

Arts + the Rural West Virtual Workshop Session Report

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1 Introduction

WESTAF's Arts + the Rural West Seminar virtual workshop brought together a diverse group of arts and culture professionals and practitioners to explore the context of and opportunities for "rural arts," particularly as it is known and experienced in the American West. The format and style of this convening represents a departure from the academic style of organization and presentation of some prior WESTAF cultural policy symposia. Developed as a collaboration between WESTAF's new Alliances, Advocacy, and Policy and Social Responsibility and Inclusion divisions, the convening builds on WESTAF's history of organizing cultural policy meetings and reaching rural communities through TourWest, our regional touring program, and research on rural creative economies. It aimed to bring together funding and policy organizations with practitioners to consider future directions for rural arts as a policy priority and practice of the field. This first convening was also designed to elevate and clarify WESTAF's future work in this area while building a western rural arts network.

Originally planned as an in-person seminar in the Central Valley of California in spring 2020, the format was changed to a three-hour, facilitated video conference held on April 3, 2020 from 11:00am to 2:00pm Mountain Time due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The original convening concept and the reformatted workshop aimed to:

- Engage a western network of thought leaders and community builders whose work intersects with the rural arts agenda.
- Share knowledge and highlight work being done in the West.
- Ensure that western rural arts perspectives inform national conversations around rural arts.
- Discover potential areas of regional partnership/collaboration.
- Define a rural arts agenda for the West.

The session considered topics and themes ranging from rural creative economies to the advancement of folk and traditional arts to aesthetics, identity, and place and examined program and project case studies and opportunities for artists/cultural workers/culture bearers in rural settings. The meeting brought together 25 rural arts advocates, folk and traditional arts professionals, arts administrators, rural economic development and policy specialists, indigenous culture bearers, and others to share knowledge, practice, and ideas. These individuals participated in eight small group discussions considering four topics related to rural development, rural arts practices, resourcing rural arts activity, and the specific opportunities and challenges for these activities and practices in the West.

Planning this convening has enabled WESTAF to engage its existing regional and national networks and begin to develop new networks. Representatives from 10 of the 13 states in the WESTAF region, including board members, state arts agency executive directors, and program alumni, participated in the rural arts convening, along with major national funding and policy organizations, some of which are newly engaged with WESTAF's work. Representatives from the National Endowment of the Arts; Art of the Rural; Alliance for California

Traditional Arts; Rural LISC; California Arts Council; Citizens' Institute on Rural Design/Housing Assistance Council; City of Bozeman; Epicenter; First Nations Development Institute; Mountain Time Arts; Plains Indian Museum at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West; Advocates for Indigenous Language Survival; the City of Eagle, Colorado; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Artes Americas; Wichita Falls Alliance for Arts and Culture; Center for Education, Business, and the Arts (CEBA); and Western Folklife Center participated.

WESTAF board member Nikiko Masumoto and Amy Kitchener, executive director, and Jenn Joy Jameson, programs manager at the Alliance for California Traditional Arts, were key partners and advisors on the development of the session. Representatives from Artplace America, Aspen Institute, and other organizations were also consulted on the selection of participants and other aspects of the organization of this session.

Key findings and recommendations

The rich and spirited discussion that occurred during the session isn't easily distilled into a concise set of findings and recommendations, but highlights from the discussion that participants advocated for informing future "rural arts" work are as follows. The group sees future work as being concerned with:

- Using more inclusive language and letting communities define the work for themselves rather than being required to adhere to concepts of "rural development," "rural arts development," and other notions that may be alien to practice and lived experience on the ground.
- Creating platforms to showcase rural artists and culture bearers to provide role models for and greater exposure and visibility to cultural work in rural communities.
- Championing authentic recognition and inclusion of rural artists and culture bearers.
- Providing capacity building support and technical assistance for rural communities in developing arts and cultural groups and organizations, programs, and projects.
- Improving internet connectivity and other infrastructure such as technical, creative, and design skills in rural areas to support the advancement of arts and culture.
- Learning from national and regional project and program models that authentically engage communities in arts and cultural practice in rural areas.
- Supporting rural networks across the region and cross pollination between networks that position the arts to have a voice at the table.
- Engaging indigenous leaders, funders, institutions, communities, and artists/culture bearers as a key constituency across the Rural West.
- Encouraging project- and activity-based action rather than just strategy and planning.
- Empowering leaders who can act as connectors in their communities and create places and spaces in which arts and cultural activities can be experienced and shared.
- Engaging non-arts organizations as advocates of arts and culture in rural communities.
- Reframing folk and traditional arts, rural arts, and indigenous arts and cultural practices in terms of living cultures and thereby recognizing their dynamism and connection to communities today.
- Representing the concerns of rural communities in the West within national conversations on rural life, rural arts, and rural economies and communities.
- Engaging grantmakers and institutions in better understanding rural issues and contexts to facilitate more inclusive investment and grantmaking practices.

The sections that follow present transcripts of the full group report-outs and discussion summaries for each of the eight discussion groups that elaborate on the topics outlined above. These discussions are passionate, authentic, highly informed, thoughtful, and constructive expositions on the topics used to frame the session and many besides. Moments of insight were had; key champions of this work in communities identified; case studies and examples shared; biases challenged; and new paths envisioned that, taken together, have the potential to inform the advancement of arts and culture in rural communities in the West and beyond.



Photo by @bella_the_brave via Unsplash

2 Participant list

Kate Belton

Director of Development and Communications
Mountain Time Arts
Bozeman, MT

Anne Bown-Crawford

Executive Director
California Arts Council
Sacramento, CA

Catherine Bryan

Director of Programs, Strengthening Tribal
and Community Institutions
First Nations Development Institute
Longmont, CO

Matthew Fluharty

Founder and Executive Director
Art of the Rural
Winona, MN

Juta (yuh-tah) Geurtsen

Community Development Director
Idaho Commission on the Arts
Boise, ID

Meg Glaser

Artistic Director
Western Folklife Center
Elko, NV

Tiffany Hammer

Senior Program Officer
First Nations Development Institute
Longmont, CO

Jennifer Joy Jameson

Programs Manager and Media Director
Alliance for California Traditional Arts
Los Angeles, CA

Margie Johnson Reese

Executive Director
Wichita Falls Alliance for Arts & Culture
Wichita Falls, TX

Sarah Lillegard

Resource Developer
Epicenter
Doyle, CA

Consuelo (Chelo) Montoya

Assistant Vice President
Adult Education and Public Programs
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Los Angeles, CA

Nikiko Masumoto

Organic Farmer and Artist
Del Rey, CA

Hunter Old Elk

Curatorial Assistant
Plains Indian Museum
at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West
Cody, WY

Bob Reeder

Program Director
Rural LISC
Washington, DC

Brandy Reitter

Manager
Town of Eagle
Eagle, CO

Ruth Saludes

Interim Coordinator
Artes Americas
Fresno, CA

Courtney Spearman

Design Specialist
National Endowment for the Arts
Washington, DC

Kelly Stowell

Executive Director
Center for Education, Business, and the Arts
Kanab, UT

Maria Sykes

Executive Director
Epicenter
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Stephen Sugg

Special Projects Manager
Housing Assistance Council/Citizens Institute
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Washington, DC

Carly Tex

Executive Director
Advocates for California Indigenous
Language Survival
Fresno, CA

Abi Whiteing

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First Nations Development Institute
Longmont, CO

WESTAF Staff

Chrissy Deal
Director of Social Responsibility and Inclusion

Christian Gaines
Executive Director

David Holland
Director of Public Policy

3 Are rural arts a rural development strategy?

Participants discuss the problematic language of “rural development,” the history of art in rural areas, the challenges of dislocation, and opportunities to integrate arts and culture into future rural initiatives.

3.1 Transcript of key insights from group discussions

Group A Discussion

Nikiko Masumoto: It appeared that everyone was challenged by the framing of the question and the idea that even the terminology of “rural development” can be ostracizing and disconnected from life on the ground and people creating and living. We were trying to work towards identifying language to replace “rural development,” and the kinds of practices that would go along with that framework shift, that paradigm shift. We talked a lot about connection, connectivity. Margie helped us hone in on that term, “connectivity,” and thinking less about strategies and more about practices and ways of being. Another theme that was brought up was the idea that, historically, creativity and the arts may have been more central in a lot of rural places, and that for folks in Indian Country there’s not necessarily a split between arts and cultural life. It’s an important dichotomy to consider when we’re thinking about arts in rural places in the United States.

Margie Johnson Reese: We’re just trying to remind ourselves that sometimes we come to these conversations with a set of vocabularies that might distance, rather than bringing in, the communities that we’re servicing. In some of the really small communities, there is a great deal of creative output. And that creative output may be the result of

responding to a challenge, a real life challenge, and it’s not called “art,” it’s called “a way to guard your property.” Then an outsider comes in and says, “Oh wow, these people are great artists!” And so “rural development” or “arts in rural development” is not a real, tangible idea that some of our communities can grab on to. But thinking about how we document, honor, and respect the creative outputs of people who live in different kinds of environments, and the connectivity that those communities have to each other, to the land, to the work they have to do is important for us to think about. We had to tweak the reframing question a little bit just to talk about this from a more service-oriented perspective, as opposed to, “Let’s come in and teach you how to do something.”

I appreciated Stephen’s comments about bringing in the federal agency support and how we can capitalize on that for our constituents.

Catherine Bryan: I agree with Margie about Stephen’s comments. With rural arts development, terminology can be confusing and not make a lot of sense. But the USDA does, for Indian Country anyway, bring in a lot of funds. We think a lot about the terminology that is used, and sometimes it’s not necessarily realistic to veer away from that terminology, but we can try to explain it or give nuances as best as we can. Maybe it’s worth having a conversation about terminology with the USDA at some point. I think Stephen had a really good point about how supportive the USDA is—even in this current administration. I don’t know about Indian Country, but a big focus of the Trump administration is rural economic development. So I think we can continue that momentum when we need to.

Hunter Old Elk: What I think is interesting about tribal communities is that there is this issue of

sovereignty at the base of it, and so we're seeing industries that have traditionally done very well crumble, including the coal industry and casinos.

If we're looking at individual groups, we have to recognize that their right to access resources is consistently challenged over and over again.

This time of COVID is really fascinating because we're seeing tribal members going back to traditional practices like food sovereignty to get down to the fundamental well being of our people. And I like what Nikiko said about recognizing that you can't separate art, functionality, and cultural identity within tribal people. I'm interested in this government oversight of our tribes, even though they have the ability to govern themselves.

Margie Johnson Reese: Recognizing what Hunter Old Elk is saying, I also want to acknowledge that in rural West Texas, the needs are the same. These are the sons and daughters of pioneers that unfortunately annihilated whole nations and took over land that was fully occupied by native people, yet they too have a tradition of sovereignty, if you will, of taking care of each other in a different sort of way. I think there are things we can learn from these unfortunate background stories. This could be a great conversation. "Rural" captures it all for us in a really positive way.

Nikiko Masumoto: There was also a little bit in our conversation about the COVID moment and the possible shifting of how people think about rural places. Bob shared a story about the danger and the opportunity in this moment. Kelly brought up the idea of re-evaluating the quality of life that rural places offer: on the one hand that might be for connection, for remembering, for drawing closer to place and land, but then it also might mean a kind of "rural gentrification."

Group B Discussion

Jennifer Joy Jameson: Our group was Juta, myself, Bob Reeder, Courtney Spearman, Maria Sykes, and Abi Whiteing. In responding to the prompt, "How are the arts being made part of rural development strategies?" Maria talked about identifying two primary approaches: arts as part of the process or community development strategy or art as the final product, and that she's interested in that intersection. Bob mentioned that culture, in working with Rural LISC, is indeed the "secret sauce" that creates the ability for people to begin to talk to each other and find new solutions in regards to rural development work and a way for communities to rebuild and come together toward that common purpose, so it needs to be deeply integrated into that work. Abi shared ways that her work with the First Nations Development Institute has used rural arts to address social issues and disparities. The Zuni Pueblo's Enrichment Program in particular has been responsive to communities' social needs and disparities through arts and culture, from language to connections with elders. They've been successful at integrating arts and culture into every aspect of that work, and that has been really powerful in that community.

