



Rural Assembly 2025 Annual Report



Building trust and relationships across communities, across organizations, and across social divides

Dear friends and allies,

Our work at Rural Assembly leans into the simple but strong belief that good work relies on building trust and relationships across communities, across organizations, and across social divides. A foundation of trust is essential to our mission to build a more inclusive nation — deep change-making follows.

Since 2007, Rural Assembly has served as a platform for rural people to gather, partner, and advocate. Our aim is to amplify rural voices and issues leading to greater connectedness, more civic participation, and increased investment in rural people and places. While our overall goals have not wavered, the course we are charting to accomplish them has shifted as we continue to understand and adapt in these constantly shifting times.

The report ahead outlines the key moments of 2025. Our biggest success was pulling off one of the largest Everywhere events of recent years, which included for the first time, an in-person component—an effort we are excited to build upon this year. Everywhere, a digital broadcast born out of the pandemic, is our annual celebration of rural people, places, and stories. We realize that even as online gatherings remain an important part of our work and lives, there is special magic in gathering together in person, sharing a meal, and having community-based conversations. We can't wait to get together again this year.

I invite you to learn more about our programs and collaborations in this report. We look forward to connecting with you, and to finding ways to strengthen the core of our country — rural America — together.



Warmly,

Madeline Matson

Director, Rural Assembly



A Shared Mission

Center for
Rural Strategies

 Rural Assembly

THE DAILY YONDER.

Rural Assembly is a program of the Center for Rural Strategies, which strives to lift up the voices of people working at the local, regional, and national level to improve life in rural communities through digital and in-person platforms. We emphasize untold stories, connect with advocates, and collaborate with rural leaders.

For nearly 25 years, **The Center for Rural Strategies** has worked to create better opportunities for small towns and rural communities by building coalitions, developing partnerships, leading public information campaigns to advance strategies that strengthen connections between and among rural and urban places.

The Center for Rural Strategies also publishes **The Daily Yonder**, a nonprofit news platform dedicated to distributing high-quality news, research, reports, features, and commentary about rural America.

The Center for Rural Strategies, Rural Assembly, and the Daily Yonder work in tandem to achieve their collective missions.

Mission



Rural Assembly aims to build a more inclusive nation through gatherings, partnerships, and advocacy.

Our efforts are focused on three foundational pillars:



Gather

We provide platforms for rural people, leaders, and advocates to engage and discuss issues affecting rural communities. Our voices are stronger and clearer together.



