

# VOICES FROM THE FIELD:

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RURAL ORGANIZERS ON WHAT  
THEY NEED FROM FUNDERS

By Judy Hatcher

With support from the Integrated Rural Strategies Group, a project of  
Neighborhood Funders Group

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# INTRODUCTION

This scan was commissioned as part of an inquiry by a newly formed working group on rural communities convened within Neighborhood Funders Group, the Integrated Rural Strategies Group. The funders involved are grantmaking at the national, regional and local level, and fund a wide variety of rural issues, including environment, civic engagement, and economy. This group came together because of evidence that there is growing interest in rural communities within the philanthropic sector. Through convening a set of discussions about what value the group could add to these discussions, it became apparent that, given the complexity of rural communities, highlighting rural organizing happening across the country with an emphasis on racial, gender and ecological justice would benefit and enhance the conversation in philanthropy on rural communities.

Our core assertion is that equity is a central principle that philanthropy should embrace, particularly in rural communities. We not only believe that equity is part of philanthropy's responsibility, but also that it makes our grantmaking more effective. Without equity, philanthropic investments only serve to increase inequality and marginalization. Investments without equity lenses also often fail to achieve their intended purpose because they do not attempt to leverage critical parts of the social fabric. Equity as a core value is particularly salient given the demographic changes in rural communities. Nine out of ten rural areas are more ethnically diverse than they were 20 years ago. As rural America becomes browner, it is more critical than ever that philanthropy contributes to a strong participatory democracy that engages all communities. Therefore, *we designed this inquiry as an attempt to learn from organizers in rural communities who see racial equity as core to their work* of creating deep democracy in rural areas, facilitating a transition to working economies that are ecologically resilient and sustainable, and protecting land, water, air, and soil for generations to come.

# BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY

The group contracted with independent consultant Judy Hatcher to conduct this scan; she is a long-time practitioner and thought-leader in the field of philanthropy and social justice, has on-the-ground experience organizing on issues of concern to rural communities, and is currently the executive director of the Biodiversity Funders Group. The aim of this effort is to inform the Integrated Rural Strategies Group as they lay the foundation for their work, gain understanding of their role, and define their intended impact in the landscape of rural organizing. A secondary aim is to create a platform that helps funders within the Integrated Rural Strategies Group begin to gain literacy in the types of work underway, the approaches, models, and interventions that organizers have developed and brought to bear to combat inequity, deepen democracy, and promote ecological sustainability in rural areas. A third goal is to contribute to a burgeoning discourse in the philanthropic field around cultivating rural organizing. This is largely in the wake of the 2016 elections, in growing awareness of the neglect and disparities in rural areas that led to the embrace of a far-right political agenda. But it is also in recognition of how climate change disproportionately impacts people of color, globally and within the United States. Climate equity makes organizing work at the intersection of land, people, and the environment even more critical at this time.

What is important about this scan is that it is based in the experiences and perspectives of organizers on the ground. More than 20 rural advocates and community-based organizers participated in telephone interviews ranging from 30-60 minutes in duration. The interviewees were recommended by members of the Integrated Rural Strategies Group and by other interviewees. It wasn't possible to cover every state, issue, and demographic, but the participants were from New England, the Mid-South, the Deep South, the Midwest, the Southwest, the Northwest and California, representing a variety of organizing models and approaches. They were asked to think about:

- Places, campaigns or movements that are primed to radically change the philanthropic conversation around race or around the economics, equity, ecology, health, and social fabric of rural communities
- Examples of inspiring or challenging multiracial or people of color-led work in rural communities that is underfunded or underexposed
- The potential value of a proactive network of rural funders who are actively engaged with, and responsive and accountable to field leaders on these issues

The names, affiliations and websites of the interviewees are listed near the end of this document. As much as possible, this summary reflects their thinking about broad movements in rural communities, but does not attempt to capture all the wisdom or every individual resource that was shared. Interviewees agreed to be quoted; many of the unattributed statements are compilations of multiple, related comments.

# SUMMARY

This scan is organized into five areas of discussion; these draw from interviews to name the challenges that organizers and advocates are seeing in their rural communities, along with the strategies they use to work for equity and change. First, an inquiry – “*What is rural, anyway?*” – which explores the characteristics that define rural America, and the economic and social realities that create inequity and ecological harm in rural communities. That rural America includes sovereign Indigenous lands is called out here, beginning a thread that continues throughout the scan. The valuable relationships and social networks that anchor and hold rural communities through hard times and that serve as the groundwork for organizing in these communities are also lifted up here. In the next section, *Race Equity and Intersectionality*, the focus is on racism in rural America, its durable history and recent eruption in wake of the 2016 election. It looks at anti-racist organizing, including multiracial and intersectional movements, with an emphasis on working with white people to help them understand how they may benefit from and contribute to racist systems. “*Homegrown Prosperity: Economies that Sustain People and the Environment*” highlights that many rural communities are built around economic structures, particularly extractive industries, which have transformed or no longer exist, with the result that there is narrower access to economic opportunities for rural residents. It gives a picture of the potential for economies of sustainability, anchored in the land of rural America, particularly “alternative economies” such as those related to food justice, foodways, land and farming cooperatives, and clean energy. Next, *Electoral Power and Civic Engagement* spotlights how small towns and rural communities are stigmatized, neglected, and/or manipulated in political arenas, and the disconnect between representatives and their constituents. Interviewees emphasize the need to support the logistics of mobilizing, and to invest in long-term base-building efforts for political power. “*This Is An Opportunity For Us To Really Organize Our Base Around The Issues That Keep Them Up At Night*” lifts up the potential for shifts embodied in the hopeful and inspiring rural organizing efforts underway. Finally, the scan closes with an active set of recommendations and lessons for philanthropy drawn directly from the voices of the rural organizers interviewed here. They articulate what their movements need to be more successful, from their vantage point, and offer some guidelines as a starting place for funders who are entering rural organizing work.

## WHAT IS “RURAL,” ANYWAY?

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“WE COULD HAVE A FOUR-DAY LEARNING EXCHANGE JUST ON THAT.”

**Paul Graham**, Ohio Organizing Collaborative

**R**ural communities are in every state in the United States. The US Census Bureau defines “rural” as any area that’s not urban, and defines as much as 97% of the country’s total land area as rural. Nearly one in five Americans, or 60 million people, live in rural communities. While some rural areas are isolated, over half of them are near or included in larger metropolitan areas. More than 64% of the total rural population is east of the Mississippi River, and nearly half, or 28 million people, reside in the Southern states. However, the states with the highest percentage of rural residents are in the New England states of Maine and Vermont. Alaska is the state with the most rural land, followed by Texas and California.

Rural communities can include sovereign Indigenous lands (federally or state-recognized reservation and trust lands, Alaska Native Village areas, and Hawaiian Homelands). They also include areas managed by the federal government – more than half of Oregon, for example, is owned by federal agencies, and as much as 85% of all the land in Nevada – and unincorporated areas where no authorities are responsible for basic utilities and services.

## WHAT IS “RURAL,” ANYWAY?

In 2016, the Census Bureau reported that fewer than 10% of rural Americans work in agriculture; most work in manufacturing, social services and other sectors. Census data also shows that while America’s non-metropolitan areas are experiencing an overall loss in population due to outmigration and deaths, they are seeing a rise in ethnic diversity, largely due to growing immigrant communities in rural areas through migration and births.