Maria Sykes: As I was listening to the session, I didn't hear the word "artist" very much, I kept hearing "culture bearers," so I think that term is clearly really key to reaching the types of people who are in our communities.

Courtney Spearman: I wanted to add to Maria's comment. Design in our world is inherent in culture, but I think the role design can play in all of that should be acknowledged.

Jennifer Joy James: Can you share more on that, Courtney?

Courtney Spearman: I think design is an invisible art in a lot of ways. At the National Endowment for the Arts, design has been one of the disciplines we've had from the beginning, but I think a lot of people don't think of it in the same way. It's an inherently practical art in many ways. I think that architecture and spatial design, and even use of the design process in how people engage community, and how people think about space, and how culture is inflected in that space are really important ways that communities can respond to evidence of their own culture, their own artists in the context of the place where they are. I think there's a back-and-forth between the people and the place itself, and design can help create a space where those two things can mingle and be visible.

down "development" strategies can be at odds with one another, and they can be problematic by entering places with the subtext of "let's teach you to do placemaking."

- **Arts in rural areas have declined in importance over time and the concept of the arts and the artist doesn't translate in the same way in all communities.** Historically, the arts was more of a central feature of rural life, but has become less of a focal point in recent years. Rural development in and through the arts doesn't necessarily resonate in Indian Country, and even the notion of the artist as it is understood in other communities doesn't always fit.
- **In being involved in this work, we observe that arts and rural development are disassociated ideas, concepts, and terms.**

3.2 Group A Discussion

Discussants: Catherine Bryan, Margie Johnson Reese, Nikiko Masumoto (Lead), Brandy Reitter, Kelly Stowell, Stephen Sugg

3.2.1 Discussion of prompts

How are the arts being made part of rural development strategies?

The group's discussion on the current relationship of the arts and rural development strategies focused on three key topics:

- **Rural development is a challenging and problematic language for framing work with rural communities. "Rural development" as a term doesn't necessarily translate, and "development language" is not always resonant in rural communities.** Grassroots work and top-

How can arts and culture be integrated into rural development strategies?

The group proposed three strategies for integrating the arts into rural development strategies based on its discussion:

- Changing the language of "rural development" to be rooted in the vernacular of place.
- Bringing funders/institutions to rural places and harnessing the power of gathering to break bread together.
- Documenting, honoring, and supporting living creative endeavors (understanding that the people who participate in rural arts/culture may not call themselves artists).

3.2.2 Other topics of discussion

The group explored a range of other topics that allowed it to expand its thinking on the major themes of the discussion. In summary, these other topics coalesced around the following:

- **Recognize the challenges and opportunities for arts in rural communities** - There is some resurgence of focus and attention on arts in rural communities at the moment. Right now, are we observing a shift in the desirability of rural areas? Where people want to live is going to be more important, and quality of life concerns might shift views on people's desire to live rurally. Challenges must not be ignored. The internet does not always allow for visibility and wider audiences because there is still a lack of access to broadband in rural places.
- **Focus on living cultures** - The group recognized that in many communities (especially in Indian Country) there is no distinction between art and culture (cultural practice). Cultural activities and expression do not necessarily take the form of a separate "gallery" or space in rural communities, but are part of everyday life (tools created are responses to a need). Traditions are often linked to place and the different constituents that inhabit a place. The group also considered how some rural places have no connection with the Native/indigenous people/land with which they share a place. The group posed questions for further inquiry: How do we reinvigorate/honor connection? How do we animate history/traditions so that they are porous enough for new people (ex: immigrants) and practices? What is the strategy that respects/honors/sustains memory of cultural traditions?

- **Move beyond strategy to more meaningful forms of collective action** - The group considered ways of moving forward in supporting arts and culture in rural communities. Animating connectivity by bringing people together and using the power of physically gathering in place were discussed as a possible solution. This could involve bringing in people who write the checks/institutions to rural places to engage in creative experiences and breaking bread together to facilitate connection and understanding. The group identified USDA rural development programs as being an example of the types of institutional connections that need to be made. To facilitate collective action, the group discussed the importance of actionable words and facilitating a state of being connected rather than one of passive conversation. The group further discussed the opportunity to be nimble, active, and alive in practices, as opposed to developing another "strategy playbook."

3.2.3 Conclusions and points of departure for future discussion

In summary, this group, which included representatives from the rural arts movement, local arts councils, town government, an indigenous grantmaker, and a national rural design initiative, concluded that "rural development" approaches have been problematic in that they can be alienating to the people who are supposedly being served. Rural communities can be left with the feeling that outsiders are imposing language and a framework that are not always useful to rural constituents and stakeholders. To break down some of the inherent tensions in the relationships between rural communities and funders/institutions looking to support rural initiatives, the group proposes using gatherings in rural places

as a method for facilitating shared understanding and encouraging funders to make long-term commitments to communities rather than one-off program and project based funding.

The group poses the following questions as points of departure for future discussions:

- ***What is a path forward in bringing funders together with rural communities?***
- ***In shifting the paradigm, are we looking to animate connectivity?***
- ***What can we learn from rural communities in expanding our practice of diversity, equity, and inclusion in arts and culture?***

3.3 Group B Discussion

Discussants: Juta Geurtsen, Jenn Jameson (Lead), Bob Reeder, Courtney Spearman, Maria Sykes, Abi Whiteing

3.3.1 Discussion of topics

How are the arts being made part of rural development strategies?

The group also identified a number of examples of initiatives, projects, and programs that facilitate or support economic and community development in rural areas:

- Art of Community, Rural SC is a project in which the South Carolina Arts Commission, Rural LISC, and other partners built teams that represented particular rural communities. These teams were charged with identifying a

problem that existed in their community and centering arts and culture in response to those needs. Mayors and City Council members, who were engaged throughout the process, are starting to recognize arts and culture as an asset. Now, 12-15 rural creatives are identifying a broader network of other rural creatives and bringing them to the table to inform the larger development work in rural communities across South Carolina.

- Rethinking Rural (based in Washington) is a national network of engaged rural millennials dedicated to creating dynamic and vibrant small communities and supporting the next generation that will make rural areas their home. The arts are included at the table in this network and are appreciated for adding value to these conversations.
- The Idaho Rural Partnership, which joins diverse public and private resources in innovative collaborations to strengthen communities and improve life in rural Idaho, was noted as a potential avenue for more engagement by the arts in rural development conversations. These types of partnerships exist in other states and are linked in a national network.
- The First Nations Development Institute's Native Youth and Culture Fund and Native Arts Initiative were highlighted as programs through which the Institute catalyzes community development in Native communities in ways that intersect with arts and culture by supporting cultural centers and programs, language programs, and youth programs. Zuni Pueblo's Youth Enrichment Project was highlighted as a community development initiative that integrates arts and

culture into every aspect of its work, including pottery making and storytelling programs.

How can arts and culture be integrated into rural development strategies?

The group identified several approaches for making the arts part of rural development strategies:

1. Arts and culture can play a core role in the process of rural economic and community development. For example, the arts can promote connectivity and act as a “secret sauce” that enables people to talk to each other and build community.
2. Arts can be a final product of a rural economic and community development strategy.
3. Arts and culture can help communities reclaim community pride and shift a community’s self-identity and reputation.
4. Arts are being used to address social issues or disparities in Native communities by providing learning opportunities for youth (including Native languages and traditional practices) and fostering intergenerational connection between youth and elders.
5. Design in the form of architectural and spatial design projects can reflect the local culture and place by engaging communities in design processes.
6. In rural communities, culture bearers have a key role to play in economic and community development strategies, and many of those engaged in this work may not self-identify as artists.

4 Are arts in rural areas different?

Participants consider the attributes that define arts and culture in rural areas today, discuss the organizations and artists who are leaders in rural communities, examine the importance of centering cultural equity, and identify the qualities that make arts and culture in rural areas distinctive from arts in urban centers.

4.1 Transcript of key insights from group discussions

Group C Discussion

David Holland: The group focused a lot on communities, actually defining what arts and culture is in rural areas and different communities defining those terms and those realities very differently. Rural communities are very diverse and evolving, so what is deemed to be “arts and culture” or how a community responds to arts and culture changes over time. Some of the other things that we talked about were that a sense of community connection and appreciation of craftsmanship are pretty key features of “rural arts” as communities define them. Rather than being closed minded or “small community minded,” as some would presume rural communities to be, rural communities are actually very excited to participate in new discussions and discover different forms of arts and culture. We also talked about the importance of leaders as connectors in supporting rural arts and culture, and that they’re a connecting point for individuals. They’re also a connecting point for ideas. They incite people’s participation, they build community, and create meeting spaces and greeting places for people. In rural communities, providing

access to arts and culture contributes to a sense of quality of life for people and allows them to connect to some of their traditions as well as new developments that are happening.

Anne Bown-Crawford: I think you summed it up really well. Thank you.

Ruth Saludes: I think so too, David. That was really nicely put. Not in our exact words, but better than our exact words. Nice summary. Thank you, David.

David Holland: You’re welcome.

Group D Discussion

Christian Gaines: Group D was Kate Belton, Hunter Old Elk, Chelo Montoya, Matthew Fluharty, and myself, Christian Gaines. I was the facilitator, and we started by diving into a conversation about how life has changed among the group’s participants in the age of COVID. And the response was, really interestingly, all over the board. It was interesting to hear Kate say that, in her role at Mountain Time Arts, which is fundraising and development, she is feeling very productive and development is doing quite well because this new era provides an opportunity to really show that you care. It also stops people from putting things off, and just generally keeps the community closer together. As far as Art of the Rural and Matthew’s work go, like a lot of organizations, there’s a service adjustment and reinvention of programs for Art of the Rural. Like WESTAF, Art of the Rural really relies on convening people and building trust and sending people into directions and outcomes that often don’t bear fruit for a year or two, so a lot of that work can’t proceed. So they’re considering kind of a reinvention—whether it’s Zoom, whether it’s podcasting—of how they’re going to convene folks.

That is what they're really involved in right now. As a broader point, we're talking a lot about artists. In this time of uncertainty, there is an opportunity to draw attention to artists. When people are sitting at home, there's so much to do around the arts, whether it's enjoying concerts, performing arts, visual arts on the internet, or watching Netflix, artists are very much at the front and center of our lives right now.

Hunter Old Elk: This is a nice time to recognize, at the baseline, how relevant art is and art administrators are in all ways. It's also a nice time to discuss how we can adapt so that we can function well, how artists can adapt, or the ways that we can convene. I am interested in what, in six months, if we have this conversation again, it will be like experiencing connectivity. We're seeing it just within the last month, people feeling disconnected from people. And then there's the emphasis on technology, the emphasis on the kind of work we're doing at home. How do we get back to that fundamental, human connectedness? Maybe in six months when we convene, let's talk about that.

Christian Gaines: In terms of what defines arts and culture in rural areas today, we talked a lot about traditions and defining traditions. Cultural and other kinds of affinity groups define arts and culture, and resilience and response and reactions to the everyday experience are some notes that we made.

4.2 Group C Discussion

Discussants: Anne Bown-Crawford, Meg Glaser, David Holland (Lead), Sarah Lillegard, Ruth Saludes, Carly Tex

4.2.1 Discussion of topics

What defines arts and culture in rural areas today?

The group discussed various ways in which arts and culture in rural areas is defined by community and in community and noted that:

- **Communities define what arts and culture are in rural areas.** For example, the reservations and rancherias surrounding Fresno define a way of life—baskets, foodways, ceremonial items—that has evolved into art forms.
- **Community connection and appreciation of craftsmanship are vital components of rural arts.** In this context, taxidermy and guns can be seen as art and as cultural objects in rural communities. Relatedly, a fish hook carved out of abalone can be seen as art, even if some may not see it as such.
- **The compelling feature of arts in rural areas is the buy-in from the community.** Rural communities are not close minded and insular small communities. They are excited by new discussions.
- **Communities in rural areas are diverse, evolving, and collaborative.** Diverse communities in rural areas (longstanding communities, universities, the theatre community, indigenous communities) seem to “mashup” (collaborate) and come together more. The communities (ethnic, occupational, environmental, tribal) and individuals living and moving in and out of specific rural areas are constantly evolving.

