

CENTERING COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

Fostering Rural and Indigenous Community Well-Being with Asset-Based Development

A CALL TO ACTION

Philanthropy's Impact:

Rural and Indigenous communities hold deep wisdom, strong networks, and rich cultural assets despite long-standing disinvestment and systemic inequities. Recent [data](#) indicates that only 3% of philanthropic dollars go to rural communities and less than 0.5% go to Native communities — yet they hold solutions to our most pressing challenges. Philanthropy can play a critical role in investing in locally-led solutions that center well-being, equity, and sustainable prosperity at a regional level.

Core Insight

Building long-term well-being requires [Rural Development Hubs](#) and community-driven capacity to align health, economic development, and regional wealth building through trust, relationships, and shared goals.

Philanthropic Recommendations

Fund Rural Development Hubs as Trusted Intermediaries

- Provide **multi-year flexible funding that allows for regional capacity-building**.
- Recognize Rural Development Hubs as bridge-builders that align external resources with community-defined priorities.

Invest in Trust-Building for Well-Being

- Fund **inclusive, community-driven strategies** to build health and social infrastructure.
- Support trust-building as foundational to system change and equity.
- Trust is only sustainably built when action occurs.

Advance Community Capacity and Leadership

- Fund **training, peer learning, and local hiring** in rural regions as a place-based capacity-building strategy.
- Require and model **diverse, inclusive leadership** in grantees.

Support Community Asset Building

- Fund **personal and community wealth-building efforts**, including cooperative ownership, land trusts, investing access, and entrepreneur ecosystems.
- Help reduce barriers to risk-taking (e.g., through flexible underwriting or guarantees).

Prioritize Community-Defined Metrics

- Work with grantees to define what success looks like and how it's measured.
- Fund **storytelling and convenings** to humanize outcomes and shift narratives.
- Encourage **qualitative + quantitative** reporting that reflects real impact.

Key Takeaway

Philanthropy has the power to reshape outcomes by resourcing rural and Indigenous communities on their own terms — building relationships, elevating community voice, and investing in what already works.

Let's invest in what's already working — together.

Connect with Aspen CSG to explore opportunities to support Rural Development Hubs

Insights from Report Participants



Mark Gabriel Little
NCGrowth, UNC Chapel Hill,
North Carolina

"Philanthropy should be putting their offices within the communities they serve. And making the process of working with them easier, through a common app for funding or allowing for video submission as opposed to written proposals."



Vanessa Roanhorse,
Roanhorse Consulting,
New Mexico

"Practitioners, government, and philanthropy should challenge the traditional concepts of economic development. We need an ecosystem approach, not siloing issues because they are all interconnected."



Manuel Machado
Oregon State University
Extension Service, Oregon

"With philanthropy, grants are evaluated by quantifying everything. There's also a qualitative side of things that is about more stories than numbers. Consider making the evaluation process more accommodating to those with more flexibility."

This is an Executive Summary of Aspen CSG's report, *Fostering Rural and Indigenous Community Well-Being with Asset-Based Development*. See the report for nuance and additional insights.



About Aspen CSG

Since 1985, the Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group has worked toward equitable rural prosperity. We support communities and Native nations to become healthy places where each and every person belongs, lives with dignity, and thrives.

As a national hub, Aspen CSG connects rural leaders, practitioners, and policymakers to share ideas, strengthen networks, and advance solutions grounded in the Thrive Rural Framework.

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The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Foundation.

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Learn more: www.AspenCSG.org