Yet, even while rural demographics have shifted, giving rise to changing needs, the focus of social services and philanthropic efforts remains with urban neighborhoods and communities. According to Oleta Fitzgerald of the Southern Rural Black Women’s Initiative, half the country’s poor children live in rural areas, but get little attention, compared to children and youth in the cities. Other organizers interviewed note that rural communities were hit very hard by home and land foreclosures at the start of the housing crisis, but were largely ignored by funders and government agencies, as the focus was on urban neighborhoods.

Despite deeply rooted cultural and historic roots (the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition’s Robin Blakeman proudly traces her heritage back eight generations), the country’s small towns and rural areas have been dealing with declining populations for quite some time. Rural communities – a source of food, fuel and people – have suffered terribly in recent decades. Some very small industrial towns have been extremely hard-hit by the economy. Often they were dominated by one industry or even one corporation; once the jobs left, many of the people left, too.

“I COME FROM A SMALL COMMUNITY [BIG SPRING, TEXAS], WITH ONLY ONE HIGH SCHOOL. SOME PEOPLE WORK IN THE CITIES, AND SOME ARE ALSO FARMERS. THEY CAN’T EASILY CHANGE JOBS, SO THEY REALLY VALUE WHATEVER JOBS THEY HAVE. KIDS THAT GO OFF TO COLLEGE CAN’T FIND JOBS AT HOME, SO THEY DON’T COME BACK. IF THERE ARE GOOD JOBS AVAILABLE, THEY GO TO THE WHITE PEOPLE.”

**Juan Parras**, Texas Environmental Justice Advisory Service (t.e.j.a.s)

“One of the biggest overarching issues is health, between the lack of access to affordable health care, insurance costs, health related debt and economic insecurity, and all the major struggles with drugs and mental health, including the overincarceration of people who would be better served by more robust public health systems,” said Vermont’s James Haslam. In some rural areas, there is growing anger around the privatization of Medicaid and the role of insurance and pharmaceutical companies in inflating the cost of health care.

Rural areas are losing their social service infrastructure, with philanthropies trying to prop up the failing public sector. In some communities, says Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement’s Hugh Espey, “there’s just one hospital trying to stay afloat, and it might be one of the biggest employers in a 30-mile radius.” Beverly Harry, a Native organizer with Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, reported seeing lines of people waiting for food, and people who “have to commute to towns to get basic needs met.” Some of those interviewed called for a sustained, multi-issue push on the state level, including lobbying and ballot initiatives, for critical public funding for needs that volunteering and local philanthropy don’t have the scale to address. “Without government funding to reach all the people you need, you’re just whistling Dixie.”

## WHAT IS “RURAL,” ANYWAY?

Nearly all those interviewed cited the “extractive industries” – fossil fuels mining and production, and industrial agriculture – as a fundamental driver of social, economic and environmental problems in rural areas. The land is often owned by corporations, by wealthy families who live far away, or by the federal government. “Eighty-ninety percent out-of-state land ownership makes it hard to find people who have influence who will challenge industry,” explained Robin Blakeman in West Virginia.

Social problems are “hyper-individualized,” the interviewees said, and not seen as systemic. Rural communities are sometimes offended by urban bias, and prejudice against rural folks, the notion that “cities are where the smart people go,” said Burt Lauderdale, Kentuckians For The Commonwealth. So attacks on urban elites have a lot of resonance. Yet Nick Olsen of Minnesota’s Land Stewardship Project believes that the urban-rural divide is overstated: “Most of the rhetoric comes from outside the community. When you get down to basics about needs and vision, the so-called ‘divide’ disappears.”

One challenge interviewees cite is “real and atrocious” government corruption and abuse of power – nepotism, winner-take-all attitudes, and incompetence. Several organizers, and the leaders they work with, have been harassed by police. Immigrants are treated shamefully in jails that are working in coordination with ICE. Interviewees shared stories of judges and local city councils openly flouting the rule of law.

## “RURAL AREAS FEEL ABANDONED, BY AND LARGE. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STANDPOINT IS OFTEN DESPAIR.”

**James Haslam**, Rights & Democracy Vermont

Even so, nearly all the organizers interviewed were inspired by the treasure trove of individual talent and creativity in struggling rural regions. They also reiterated their appreciation of long-standing social services, educational institutions, advocacy groups and other community resources. Groups in the South that have been organizing since the Civil Rights movement are still there. Churches are, by far, the oldest and most consistent and trusted institutions in many rural areas: “We’re still holding our meetings in church basements.”

Veronica Coptis and the Center for Coalfield Justice published a Coalfield Listening Project as way to understand what’s on the minds of rural residents of southwestern Pennsylvania. When asked what they value most about their community, responses included, “I just like how close everybody is. If you need something, you just go to your neighbors and you just know they’re gonna help you out with what you need. It’s nice to know that people are there for you.”

## RACE, EQUITY, AND INTERSECTIONALITY

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“IT’S SHOCKING HOW MUCH EVIDENCE WE HAVE TO PUT TOGETHER TO CONVINCING EVEN THE MOST PROGRESSIVE WHITE PEOPLE HOW BADLY RACISM STILL LANDS ON PEOPLE.”

**Bill Kopsky**, Arkansas Public Policy Panel

The interviewees confirmed the stories of whites taunting black and brown people after the 2016 election, and reported more visible Klan activity in some areas. The fear of physical retribution is very real, but isn’t a new development in many rural communities. Some believe that ignoring or writing off racism for decades fueled the growth of the Tea Party and other political groups with overt or covert white supremacist themes. In spite of being in rural communities for many generations, the presence of people of color continues to be ignored in many rural areas; worse, they serve as the scapegoats for a myriad of social problems.

In some rural communities, people of color are routinely humiliated whenever they interact with civil society. The Arkansas Policy Panel is working to document the subtle racism of those in power. Black rural community leaders in their state were told they couldn’t have public information about local school improvement plans. When white representatives from the group asked, they were given the information without comment. City and county clerks and state workers wouldn’t give black community leaders information about contacting city officials – again, white folks got the information right away.

“EQUITY AND INCLUSION SHOULD BE THE BASIS OF THE WORK WE DO. HAVING MORE PEOPLE OF COLOR LEADING IN THEIR COMMUNITIES WOULD MAKE THE WORK MORE POWERFUL. PEOPLE LIVING IN THEIR COMMUNITIES ARE THE EXPERTS OF THEIR OWN LIVES.”

**Nicole Donaghy**, Dakota Resource Council

While some of those interviewed appreciated funder-led efforts to support diversity and healing, others were more energized by their own work to incorporate anti-racism on the ground. They said several times that people have to have concrete things to work on if they're going to name and address racism. “The intersection of racial and economic justice is part of everything we do. People are feeling that we have to be in multiracial formations to be really powerful,” said Jess Campbell of Oregon. There's keen interest across the country in Rev. Barber's Poor People's Campaign and other attempts to build strong and lasting multiracial, multi-issue poor people's alliances.

Most of those interviewed are talking to communities in primarily white states about the role that racism plays in society. They are hosting spaces for rural parents, for instance, to share the fears they have for their families, and what can be done about them, and connecting with the values and relationships of churches and faith communities. People are getting their information through increasingly polarized national sources. “They don't have enough personal experience to know that what they've seen on Fox News or Facebook isn't true. Expanded, intentional spaces work,” asserted Rhonda Perry, from Missouri.