What kinds of artists and organizations are leaders in rural areas? What kinds of arts and cultural activities are missing in rural areas?

- **Community builders are vital as leaders within indigenous and rural communities, and these leaders encite participation.** Karuk Master Artist **Brian Tripp**, who was noted as a connector of tribes, is a great example of leaders connecting traditional and contemporary life.
- **Leaders create meeting spaces and greeting places for people, and these leaders are important connecting points for people and ideas.** For example, activist **Lali Moheno**, who was mentioned as an example in the Central Valley of California, invited a group of women artists and makers together and she created and shared a booklet with information on the participants to promote future interaction.
- **Arts and cultural activities are spurred by people in rural areas trying to improve the quality of life for their families and make those areas attractive to future generations.**

How are arts and culture in rural areas distinctive from arts in urban centers?

Group members noted the following opportunities and challenges for rural arts:

- **Distances are a challenge in rural areas and limited resources can constrain people's ability to travel, but cultural events and activities can facilitate closeness and connection.**

- **There is a distinct opportunity and need to provide those in rural communities who may be disconnected from their cultural traditions with access to cultural experiences that connect them with their traditions.**

For example, Amy Kitchener helped to organize activities around Nacimientos (a Latinx Christmas tradition) and many attendees from rural areas were reconnected with their culture through an exhibition hosted by Arte Americas.

4.2.2 Other topics of discussion

Another topic that the group brought into the discussion was the need to engage decision-makers outside of local areas in the distinct advantages, opportunities, and context for the arts in rural communities. Group members noted the need to:

- Focus on the advantages and opportunities of rural arts and amplify that message to decision-makers.
- Invite decision-makers to events in rural areas.

4.3 Group D Discussion

Discussants: Kate Belton, Matthew Fluharty, Christian Gaines (Lead), Chelo Montoya, Hunter Old Elk

4.3.1 Discussion of topics

What defines arts and culture in rural areas today?

The group identified the following as defining arts and culture in rural areas:

- Traditions
- Cultural and affinity groups

- Resilience
- Response and reaction to the everyday experience
- Makers/artists

What kinds of artists and organizations are leaders in rural areas? What kinds of arts and cultural activities are missing in rural areas?

- The group identified organizations such as Art of the Rural, Alliance for California Traditional Arts, and First Peoples Fund as being influential organizations advancing arts and culture in rural areas.
- The group determined that what is missing is large, county-level infrastructure to connect the rural communities and provide equity in rural regions.

How are arts and culture in rural areas distinctive from arts in urban centers?

- The group noted that school, church, cultural, or other affinity group affiliations serve as points of connection for people in rural areas.

4.3.2 Other topics of discussion

The group also discussed their COVID-19 response efforts, noting the following:

- Mountain Time Arts in Bozeman, Montana has fared well during the COVID-19 outbreak, which has provided the organization with the opportunity to show it cares by bringing people together around things that may have been forgotten.

- The Plains Indian Museum in Cody, Wyoming’s visitor base is associated with seasonal tourism (Yellowstone). The museum typically expects 100,000 tourists from May to September. Many people in tourism, service, and lodging are experiencing difficulties. The Museum is currently looking at ways to engage visitors, such as educators, online. Because the Museum relies on private events, its special events department pivoted to hosting a soup event in which visitors can drive up to the Museum and get soup.
- On the bright side, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) is committed to paying all of its staff through the COVID-19 closure. LACMA is also supporting artists and sustaining them through this crisis, which has exposed that there is little infrastructure to support individual artists.
- Art of the Rural is adjusting slowly. Much of the organization’s work is relational and involves connecting community members and building trust to move efforts toward outcomes that cannot always be anticipated. Because of the organization’s strong focus on convening, a lot of that work cannot proceed in this climate. As a result, Art of the Rural is exploring ways to advance its work virtually while social distancing.

5 Do rural arts face a resource challenge?

Participants discuss the resources that are needed to advance arts and culture in rural areas—including the need for increased funding and the barriers to getting it—and identify potential resources to advance arts and culture in these areas.

5.1 Transcript of key insights from group discussions

Group E Discussion

Nikiko Masumoto: Our group was Margie, Ruth, Kate, Meg, and myself. The group talked about missing resources for rural artists and cultural bearers. One item that we talked a lot about, which resonated really deeply, was the idea of encouragement. In the context of thinking of how we shift the landscape for rural artists and rural culture bearers so that inclusion, genuine inclusion, is a delivery of encouragement—the idea that work in rural places matters and people matter. We spoke in depth about encouragement as a missing resource. We also talked about processes as limiting factors to resources, such as the technical challenges of getting access to grants, whether it's the format of applications or not having the time to do things. Sometimes the cycles of opportunities don't align with real life for people who are working and pursuing other things in addition to being creative. The final thing that we talked about was the idea that the people advancing rural arts and culture might not necessarily be the people we always think of—librarians, local arts advocates—people not necessarily in the beltway of the “arts sector.” And those people sometimes, as arts advocates, need information and need help understanding the landscape of the

processes for getting more resources. And, of course, funding is needed and the process for accessing funding in particular needs to change so that it's more accessible.

Margie Johnson Reese: We also talked about investment being a long-view process, that “project investment” is not necessarily what's needed as we move into thinking more about how we make an investment in these communities.

Group F Discussion

David Holland: Our group included Bob, Maria, myself, Carly, and Kelly. We began our conversation talking about how a focus on resource needs sometimes makes it seem as if there is a deficit issue, or there is a lack of something. Another way of approaching this is to think about what the assets are within rural communities rather than what the deficits are. That really flowed throughout the rest of the conversation. A big point of agreement between the group was around the need for technical assistance and capacity building for supporting infrastructure and program development. A lot of people, because of isolation or not being connected to particular networks, don't have the information, access, or resources, and so there are unmet needs. The group also talked about how COVID-19 presents challenges, especially because a lot of activity in rural areas is based around events and festivals. Events, festivals, community meetings and cultural practices rely heavily on people gathering together and the ability to meet together in the future presents a challenge due to risks of virus transmission especially to vulnerable populations. We also talked about how USDA RBOG and RBEG grants were a nontraditional source of funding to support arts related projects in rural areas. Those programs may no longer be in existence, but USDA is a good source for potential funding. Looking

ahead, there may be challenges accessing community development block grants but there may be other opportunities for funding with the CARES Act. The post COVID environment is moving especially fast, right now, and it's hard to know what sources are reliable and how to find out about valid opportunities.

Maria Sykes: One of the things that came up was the idea of economic diversification and how self-sufficiency is really, really, really important. Especially during the times that we're living in right now. We also talked a little bit about the extractive nature of some resources or economics, whatever it may be, that are less obvious, like tourism.

Kelly Stowell: I think we have a real opportunity to step up as leaders and help people access the resources that are out there, like the federal stimulus bill that was just passed. We're still figuring out details and how to access the resources to get them where people need it the most. There are supposed to be levers in the stimulus bill that go out to different business types sole proprietorships, 1099 independent contract workers, which includes a lot of artists. We need to make sure people are accessing the resources available to keep them afloat during this critical time.

5.2 Group E Discussion

Discussants: Kate Belton, Meg Glaser, Margie Johnson Reese, Nikiko Masumoto (Lead), Ruth Saludes

5.2.1 Major conclusions and highlights from discussion

- **Those advancing arts and culture in rural areas need encouragement and inclusion.** Not just “fluff” encouragement. We're talking about deep encouragement, the kind of encouragement that tells people they matter.

- **Rural arts and culture can be looked at through an inclusion and equity lens.** Considering the needs of rural communities presents a whole new edge to thinking through inclusion practices.
- **Long-term investment is needed to advance arts and culture in rural arts.** Not just one-off investments for time-limited projects and initiatives.
- **Institutions that provide resources to the arts and cultural sector need to open up processes and structures** that don't accommodate organizations, artists, and culture bearers in rural communities.

5.2.2 Discussion of topics

What resources are needed by those advancing arts and culture in rural areas?

- The group noted that those advancing arts and culture in rural areas by serving as mentors and advocates (such as local arts council members or librarians) may not be creatives all the time. Advocates and support systems for rural artists and culture bearers are not always found in traditional places. Such mentors and advocates may be local arts council members, librarians, school administrators, or community leaders – not necessarily arts administrators. These **advocates need information, knowledge, tools, and circles (networks) to share resources.**
- **Encouragement is a missing resource.** There is a perception that rural cultural makers and artists are not counted, which could lead us as a field

to think about inclusivity on a different level by centering recognition and inclusion in a way that is genuine.

Is more funding needed? If so, what are the barriers to increasing funding in rural areas?

The group underscored the need for more funding to support arts and culture in rural areas and identified lack of access, technical barriers, and application processes as the key impediments that prevent rural communities from garnering more support. The group also noted that:

- **Barriers to resources are not always apparent and visible** (ex: Story of a visual artist who didn't have enough gas money to get their application turned in on time for a juried exhibition).
- **Structures and processes like grant cycles don't always align with rural life** (ex: An artist or group may not have the resources to submit an application and waits months to hear back based on granting cycles).
- **Time is also a missing resource.** Many rural artists/culture bearers have other work and are not always aware of or able to respond to opportunities.

5.2.3 Addressing the challenges identified

The group identified the following ways of being more successful at including rural communities:

- **One way to be more inclusive is to develop long-term projects and relationships—**keeping with it, providing more than a one-off investment. Rural communities are now a topic

of interest, but this cycle has happened before. Long-term investment in the work of rural communities is needed.

- It is time to **conduct fieldwork and research to really get to know people in the community, their needs, their passions, their stories, their skills.** This work has to be ongoing, as people are constantly coming and going.
- **Recognizing the importance of time and timing in rural communities** is key (ex: wrong time of year for an artist to participate).
- **Increasing and illuminating the visibility of people who are already doing amazing things** are important because there is not equal visibility for rural artists and creators—they need a larger platform. Showing a “day in the life” and successes can provide communities with people to look to as role models.
- **Deep listening to artists' feedback about the limitations of current processes** is needed.
- **Real limits and challenges like lack of money and access to transportation can be hidden** from the view of those organizing arts and cultural opportunities and need to be given more consideration.
- We can **reimagine offerings that allow more rural residents to participate by supporting and identifying key infrastructures,** such as better internet, skilled labor or training in areas that support those advancing arts and culture (sound, lighting, stage managing, videography, fieldwork, marketing, communication tools, design, social media), up-to-date tools, good sources of news on opportunities and developments in the field,

and healthy communities (mentally, physically, and economically).

5.3 Group F Discussion

Discussants: David Holland (Lead), Bob Reeder, Kelly Stowell, Maria Sykes, Carly Tex

5.3.1 Discussion of topics

What resources are needed by those advancing arts and culture in rural areas?

- The group began its discussion by pointing out that **a focus on resources that aren't available is problematic**; we are not starting with the opportunities that exist in rural communities.
- The group also identified the **need for technical assistance and capacity building** to enable communities to connect to the “high speak” that is emblematic of broader conversations about arts and culture and “rural development.” In order to stage events and festivals or create public spaces for art, guidance may be helpful, particularly capacity-building and infrastructure on starting an organization. Capacity building should focus on people in the community, particularly people who have been excluded. Community leaders can be important to making those connections. Isolation can leave people unaware of opportunities, and they don't always know what questions to ask. Some cautioned that there are lots of funds for planning but not necessarily for activities.
- Some recognized the opportunity for self-sufficiency and creating spaces for art in the time of COVID-19, but also identified the need to have good internet connection, as our

rural communities may not have the resources to connect virtually. The group acknowledged events as important and a lifeline for people that are being deeply affected by COVID-19. The group identified the CARES Act as a potential source of support for artists and organizations during this time.

Is more funding needed? If so, what are the barriers to increasing funding in rural areas?