Partner

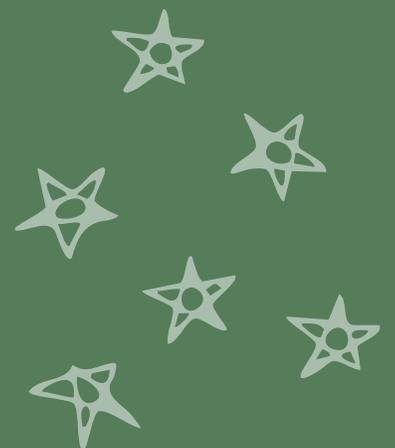
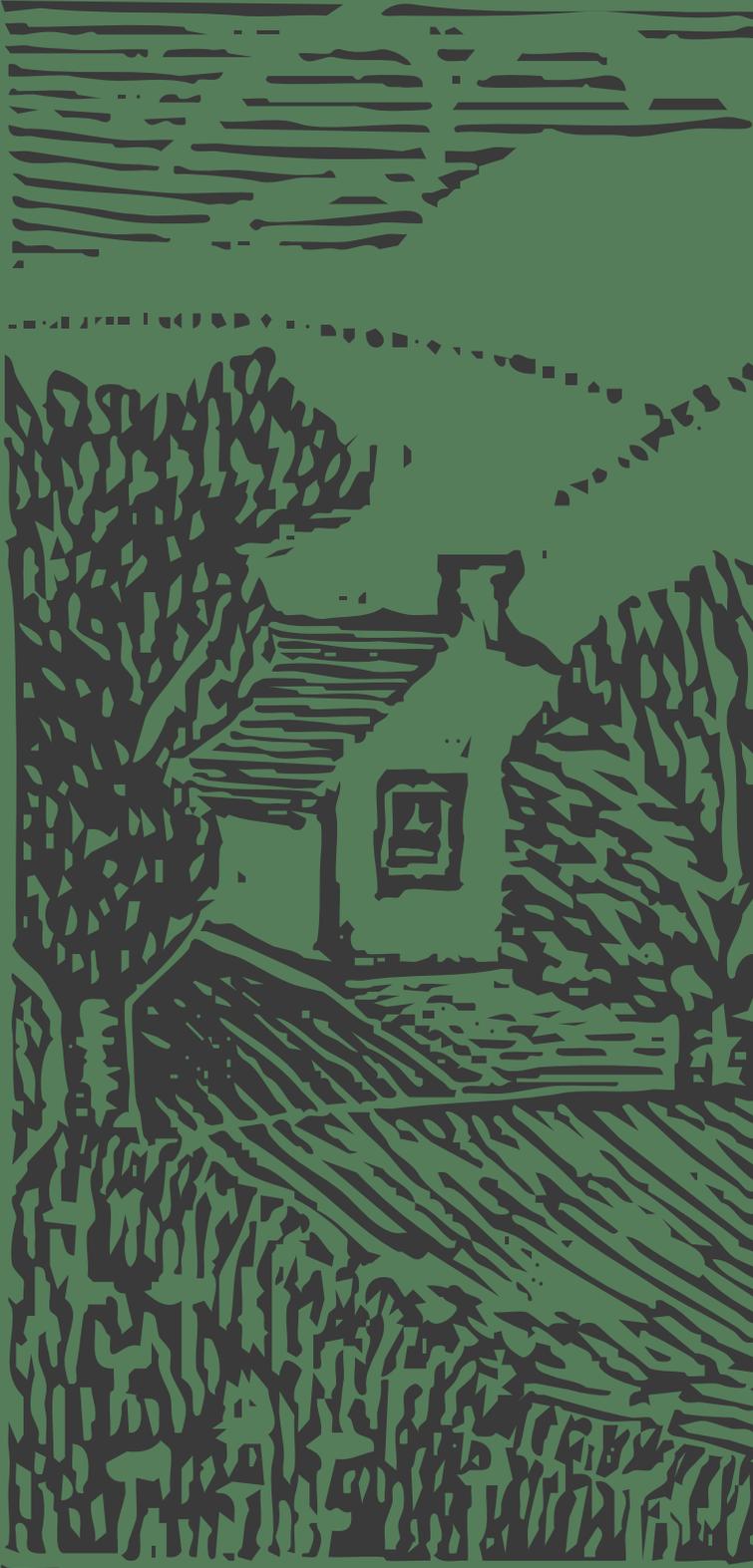
We connect and collaborate to ensure rural voices, lives and issues are presented in an accurate and compelling way in the national discourse.



Advocate

We advocate for policies and issues that benefit rural communities and ensure more just, positive, and sustainable outcomes.

Our Programs



Programs

Rural Assembly Everywhere



A free gathering for rural leaders, community members, advocates, and allies

Rural Assembly Everywhere is our annual flagship gathering. This year's *Everywhere* event was bold—we broke new ground with the first ever hybrid gathering model. Overall participation increased to more than **450 attendees** with people joining online and in person. The event featured national voices like journalist Ray Suarez and author Natalie Baszile along with stories from rural residents making change in their local communities.

Neighbors across the country joined together to explore ways in which our communities can foster an abundance mindset in times of scarcity through the power of open conversation and storytelling. We listened, laughed, talked, and shared meals.