“WE HAVE TO USE CLASSIC ELBOW GREASE AND ORGANIZING TO CONVINCe PEOPLE THAT THERE’S MORE TO THEIR PROBLEMS THAN SCAPEGOATING OTHER PEOPLE.”

**John Smilie**, Western Organization of Resource Councils

Ohio’s Paul Graham, who was profoundly influenced by reading Michelle Alexander’s groundbreaking book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, sees criminal justice reform – including the war on drugs, and felony disenfranchisement – as an opportunity for multiracial organizing. According to a 2017 report by the Vera Institute, smaller, rural populations are driving the growth nationally of the population of local jails. Although it’s often ascribed to the opioid epidemic, the Prison Policy Initiative points to rising numbers of people detained for pretrial purposes as one explanation. Activists in Ohio got Clergy got involved a few years ago, and some Catholic parishes have adopted re-entry ministries.

Nick Olsen, of the Land Stewardship Project, found that talking to white people about the history of whiteness, how white people got access to land, and about historical events like the Homestead Act of 1862, was a powerful eye-opener for rural whites. He also believes in the potential of networking across differences. “I’ve seen where being in multiracial groups with others from around the state is transforming some of our rural white members, who say that they’ve had few opportunities to engage with people of color around common values.” The Land Stewardship Project’s long-term commitment to incorporating anti-racism in its work was praised by many of the interviewees as a model to emulate.

## “HOMEGROWN PROSPERITY”: ECONOMIES THAT SUSTAIN PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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“WE HAVE TO LIFT UP WHAT WE NEED, NOT JUST WHAT WE  
THINK WE CAN WIN.”

**Hugh Espey**, Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement

The interviewees were very animated about economic and employment issues: “We have to change the narrative around work.” As rural economies decline, communities have lost their identification and pride in being producers and workers. The union workers in mining areas, for instance, are likely to be brought in temporarily from other states, with no real affiliation to the area they work in beyond the industry that employs them. Traditional labor unions, losing members, power, and relevance, are open to paying more attention to climate, racism, and gender. People aren’t as scared as they used to be about their jobs moving to Mexico. But it still takes many years to build relationships with traditional unions, and they aren’t a primary concern for many of those who were interviewed. Some of the leaders interviewed are working more with nontraditional labor organizations, such as National Nurses United, and are campaigning for Fight for \$15, the push to raise the poverty-level wages of fast-food workers, retail employees, home health care aides, and many others.

The living wage, not just minimum wage, has more resonance than ever, especially in rural communities where there’s only a handful of jobs, and those are more and more likely to come without benefits or job security. Rural residents don’t have many avenues for self-employment or flexible jobs; investments in modest income-generating projects for welfare recipients, caregivers, and people who live far from away from job centers could go a long way toward lifting struggling families out of poverty.

“THE CONVERSATION IS OFTEN ABOUT WHITE RURAL AMERICA OR FARMWORKERS. BUT THOSE GROUPS HAVE MORE IN COMMON THAN WITH WEALTHY GROWERS AND RANCHERS OR OIL EXECUTIVES.”

**Caroline Ferrell**, Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment

Promoting family farms over factory farms, and building on the growing interest in healthy food, agroecology, and small-scale farming, is an opportunity some of those interviewed were very enthusiastic about. “A lot of Native people are grappling with the food system, and how to collaborate with others on their own terms,” said Joy Persall, formerly of Dreams of Wild Health. Angela Adrar of Climate Justice Alliance and Dara Cooper of the National Black Food and Justice Alliance called out the importance of protecting Black land and spaces. “Young farmers need to be matched with elders, to learn about the business and be creative about how resources can be shared,” Dara said.

Dara and others noted the desire they’ve seen to link food and racial justice to economic and ecological sustainability. Soul Fire Farm, in Petersburg, New York, is a Black-led institution that is committed to “making real food available to everyone.” Using a cooperative economics model, the farm grows and delivers organic food to families in nearby Albany and Troy; trains and mentors over 100 farmers, mostly of color, each year; conducts programs for youth; participates in national movements, and more – all within the framework of food sovereignty, land equity, anti-racism, and sustainable farming.

## “PEOPLE NEED THEIR BASIC HUMAN NEEDS MET, AND ASSET MODELS TO BUILD A WHOLE NEW ECONOMY AFTER THE EXTRACTIVE PRACTICES THAT EVISCERATED OUR COMMUNITIES”

**Oleta Fitzgerald**, Southern Rural Black Women’s Initiative

There’s lots of interest in developing the capacity to explore alternative economic models, worker-led cooperative economics, just transition plans, rural cooperative energy projects, and “an economy that works for everyone.” Crucial discussions about rural broadband are dominated by corporate interests. Investing in rural energy was cited several times – “rural communities have been off the grid, anyway” – as a solution to the levels of destruction caused by extractive industries. The protracted fights to stop fracking, mining, and new pipelines and storage facilities have brought a collection of strange bedfellows together, often across rural communities in multiple states. Careful relationship-building can solidify some of these “not-in-my-backyard” campaigns into more long-lasting partnerships centered on equity and community sustainability. The organizers want to build alliances between ranchers and workers, for example, around extractive industry clean-up and transition. National church bodies that are divesting from extractive industries could be encouraged to do more at the local level with their rural members.

Interviewees have found a great deal of interest in solar co-ops, and in low-interest financing for individuals and small institutions to switch to affordable, cleaner energy sources. However, the major national environmental organizations promoting energy alternatives were roundly criticized for how they show up in rural communities. “A lot of national organizations that have worked on energy and climate have contributed to a public narrative that has alienated and ‘othered’ coalfield communities,” maintained Burt Lauderdale, of Kentuckians For The Commonwealth. “It was very heavy-handed and awkward. They made it easy for coal companies that were positioning themselves as for the community’s best interests.” Instead of developing messages along with local organizations, they came into desperate communities with a blanket “keep it in the ground” message for a national audience, undercutting years of dialogue and trust-building.

## ELECTORAL POWER AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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“PEOPLE WEREN’T LISTENING TO RURAL PEOPLE, AND OUTSIDERS SAID, ‘WE DIDN’T MESSAGE WELL ENOUGH FOR RURAL PEOPLE.’ CORPORATE POWER, WATER, AND THE ENVIRONMENT ARE NONPARTISAN ISSUES, BUT PEOPLE ON THE COASTS JUST WEREN’T LISTENING TO US.”

**Rhonda Perry**, Missouri Rural Crisis Center

The organizers had a lot to share with funders about politics and policy. Several of them felt that rural voices are missing in state policy debates, which allows legislators to claim to represent their constituents without any real accountability. Right-wing funders are reaping the results of decades of investment in developing statewide networks. But on the progressive left, there is room to learn about how to shift state policy by leveraging rural communities; it’s not just turning out people in big cities, they said. To participate in lobby days, rural residents need training, and help with travel expenses. They often live several hours’ drive from the capital or, in the case of Alaska and Hawai‘i, may require airfare for small planes. A small grant from the Hill-Snowdon Foundation helped the Southern Rural Black Women’s Initiative bring over 100 women in each of three states – Mississippi, Georgia and Alabama – to their state capitals, and connected them to policy groups, and participated in the largest ever mobilization around education in Mississippi.