- The group identified the **need for stimulus funding that addresses events that have been cancelled or affected by COVID-19**.
- **Rural projects need to pursue diversification of resources and nontraditional sources.** In the past, these included USDA Rural Business Opportunities Grants (RBOG) and Rural Business Enterprise Grants (RBEG), which enabled the development of innovative creative entrepreneurship and other programs in rural areas.
- The group asked, “What is the source for information on opportunities?” and recognized that **going through a middleman/intermediary is part of the challenge** for rural communities, as regional representatives are not always helpful. As an example of the role of intermediaries, it was noted that very few programs support individual artists or groups of artists directly and that many had to go through a nonprofit organization or university to access the funds. It was also pointed out that this phenomena also exists in fields outside of arts and culture, like linguistics. The group noted that bureaucracy can be obstructive. It also identified the need

for trusted sources, which are difficult to find in such a rapidly changing environment. The group recognized that connecting people to information and resources is a struggle in this environment.

- The group also noted that **groups shouldn't chase funds, but instead find resources that offer meaningful opportunities.**

5.3.2 Other topics of discussion

The group focused the remainder of the conversation on two specific topics—tourism and events and festivals:

- Members of the group noted that **tourism support can be important to supporting rural arts and culture**, but that tourism isn't necessarily about destination development, as it often does not focus on the assets of rural communities. Economic diversification could be another way of looking at tourism.
- The group reflected on the challenges facing the world currently, and expressed hope that we can go back to events and festivals (which are vital aspects of rural arts and culture). **The group proposed that adjustment and adaptation are needed now, and recognized that self-sufficiency may be part of the solution, facilitated by technology.** Specifically, the group recognized that programs and events are being cancelled, so there may be a need to shift to virtual or smaller group activities. Supporting private, family oriented activities in the interim was also discussed.



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6 What's next for arts in/and the Rural West?

Participants examine the opportunities and challenges for arts and culture in the rural West moving forward.

6.1 Transcript of key insights from group discussions

Group G Discussion

Jenn Joy Jameson: One thing that the group noticed as a challenge and an opportunity was the sprawling nature of the West, the rural West. Especially in this moment when density is not desirable, it's an interesting opportunity but also a risk. How do you find what "good growth" looks like for communities? We kind of joked about folks in Los Angeles going to Joshua Tree to escape COVID and things like that, at this time when rural morality is what everyone is desiring or needing—having this sort of back-to-the-land impulse. That's been a very real day-to-day experience for many rural communities. The incredible challenge for rural communities and Indian Country communities was also articulated during our discussion. There is a lot of inequity in grantmaking and the philanthropic resources, especially for Indian Country and rural communities more broadly. There is also a real disconnect with what it means to make that funding truly accessible and how to provide meaningful outreach and really understand what the potential is, what the interest is, and what the desire is in rural communities. A lot of decolonization is also needed, especially when people are coming from outside these areas with funding opportunities.

Hunter Old Elk: I'm interested to see how arts agencies will adjust their policies in the coming months to make resources accessible to all communities, rural

or highly populated, because we want our artists and arts administrators to assist communities in reacting to what's going on. What are the ways that our policies can adjust? As opposed to a grant agency applying and waiting three or four months to hear back, can we fast track that in a small, strategic way? I think we may have an opportunity to do that.

Group H Discussion

Christian Gaines: One of the first things we talked about in terms of opportunities for arts in the rural West was the Regional Cultural Corridor, which is a program that Jutta is working on.

Jutta Guertsen: As was talked about in California, and I'm sure in many states that are working on creative districting, we're looking at how to best do that in Idaho. We've been closely looking at Colorado and Washington, but California has just come to my attention as well. We're doing our first pilot project in McCall, a tourist destination for skiing, and summer recreation—there are tons of dollars given to that. There is also a very strong arts community in McCall, although they have no actual physical venues for the arts. They take advantage of the outdoors and festivals. Surrounding McCall are Cascade and Donnelly, these tiny little towns that are also doing amazing work. We're looking at making a creative district plan that includes areas that are self contained, but then also regionally connecting those assets and doing it in a way that's authentic to the community. Idaho is experiencing tremendous growth, so a lot of the project is about preserving tradition bearers and the artists whose efforts have made it a great place to live. The project has been two years in the making and is now on hold. And so, we shall see.

Christian Gaines: Anne also gave a really good California perspective. We didn't want to go without

mentioning the mythology, the cache, the desirability of the West. Anne also talked about expanding cultural districts statewide in California. And Catherine also mentioned tribes having closer relationships with their states. She gave New Mexico as an example, in particular tourism.

Catherine Bryan: As I mentioned in our group, not all states have a friendly relationship with the tribes in their state. New Mexico, and I would also say Minnesota from our experience (not to leave out any other states that are making a lot of headway in that area), but those are the two states I've seen that have really tried to foster a relationship with the tribe. In New Mexico they have a cultural atlas, a mobile app, and they also have Cultural Pathways, where they really try to include tribes and their arts efforts and things like that. Our partners so far have expressed having good experiences working with the state of New Mexico. I think it's important to tap state tourism departments and try to help them be more inclusive too. We also look to Minnesota often to see what they're doing with their regional arts councils or associations. I know our tribal partners in Minnesota have gained some really valuable things out of those relationships as well.

Christian Gaines: Stephen also mentioned the Citizens' Institute on Rural Design as a great opportunity. Challenges included: searching for resources, infrastructure, and rural regions at the state or county level. Unincorporated communities are particularly challenged in organizing arts and cultural activities. Schools, churches, and libraries are very helpful in that regard. We talked about a lack of private foundation funding in the West. Speaking from a legacy point of view, private foundation funding is very East-centric. Catherine talked about the challenge of getting the creators and the culture bearers to the table to have these kinds of conversations. Jutta

mentioned the lack of gathering places and meeting spaces in rural areas as well.

6.2 Group G Discussion

Discussants: Matthew Fluharty, Jenn Jameson (Lead), Hunter Old Elk, Brandy Reitter, Courtney Spearman, Abi Whiteing

6.2.1 Discussion of topics

What are some of the opportunities for arts in the Rural West?

The group identified the following opportunities for arts in the Rural West:

- **There is an opportunity for (arts) funders to think about the ways that they are allocating money.** Are there ways that institutions can fast track the grants process?
- **Folks in the rural West experience isolation and there is more awareness of this phenomenon now.**
- **There may be a way to appeal to the general population about the beauty of rural communities and opportunities for people to get reintroduced.**
- **There is an opportunity to look at broader arts policy questions (including rural).** We're at a big transition point (health, culture, economics, etc.) Everything's about to change in a profound way—but also it's an opportunity.

- **There's an opportunity to grow awareness about the assets of rural communities.** From a more national perspective, there has been a rising rural renaissance recently. Though acknowledging that rural is “finding its groove,” there are disparities even in that observation.
- **Rural spaces are now being recognized as an asset to people in more dense areas** (i.e. folks in LA going to Joshua Tree to escape COVID-19).

What are some of the challenges for arts in the Rural West?

The group identified the following challenges for arts in the Rural West:

- **People are so spread out.** Especially in the West, people are so widely dispersed. Technology and the current times are changing how we connect. How can remote communities benefit from connectivity and how can we better understand shared experiences in disparate places?
- **Often small communities want to stay small.** How can small communities welcome visitors/outsiders without sacrificing the needs/interests/sense of place?
- **What does “good growth” look like for rural communities?**
- **A challenge is the sustainability of cultural traditions for the long haul, and managing this cultural transmission in a way that celebrates the work while also acknowledging the challenges encountered (i.e. the impact of climate change on natural resources, etc.).** In tribal communities, there's an effort to capture arts that are now less commonly practiced.

- **Access to funding in rural, indigenous communities.** Grantmakers participating in the group recognized the challenge of making funding truly equitable in rural tribal communities due to the lack of access to the internet and grant guidelines that do not address the needs of Native communities.
- **Connecting with Native individuals who make art but do not consider themselves “artists.”**
- **Inequity of philanthropic resources to Indian Country. What are the ideologies of these funders regarding the kind of creativity being supported?** How we understand what “art” is or what it looks like is a concept that is not relevant or applicable in every setting, particularly in Native communities.
- **Establish a learning curve/decolonization process when working with cultural institutions like museums, etc. in considering the work of artists.** For example, “Are you an artist or a Native artist?”

6.2.2 Other topics of discussion

- The group acknowledged the recent National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities convening with Native artists as **helpful to federal agencies' understanding of the needs and aspirations of Native communities.**
- The group also discussed the use of **social media** accounts to connect with dispersed populations in the West.

6.3 Group H Discussion

Discussants: Anne Bown-Crawford, Catherine Bryan, Christian Gaines (Lead), Juta Guertsen, Chelo Montoya, Stephen Sugg

6.3.1 Discussion of topics

What are some of the opportunities for arts in the Rural West?

The group identified the following opportunities:

- Developing **opportunities for arts organizations and artists to be engaged with economic development councils** such as Idaho's Regional Cultural Corridor program.
- Developing **programs that increase the business skills of artists in rural areas** such as Montana's Artrepreneur program, which teaches individual artists 35 business skills. After 6 years, results of the program include a 646% increase in sales for artists who have participated, with 60% of that increase coming from out-of-state sales.
- **Leveraging the cache and pride of the West** in terms of the desirability and the methodologies by which people advance arts and culture in the Rural West.
- **Expanding cultural districts** statewide in states across the West, particularly in rural areas.
- **Private institutions developing closer working relationships with state governments** (ex: tourism).

What are some of the challenges for arts in the Rural West?

The group identified the following challenges:

- **Searching for resources and infrastructure in rural regions is challenging**, especially state county resources in unincorporated communities where there is no support. Churches and schools are the most important institutions in these communities.
- **Lack of young philanthropists and the general aging of the West.**
- **Lack of private foundation funding**, which is East-centric.
- **Getting creators and culture bearers to the table.**
- **Lack of gathering places/meeting spaces**, but libraries can be a solution (ex. Idaho Commission on the Arts working in partnership with Idaho Commission for Libraries).

7 About WESTAF

The Western States Arts Federation (WESTAF) is a regional nonprofit arts service organization dedicated to the creative advancement and preservation of the arts. WESTAF fulfills its mission to strengthen the financial, organizational, and policy infrastructure of the arts in the West by engaging in arts policy research and state arts agency development; developing innovative programs, services, and technology solutions; and supporting programming for artists and arts organizations. WESTAF regularly convenes experts and leaders around critical issues affecting the arts and cultural policy. Historically, the organization has been funded by the National Endowment for the Arts (Arts Endowment). In addition to Arts Endowment funding, today WESTAF is significantly supported through an array of technology-based earned-income programs.

Founded in 1974 as a project of the Western Governors' Association, WESTAF is now an independent nonprofit organization. Located in Denver, Colorado, WESTAF serves the largest geographical area and number of states of the six U.S. regional arts organizations. WESTAF's constituents include the state arts agencies, artists, and arts organizations of Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawai'i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

WESTAF remains committed to the improvement of the capacity and quality of the public funding of the arts by the state arts agencies of the West. Position papers, advisory research, and professional development services are regularly provided to these agencies. WESTAF is also an experienced technology developer that originated and now manages seven distinct online projects that benefit the arts and creative industries. As a progressive and evolving organization, WESTAF initiates new programs and projects regularly and is proud to have artists and arts administrators on staff.



Photo by @jacobemedia via Unsplash

8 Participant bios

Kate Belton

Director of Development and Communications, Mountain Time Arts

Bozeman, MT

Born and raised in Wyoming, Kate Belton has deep roots in the West. She is passionate about the arts, community, and conservation. Belton has previous experience in exhibit design, art conservation, graphic design, and nonprofit strategy for small organizations whose focuses include land and water conservation, climate change mitigation, indigenous perspectives, and the arts. She is an alumna of Colorado College and a ceramics artist.

