (arts and parks tax)

Farm to table dinners can generate dollars.

make sure airbnbs are paying their income taxes and impact fees

Farmer's markets, concerts, scheduled activities throughout the higher traveled months

Are there hiking and biking trails to get people

How many people have you spoken to? How many people have you spoken to? How many people have you spoken to?

AMERICORP/Visa -capacity

Funding that would local funds to build the university. I would like to see if there are any other ideas that could be combined with this one. I would like to see if there are any other ideas that could be combined with this one.

This idea is a story of a small town that has a history of being a small town. I would like to see if there are any other ideas that could be combined with this one. I would like to see if there are any other ideas that could be combined with this one.

Village of Marcellus, MI PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Village of Marcellus is located at the northeast edge of Cass County, Michigan in the southwest region of the state. With over 50% of the Main Street commercial buildings currently inactive, the Village of Marcellus faces a challenge in a) appealing to potential developers b) encouraging existing business support and c) retaining young talent.

- Main street revitalization
- In the beginning stages of the plan
- Agricultural community - “36 lakes within 6 miles”
- 1,100 population

DESIGN CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- How do we fund a project once a plan is developed?
- How are other communities and projects funded through alternative funding sources?
- There are great natural assets, but we are having trouble translating this into success downtown.

QUESTIONS FROM THE GROUP

- What is your year round vs seasonal population?
- Are there community colleges that could be good partners?
- Do you know what the community wants? Who is at the table?

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- What local philanthropic partners do you have? community foundations?
- How many affordable rentals and homeowners do you have in the community? Businesses like bars, coffee shops, restaurants can only be supported by rooftops for those workers in the industry.
- Schools?

IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FROM THE GROUP

- Find a third place for a community.
- The Oregon Legislature has created a fund to support Oregon Main Street communities with priority projects from privately owned building renovation to publicly owned improvements in downtown. Funding levels have been between \$5-10 million/biennium and I think the maximum award/community is \$200K.
- Look into transient tax and building/diversifying funding options.
- Community foundations typically have limited discretionary grant resources so consider asking for an investment instead. More and more are becoming impact investors and love placemaking projects - and sometimes are willing to be anchor tenants.
- Hold intentional meetings with stakeholders/community members.
- Find what you have capacity to do.
- Find diverse sources/services of income.
- Look into tax opportunities in your community (arts and parks tax).
 - Make sure Airbnbs are paying their income taxes and impact fees.
 - We have hotel/motel taxes here that are often used for this type of work.
- Solution:
 - 1. Check out Durant Oklahoma - Downtown Contest Winner (Alley Art, Restaurants, Multipurpose venue and photography studio)
 - 2. Partner with school / community college to develop/fundraiser FFA sells
 - 3. CIRDC promotes easy grants to apply to
 - 4. Check with the local or state arts council.
 - 5. Check with an organization to take over a building.
- Put some effort into shared housing options for those that cannot afford high rentals but can add to cultural diversity.
- Community foundations typically have limited discretionary grant resources so consider asking for an investment instead. More and more are becoming impact investors and love placemaking projects -- and sometimes are willing to be anchor tenants.
- Create a team where you are the minority.
- Get the national forest service involved.
- With CIRDC (Citizens' Institute on Rural Design), we've often seen that artists (broadly defined) offer so much when it comes to bringing lots of folks--including youth--to the table.
 - Glad to see an acknowledgement that artists can be broadly defined. I think we sometimes forget that, -- it's not just murals, galleries, or visual art. I think sometimes people forget how broad the "arts" can be.
 - Yes, photographers and writers come to mind!
- Conducting tours of the community (history, architecture, public art) might be a source of earned income.
- If there is a market square, running a consignment type store that area farmers, artists and locals can capitalize on the foot traffic.