## ELECTORAL POWER AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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The interviewees, concerned that there is too much focus on electoral outcomes at the expense of the long-term base building that leads to better electoral outcomes over time, expressed exasperation with those who see everything through the lens of the 2016 presidential election. “How do we get everyone to organize around power and not around the next election?” asked Paul Graham of the Ohio Organizing Collaborative. “If we’re asking how to get a state to vote differently, we’re asking the wrong question. If we’re going to invest a lot of money in politics to get someone elected, how can we spend the same amount and get lasting, accountable leadership?” Rural people need to feel like they are being heard and engaged on the issues, not just the subjects of listening tours of outsiders, or the workforce for larger groups parachuting in.

Despite the apathy some have found – “Some people didn’t want anything to do with voting, they didn’t feel their vote counted” – most were enthusiastic about the potential of civic engagement as a way to build power in rural communities. Missouri’s Rhonda Perry recalled that Jesse Jackson’s presidential campaigns in the 1980s won strong support in Midwestern rural caucuses at the same time that militant far-right groups such as the Posse Comitatus were gaining in rural areas. Last year, rural Americans came out in surprising numbers for the Women’s March, the Science March, the People’s Climate March, and Black Lives Matter rallies. Self-organized chapters of Indivisible are springing up everywhere. “Our state has a smaller population than a major city,” said another organizer, “But it also means that we can do things statewide that others can’t. We have greater potential to turn things around.” By identifying viable candidates, including people of color, for local seats, starting with school boards and city councils, most of those interviewed felt that, with time, it would be possible to return progressive voices to the state legislatures and governors’ mansions.

The media-driven “red state/blue state” orientation doesn’t address the reality or complexity of politics on the ground. Dealing with tribal leadership is very different, as Native tribes are sovereign nations, with their own rights and processes. Rural areas in predominantly Democratic states are “sacrifice zones,” ignored by policymakers from urban areas. “It’s not our fault that you people keep voting against your best interests,” progressive politicians who refuse to engage in “red” parts of the Oregon told Jess Campbell of the Rural Organizing Project. Developing power independent of any one political party was a consistent theme. Another was frustration with national get-out-the-vote groups that use people of color groups as their “field” during the election cycles and disappear until time to gear up for the next election.

**“This is an opportunity for us to really organize our base around the issues that keep them up at night.”**

**“IN MONTANA, AT A WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP GATHERING, I SAW THAT THERE’S PEOPLE ALL OVER WHO ARE READY TO ORGANIZE, READY TO ROCK AND TALK LONG-TERM STRATEGY...ONCE PEOPLE BREAK OUT OF THEIR ISOLATION, THEY DON’T WANT TO GO BACK.”**

**Jess Campbell**, Rural Organizing Project

Although participants spoke at length about challenges and needs, they were able to identify progress worth celebrating. For instance, Oleta Fitzgerald of the Southern Black Women’s Rural Initiative is proud that they successfully organized human rights commissions in over a dozen counties. Their efforts contributed to more community leaders standing for election, and winning positions as school board and city council members, and mayors.

“In my little county, which is totally red, we just came together to get our county commission to enact regulations to protect their water. To view rural America with a lens that doesn’t see these as victories is a problem,” said Rhonda Perry of the Missouri Rural Crisis Center. Rural organizing by several groups led to the Navajo Nation’s commitment to shift to 100% renewable energy. The Black Mesa Water Coalition, a Native-led group in northern Arizona, has launched several groundbreaking renewable energy, food sovereignty, and alternative economic projects.

Fort Berthold Protectors of Water and Earth Rights (POWER), based in North Dakota’s Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara nations, was lifted up by other organizers as an example of Native and non-Native people, along with Western Native Voice, for their inspiring fights against extractive energy. The methane that is a byproduct of flaring oil and gas is a serious health problem. The community won a key victory by organizing the tribal councils to write to Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, securing her commitment not to overturn a Bureau of Land Management regulation on methane.

## ELECTORAL POWER AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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Our Minnesota Future is made up of over 20 organizations focused on health, farming, LGBTQI rights, immigration, social justice, and other issues; many of the participating groups are multiracial or led by people of color. “It’s very powerful to be with others around the state,” said Nick Olsen of the Land Stewardship Project. “I’ve seen it transforming some of our rural white members who say that they have had few opportunities to engage with people of color around common values and moving work forward.” The Land Stewardship Project is developing leaders in rural communities who can look at issues through a racial justice lens. Young farmers in Minnesota were motivated by high-profile racial incidents to express their solidarity, but they didn’t want to always drive to the Twin Cities to take action. Our Minnesota Future gives them more avenues to be active in these struggles.

In California’s Kern County, there was a push to declare it a “non-sanctuary county,” in defiance of the state’s commitment to limit how much local agencies would help federal immigration authorities. The county sheriff was using rhetoric like “illegal aliens.” Organizers noticed that most of the county’s discretionary funds were going to the sheriff’s office. A coalition formed to stop the “non-sanctuary” initiative and drive a dialogue about priorities, public accountability, and civic engagement. In an unincorporated area of Bakersfield, Latina women who wanted to practice Zumba in a public park started the Greenfield Walking Group, which began by making the park useable, before going on to organize for better air quality. They supported youth leadership and got the larger community involved in fun, celebratory activities. Even though many of the members are undocumented, they fiercely challenged the county sheriff and work actively with the city’s power structure.

The STAY Project: Stay Together Appalachian Youth, which was founded by youth from West Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky, and incubated by Appalshop, the Highlander Center, and Highrocks Educational Center, was cited as an example of young people who are building regional power with an intersectional approach. The renowned Highlander Center, in New Market, Tennessee, has a long history of hosting popular youth programs, including the Seeds of Fire program and a Children’s Justice summer camp, to develop the next generation of grassroots leaders and nurture their ability to work across differences and issue areas.

# CONCLUSION

# WHAT WOULD HELP RURAL ORGANIZERS BE MORE SUCCESSFUL?

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In conclusion, interviewees identified some specific areas of need. When asked what resources or tools might help take their efforts, particularly with a focus on intersectionality and racial equity, to another level, responses clustered around a handful of dominant themes:

1

## INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPACITY

**More organizers!** – “There should be at least two of me in every county. Almost all of our groups are stretching our staffs incredibly thin. Things like voter registration are very important, but we have limited capacity to go door-to-door.” Especially, there is a need for *multilingual organizers*, rooted in immigrant communities, and internal capacity to serve non-English speakers equally as well as English speakers.

**Logistical Support for Mobilizing Rural Residents** – Help rural residents participate in larger networks, attend trainings, and come to the state capital by providing support for logistics. People have to drive for hours and hours to come to the state capital; resources are needed to bring hundreds or thousands to the capital when needed. Also, there is a need for leadership training on how to go back and have follow-up conversations with their neighbors back home.

**Strengthening of Organizational Systems** – Some organizers indicate a need for more support of core organizational systems such as human resources and other critical back-office functions, and/or shared infrastructure to pool administrative costs with similar organizations.

2

## COMMUNICATIONS

**Support for Communications** – Organizers need to build their technical expertise around social and traditional media, and are looking for support for communications strategies. As they take on shifting the public narrative, there is a need for resources to pay for TV and radio ads to counter industry propaganda and partisan news sources.

**Online Organizing Support** – “Our people are really spread out, we need more ways to connect across long distances.” Movement building organizations focused in rural community building need technical support and training on digital organizing.