Anne Bown-Crawford

Executive Director, California Arts Council

Sacramento, CA

Anne Bown-Crawford is executive director of the California Arts Council, a state agency dedicated to advancing California through the arts and creativity. As lead executive, Bown-Crawford promotes the Arts Council's mission to advance California through the arts and creativity by way of the agency's grant programs, services, and initiatives. With nearly 40 years in public education, Bown-Crawford is a champion for creative education in California. She is a founding member of Create CA, a statewide collective impact organization with a mission to rethink and create an educational environment for all California students, featuring arts education as a central part of the solution to the crisis in our schools. Outside of the classroom, Bown-Crawford's sphere of influence spans from community-based work, helping to link the creative industry with economic development; to statewide leadership as an arts advocate; to international impact, endorsing creative education in higher education and technology settings. She is a Stanford FabLearn Fellow and an Adobe Education Leader. She is a new media studio artist and a freelance graphic designer. Bown-Crawford holds a master's degree in education from UC Berkeley, a bachelor's degree in design from Northern Illinois University, and was an MFA design candidate at the California College of Arts.

Catherine Bryan

Director of Programs, Strengthening Tribal and Community Institutions, First Nations Development Institute

Longmont, CO

Catherine Bryan is a member of the Navajo Nation and is the director of First Nations' Strengthening Tribal and Community Institutions. In this position, she provides strategic leadership, management and direction for First Nations' Strengthening Tribal and Community Institutions program and other First Nations program areas. Bryan also leads First Nations' Native Arts Initiative, which provides partner organizations and tribal programs with program support through grants and technical assistance and training, including organizational capacity building, with the goal of revitalizing and growing the field of traditional Native arts and artists.

She joined First Nations as a program officer in 2008, then served as a senior program officer, and became a director of programs in 2017. Prior to joining First Nations, from 2004 to 2008, Bryan was a legal analyst for the National Tribal Justice Resource Center, a program of the National American Indian Court Judges Association that convenes and provides technical assistance for tribal court judges and judicial systems across Indian Country.

She holds a juris doctorate degree from the University of New Mexico – School of Law. In her former life, she attained a master’s and a bachelor’s degree in French literature from the University of Oklahoma, lived in France on and off for several years, and taught lower-level French university courses. Bryan was born and raised in southeastern New Mexico. She has called Boulder, Colorado, home for the past 14 years and relies heavily on the mountains and hills for a sense of direction and outdoor fun. Every day would be perfect if it involved riding a bike under Colorado’s sunny skies.

Matthew Fluharty
Founder & Executive Director, Art of the Rural
Winona, MN

Matthew Fluharty is a visual artist, writer, and field-based researcher living in Winona, Minnesota, a town placed along the Mississippi River. He is the founder and executive director of Art of the Rural and a member of M12 Studio an award-winning interdisciplinary group of artists, researchers, and writers. Fluharty also serves on the board of directors of Common Field, a national effort that connects, supports and advocates for the artist-centered field, and he is a member of the steering committee for the Citizens’ Institute on Rural Design.

His collaborations with M12 Studio have been featured at the Santa Fe Art Institute and the Iowa State Fair, while his multidisciplinary collaboration with Jesse Vogler and Jennifer Colten in the East St. Louis American Bottom floodplain was recently featured in Art in America. He is the co-convenor of the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) Anthropocene River Field Station in St. Louis.

Fluharty’s poetry and essays have been widely published in the US and abroad. His essay “Burn the Maps,” considering contemporary rural-based art and cultural practice, was commissioned by Walker Art Center for their convening Superscript: Arts Journalism and Criticism in a Digital Age, and he also recently was commissioned by MnArtists and the Walker to serve as a guest editor for a series on local practice that bridges rural and urban cultural work. In late 2019, Colorfield, a book of poems, essays, and visual fieldwork in rural places, will be published by Last Chance Press. Fluharty is co-curating High Visibility: On Location in Rural America, opening at the Plains Art Museum in October of 2020.

Fluharty was born and raised in Appalachian Ohio and helps out when he can at Foster Fluharty Farms, his family’s seventh-generation farm.

Juta (yuh-tah) Geurtsen**Community Development Director, Idaho Commission on the Arts****Boise, ID**

Juta Geurtsen has more than 15 years of experience in the arts and culture nonprofit sector, both in Idaho and New York City. Geurtsen currently serves as the community development director for the Idaho Commission on the Arts (ICA), primarily working with local arts agencies, city economic developers, arts organizations and administrators to strengthen communities around the arts in a predominately rural state. Geurtsen manages the ICA's grants to organizations and the facilitation of technical assistance to orgs. Having been certified as an Idaho Change Leader prior to working for the agency, she now manages the statewide professional development program, the Idaho Change Leader Institute. Geurtsen's current efforts are focused on a pilot project to form the first regional creative district in Idaho. She works with the Idaho Rural Partnership assisting in community reviews and is an original cohort member of Rethinking Rural. To gain greater knowledge of integrating the arts into economic development, she has completed year one, of three, of the Northwest Community Development Institute to achieve PCED accreditation. Geurtsen's previous nonprofit sector background includes serving in development and executive director leadership roles with extensive program/project development and implementation. Geurtsen grew up in Troy, in northern Idaho, with a population of less than a thousand people and very limited access to the arts. Geurtsen has a bachelor's degree in liberal arts from the New School and was selected for the first Riggio Honors Program: Writing and Democracy, where she served as the creative director for the first publication of the award-winning literary magazine, 12th Street.

Meg Glaser**Artistic Director, Western Folklife Center****Elko, NV**

In 1990, Meg Glaser circled back to her hometown of Elko, Nevada, to join the staff of the Western Folklife Center. Prior to Elko, Glaser lived and worked in Washington, DC, for eight years, serving as a fellow in the Folk Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, program coordinator for the Smithsonian's Festival of American Folklife, and program director of the National Council for the Traditional Arts. As artistic director of the Western Folklife Center, Glaser's work includes planning, fundraising, curating and producing exhibitions, performance tours, media, workshops and events, including the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering. Her graduate studies were in the field of ethnomusicology at the University of Washington.

Tiffany Hammer**Senior Program Officer, First Nations Development Institute****Longmont, CO**

Tiffany Hammer joined First Nations as a senior program officer in 2017, after many years of contracting with First Nations as a nonprofit capacity-building consultant. As an attorney specializing in nonprofit governance and IRS compliance issues, Hammer has consulted with both emerging and established nonprofits, providing technical assistance and training on nonprofit formation, tax exemption and

compliance, board development, policy and bylaw development, as well as serving as interim executive director, and community mediator.

Before her time as a consultant, Hammer worked as a legal aid attorney for DNA-People's Legal Services (Dinébe'iiiná Náhiitna be Agha'diit'ahii) in Window Rock, Arizona, providing legal representation in civil matters for members of the Navajo, Hopi, Zuni and Jicarilla-Apache Nations. She went on to serve as District Court Magistrate, Domestic Violence Docket, for the Crownpoint Judicial District of the Navajo Nation, before returning to Colorado to start her own consulting firm.

Hammer is licensed to practice law in the State of New Mexico and the Navajo Nation. She holds a bachelor's degree in sociology and nonprofit organization administration from Metropolitan State University of Denver, and a juris doctorate from the University of Denver College of Law. Hammer is also a member of the board of directors for Live by Living, a Colorado nonprofit working to improve the quality of life of cancer survivors through outdoor walks and retreats. When she is not working, Tiffany loves spending time in her garden with her husband and two spoiled dogs.

Jennifer Joy Jameson

Programs Manager + Media Director, Alliance for California Traditional Arts

Los Angeles, CA

Jennifer (Jenn) Joy Jameson is a public folklorist and cultural organizer originally from Encinitas, California, near San Diego. Jameson came to the Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA) from the Mississippi Arts Commission, where she served as the folk and traditional arts director since 2014. Jameson also worked in digital media for SPACES Archives, a nonprofit archive dedicated to documenting and advocating for the preservation of international art environments. With a master's degree in public sector folk studies from Western Kentucky University and a bachelor's degree in folklore and ethnomusicology from Indiana University, Jameson has worked with museums, archives, festivals, and cultural organizations on the federal, state, and local level, including positions or residencies at the Smithsonian's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Traditional Arts Indiana, the Kentucky Folklife Program, the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, and Tennessee's historic Highlander Center for Research and Education. Jameson joined the Alliance for California Traditional Arts in March 2017, where she directs the organization's media efforts, manages the Apprenticeship Program, co-leads the Traditional Arts Roundtable Series in Los Angeles, coordinates technical assistance offerings, and supports the statewide Sounds of California project.

Margie Johnson Reese

Executive Director | Wichita Falls Alliance for Arts & Culture

Wichita Falls, TX

A native of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Margie Johnson Reese brings exceptional skills in cultural policy planning and implementation design. Margie's career has included arts leadership in Dallas and Los Angeles. Currently executive director of the newly created Wichita Falls Alliance for Arts and Culture, Johnson Reese has

responsibility for establishing arts policy, artists training programs and creating new grant making programs to service Wichita Falls, Texas and the surrounding areas.

Johnson Reese served as a grantmaker for the Ford Foundation in their Office for West Africa as the program officer for media, arts and culture. In that capacity, she led the ongoing efforts of the Foundation focusing on heritage preservation, conservation, museum education, governance and cultural policy. She cites among her major accomplishments funding the restoration of the slave castles in Ghana and Nigeria, and providing funding to preserve the ancient Arabic manuscripts of Timbuktu in Mali. Prior to her work with the Ford Foundation, Johnson Reese served as general manager of the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs; and as director of the City of Dallas Office of Cultural Affairs.

Johnson Reese is a board member Emeritus of Americans for the Arts and served as chair of the board's Diversity and Inclusion Task Force. She is an active grant review panelist for the National Endowment for the Arts, and continues to serve as an adviser to the Association of African Museums in Nairobi, Kenya. Johnson Reese was recognized with the 2014 National Guild for Community Arts Education's Lifetime Service Award for her lifelong dedication to increasing young people's access to arts learning opportunities, both in and out of school; and for her powerful advocacy and action for equity and diversity.

She began her collegiate pursuits at Southern University in Baton Rouge, and transferred to Washington State University in Pullman, Washington to earn a bachelor's degree in speech and theatre. Johnson Reese holds a master's degree in Theatre from Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. She is a fellow of the Salzburg Global Seminar in Salzburg, Austria and an adjunct professor at Goucher College in Baltimore, Maryland, where she teaches public policy in the arts.

Sarah Lillegard
Resource Developer, Epicenter
Doyle, CA

Sarah Lillegard first came to Epicenter in 2016 as a Frontier Fellow and essentially couldn't stay away. As a working artist with experience in gallery management, grant writing, and event coordinating, Lillegard now assists with the Frontier Fellowship and Emerging Fellows programs. In addition to her work with Epicenter, Lillegard also sews, weaves, teaches workshops, and shears sheep from her home in Doyle, California.

Consuelo (Chelo) Montoya
Assistant Vice President, Adult Education and Public Programs, LACMA
Los Angeles, CA

Consuelo (Chelo) Montoya is an artist, educator, and cultural producer. She is the assistant vice president of adult education and public programs at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. She previously served as director of education and public programs at the California African American Museum. She was the founding program administrator and faculty member in the Master of Public Practice program at Otis

College of Art and Design, where she worked for a decade developing the program alongside Suzanne Lacy, the program chair. Her master's degree in public art studies from the University of Southern California focused on arts administration and community-based arts. She received a second master's degree, an MFA in graphic design from Otis. Montoya sits on the board of trustees' executive committee of the Vincent Price Art Museum and is an appointed member of the California Arts Council.

Nikiko Masumoto

Organic Farmer and Artist

Del Rey, CA

Nikiko Masumoto first learned to love food as a young child slurping the nectar of overripe organic peaches on the Masumoto Family Farm. Since then, she has never missed a harvest. A farmer, artist, and leader, Masumoto works alongside her father to raise organic peaches, nectarines, and grapes. She calls herself an "agrarian artist," cultivating the richness of life in the Central Valley through farming, food, stories, art, and community. In 2011, she debuted her one-woman show, *What We Could Carry*, about Japanese American Redress hearings and co-authored her first book, *The Perfect Peach* (Ten Speed Press), with Marcy Masumoto and David Mas Masumoto. Her artistic work currently is focused on Yonsei Memory Project, which she co-founded with Brynn Saito to awaken the archives of Japanese American history through site-specific creative and public pedagogy. Masumoto has a bachelor's degree in gender and women's studies from the University of California at Berkeley and a master's degree in performance as public practice from the University of Texas, Austin.