- Community art ... murals, sidewalk art, etc. Partner with local art students or offer an internship or fellowship to college student artists.
- How many affordable rentals and homeowners do you have in the community? Businesses like bars, coffee shops, restaurants can only be supported by rooftops for those workers in the industry - primarily homeowners.
- Farm to table dinners can generate dollars.
- Consider farmer's markets, concerts, scheduled activities throughout the higher traveled months.
- Are there hiking and biking trails to get people?
- AMERICORPS/Vista =capacity
 - I can vouch for the use of the VISTA/AmeriCorps personnel as staff grant writing resource.
 - USDA's Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI) grant is one that we've used to actually hire new staff and Vistas (not many grants that will just pay for staff or contractors). It requires a larger nonprofit to be the umbrella organization, but it subgrants funds to smaller community nonprofits and small governmental entities. Another capacity option to explore.
- Funding that worked: Local bank hosted the celebrity dressed talent show which raised thousands of dollars. Let your local groups that have pull, fundraise for you!!
- This link is a story of a small town brew pub story in Ord, NE several ideas on how they did it and listened to their residents:
 - <https://drive.google.com/file/d/11Hz5XPmN6v8V1kwLdap2N9IVmWZeAvq1/view>
 - Ord is a community with some great community development success stories and momentum!
- Annual fundraisers that are FUN like a golf cart poker run they hold yearly in Port Bolivar Texas which is a community of vacation rentals there:
 - <https://www.bolivarpeninsulatexas.com/Events/Golf-Cart-Poker-Run>



Project G.A.I.N Hugo, OK

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Project G.A.I.N, a nonprofit (501c3) organization striving to eliminate poverty in Choctaw County and surrounding areas, specifically the town of Hugo, OK by advancing the community and securing its future through youth leadership and professional development. Project G.A.I.N. seeks to provide a consistent/permanent space for teen youth to expand on their efforts, gifts, and talents. Having a facility to organize, train and equip youth with the tools needed to break generational cycles of poverty is vital to successfully bring about social change. Project G.A.I.N. recently obtained a facility, Washington Heights Hope Center, which is located on an historical site. Revitalizing the space will help to restore local cultural identity, encourage tourism, provide economical benefits, and improve the overall quality of life.

- 5,000 population
- Former circus town
- Tribal land
- One project at a time
- Goal - training and recreation facility

DESIGN CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- How to maximize multipurpose rooms to cater to all programs?
- What are the steps we can take to integrate art, culture design, while preserving history?

QUESTIONS FROM THE GROUP

- Who will run this space?
- What is the budget?
- Where is this facility in the community?
 - Is right in the entrance to Hugo.
 - It's located on the south side of the city with no development. 98% residential.
- How does the community feel about this space?
- Are schools, nearby colleges or other prospective investors- users engaged in the process?

IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FROM THE GROUP

- Use the cafe as a multi-purpose room when not serving lunch or snacks. Split the days to host different activities in the room. Such as, on Mon & Wednesday an area would be for Art & Culture, then on Tuesday & Thursday it will be for Homework and Enrichment). Another room can be for Technology which can house all your electronics, such as laptops, Large Television on the wall and media room). Also get the Boys & Girls Club to reach out to other Clubs that mirror your space and see how they use their space and Boys & Girls Clubs of America have staff that can help with design development and rendering. For outside, do a playground/workout space. There are grants for that. For the mural if you create a small council that can talk with the community about a mural that bridges the past to the present and they have artists that can do color by number murals where the entire community can help paint.
- I wonder if you have connected with the small city of Smithers, WV about your project. The city of Smithers has repurposed an old school building (that was closed after a school consolidation process) and the community has transformed it into a Gateway Center that now houses their city hall, senior center, community theatre, day care, and much more. Might be a good example to tap into!
- Check this out <https://wimberlycenter.com/> a project of the nonprofit centers network <https://www.nonprofitcenters.org/>
- Consider temporary possibilities in the interim (pop-ups).
 - Love the idea of pop ups!
- Currently we have no budget. We are navigating funding. We love creating. Making something out of nothing!
 - small budget = small steps
- Have you talked to the owners of the low income apartments nearby on what services those families might want? Like daycare maybe? If it's a Housing Authority owned development, they would have federal funds to lease the space from your group for their residents.
- Find out what you need right now.
 - Finding the wants/needs/emotions - put those into the design.
 - Do it in phases. Nothing on the names right now.
 - Don't name the room before deciding what to do with it - take a step back.
- I love the elephant sanctuary - what a community asset. The history of being a circus town. How can you nod to that history?
- If you want to integrate arts, culture, and history, I think a storytelling or story-gathering project would be great.
 - Not sure if there's any kind of historical society there - that could be a good asset, but actually going to residents and community members to gather their stories of how THEY understand the history would be a great way to get community involvement, and then sharing those stories (in