### 3

## STRATEGIZING FOR IMPACT

**Support for Coalition** – building and Information-sharing – Interviews suggest a need for support to build networks to connect across the country, and the support to be in spaces with their peers, to strategize in cooperation, not in competition. Organizers would like to be part of a national organizing network of multi-issue rural organizations, to dive in deeply and brainstorm approaches and to share information about the Klan, militias, etc., to share information in real time, share strategies, and get organizing advice and support. “We would like to be part of a cohort of others from small states.” There is the sense that existing groups and networks aren’t providing this.

**Support for Political Work** – Organizers want support and training around political engagement and campaign work at the local and state levels. They want to engage with more impact by getting training for local political candidates, developing “our own think tanks, not Beltway experts,” creating more and different advocacy organizations such as 501(c)(4)s and political action committees (PACs). They would like to increase their ability to shape local resource distribution, by working with small-town officials around budgets and management.

### 4

## ANTI-RACIST ORGANIZING

**Support for Anti-Racist Organizing and Trainings** – Organizers would like to obtain and provide access to more training on institutional and systemic racism. They want to increase ways to talk about capitalism that doesn’t fall into the trap of ideology or political parties, perhaps based in storytelling, and grounded in personal experiences.

## AND WHAT IS THE ROLE OF FUNDERS IN RURAL ORGANIZING?

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For funders who recognize the importance of investing in rural communities, organizers interviewed give some clear direction, in their own words, for how philanthropy can enter the space of rural organizing and put their resources to constructive use:

First, organizers urge funders to **truly partner with grantees**, to be careful around the funder-grantee power dynamic, and to support grantee leadership rather than enlisting grantees in support of funder-driven agendas and models:

*“Years ago, funders came to the table as partners in the work. Funders can survey the landscape and see the elephant of where the movement’s going. But the tricky part is when the funders then decide on what you should do about the elephant. Too many funders come to us with their own agendas: ‘This is how we see the work happening, how do you want to plug in?’ We’ve seen this before, and participated in many discussions with funders, but it never moves to action, or it’s unclear what the timeline is. What is the end product?”*

*“Funders need to be rooted in **our** theories of change. Because big funders have turned to corporate types of boards and staff, they focus on corporate models, and return on investment. Sometimes ROI is just keeping something worse from happening. Funding in rural areas is a long-term proposition.”*

This applies also to funder-driven collaboratives:

*“There’s value in convenings and so forth. But groups need real reasons to continue to work together, on topics and with folks they’ve identified, not because they happen to have the same funder. It’s a struggle maintaining authenticity in funder-initiated spaces.”*

*“Funders should ask us for candid feedback about the national and regional coalitions and networks they are funding. Many of them aren’t worth the capacity it would take to participate fully.”*

Second, interviews suggest funders should **come with a learning stance**. It is important to understand and appreciate the existing mechanics and structures of rural organizing on the ground, how they are different than organizing in urban areas – be they faith-based institutions or other community institutions and social networks. There is an opportunity to learn who the players are in a given rural terrain. Similarly, there is learning to be done about the breadth of need, the texture of the work, and the strategies brought to bear due to the economic inequity, isolation, and lack of infrastructure in rural communities. Funders might consider their initial round of grants in rural communities to be opportunities to learn the lay of the land, so to speak, as funders gain the benefit of grantees’ deep knowledge and experience through grantmaking.

*“I really appreciate the funders who appreciate organizing and building relationships. Those funders allow the groups to come up with the right approaches. The funders who focus on metrics and are less helpful. See the folks in the field as the experts. Come in with beginners’ minds.”*

*“Many long-standing organizations in rural areas are struggling to stay afloat. We need to strengthen the anchor groups for smaller groups in these areas. And it’s important to fund small groups, too.”*

*“They already know this, but general support grants, and program grants that operate like general support grants, are the most helpful. Groups are helping their folks deal with immediate crises while they are trying to change policies. It would be good if funders would see that and fund both. People are coming in needing food, disaster assistance, help with Medicare forms. We can’t ignore the daily problems because funders want great new projects. Without general support funding, resources are so tightly constrained that funders miss opportunities to support what’s emerging on the ground. Sometimes you have to be a contortionist to fit their restrictions and still do meaningful work.”*

Third, organizers know that building enduring infrastructure for organizing requires sustained resources and relationship building. For funders, then, it follows that it makes sense to **fund deeply and over the long term**, to thoughtfully enter into long-term partnership with grantees, and invest in building networks and institutions.

*“I hope that philanthropy gets strategic about long-term infrastructure. The Right has been heavily funding grassroots organizing for decades. I don’t think that funders get the process and the effort it takes to build up infrastructure, especially within the historical, political context that people of color-led groups are in.”*

Organizers would like to see funders **imbue grantmaking with political and geographic strategy, and embed a racial equity frame** into their work.

*“Right after the election there was this sense of either-or: either urban communities of color or rural areas. Too many funders are prioritizing white communities, without an analysis of race and power. Can’t funders support both in ways that make sense to those of us doing the work?”*

*“Rather than looking for the most isolated communities to invest in, think strategically about where they are in conjunction with urban areas, or with other rural areas of the state. If members of big the national groups would be linked to local organizations, we could turn out people in volumes anywhere.”*

Finally, organizers urge funders to **prioritize grantmaking in Native communities**, and to partner thoughtfully and with respect.

*“Funders and coalitions are doing a disservice to Native and rural areas when they don’t direct their money beyond the city limits. Funders and regranters can start out small, but they have to start somewhere, and prioritize Native communities. Funders should require anyone claiming to work in Native communities but not from those communities to have cultural sensitivity training. Funders need to be open to how Native folks build power--it isn’t at all like Alinsky-style campaign organizing. Native folks don’t love being studied! Be aware of how information is being taken out of the community, and how it comes back. Share the information.”*

In closing, this scan of rural organizing leaves the Integrated Rural Strategies Group with a better understanding of a diversity of rural experience, along with a singular picture of the economic inequity that is central to rural America. It also helps us to grasp the ingenuity and range of strategies that have been brought to bear by and with rural communities, the ways and means of fighting for change by building community with others. The voices of the organizers interviewed, sharing with us the stories of their work in African American, Native, Latino, Asian and white communities, along with the very demographics of rural communities, affirm our belief about the centrality of intersectional struggles for equity in this arena. Even while it suggests additional areas of inquiry, this effort begins to offer some initial guidelines for how the Integrated Rural Strategies Group, and other funders, can help to build the inspirational organizing work taking place in America's rural communities today.

The Integrated Rural Strategies Group thanks the following people and organizations for their contributions to this scan:

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**Beverly Harry**, Community Organizer, Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada  
**Bill Kopsky**, Executive Director, Arkansas Public Policy Panel  
**Burt Lauderdale**, Executive Director, Kentuckians For The Commonwealth  
**Caroline Ferrell**, Executive Director, Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment  
**Dara Cooper**, National Organizer, National Black Food & Justice Alliance  
**Emily Zucchini**, Community Network Manager, Dogwood Alliance  
**Hugh Espey**, Executive Director, Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement  
**James Haslam**, Executive Director, Rights and Democracy VT  
**Jeannie Economos**, Project Coordinator, Farmworker Association of Florida  
**Jess Campbell**, Co-Director, Rural Organizing Project  
**John Smilie**, Executive Director, Western Organization of Resource Councils  
**Joy Persall**, former Executive Co-Director, Dream of Wild Health  
**Juan Parras**, Executive Director, Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services (t.e.j.a.s.)  
**Nicole Donaghy**, Field Organizer, Dakota Resource Council  
**Nick Olsen**, Farm Beginnings Program Organizer, Land Stewardship Project  
**Oleta Garrett Fitzgerald**, Regional Administrator, Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative for Economic and Social Justice  
**Paul Graham**, Organizing Director, Ohio Organizing Collaborative  
**Rhonda Perry**, Program Director, Missouri Rural Crisis Center  
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**Veronica Coptis**, Center for Coalfield Justice

The Integrated Rural Strategies Group is a newly formed working group on rural communities convened within Neighborhood Funders Group. The Integrated Rural Strategies Group is:

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The following organizations were among those cited in interviews as allies, resources, or especially effective and inspiring groups:

**Alliance for Appalachia**, in London, KY, “is a regional coalition of grassroots, non-profit organizations with the goals of ending mountaintop removal, putting a halt to destructive coal technologies, and creating a sustainable, just Appalachia.”

