



# Practitioner Recommendations

## Practitioners

These recommendations apply to practitioners in the field of rural development, including national NGOs, Rural Development Hubs, and their local partner organizations.

### Deepen collaboration

- Keep the region at the center of your work and hold yourself accountable to the community.
- Convene coalitions in response to landscape changes (e.g., federal funding cuts, natural disasters, major employer closures).
- Attend regional rural-focused gatherings in other parts of the country and build relationships with peers.
- Join efforts with other organizations, including other Hubs.
- Find creative ways to share resources and create efficiencies.
- Don't be extractive: always remember that your community and region are more important than your organization.

### Strengthen your organization and organizational structures

- Align mission and business plans.
- Develop accounting systems that allow for full accounting of program costs.
- Measure how much risk your Hub can manage (e.g., know your financial capacity to front funds you only get back on a reimbursement basis).
- Invest in staff and their development.
- Staff and grow your teams with people from the places you serve.
- Train staff in an asset-based approach to the work and communication about the work.

- Ground yourself in your purpose and mission—be careful about chasing funding, maintain power and boundaries, and teach these skills to your staff.

### Speak up

- Push back on harmful narratives and actions with positive frames of impact and opportunity.
- Speak in plain, direct language that resonates with your region—know your audience.
- Communicate needs: tell local and state philanthropy what you need them to be or do.
- Encourage funders to take risks (e.g., lending on Tribal trust lands).
- Communicate the value of Hubs (and the value of having a national model and network).
- Politely call out bad behavior by funders, partners, and the public sector.
- Advocate for yourself—walk away or say no when needed.

### Support and learn from other Hubs

- Help communities take the next step toward Hub development.
- Participate in field-building.
- Take time to travel to other regions to learn from other Hubs.

**"Make sure you have young people on your boards and staff to represent, not just to build a leadership pipeline."**



**Stephanie Tyree**  
West Virginia Community  
Development Hub, West Virginia

### Rural Priorities

Hub leaders consistently identify specific priorities for all levels of rural work, including:

- Civic education and engagement.
- Leadership development.
- Disaster preparedness and response.
- Local food systems.
- Alternative economic paradigms.

**"It's when you start chasing funding that you start to twist and contort and turn into a pretzel, and then you wake up one day and you don't know who your organization is. But as long as you stay true to your mission, you'll be okay."**



**Ebonie Alexander**  
Black Family Land Trust, Virginia

**"As Hubs, we need to actually do internally what we're wanting to do externally: foster leadership, capacity, agency, and a high level of communication across teams. We really need to be deliberate about walking the walk."**



**Rob Riley**  
Northern Forest Center,  
New Hampshire