Everywhere gathering hosted by
Department of Public Transformation
in Granite Falls, Minnesota

Programs

Rural Assembly Everywhere



700+

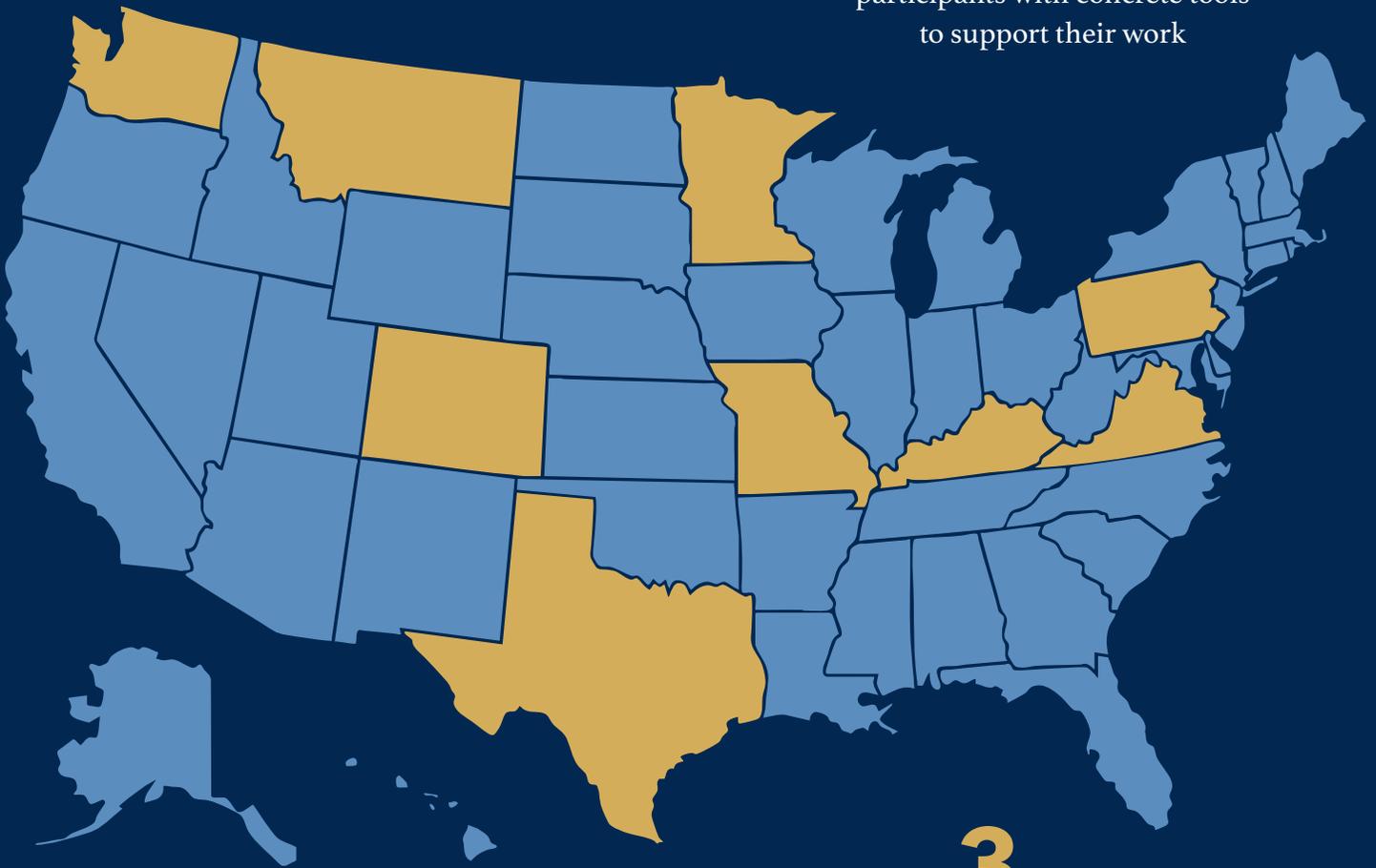
People registered
for Rural Assembly
Everywhere