**American Friends Service Committee**, a national organization based in Philadelphia, PA, is a “Quaker organization that promotes lasting peace with justice, as a practical expression of faith in action.”

**Animal Agriculture Reform Collaborative** is “bringing together sustainable farmer, environmental, public health, social and economic justice, and animal welfare organizations to bring about systemic change required to establish a sustainable and just animal agriculture system. Together we are building a network of national, regional, and state-based non-profit advocacy organizations to build and align movements and issue advocacy communities.”

**Anti-Oppression Resource & Training (AORTA) Cooperative** is “a worker-owned cooperative devoted to strengthening movements for social justice and a solidarity economy. We work as consultants and facilitators to expand the capacity of cooperative, collective, and community-based projects through education, training, and planning. We base our work on an intersectional approach to liberation because we believe that true change requires uprooting all systems of oppression.”

**Appalshop** is based in Whitesburg, KY. “Since 1969, Appalshop has been enacting cultural organizing and place-based media, arts and education to document the life, celebrate the culture, and voice the concerns of people living in Appalachia and rural America.”

**Arise Citizens’ Policy Project**, in Montgomery, AL, “a statewide nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of 150 congregations and community groups and hundreds of individuals united in their belief that low-income people are suffering because of state policy decisions.”

**Black Mesa Water Coalition**, in Flagstaff, AZ, was formed in 2001 by a group of young inter-tribal, inter-ethnic people dedicated to addressing issues of water depletion, natural resource exploitation, and public health within Navajo and Hopi communities. “Today, we are a leader in energy justice issues in the Southwest and around the country.”

**Black Oaks Center for Sustainable Renewable Living**, in Pembroke Township, IL, says, “our vision is to create safe, healing spaces founded on the principles of environmental stewardship and social equality. A place where community can learn skills required to master sustainability to lead a successful transition to a post carbon world. From this, our communities, families, and children will be resilient.”

**Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity (BOLD)** is “a national Leadership Training Program designed to help rebuild Black (African-American, Caribbean, African, Afro-Latino) social justice infrastructure in order to organize Black communities more effectively and re-center Black leadership in the U.S. social justice movement.”

**California Environmental Justice Alliance** is a “community-led alliance that works to achieve environmental justice by advancing policy solutions. We unite the powerful local organizing of our members in the communities most impacted by environmental hazards—low-income communities and communities of color – to create comprehensive opportunities for change at a statewide level.”

**Center for Community Change** is a Washington, DC-based institution that “builds the power and capacity of low-income people, especially low-income people of color, to change their communities and public policies for the better.”

**Center for Popular Democracy** is a national organization which “works to create equity, opportunity and a dynamic democracy in partnership with high-impact base-building organizations, organizing alliances, and progressive unions. CPD strengthens our collective capacity to envision and win an innovative pro-worker, pro-immigrant, racial and economic justice agenda.”

**Center for Social Inclusion**, based in New York, NY, “catalyzes community, government, and other institutions to dismantle structural racial inequity and create equitable outcomes for all. We craft and apply strategies and tools to transform our nation’s policies, practices, and institutions, in order to achieve racial equity.”

**Center for Sustainable Communities Atlanta** works at the intersection of climate mitigation and racial equity: “We help to transform vulnerable communities to thriving through proven planning and sustainable techniques and policy and advocacy, building collaboratives that increased mobility, livability, food systems, promote health and wellness, restoration and conservation, and climate mitigation.”

**Center for Third World Organizing** is a racial justice organization “established in 1980 as a training and resource center that promotes and sustains direct action organizing in communities of color in the United States.”

**Children’s Defense Fund** is a national advocacy organization that “champions policies and programs that lift children out of poverty; protects them from abuse and neglect; and ensures their access to health care, quality education and a moral and spiritual foundation.”

**Coming Clean**, based in Brattleboro, VT, is a national “collaborative of environmental health and justice experts working to reform the chemical and energy industries so they are no longer a source of harm.”

**Community to Community**, based in Bellingham, WA, “develops projects that come from and are led by the folks from communities that need to affect change for improving the lives of their families and future generations....Our program work is structured in three major program areas: Participatory Democracy, Food Justice and Movement Building.”

**Cooperation Jackson**, in Jackson, MS, “is seeking to accomplish a major breakthrough for the Cooperative Movement in the South by becoming the first major network of predominantly worker cooperatives to be established in an urban area.”

**Dogwood Alliance** works “with diverse communities, partner organizations and decision-makers to protect Southern forests across 14 states. We do this through community and grassroots organizing, holding corporations and governments accountable and working to conserve millions of acres of Southern forests.”

**Earthseed Land Collective** in Durham County, NC aims to “increase the self-determination of ourselves, our communities and generations to come, by providing access to land and structures that enable us to build wealth, foster environmental sustainability and actualize community wellness... Earthseed is a center for community resilience through cooperative ownership of land and resources.”

**Environmental Justice and Climate Program**, NAACP “works at addressing the many practices that are harming communities nationwide and worldwide and the policies needed to rectify these impacts and advance a society that fosters sustainable, cooperative, regenerative communities that uphold all rights for all people in harmony with the earth.”

**Families Unidas Por la Justicia**, in Burlington, WA, is an “independent farmworker union of indigenous families located in Burlington, WA representing over 500 Triqui, Mixteco, and Spanish-speaking workers at Sakuma Bros. Berry Farm. FUJ is the third independent farmworker union formed in WA in 30 years and the first union led by indigenous workers.”

**Federation of Southern Cooperatives**, based in Epps, AL, “strives toward the development of self-supporting communities with programs that increase income and enhance other opportunities; and we strive to assist in land retention and development, especially for African Americans, but essentially for all family farmers.”

**Food Chain Workers Alliance** “is a coalition of worker-based organizations whose members plant, harvest, process, pack, transport, prepare, serve, and sell food, organizing to improve wages and working conditions for all workers along the food chain.”

**Fort Berthold Protectors of Water & Earth Rights (POWER)**, based in Native communities around New Town, ND, “organizes concerned community members to protect land, air, and water; safeguard the rights of landowners; and uphold the integrity of Fort Berthold.”

**Franklinton Center at Bricks**, in Whitakers, NC, “is a former slave plantation that was transformed into one of the first accredited schools for African Americans in the South. Today, it is a conference, retreat, and educational facility focusing on justice advocacy and leadership development.”

**Front and Centered** (formerly Communities of Color for Climate Justice), in Washington State, is “a statewide coalition of organizations and groups rooted in communities of color and people with lower incomes; we’re on the frontlines of economic and environmental change. As thought leaders and organizers we build our agenda and strength with our grassroots community.”