multiple ways, i.e., murals, slam story nights, story circles, etc.) could be a great placemaking effort.

- Maybe have local students conduct some oral histories?
- Work with a nearby college or university, perhaps an extension program to find students to help with design, they need real world projects for their school work.
- Maybe hosting cultural events that introduce the history of the building and neighborhood challenges and how they can contribute to changing and upgrading the value of the property as well as the community.
- This is an excellent opportunity to create interest and value via the legacy. It's the challenges of rebuilding impoverished and oppressed communities. Bring art into the events, music, black history etc.
- Love the idea of a design charrette.
 - Get things on the wall that people can respond to.
 - Here is a photo from the design charrette we did last year for our community resource navigation center which is currently under construction - people with lived experience of homelessness were part of this.
- Who is your broadband provider? What telecommunications firms service the area? There are some firms who will provide access to rural communities.
 - Access to technology is often needed in our rural community spaces.
- A wish list could also help for some of those day-to-day items like a projector or materials. It can be easier for folks to fund one item rather than simply donate money.
- Food, kids activities, and music are great when thinking about a community event.
 - Folks need help with basic things - ie dinner night.
 - Where food is provided, you will have people participate.
 - Any food trucks in your town? Invite them to the event.
 - Competitive food events - chili cook-off, tailgates, pumpkin pie bake off ...
 - And incorporating the youth you work with in the envisioning and design processes is positive.
 - Without exception, I've always found that kids have the best design ideas.
 - @Maria Sykes (she/her): In my rural community, that didn't have anywhere to eat that wasn't the gas station for a couple of years, bringing in a food truck from farther away (up to two hours) one night a week was very popular. Food trucks sold out, community members gathered, and the community festival committee hosted small fundraisers plus donations from the food trucks, each week.

Camille Ferguson Sitka Tribe of Alaska Sitka, AK

Project Background

- cruise destination - vacation destination
- Tlingit culture/natural beauty
- downtown has converted into tourist shopping - no community needs/shops

Design Challenge Questions

- How can art design and creative placemaking bolster indigenous sustainability and quality of visitor's experience in Sitka?
- does Sitka have back streets to de-intensify the crowd?
- What happens to Sitka in the off tourist season?
- Is the tourist community constant or in-n-out
- Are there any indigenous performance arts?
- What is the main draw to Sitka for visitors?
- Has the town done any envisioning or strategic planning work that maps out city-level priorities based upon resident input?
- Does the task force primarily represent the Tlingit community?

Ideas & Insights

- Bridge lighting projects are awesome and people love them
- What about a self guided walking tour with QR codes to tell them about significant local history/sites
- Bar Harbor, Maine wrestles with some of the same issues. Might be a good resource for ideas.
- Do a resident-driven event based community engagement process like community walk & talk to learn what matters most to the residents, and then develop action plans around what will strengthen those assets.
- Are the big cruise companies potentially funders for any of the work you're looking to do?
- The indigenous culture is one of your biggest assets.
- designers would be excited to get involved
- focusing on the community partnerships first will meet the needs of the community but also brings a wider authentic experience
- ways to get donations from cruise ships? tax dollars?
- How much does the local economy depend on tourism?
- <https://www.cdfif.org/>
- help make locals interested in starting a business making it happen
- also Native CDFIs : <https://nativecdfi.net/>
- It looks like you all have a native CDFI - Spruce Root?
- getting information about the Sitka community on the cruise ships so they can learn before arriving
- <https://www.sprucero.org/abot-us>
- Novia Scotia has one too: <https://abotops.bartus.com/bestest/the-artisan-82-all>