Hunter Old Elk

Curatorial Assistant, Plains Indian Museum at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West

Cody, WY

Hunter Old Elk (Crow & Yakama) of the Plains Indian Museum at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, grew up on the Crow Indian Reservation in southeastern Montana. Old Elk earned a bachelor's degree in art with a focus on Native American history at Mount St. Mary's University in Maryland. Old Elk uses museum engagement through object curation, exhibition development, social media, and education to explore the complexities of historic and contemporary Indigenous culture. She is especially inspired by the stories of Native American women who lived and thrived on the Plains.

As the curatorial assistant for the Buffalo Bill Center of the West's Plains Indian Museum, Old Elk uses museum engagement through educational outreach, object curation, exhibition development, guest lecturing, and social media to explore the complexities of historic and contemporary Plains Indian cultures. In a field historically operated and intentionally disconnected from tribal members, Old Elk's work focuses on connecting marginalized tribal communities into museum conversations as equals and allies. Old Elk is the program coordinator in charge of the Annual Plains Indian Museum Powwow and artist residency. She is especially inspired by the lives of indigenous women who lived and thrived on the Great Plains. Old Elk was a 2017 WESTAF Emerging Leader of Color representing Wyoming and Montana. She has collaborated with NPR, Wyoming Public Radio, and contributed to National Geographic. In 2018, she was named one of

“121 Pioneers of Their Industry” by C.C. Filson clothing company and was featured in an art catalog by the company supporting the National Forest Foundation. Old Elk was also highlighted in her alumni magazine as a “Mount Maker.” Lastly, Native Nations Now, an exhibition that she co-curated with Plains Indian Museum Curator Rebecca West, was featured in the October 2018 issue of Cowboys and Indians Magazine. Old Elk earned a bachelor’s degree in art with a focus on Native American history at Mount St. Mary’s University in Maryland.

Bob Reeder

Program Director, Rural LISC

Washington, DC

J. Robert (Bob) Reeder has served as a program director for Rural LISC since 2005.

Bob has built a 30-year career devoted to social and economic justice and equity; and comprehensive community and economic development. His areas of expertise include single- and multi-family housing development; grant and loan assistance; board of director development and training; land retention strategies in rural areas; grant and loan assistance; organizational capacity-building assistance; grass roots meeting facilitation; community and civic engagement; and comprehensive community and economic development focusing on economic, cultural, and environmental equity. A native of Rock Hill, South Carolina, he earned a bachelor’s degree in government from Wofford College in Spartanburg, SC, and earned his juris doctor from Vanderbilt University School of Law in Nashville, TN.

Brandy Reitter

Manager, Town of Eagle

Eagle, CO | brandy.reitter@townofeagle.org

Denver native Brandy Reitter is the town manager for Eagle, Colorado and has 15 years of experience working in city management to build communities and improve economic vitality. She started her career in economic development working for the City and County of Denver and the District of Columbia in Washington, DC. Prior to Eagle, she was the town administrator for Buena Vista and supported art, events, and music in the Arkansas River Valley as an economic driver. She has served in various leadership roles that have helped communities accomplish Space to Create artist work-live projects, art in public places, Creative Districts, downtown revitalization, and affordable housing. Having participated in WESTAF’s Emerging Leaders of Color in 2014, Reitter started her journey as an arts and humanities advocate at the state and federal level. In addition to her experiences in municipal government, Reitter received a master’s degree in public administration from the University of Colorado Denver’s School of Public Affairs in 2008. Brandy also serves on the board of directors for Downtown Colorado, Inc. and was appointed by Governor John Hickenlooper to serve on the Colorado Creative Industries Council. In her free time, Reitter enjoys the outdoors and likes to travel.

Ruth Saludes**Interim Coordinator, Artes Americas****Fresno, CA**

Ruth Saludes has been the Interim Coordinator for Arte Americas - The Mexican Arts Center since December 2019. Arte Americas has been part of the Fresno California community for 32 years and is located in the heart of the Central San Joaquin Valley. Saludes accepted a leadership role after having spent only 7 months as a docent for the gallery. Her prior work encompasses a variety of experiences from directing or coordinating educational programs, women's programs, and foreign exchange programs. Her artistic experience includes photography, videography and work as a curator/preparator at a local photo gallery. She also has experience as a writer, lecturer, university academic advisor, and development officer for public radio. It's no exaggeration to say she values exploring and learning new things; other experiences include anti-money laundering analyst, apprentice carpenter and Fresno County master gardener. Saludes is a graduate of Harvard University (Ed.M.) and the University of California Berkeley (B.A). She also attended University of Arizona (Architectural Program), University of Michigan (Summer Program), UC Santa Cruz (Summer Program), CSU Fresno, and Fresno Community College.

Courtney Spearman**Design Specialist, National Endowment for the Arts****Washington, DC**

Courtney Spearman manages the Design program for the National Endowment for the Arts, overseeing the Arts Endowment's relationship with and support for the design field across the country and managing the Art Works Design grant program. Trained as a landscape architect and architectural historian, Spearman came to the Arts Endowment after working for the Cultural Landscape Foundation, a DC-based nonprofit focused on raising awareness about design landscapes. She has also worked in practice at EDAW/AECOM in Alexandria, Virginia. Before returning to graduate school, Spearman worked for a small tech start-up in Houston and London doing project management and development, and for several Houston museums and art galleries. Spearman earned master's degrees in landscape architecture and architectural history from the University of Virginia, and bachelor's degrees in history and art and art history from Rice University.

Kelly Stowell**Executive Director, Center for Education, Business and the Arts****Kanab, UT**

Kelly Stowell has been the executive director of the Center for Education, Business, and the Arts since 2008 and also serves as the Kane County film commissioner. He is a native of southern Utah, where he grew up on a ranch in Parowan. Before relocating to Kanab, he was the executive director of the Utah Student Association with the Utah System of Higher Education. Stowell's background includes stints in Washington, DC with United States Senator Orrin Hatch from Utah. Stowell earned a degree in business and psychology from Utah Valley University.

Maria Sykes**Executive Director, Epicenter****Green River, UT**

As Epicenter's executive director, Sykes leads with a contagious passion for rural places. After graduating from Auburn University's School of Architecture, Sykes moved to Green River to co-found Epicenter in 2009. She has been working in rural community development around the globe for less than a decade, but the work has been honored many times, including by Utah Governor Gary Herbert. She loves swimming in the Green River, sitting on her front porch, and taking trips to other rural places around the world.

Stephen Sugg**Special Projects Manager, Housing Assistance Council/Citizens Institute on Rural Design****Washington, DC**

Stephen Sugg takes on rural arts, design, and placemaking in a special projects role at the Housing Assistance Council (HAC). This includes the Citizens' Institute on Rural Design (CIRD), a National Endowment for the Arts initiative carried in partnership with HAC. Over his career, Sugg has handled government relations at HAC; spent 6 years as a senior policy officer at LISG; and worked as an advisor to a U.S. senator. He is also an active and published fiction writer.

Holding a doctorate degree in education (William & Mary) and a master's degree in rural sociology (Univ. of Missouri), Sugg taught social science at the college level for five years. His academic research and subsequent advocacy focus on place-based education, school and community, and the link between arts in schools and student success.

Carly Tex**Executive Director, Advocates for California Indigenous Language Survival****Fresno, CA**

Carly Tex is Western Mono and an enrolled member of the North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians. She currently resides in Fresno, California. Tex is a traditional basket weaver, cultural demonstrator, and consultant. She participates in events and gatherings where she educates the public about Western Mono culture.

She also attends community language classes and works with her elders to learn, document, and maintain the Western Mono language. She provides her services as a linguistic consultant to tribes and tribal organizations, including the Nuumu Yadoha Language Program, where she assists language groups and tribes with language research, curriculum development, and instruction. Tex is dedicated to the revitalization, documentation, and maintenance of indigenous languages. She has a bachelor's degree in anthropology from Sonoma State University and a master's degree in Native American linguistics and languages from the University of Arizona, Tucson.

Abi Whiteing

Lead Program Officer, First Nations Development Institute

Longmont, CO

Abi Whiteing (Blackfeet) joined First Nations as a program officer in November 2015, having first worked with First Nations as a consultant. In 2019, she was promoted to lead program officer. Whiteing's previous experience includes fundraising development and event management for several nonprofit organizations, including the American Indian College Fund and the Denver Scholarship Foundation. Whiteing earned her bachelor's degree in anthropology from the University of Colorado at Boulder, with a minor in history.

WESTAF Staff

Chrissy Deal

Director of Social Responsibility and Inclusion, WESTAF

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Chrissy Deal currently serves as WESTAF's director of social responsibility and inclusion after joining the organization in 2013 as manager of its multicultural initiatives. Deal is responsible for developing a range of equity-centered learning experiences that connect and inspire leaders and communities to build a more inclusive arts and culture sector. Deal leads WESTAF's internal inclusiveness efforts, advises public sector and nonprofit arts organizations on how to align their missions with inclusion and equity goals, oversees WESTAF's Emerging Leaders of Color (ELC) program for arts administrators of color in the western United States, manages WESTAF's regional touring program (TourWest) and is WESTAF's accessibility coordinator.

With more than 20 years of nonprofit, education, and philanthropic experience, Deal is a longtime community volunteer and alumna of Denver's Circle of Latina Leadership. She sits on the board of trustees at the Denver Foundation and serves in an advisory role for the Community ACTS Fund and Diversity in the Arts Internship—programs designed to amplify the voices of historically marginalized or underrepresented communities in the Denver area. She is former vice chair of the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD) Denver County Cultural Council, which allocates public funds to scientific and cultural organizations, and is a founding member of Denver's first Latina women's giving circle, LatinasGive! She holds a bachelor's degree in art history from Northwestern University and a master's degree in nonprofit management from Regis University. Deal lives in North Denver with her husband and two young sons.

Christian Gaines

Executive Director, WESTAF

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A film, arts and technology leader with experience in the nonprofit and for-profit sectors, Christian has held leadership positions at the Sundance Film Festival, the Hawaii International Film Festival and the American Film Institute. For five years, Christian ran business development at Withoutabox, a film festival submissions platform acquired by IMDb, a division of Amazon. In 2013, Christian became Executive Director of ArtPrize, a disruptive international art competition held in Grand Rapids, Michigan. During this time, he served as a

council member on the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs. In January of 2019, Christian joined WESTAF as its Executive Director. Christian is passionate about bringing opportunities to artists, creating joyful spaces and inspiring teams to do their best work.

David Holland

Director of Public Policy, WESTAF

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David Holland is the director of public policy at WESTAF. In this role, Holland guides WESTAF's public policy and arts advocacy programs and services, which fund and catalyze arts advocacy across the region, convene state arts agency and arts advocacy leaders, and build cultural policy networks. Holland previously served as associate director of the Arts and Business Council of Greater Boston, a chapter of Americans for the Arts. Holland's prior roles include senior management positions with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) da Vinci Center for Innovation, VCU School of the Arts, Arts and Business (now Arts & Culture at Business in the Community), and the UK innovation think tank Nesta. Holland began his career with BOP Consulting, a global consulting firm focused on cultural policy, leading projects for government departments, public agencies, and international organizations. For more than 10 years, he has served as an independent management consultant working primarily in the arts and culture field both nationally and internationally with clients including the Inter-American Development Bank, Salzburg Global Seminar, and B3 Media.

Holland was recently elected to the Americans for the Arts Private Sector Advisory Council and serves on their Creative Economy Advisory Group. He is also a panelist for Arts in Society, a collaborative grant program supporting cross-sector work through the arts in Colorado. He has served as a panelist for the National Endowment for the Arts Office of Research and Analysis, the Virginia Commission for the Arts, Virginians for the Arts, the Boston Foundation, and as a site reviewer for the Mass Cultural Council. Holland has also served on research and program committees for the Alliance for the Arts in Research Universities and on the boards of several nonprofits, including the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia. He was selected as a Salzburg Global Seminar Young Cultural Innovator in 2014 and is a Salzburg Global Fellow and a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. Holland holds a bachelor's degree in economics from Amherst College and master's degrees in international studies and diplomacy and the history of art from the University of London, SOAS.