**Greenfield Walking Group**, in Bakersfield, CA, is “a group of volunteers that works to make communities healthier and safer, united with Neighborhood Watch and other organizations.”

**HEAL Food Alliance** is a national multi-sector, multi-racial coalition that aims to “build our collective power to create food and farm systems that are healthy for our families, accessible and affordable for all communities, and fair to the hard-working people who grow, distribute, prepare, and serve our food — while protecting the air, water, and land we all depend on.”

**Highlander Research and Education Center**, in New Market, TN, is a “catalyst for grassroots organizing and movement building in Appalachia and the South. We work with people fighting for justice, equality and sustainability, supporting their efforts to take collective action to shape their own destiny.”

**Hmong American Farmers Association**, in Dakota County, MN, is “dedicated to advancing the prosperity of Hmong farmers through cooperative endeavours, capacity building and advocacy. HAFA was started by and is led by family farmers.”

**Land Loss Prevention Project** “provides legal support and assistance to all financially distressed and limited resource farmers and landowners in North Carolina. LLPP’s advocacy for financially distressed and limited resource farmers involves action in three separate arenas: litigation, public policy, and promoting sustainable agriculture and environment.”

**La Via Campesina** “is an international movement bringing together millions of peasants, small and medium size farmers, landless people, rural women and youth, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from around the world. Built on a strong sense of unity, solidarity between these groups, it defends peasant agriculture for food sovereignty as a way to promote social justice and dignity and strongly opposes corporate driven agriculture that destroys social relations and nature.”

**Maine Peoples Alliance** “brings individuals and organizations together to realize shared goals.

We focus on leadership development to increase the number of citizen leaders prepared to work for positive social change. We are known for our ability to do grassroots organizing and education that reaches more than 100,000 Mainers each year with direct personal contact and quality leadership development work that has yielded dozens of leaders and staff for MPA and other organizations.”

**Migrant Justice**, in Burlington, VT, “builds the voice, capacity, and power of the farmworker community and engage community partners to organize for economic justice and human rights. We gather the farmworker community to discuss and analyze shared problems and to envision collective solutions. Through this ongoing investment in leadership development, members deepen their skills in community education and organizing for long-term systemic change.”

**Milk Not Jails** in Brooklyn, NY is a “volunteer-run, grassroots campaign working to build a new urban-rural alliance in New York State. We are urban and rural residents, prison justice activists, farmers, artists, formerly incarcerated people, local food enthusiasts, and prison families who believe that one important way to fix a dysfunctional prison system that plagues both rural and urban people and spaces is to build grassroots alliances amongst urban and rural communities.”

**Mississippi Association of Cooperatives**, based in Jackson, MS, “serves farmers, their families and communities in increasing their livelihood security and improving quality of life. Building from a tradition steeped in the Civil Rights Movement, MAC provides technical assistance and advocates for the needs of its members in the areas of cooperative development and networking, sustainable production, marketing and community food security.”

**Missouri Organizing and Voter Engagement Project**, in Kansas City, MO, “empowers ordinary people to reclaim democracy in the state of Missouri. MOVE’s role is behind-the-scenes, supporting existing grassroots movement organizations in developing and executing strategic integrated voter engagement plans.”

**Montana Women Vote**, in Missoula, MT, “is a coalition of non-profit women’s organizations working statewide to educate and mobilize low-income women and their allies to participate in the democratic process.”

**National Family Farm Coalition**, based in Washington, DC, “promotes socially just farm and food policies and empowers family farmers to reduce corporate control of agriculture. NFFC chooses its projects based on the potential to empower family farmers by reducing the corporate control of agriculture and promoting a more socially just farm and food policy.”

**New Alpha CDC**, based in Florence, South Carolina, is led by Rev. Leo Woodbury, and emphasizes “environomics,” the intersection of environment, health, and community economic development. “We work by conducting community education campaigns, developing programs, projects, initiatives, trainings, community organizing, mobilizing, and developing strategic plans.” New Alpha CDC partners with the Whitney M. Slater Foundation, described below.

**One Voice**, in Jackson, MS, is a “civic engagement organization working to give voice to marginalized and vulnerable communities across the South by democratizing public policy through research, training, education, and organizing in order to make a difference in the civic life of traditionally silenced and underserved communities.”

**Our Minnesota Future** “is a long-term strategy to build the power to govern in Minnesota, and the Land Stewardship Project is taking it on in partnership with some of the strongest people’s organizations in the state: faith groups, environmental groups, organizations that work in communities of color and immigrant communities, as well as labor unions and progressive organizations.”

**Penn Center**, on St. Helena Island, SC, “is the site of the former Penn School, one of the country’s first schools for formerly enslaved individuals. Penn Center is one of the most significant African American historical and cultural institutions in existence today....Penn Center continues to thrive as a national monument promoting historic preservation, as well as a catalyst for economic sustainability throughout the Sea Islands.”

**Peoples Action**, based in Chicago, IL, is a national network “fighting for community over greed; justice over racism, and people and planet over big corporations....Knowing change starts close to home, we’re building powerful organizations nationwide where people of all races, faiths, and genders gather to make change.”

**PICO National Network**, based in Oakland, CA, “began in 1972 as a regional training institute to help support neighborhood organizations in California. PICO has 44 affiliated federations and eight statewide networks working in 150 cities and towns and 17 states. More than one million families and one thousand congregations from 40 different denominations and faiths participate in PICO.”

**Poor People’s Campaign** is “A National Call for Moral Revival, uniting tens of thousands of people across the country to challenge the evils of systemic racism, poverty, the war economy, ecological devastation and the nation’s distorted morality.”

**People Organized for Westside Renewal (POWER)** in Los Angeles, CA, “employs a community organizing strategy based on relationship building and direct action to create meaningful change in the neighborhoods where we work. We start locally, working on issues that matter to people in our communities, such as affordable housing, community safety, and quality education....we are part of a national movement focused on building an economy that works for everybody, challenging corporate power, and winning increasingly more inclusive and democratic government policies.”

**Project South**, based in Atlanta, GA, is a “trusted movement anchor organization for social justice work in the U.S. South. Recognized for the production of popular education tools, curriculum, and workshops that support grassroots organizers, educators, and activists, Project South also affects policy at the municipal level, produces reports and analysis that impact decision-makers, innovates organizing methodologies, and provides an institutional hub for organizers to develop shared regional plans that match the urgency of this political moment while building long-term infrastructure.”

**Race Forward** “builds awareness, solutions, and leadership for racial justice by generating transformative ideas, information, and experiences. We define racial justice as the systematic fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all and we work to advance racial justice through media, research, and leadership development.”

**Sandhills Cooperation Association** “is a community-based nonprofit in Monroe and Richmond Counties, NC, helping low-income individuals prosper and their communities come together, using cooperative self-reliance with skills and resources already at hand.”

**Southeastern African-American Farmers Organic Network** “ensures the viability and economic success of Black farmers by increasing their organic and sustainable farm practices; advocating for Black sustainable farm ethic and values in the food system; and promoting links among Black farming, culture and history.”

**Shared Ground Farmers Cooperative**, in St. Paul, MN, is “a marketing and distribution cooperative owned by seven farms in the Twin Cities region....Shared Ground farmers live in both urban and rural communities and come from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. A core objective is a strong commitment to making environmentally sustainable farming a living wage job for any who chose to pursue it, especially for minority, immigrant, and beginning farmers.”