Sitka Tribe of Alaska Sitka, AK

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Sitka Tribe of Alaska is a Tribal Government with 4000 tribal citizens whose ancestors occupied the area of Sheet'ka Kwaan (Sitka) from time immemorial. However, they are a landless tribe and their citizens are integrated into the City Borough Sitka and impacted by all decisions made by the City Government. The Sitka Tribe of Alaska's Mission is "To exercise sovereign rights and powers, to preserve the integrity of tribal society, and to improve the lives of individual Tribal Citizens." Sitka and Southeast Communities are undergoing cruise industry growth and are challenged with accommodating the influx of visitors. This includes transportation, infrastructure, attractions, and supply demand.

- Cruise destination - vacation destination
- Tlingit culture / natural beauty
- Downtown has converted into tourist shopping - no community needs / shops

DESIGN CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- How can art design and creative placemaking bolster indigenous sustainability and quality of visitor's experience in Sitka?

QUESTIONS FROM THE GROUP

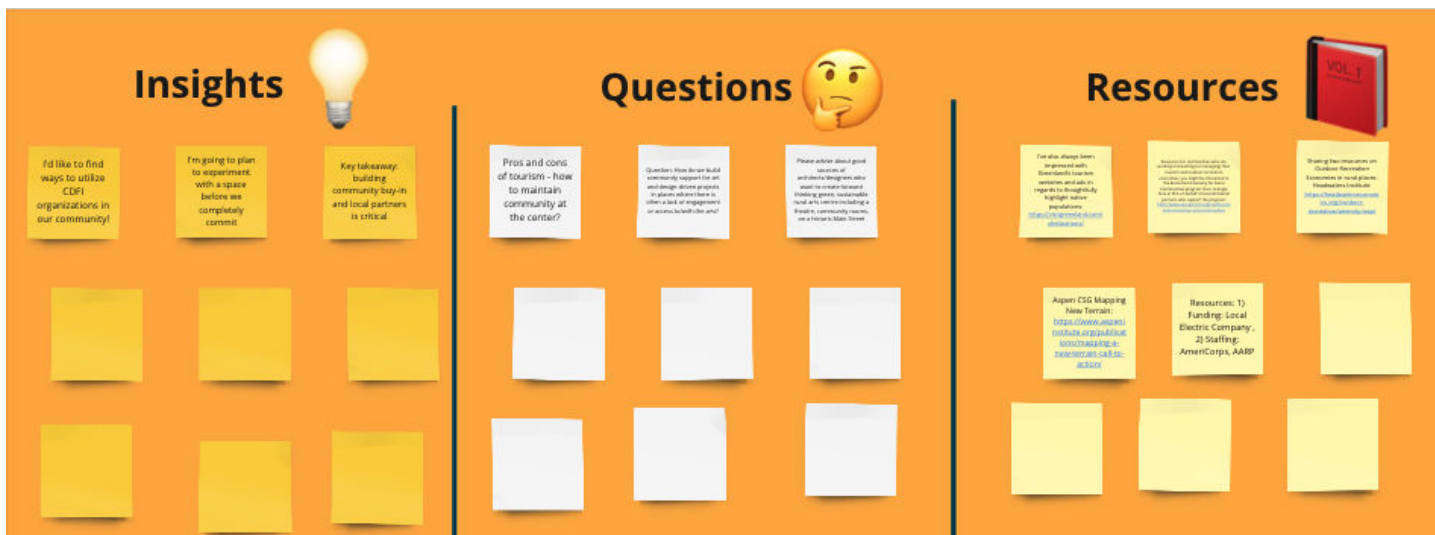
- Does Sitka have back streets to de-intensify the crowd?
- Does The Gathering impact your community that happens in Juneau or not really?
- What happens to Sitka in the off tourist season?