95%

Joined to hear about the
work others are doing in
their rural communities

72%

Of respondents said that
Everywhere achieved the goals
of celebrating rural successes,
inspiring action, and equipping
participants with concrete tools
to support their work



● States with a partner Everywhere site

142

People joined from watch parties
in rural communities

231

Folks joined the live
online broadcast

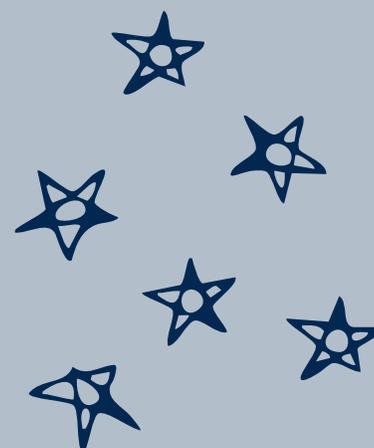
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Workshops: *The
Serviceberry Book
Discussion, Small Town
Magic, and Navigating
Difficult Conversations:
A Two-Part Workshop on
Conflict Management*

"I think we can't lose hope. Not in a naive way, because the world is complicated ... and it is deeply distressing to me to see how so much progress is being dismantled. But when I look around at my community, when I look around at what young people are doing, when I look at how people are really kind of coming together, that is what brings me hope."

Natalie Baszile

Comments at Rural Assembly Everywhere



Programs

Rural Assembly Everywhere



Award-winning author Natalie Baszile and artist and community leader Carlton Turner discussed stories of Black farmers and land stewards.

 [Watch recording](#)



PBS television host Ray Suarez explored ways in which immigration is reshaping small towns and rural economies across the country.

 [Watch recording](#)



A group of leaders from rural Southwest Washington State discussed strategies they use to work past scarcity mindset.

 [Watch recording](#)



Latingrass duo Larry & Joe and Poet Laureate Salaam Green delighted us with thoughtful artistic segments.