**Soul Fire Farm**, in Petersburg, NY, “brings diverse communities together on this healing land to share skills on sustainable agriculture, natural building, spiritual activism, health and environmental justice. We are training the next generation of activist-farmers and strengthening the movements for food sovereignty and community self-determination.”

**Southern Echo**, in Jackson, MS, is “a leadership development, education and training organization working to develop effective accountable grassroots leadership in the African-American communities in rural Mississippi and the surrounding region through comprehensive training and technical assistance programs.”

**Stay Together Appalachian Youth** is “a diverse regional network of young people throughout Central Appalachia who are working together to advocate for and actively participate in their home mountain communities....its network of members and regional gatherings create avenues for young people to educate themselves, find voice, and nurture political power, in their own communities of West Virginia, southwest Virginia, eastern Kentucky, eastern Tennessee, and western North Carolina.”

**Toxic Free NC** has worked for 30 years to “engage North Carolinians in the transition to a toxic-free society through initiatives that promote human and environmental health...we envision North Carolina as an integral member of a just global community where human and environmental health are valued, respected, and enjoyed by all.”

**Unite Oregon** is two strong organizations – Center for Intercultural Organizing (CIO) and Oregon Action (OA) – who merged to work together at the intersection where largely urban and suburban immigrants, refugees, and people of color share common interest with low-income rural communities around a growing economic inequality and lack of access to opportunity. Unite Oregon organizes “immigrants, refugees, people of color, and low-income Oregonians to address racial and economic disparities and build a unified intercultural movement for justice.”

**US Food Sovereignty Alliance** “works to end poverty, rebuild local food economies, and assert democratic control over the food system....As a US-based alliance of food justice, anti-hunger, labor, environmental, faith-based, and food producer groups, we uphold the right to food as a basic human right and work to connect our local and national struggles to the international movement for food sovereignty.”

**Voices for Racial Justice**, in Minneapolis, MN, “advances racial, cultural, social, and economic justice in Minnesota through organizer and leadership training, strategic convenings and campaigns, and research and policy tools.”

**We Own It**, “the national network for cooperative member rights, education, and organizing, aims to bring the 130 million members of co-ops into the movement to build a cooperative economy, and to help both member-owners and their co-ops navigate the necessary transition in how they engage with each other.”

**Western Native Voice**, in Billings, MT, is a “non-partisan social justice organization working to inspire Native leadership. We work across the state in rural and urban communities promoting community based, resilient responses to advance racial, gender, class, social, economic, and environmental justice.”

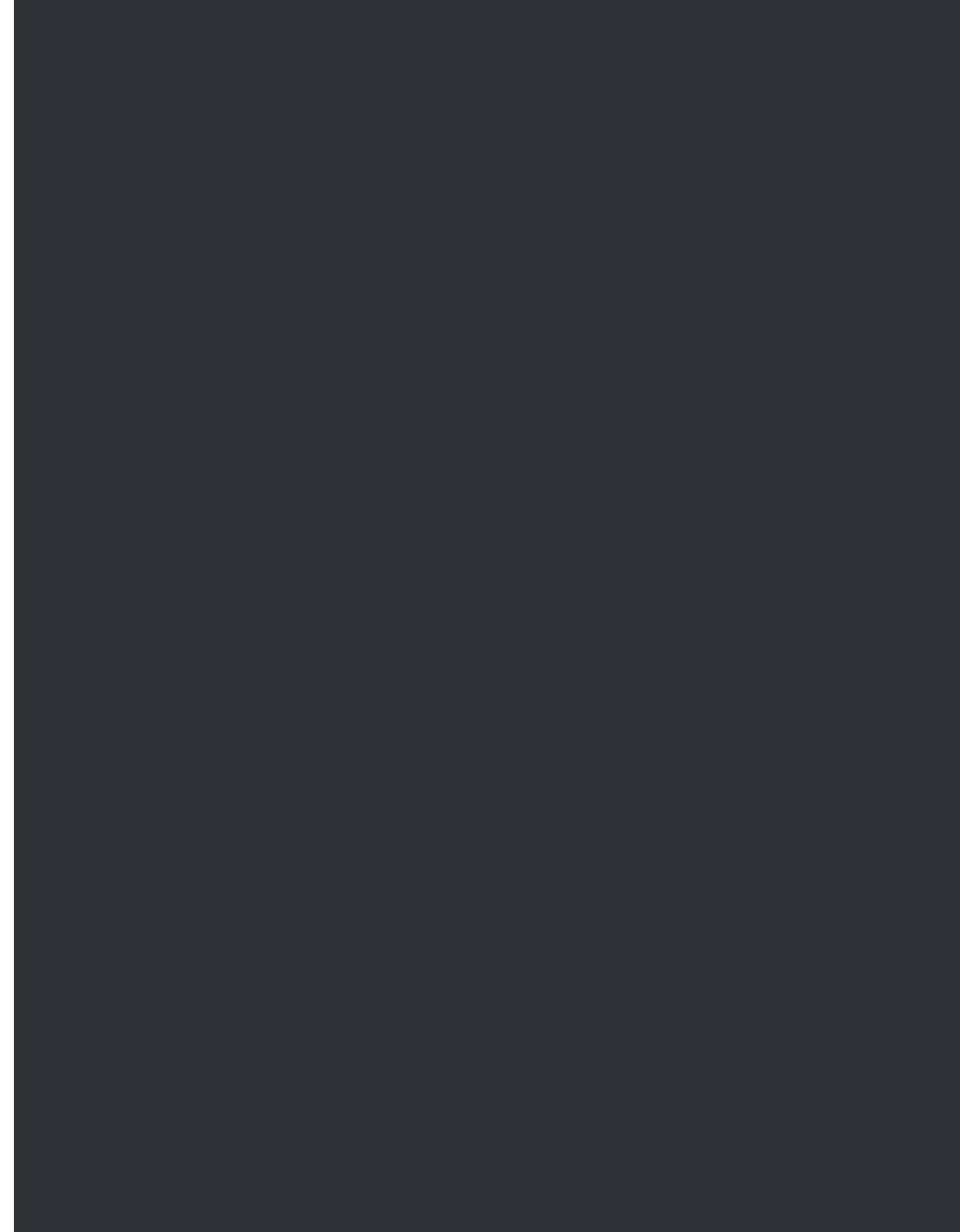
**Western States Center**, based in Portland, OR, “connects and builds the power of community organizations to challenge and transform individuals, organizations and systems to achieve racial, gender and economic justice. We envision our movement achieving a just society where we all flourish in sustainable, caring and connected communities.”

**West Virginia Interfaith Power and Light**, in Charleston, WV, is “group of concerned West Virginians from various faith traditions--leaders and lay persons alike--who believe that care for Creation is a call to be heeded and acted upon.”

**White Earth Land Recovery Project**, in Callaway, MN, “facilitates the recovery of the original land base of the White Earth Indian Reservation while preserving and restoring traditional practices of sound land stewardship, language fluency, community development, and strengthening our spiritual and cultural heritage.”

**Whitney M. Slater Foundation - New Alpha** in South Carolina, “works to provide environmental health education, to expand breast cancer awareness, and make it possible for qualified young people to receive scholarships.” The Foundation works together with the New Alpha CDC in Florence, South Carolina, described above.







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