- In addition to things that may be developed or envisioned for tourists/visitors, are there spaces for local and indigenous people to gather that are safe and separate from visitors/tourists?
- Is the tourist community constant or in-n-out
- Are there any indigenous performance arts?
- What is the main draw to Sitka for visitors?
- Has the town done any visioning or strategic planning work? Something that maps out city-level priorities based upon resident input?
- Does the task force primarily represent the Tlingit community?
- How much does the local economy depend on tourism?

IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FROM THE GROUP

- You may already be connected with fellow Alaskan communities, but if not, I will mention that I had the honor of working with Haines, Alaska through the Recreation Economy for Rural Communities program this year, and they are tackling many of the same challenges. The Chilkoot Indian Association and the Chilkat Indian Village in Haines are also doing some great work around cultural tourism that builds on the strong indigenous culture of the Tlingit people. The Borough of Haines and the Chilkoot Indian Association have also started to install more bilingual street signs, making sure that the Tlingit language is reflected in the design of streets signs and wayfinding in the community. I'd love to learn more of what you are doing in Sitka as well!
- Bar Harbor, Maine wrestles with some of the same issues. Might be a good resource for ideas.
- The community I live (Moab, Utah) in is often touted as a prime example of what *not* to do in regards to tourism! I will say that the resources that underpin the lives of locals (housing, medical care, groceries, mechanics, childcare etc) need to be developed in consort with any development for visitors, as increased visitation will strain basic services.
- As far as towns inundated with too many people, Estes Park, Co is right outside Rocky Mountain National Park, they have a free shuttle service during tourist season.
<https://www.visitestespark.com/plan/getting-around/free-shuttle-buses/> Denver also has free shuttles in their shopping area, <https://www.denver.org/things-to-do/attractions/16th-street-mall/>.
- In Columbus, Nebraska there is a store called Market 23, where vendors rent out spots, and then have to work the store (cash register) a couple times a week/month. This may be a strategy for your locals to sell their art, and even incorporate space where the artists can work where the tourists can watch them.
 - Here is the website: <https://www.market23nebraska.com/about/>
- Sacramento started having annual mural festivals in downtown as well as outlying areas that suffered from graffiti tagging. Unwanted graffiti and vandalism have slowed significantly. Many businesses have beautiful, meaningful, and cultural artworks done by local artists. Now, there are too many businesses applying to have murals done during the festival to cover them all. Typically, 40-50 murals each festival. QR codes tell about the piece, artists, and businesses. People tour these via car, bike, and on foot. There are so many possibilities for raising awareness and money with something similar. My art group has spearheaded a project that is set to start very soon. It will be considered an open air museum . 125 pillars will be painted under the freeway interchange. All culturally based, 80% local artists, on Caltrans pillars which will all have qr codes. Schools taking children on field trips can map out pillars related to a specific topic, for example.
- On the design front, I'm getting messages re: possibility of using side streets or other "quick interventions" that might be a step toward longer term solutions.
- What about a self guided walking tour with QR codes to tell them about significant local history/sites