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Appendix:

WESTAF Provocation Paper on Rural Arts

David Holland, Director of Public Policy WESTAF

March 2020

Are rural arts a rural development strategy?

For pressing political and economic reasons, policymakers and the philanthropic and public sectors have a renewed interest in developing strategies that support Rural America. As has often been reported in the media and discussed in policy circles in recent years, the economic rebound from the last recession was not distributed evenly across U.S. populations and rural communities have not seen the jobs and industry growth that urban areas have seen during a period of economic recovery¹. Different types of rural communities have experienced these realities in varying ways, but many have seen depopulation, low levels of new business formation, and job loss². The economic declines felt in rural areas during the recession remain, coupled with a host of inequities that have persisted for generations. The increasing urbanization being observed and predicted may further exacerbate these trends. At the same time, there are many stories of rural transformation that belie these pessimistic predictions of the future of rural life. Some point to growth in Indian Country as one example of resurgence in rural areas³, while others highlight population growth in rural areas due to migration from urban areas⁴.

This is the backdrop against which current rural development strategies are being developed, and there is some urgency for those working in this space to find new ways to encourage rural growth and stability. New rural development strategies must identify the types of organizations and industries that can be promoted and invested in to support economic and community development.

Those advancing new conversations in this field have identified “regional development hubs”⁵ as a broad set of organizations that have the capacity to catalyze existing assets to build thriving rural

1 Greenblat, Alan. 2016. “Can Counties Fix Rural America’s Endless Recession?” *Governing*, August 2016. <https://www.governing.com/topics/mgmt/gov-rural-america-recession-oregon.html>

2 Ajilore, Oluqbenga. 2020. “Economic Recovery and Rural Dynamism in Rural America.” Center for American Progress, February 20, 2020. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2020/02/20/480129/economic-recovery-business-dynamism-rural-america/>

3 Kunes, Patrice H. 2019. “Getting Real About Indian Country—Surprising Progress in the Heartland.” *Indian Country Today*, April 22, 2019. <https://indiancountrytoday.com/opinion/getting-real-about-indian-country-surprising-progress-in-the-heartland-P9OJ5PA0aECqac42NM5dYg>

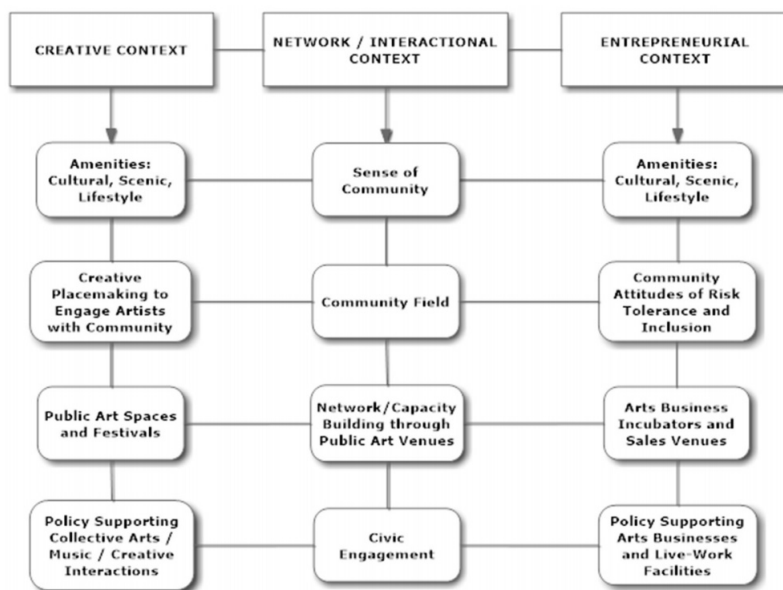
4 Cromartie, John and Dennis Vilorio. 2019. “Rural Population Trends.” United States Department of Agriculture, February 15, 2019. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2019/february/rural-population-trends/>

5 Community Strategies Group. 2019. “Rural Development Hubs: Strengthening America’s Rural Innovation Infrastructure.” Aspen Institute, 2019. https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2019/11/CSG-Rural-Devel-Hubs.pdf?_ga=2.94401311.249445304.1583263203-1270423169.1583263203

communities and positioned arts and culture and agtech as key industries⁶ (among others) that can attract talent, contribute to quality of life and generate economic activity.

While arts organizations in rural areas have not yet been identified as development hubs⁷ in new bodies of research and policy analysis on rural development, arts organizations exhibit many of the characteristics posited. Some rural arts organizations, such as Appalshop, are often used as examples of effective community development practice in rural areas. There is increasing recognition that rural creative sectors contribute to rural economic and community development. Both the evidence base that supports this theory remains in its infancy and the practice of rural development in and through the arts can be better understood. Within rural development, there is also a growing interest in and recognition of the importance of rural wealth and a recognition that building the wealth of rural communities requires various forms of capital, including cultural capital⁸. The focus on rural wealth building shifts the focus of rural development conversations from a focus on traditional economic development strategies to a wider community development focus, extending the range of organizations that can be seen to have a role in rural development strategies (including arts organizations). Organizations like Rural LISC that are expanding rural development practice to include arts and culture⁹ through holistic development strategies are doing so with a belief that this approach can foster community cultural development, transform physical environments in culturally relevant ways and create arts-related economic clusters.

Figure 1. Rural arts based development framework



Source: Balfour, Fortunato, and Alter, 2018

6 Burgum, Doug, and Benjamin Winchester. "Reimagining the Rural West in Fargo" (workshop, Western Governors' Association, Fargo, October 1, 2019). <https://westgov.org/news/article/watch-workshop-reimagining-the-rural-west-in-fargo-north-dakota-on-oct.-1>

7 Community Strategies Group. 2019. "Rural Development Hubs Brief." Aspen Institute, 2019. https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2019/05/RD-Hubs-Brief-2019-05-14-Release-FINAL.pdf?_ga=2.183272803.418591090.1559061183-1147792128.1559061183

8 Rural Policy Research Institute. "Rural Cultural Wealth Lab." Accessed March 6, 2020. <http://www.rupri.org/areas-of-work/rural-cultural-wealth-lab/>

9 Rural LISC. "Creative Placemaking." Accessed March 6, 2020. <https://www.lisc.org/rural/our-work/economic-workforce-development/rural-placema>

Academic theorists are also developing new conceptual frameworks that define rural art development as a set of activities driven by strengthening the creative, interactional, and entrepreneurial context of rural communities. Because many rural communities in the West are experiencing firm growth in business formation¹⁰ and other positive indicators of economic activity, rural arts development in the region may indeed be able to take advantage of an increasingly entrepreneurial context for rural development.

Are arts in rural areas different?

Arts and culture are and have long been an important part of life in rural communities across America. In popular consciousness, folk and traditional arts, including folk music cultures, traditional crafts and community festivals and celebrations, are seen to exemplify cultural production in rural areas. Although these practices are part of the unique and rich cultural assets and traditions that rural communities possess, rural arts encompasses contemporary aesthetics and practices in dynamic ways that defy the misconceptions of often urban-centric art worlds. Though rural arts lacks a clear set of criteria for definition, there are examples and features of current rural arts activity that can be identified as being particularly relevant to rural development dialogues:

- **Trails¹¹ and festivals¹²** - Music, craft, and heritage trails and local festivals (folk, music, craft, food, etc.) are programs that support cultural tourism and highlight people and places that have been important to the development of local cultural practices.
- **Cultural and creative districts¹³** - Cultural and creative districts have historically been an urban phenomenon, but many states have created policies for designating these districts in rural areas in recent years. Fifteen states across the country now have certified creative districts programs.
- **Public art¹⁴** - Public art and associated fields like mural art (often cast as urban art) can be largely associated with cities, but rural areas provide distinctive environments in which to locate permanent and ephemeral works of art. In addition, some have identified “public art spaces” as a key feature of rural arts.
- **Guilds and alliances¹⁵** - Guilds and alliances of folk and traditional artists continue to build on and evolve local practices and provide community to those that conduct this work.

10 Ajilore, Olugbenga. 2020. “Economic Recovery and Dynamism in Rural America.” Center for American Progress, February 20, 2020. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2020/02/20/480129/economic-recovery-business-dynamism-rural-america/>

11 New Mexico Arts. “Arts Trails.” Accessed March 6, 2020. <http://nmararts.org/arts-trails/>

12 Evanston Bluegrass Festival. “Home.” Accessed March 6, 2020. <http://bluegrassevanston.com/home.php>

13 Kay, Cristin. 2018. “New Art Loop Brings Tourism and Energy to Rural Creative Districts.” Aspen Public Radio, May 31, 2018. <https://www.aspenpublicradio.org/post/new-art-loop-brings-tourism-and-energy-rural-creative-districts>

14 Jackson Hole Public Art Program. “Places of Possibility.” Accessed March 6, 2020. <http://2vu7r51wf6it1bb04v1tratrk.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Places-of-possibility-public-art-toolkit.pdf>

15 Herzog Melby, Alyssa. 2015. “Reflections from the Rural Arts and Culture Summit.” Northfield Arts Guild, June 7, 2015. <https://northfieldartsguild.org/reflections-from-the-rural-arts-culture-summit/>

- **Artist communities and collectives**¹⁶ - Some artist communities and collectives **inspire and challenge contemporary artistic practice**¹⁷ based on the opportunities that rural environments provide artists working in these spaces.
- **Rural-urban exchanges**¹⁸ - Several states are beginning to create rural-urban exchanges to develop relationships between artists, urban and rural arts administrators, policy makers, and business owners to develop solutions to shared challenges.
- **Folk and traditional arts**¹⁹ - Folk and traditional arts, which represent a wide range of traditions and cultural practices rooted in communities, **engage high proportions of rural residents, high poverty areas and historically underserved or marginalized communities**²⁰.

These examples do not represent the full spectrum of rural arts, but highlight **types of organizations engaged in this work as well as the types of initiatives**²¹ that are being developed to advance rural arts. Recent **National Endowment for the Arts research**²² examines the ways in which rural arts organizations act as “substantive innovators” in their communities, support tourism by drawing in non-local audiences, and serve as civic leaders. Outside of policy circles in which the connection between rural prosperity and the arts and creative sector is increasingly recognized, rural arts has also gained increasing media currency in recent years with programming such as PBS’ American Creators²³ presenting rich arts experiences that are engaging rural communities throughout the country.

Does rural arts face a resource challenge?

There is growing recognition among grantmakers that philanthropic investments are largely weighted to metropolitan areas, and public and private institutions that include rural communities within their mandate are looking for ways to increase support to these areas. Research by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies²⁴ suggests that state arts agencies play a unique role in funding the arts in rural America in aggregate and that their investments engage more community organizations (community centers), education institutions (schools), and individual artists in rural communities than in urban areas. Collaborative grantmaking among private funders has also supported innovative rural arts²⁵ organizations and programming in communities across the country.