 [Watch recording](#) *(Larry & Joe)*

 [Watch recording](#) *(Salaam Green)*

Morning Connections



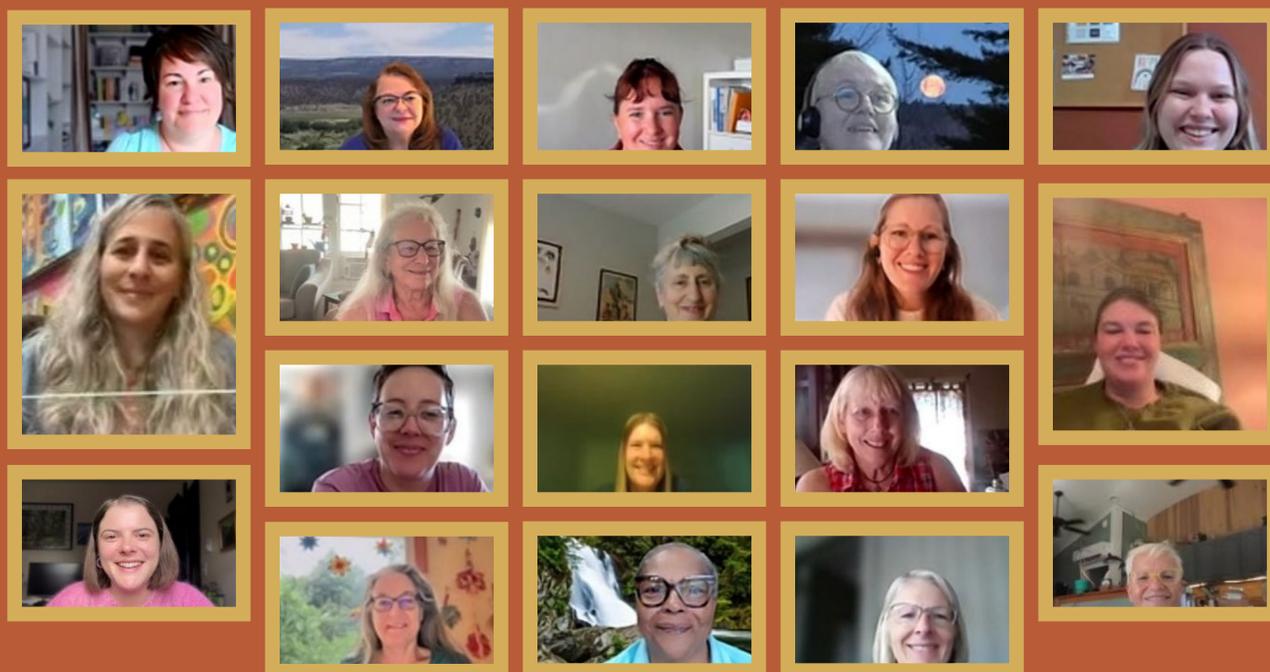
Filling Our Cups

Morning Connections is the go-to spot for weekly conversation among rural woman-identifying people to keep our heads in the game, share support, and fill our cups. What started as a pilot based on a program by 100 Rural Women in Minnesota has grown into one of the most meaningful weekly rituals for us and our participants.

This year we celebrated personal and professional milestones; we shared resources, recipes, baby pictures, baby goat pictures, and, perhaps most important, ideas for supporting our communities and each other.

As a result of some open-hearted conversations and a keen curiosity from the community, Morning Connections added a relevant book discussion group. Over the course of several months, we read and discussed *The Night is Long but Light Comes in the Morning* by Catherine Meeks. We look forward to continuing to offer supportive spaces in addition to Morning Connections

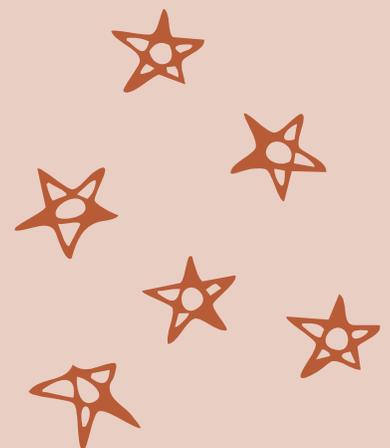
Join us any Thursday morning, [sign up here](#).



“Because Morning Connections is a women-only space, it lends itself to an emotional depth with lots of reflection on the service we do for our families and communities. The needs of the group are at the center.”

Jess Limbird

Read the full Q&A with Morning Connections community member Jess Limbird, Founder of the New Leaders Network, [on our blog](#).



Rural Remix



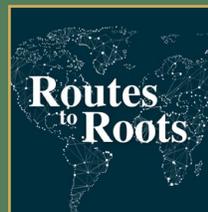
Many Routes to Rural

The Rural Remix podcast is a joint project of The Daily Yonder and Rural Assembly, published by Center for Rural Strategies. This channel is your place for richer, deeper stories about rural America.

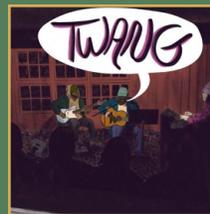
The Routes to Roots five-episode series was released during Welcoming America's annual Welcoming Week and was led by Rural Assembly Fellows Smmo Ozawa and Phillip Norman, in partnership with Welcoming America. It is available in English and Spanish.



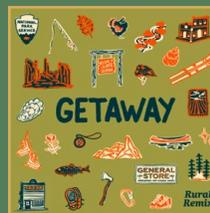
Listen back to Rural Remix



Series: *Routes to Roots*



Series: *Twang*



Series: *Getaway*



Series: *Crop Circle Cinema*



New in 2026, look for **Yonder Radio**, a weekly hour-long program featuring segments on news, music, and culture from rural communities around the country. Contact us about bringing Yonder Radio to your local radio station.

Beyond the Clock



Community Care for Rural

Beyond the Clock is led by Department for Public Transformation and Voices for Rural Resilience, supported by Rural Assembly. Drawing on the wisdom and experience of rural culture bearers, Beyond the Clock brings together rural creatives for thoughtful, honest, courageous conversation about practice during their virtual learning exchanges.