- Solutions:
 - Scavenger Hunt
 - Performance Arts Arts in/near the waters (safe materials)
 - Street Museum Downtown: Can current stores have off season offers for locals!! Farmer's market?
- This event is like a great opportunity for a “real rent” style campaign that cruise ship passengers should be asked to voluntarily contribute to. That helps generate targeted resources for community self-determined development and contributes to education.
- Are the big cruise companies potential funders for any of the work you're looking to do?
- Ways to get donations from cruise ships? tax dollars?
- So hard to hear that the population that call this home are being marginalized in their own town. As a tourist, I would say I'd rather see the town in a more natural state. I would want to see the history of the area and acknowledge the locals with appreciation.
- The Cruise line wouldn't be there without your amazing culture to experience; use that and get that funding support.
- Consider getting information about the Sitka community on the cruise ships so they can learn before arriving.
- Maria Sykes helped get a percent for art fund started in Green River, and this could be applicable for generating revenue for Sitka and especially for highlighting indigenous arts.
- Consider bridge lighting projects, they are awesome and people love them.
- Use the public art to move people through the streets and tell stories that will naturally divide visitors. Smaller spaces around art can be for performance for young people gathering. Lighting does create night places--just know what behavior you want to encourage!
 - Not much need for light in Sitka in the summer...
- The indigenous culture is one of your biggest assets.
- <https://www.cdfifund.gov/>
- Also Native CDFIs : <https://nativecdfi.net/>
- It looks like you all have a native CDFI - Spruce Root?
 - <https://www.spruceroot.org/about-us>
 - Sitka does have a Spruce- CDFI , and they are now assisting in the strategic planning for the City of Sitka.
- Focusing on the community wants/needs first will meet the needs of the community but also inspire visitor = authentic experiences.
- Do a resident-driven asset-based community engagement process like Community Heart & Soul to learn what matters most to the residents, and then develop action plans around what will strengthen those assets.
- Help make locals interested in starting a business making it happen.
- Designers would be excited to get involved.
- Solution:
 - Provide culture activities.
 - Current shops providing the needs of locals. Ex: One store off the sacks you mentioned.
- Design from Nowhere project: <https://frameweb.com/article/austurland-designs-from-nowhere>.
- Artisan map might be an option for rural AK: <https://handpickediceland.is/>.
 - Nova Scotia has one too: <https://cabotcapebreton.com/resort/the-artisan-trail>.
 - I've also always been impressed with Greenland's tourism websites and ads in regards to thoughtfully highlight native populations: <https://visitgreenland.com/destinations/>.



Insights, Questions, and Resources

INSIGHTS

- I'd like to find ways to utilize CDFI organizations in our community!
- I'm going to plan to experiment with a space before we completely commit.
- Key takeaway: building community buy-in and local partners is critical.
- This is FANTASTIC! Lots of ideas/resources that could apply to our "places."
- I appreciate retaining the orientation to the needs and vitality of the year-round community and then how to serve visitors.
- So many great ideas that have been shared. Thank you.

QUESTIONS



- Pros and cons of tourism - how to maintain community at the center?
- How do we build community support for art and design-driven projects in places where there is often a lack of engagement or access to/with the arts?
- Please advise about good sources of architects/designers who want to create forward thinking green, sustainable rural arts centre including a theatre, community rooms, on a historic Main Street.
- Question: Is there a guide on creative placemaking and ways to compare cost effect materials? Specifically, flooring and drainage solutions (rain water getting into buildings)?




ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- For communities who are working on boosting (or managing) their tourism and outdoor recreation economies, you might be interested in the Recreation Economy for Rural Communities program that I manage here at EPA on behalf of several federal partners who support the program: <https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/recreation-economy-rural-communities>
- Sharing two resources on Outdoor Recreation Economies in rural places:
 - Headwaters Institute: <https://headwaterseconomics.org/outdoor-recreation/amenity-trap/>

- Aspen CSG Mapping New Terrain:
<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/mapping-a-new-terrain-call-to-action/>
- Resources:
 - 1) Funding: Local Electric Company
 - 2) Staffing: AmeriCorps, AARP
- Epicenter Annual Report (2022):
ruralandproud.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/FY22-Annual-Report.pdf
- Frontier Fellowship (residency program): frontierfellowship.org
- Waypoint: Green River (Downtown Revitalization Plan):
https://ruralandproud.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Waypoint-Green-River-Unabridged_092017.pdf
- www.projectgain.org
- www.facebook.com/pgprojectgain