This year, Artist-in-Residence Eliza Blue wrote a song based on the conversation and work of each Rural Rockstar featured throughout the year. Listen to the EP at the link below!



In 2025, we released six Beyond the Clock podcast episodes on Rural Remix which followed each virtual learning exchange.

[Intro Episode with Eliza Blue](#) • [Nancy X. Valentine](#) • [Lacy Hale](#) • [Siriaco “Siricasso” Garcia](#) • [Viktor le. Ewing Givens](#) • [Kyle Mesteth](#)



 [Listen to the EP](#)

Slow Rivering Home
by Eliza Blue (pictured left)
Album artwork by Lacy Halev

Continued Programming & Collaborations



Storytelling

In [Drawing Resilience](#), Nhatt Nichols authors thoughtful pieces on the Rural Assembly blog. Each story details people who are finding new ways forward which honor the people and places around them – and each has a drawing from Nhatt which evokes her experience of the interview.

Through multi-media storytelling in the Daily Yonder, the [Living Traditions](#) project spotlights people and communities who sustain cultural practices in Appalachia. We had the pleasure of convening the culture bearers who were featured in these stories to learn more about supporting and contributing their traditions locally.

Virtual Programs

Rural Assembly hosted [Navigating Difficult Conversations: A Two-Part Series on Conflict Resolution](#), facilitated by Merry Brown, founder of 3P, to provide free, quality training to people interested in improving their ability to talk through tough issues.

In our panel [Models of Community Resilience](#), we brought together local experts from across the country to explore how we can prepare for the unexpected and strengthen our communities before a crisis hits.

Gatherings

The Center for Rural Strategies [hosted an event](#) centered around the five First Amendment rights—speech, religion, press, the right to assemble, and the right to petition the government with Federal Communications Commission Commissioner Anna Gomez.

The Center for Rural Strategies' [Rural Faith Initiative](#) created an opportunity for the Rural Assembly to host community gatherings in two of the participating communities, Greene County, PA and Letcher County, KY. Over the next few years, the Rural Assembly will continue to support the Rural Faith Initiative work.

Fellows Phillip and Smmo presented on Rural Migrations at the Welcoming America Welcoming Interactive in Detroit, MI. Read more about their experience on the blog.



Illustration by Nhatt Nichols for
Drawing Resilience series



Rural Assembly On the Road



Visiting Neighbors

An important part of our work is getting out into rural communities across the U.S. and engaging in regional and national conversations. From Fergus Falls, Minnesota, to Keene, New Hampshire, 2025 kept us on the road and we're looking forward to a busy 2026.

- First Rural Retreat of International Economic Development Council – Great Falls, Montana
- Rural Futures Summit, Springboard for the Arts – Fergus Falls, Minnesota
- Local First Arizona, Rural Policy Forum – Thatcher, Arizona
- Regional Economic Forecast and Innovation Expo – Grand Mound, Washington
- Washington Forest Protection Association, Annual Meeting – Olympia, Washington
- Civic Collaboratory – a program of Citizen University – Cambridge, Massachusetts
- Percent for Place Coalition steering committee
- Radically Rural - Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship – Keene, New Hampshire

What's Next

We want to work with you!

We are looking for more workshop facilitation and speaking engagement opportunities in the coming year and would love to talk more about partnering with you at your rural-focused event. We also always have an open door for connection calls. We welcome the chance to learn more about your work and ways we can collaborate. [Reach out!](#)



Top image: Visiting Keene, New Hampshire for Radically Rural

Bottom image: Visiting Fergus Falls, Minnesota for the Rural Futures Summit



Workshop at Radically Rural
with Ash Hanson and Mai'a
Williams



Rural Assembly Annual Report 2025

Credits



ruralassembly.org

Sign up for our newsletter!

Center for
Rural Strategies

Rural Assembly is a project of the Center for Rural Strategies
ruralstrategies.org

THE DAILY YONDER.

dailyyonder.com

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