CONTACTS

Facilitator	
<p>Jamie Horter</p> 	<p>www.jamiehorter.xyz</p> <p>Jamie Horter is a rural advocate, artist, and visual facilitator based out of Lyons, NE (pop. 851). She works primarily in rural places and believes in the power of art to shape and enhance quality of life in rural communities. Jamie uses art mediums and processes to create opportunities for people to engage in conversations and decisions impacting their communities and organizations. Her work is multidisciplinary, intergenerational, inclusive, and welcomes collaborators.</p> <p>Jamie utilizes a range of methods and artistic mediums to assist communities and clients. In addition to a background in art, Jamie is trained in the Art of Hosting, Circle Way, Technology of Participation, Strategic Doing, trauma-informed facilitation practice, and visual scribing. She has served as a Resource Team member for the National Endowment for the Arts' Our Town Technical Assistance Program since 2020. Jamie works with rural artists, community volunteers and leaders as well as governments, non-profits and foundations serving rural places.</p>
Guest Consultants	
<p>Maria Sykes</p> 	<p>Epicenter, https://ruralandproud.org, frontierfellowship.org</p> <p>Maria Sykes is a designer, rural advocate, and community coach. In 2009, Sykes co-founded Epicenter, a non-profit organization that uses art and design to invest in the rural community of Green River, Utah. Sykes has coached rural communities, non-profit organizations, and individuals throughout Utah, across the States, and as far as Iceland. Her efforts have been honored many times, including by former Utah Governor Herbert in 2015. Sykes remains the Executive Director of Epicenter and has a palpable passion for the arts and rural places.</p>
<p>Emily Wilson</p>	<p>Woodlands Development & Lending, www.woodlandswv.org, emily@woodlandswv.org</p> <p>Emily Wilson is the Director of Partnerships & Programs at Woodlands Development & Lending, a Community Development Corporation and Community Development Financial Institution based in Elkins, West Virginia. Having joined the Woodlands team in 2015, Emily now supports programs and projects that benefit the communities in Woodlands' service area including affordable housing, downtown redevelopment, community facilities, community planning, as well as small business lending and technical assistance. Along with</p>

	<p>her on-the-ground engagement work, Emily, in her dual role, also helps foster Woodlands’ relationships with local, state, regional, and national partners to collaborate on broader programs, initiatives, and funding proposals; boost WV’s community development ecosystem; and advocate for increased development resources and policy change.</p> <p>Emily holds an M.A. in Sustainable International Development from Brandeis University’s Heller School for Social Policy and Management. She is currently serving on the Board of Directors for Fahe, a Central Appalachian member organization of affordable housing nonprofits based in Berea, Kentucky. Locally, she serves as Vice President of the Tucker County Planning Commission. Emily lives in Canaan Valley, West Virginia with her husband and daughter, Kat.</p>
<p>Community Speakers</p>	
<p>Sarah Ayers</p> 	<p>Sarah Ayers is currently a Doctoral Candidate at Liverpool John Moores University Transart Institute exploring knowledge-sharing within community-led arts organizations in rural locales. She holds a Master’s in Art History and Visual Culture from Lindenwood University and a Bachelor’s in the Business of Art and Design from Andrews University. Ayers also has additional certification in Strategic Corporate Research from Cornell University, Labor Studies from CUNY: Murphy Institute, and Collections Management in Costume and Textiles from California State University: Long Beach. She works as the Economic Development Director of the Village of Marcellus and operates S. Ayers Art, a consulting firm specializing in initiatives at the intersection of community and culture.</p>
<p>Di’Mehlia Adamson</p> 	<p>Project G.A.I.N, www.projectgain.org, www.facebook.com/pgprojectgain</p> <p>Di’Mehlia Adamson is the Marketing Outreach Liaison for Project G.A.I.N (Get Active and Involved Now) using creativity and strategy to help find access to resources and opportunities for her hometown Hugo, Oklahoma. PG is striving to eliminate poverty by equipping the community with tools to become independent and restore H.U.G.O with one project at a time. The focus is discovering creative placemaking for a newly obtained building to have a safe consistent space for youth empowerment and community programming as the first step toward the dream of building a recreational/training facility.</p>
<p>Camille Ferguson</p>	<p>Camille Ferguson returned to the Economic Development Director position at Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA) after previously serving in the position from 1996 – 2012. Camille was asked to return to restructure Sitka Tribal Enterprises,</p>



including: reestablishing a Cultural Training Program, institute CDL training, rehabilitate six tour buses, assess the Tribal Tannery, rebuild the Made in Sitka Gift Shop, create a marketing strategy for the Sheet'ka Kwaan Naa Kahidi Community House, open the Alaska Wild Game Pull Tab Parlor, and reinstate Sitka Bingo – all while exploring new economic opportunities for Sitka Tribe of Alaska, including steering a small committee for special forest products and the development of STA's Cottage Kitchen.

Prior to returning to STA, Camille served as Executive Director for the American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AINTA), wherein she: expanded and established new formal partnerships with international DMOs and national tribal and tourism industry non-profits, federal agencies, and higher education institutions; launched the first Native American destination website NativeAmerica.Travel; developed a template for Native American FAM trip in partnership with Brand USA; and gained support for the passage of the NATIVE act, along with the advocacy needed to support the \$3 million for appropriation to implement the unfunded mandate. During her tenure as Executive Director, AINANTA received: the President's E-Award, signed by executive order by President Kennedy – the highest recognition any U.S. entity can receive for making a significant contribution to the expansion of U.S. exports; ArtPlace America grant for an infrastructure and interpretation project on behalf of 11 tribes at the Grant Canyon National Park; the U.S. Department of Interior Partnership Award; and the U.S. Department of Commerce Market Development Cooperator Program Award. Camille's work as AINANTA's Executive Director concluded with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Interior and a Cooperative Agreement with the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Organizers: Housing Assistance Council & Citizens' Institute on Rural Design

Stephen Sugg

[Home - Housing Assistance Council \(ruralhome.org\)](http://ruralhome.org)
[Citizens' Institute on Rural Design \(rural-design.org\)](http://rural-design.org)
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Before joining HAC as a Government Relations Manager and now Special Projects Manager, Stephen Sugg worked as a U.S. Senate staffer, a state-level higher education lobbyist, and as a senior policy officer at the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC). Stephen is a published short story writer. He holds a master's degree in rural sociology from the University of Missouri and a doctorate from the College of William and Mary. His academic research interests include rural education, place-based education, and environmental education. Stephen spent four years as an adjunct faculty member at St. Leo University and Tidewater Community College.

Manda LaPorte

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Manda LaPorte is a Research Associate at the Housing Assistance Council. Her areas of interest include farmworker housing, placemaking and community development, and rural housing policy. Prior to HAC, she served as a Peace Corps Volunteer and a Peace Corps Response Volunteer in Nicaragua and

	Guatemala, respectively. After her service, she worked for Habitat for Humanity in the Greater Charlottesville area in a variety of bilingual positions ranging from construction to financial coaching. Manda holds a B.A. in Global Studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara and an M.S. in Political Science with a focus in Applied Community and Economic Development from Illinois State University.
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About the ROAD Sessions and organizing partners

The ROAD Sessions highlight and unpack rural development ideas and strategies that promote access to inclusive economic opportunity and long-term resilience. ROAD Sessions feature stories of on-the-ground practitioners with experience, wisdom, and savvy to share. The series reflects and emphasizes the full diversity of rural America, spotlights rural America's assets and challenges, and lifts voices and lived experience from a wide range of rural communities and economies. Each Session includes an added opportunity for peer exchange.

Overall, the ROAD Sessions aim to infuse practitioner stories and lessons into rural narratives, policymaking, and practice across the country and to strengthen the network of organizations serving rural communities and regions.

The ROAD Sessions are virtual exchanges co-designed as part of Thrive Rural – an effort of the Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation – and in collaboration with the Housing Assistance Council, the Rural Community Assistance Partnership, Rural LISC, the International Economic Development Council, and the Federal Reserve Board.