16 Ucross. “Home.” Accessed March 6, 2020. <http://www.ucrossfoundation.org/>

17 Stacey L. Ray Roth, “Experimental Contemporary Arts Practice in Rural Places.” (master’s thesis, University of Oregon, 2016). https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/20070/AAD_Ray_FinalProject_2016.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y

18 Nevada Arts Council. “The Nevada Basin to Range Exchange 2020.” Accessed March 6, 2020. <https://nvculture.org/nevadaartscouncil/programs/community-arts-development-program/nevada-basin-to-range-exchange/>

19 Kitchner, Amy, and Elizabeth Peterson, “National Support Systems for Folklife, Traditional Arts, and Cultural Heritage,” Field Convening organized by the Alliance for California Traditional Arts and the American Folklife Center, Washington, DC, September 27-28, 2018, Alliance for California Traditional Arts. <https://actaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/ACTA-AFC-Report-on-National-Support-Systems-9-19.pdf>

20 National Endowment for the Arts. “Living Traditions: A Portfolio Analysis of the National Endowment for the Arts’ Folk and Traditional Arts Program.” Accessed March 6, 2020. <https://www.arts.gov/publications/living-traditions-portfolio-analysis-national-endowment-arts%E2%80%99-folk-traditional-arts>

21 National Governors’ Association. 2019. “Rural Prosperity Through the Arts & Creative Sector,” National Governor’s Association, January 2019. https://www.nga.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/NGA_RuralArtsReport.pdf

22 National Endowment for the Arts. 2017. “Rural Arts, Design, and Innovation in America.” 2017. National Endowment for the Arts, November 2017. <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Rural%20Arts%2011-17.pdf>

23 Public Broadcasting Service. “American Creators.” Accessed March 6, 2020. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/tag/american-creators>

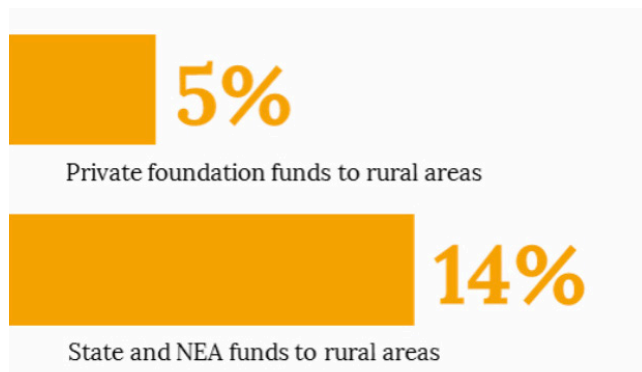
24 National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. “Rural-Grant-Making-Fact-Sheet.” Accessed March 6, 2020. https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa_research/rural-grant-making-fact-sheet/rural-grant-making-fact-sheet-2/

25 Americans for the Arts. “Arts Resources for Rural America.” Accessed March 6, 2020. <https://www.americansforthearts.org/blog-feed/arts-resources-for-rural-america>

A number of federal agencies support rural development activities that engage the arts. The U.S. Department of Agriculture²⁶ (USDA) and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) are among the federal agencies that are supporting rural arts activities both through large scale initiatives like the Citizens' Institute on Rural Design²⁷ (an Arts Endowment initiative in which the USDA act as collaborators) and Promise Zones (a HUD program) as well as funding individual projects in communities throughout America. There are, however, challenges with the ways in which

federal funding is deployed in rural areas²⁸ as compared with urban areas that may make it more difficult to apply these resources to creative placemaking and other arts based rural development initiatives. In general, private, state, and federal funding to rural areas makes up a relatively small percentage of overall funding across America, though some argue that state and federal funding are proportional to the U.S. population living in rural arts. Private foundation funding lags considerably behind public funding in rural areas²⁹, both in terms of arts funding and broader funding trends.

Figure 2. Private, state, and Arts Endowment funding to rural areas



Source: National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 2019

Research has also explored current challenges in supporting arts education in rural areas³⁰, highlighting both persistent inequities in urban versus rural funding and the challenges that rural communities face in meeting grant requirements like matching funds and program evaluations along with broader systemic challenges related to arts supportive education policy and lower tax bases in rural areas.

26 National Agriculture Library. "Arts and Humanities in Rural America." Accessed March 6, 2020. <https://pubs.nal.usda.gov/sites/pub.nal.usda.gov/files/artspub.html>

27 Citizens' Institute on Rural Design. "Resource Guide for Rural Planning and Design." Accessed March 6, 2020. <https://www.rural-design.org/resource/resource-guide-rural-planning-and-design>

28 The Pew Charitable Trust. "Can the Arts Help Save Rural America?" Accessed March 6, 2020. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2016/10/20/can-the-arts-help-save-rural-america>

29 Pender, John L. 2015. "Foundation Grants to Rural Areas From 2005 to 2010: Trends and Patterns." United States Department of Agriculture, June 2015. https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/43991/53166_eib141.pdf?v=0

30 Donovan, Lisa and Maren Brown. 2017. "Leveraging Change: Increasing Access to Arts Education in Rural Areas." Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, 2017. http://www.mcla.edu/Assets/MCLA-Files/Academics/Undergraduate/Art/MCLA_working_paper_FOR%20DIGITAL_single%20pgs_08.pdf

What's next for arts and/in the Rural West?

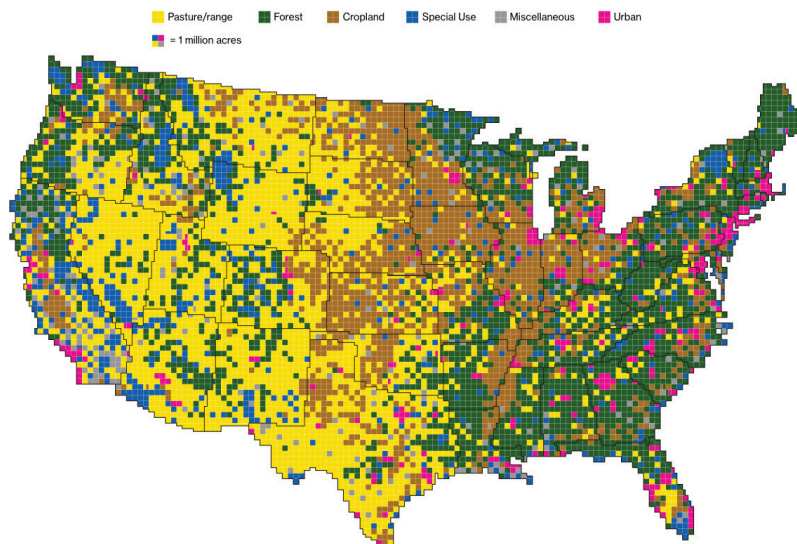
Understanding the Rural West

Defining “rural” is both a methodological and philosophical issue that influences how rural policy is being developed across the nation. Data from the U.S. Census³¹, in defining rural according to population, positions the center of rural America in the east, the Southeast in particular. A summary of these statistics is follows:

- 64.4 percent of the total rural population lives east of the Mississippi River.
- Nearly half (46.7 percent) of all people living in rural areas are in the South region, which is about 28 million people.
- Only 10 percent of the total population in the West region live in rural areas.
- Montana has the highest rural population in the West (43.6%), while California has the lowest rural population (4.3%).

Examining geography and concentration of urban centers presents a different view of the rurality of the West that shows it to be made up significantly of rural pasture and ranges (see Figure 3) with fewer significant urban clusters than other regions of the United States (see Figure 4).

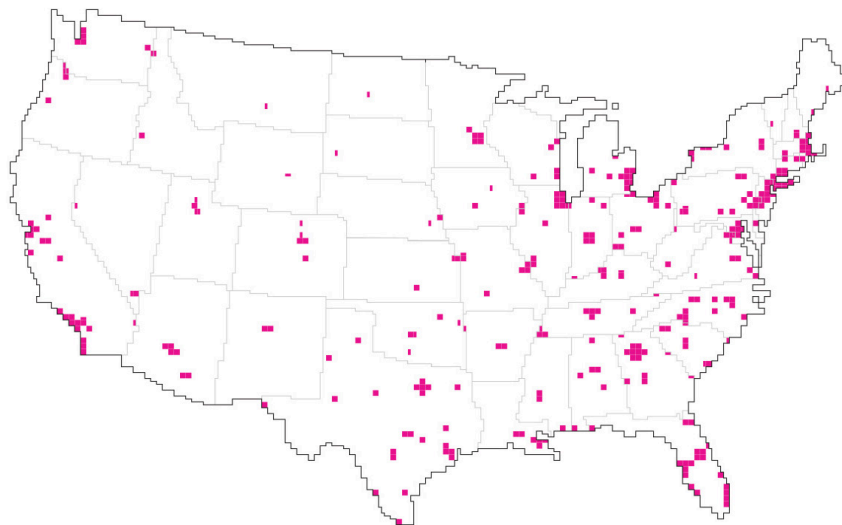
Figure 3. Land use in the United States



Source: Bloomberg, 2018

31 Fields, Alison, Kelly Ann Holder, and Charlynn Burd. “Off the Highway: A Snapshot of Rural America.” United Census Bureau, December 8, 2016. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2016/12/life_off_the_highway.html

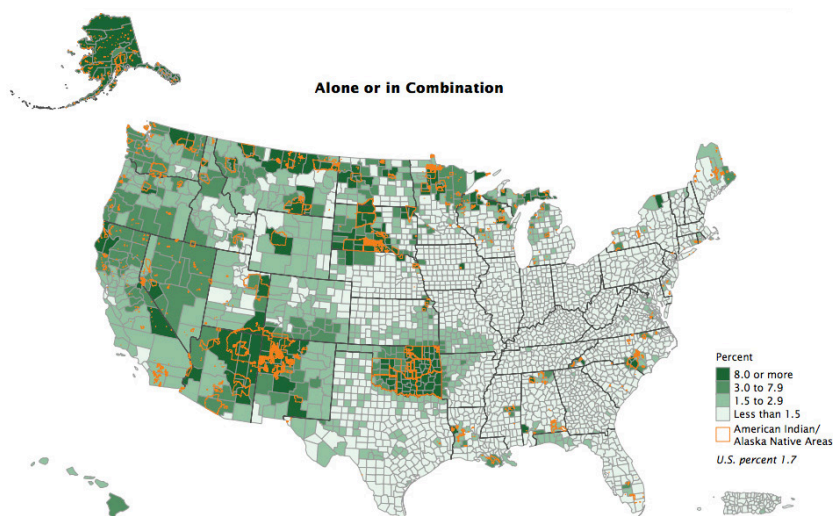
Figure 4. Urban areas in the United States



Source: Bloomberg, 2018

The Rural West, much like other rural areas across America, is much more diverse than commonly thought and, in some areas, increasingly diverse due to migration. While less than 2% of the U.S. population identifies as Native American, more than half (53.8%) of Native Americans reside in rural & small town areas.³² Native populations are significantly represented in the West compared to other regions of the United States and Native lands are an important part of the Rural West (see Figure 5). 463 of the 537 federally recognized tribes in the United States (86%) are located in the West.

Figure 5. Native populations in counties in the United States

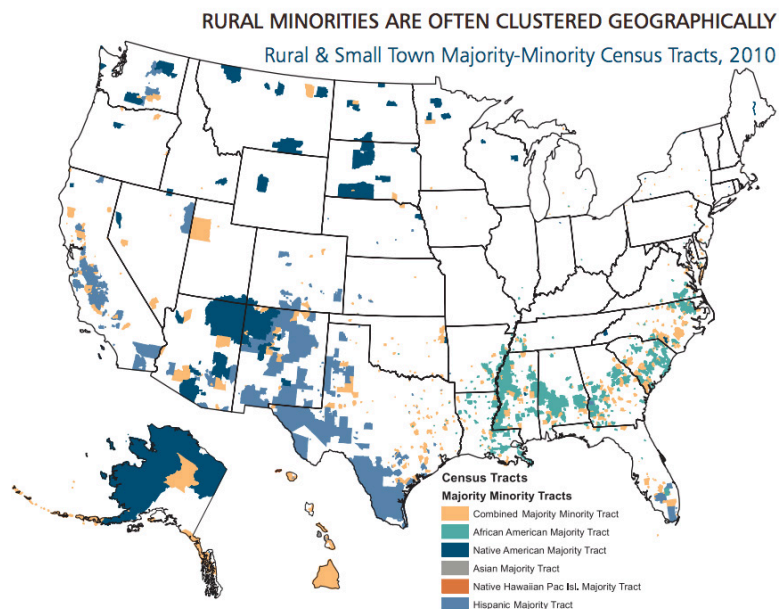


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Table P1.

Source: U.S. Census, 2010

Three of five “majority minority” states are in the West and nearly half of the population (47%) can be defined as “minority” – the highest percentage of all American regions.

Figure 6. Rural and small town majority minority Census Tracts



Source: Housing Assistance Council, 2010

Native American majority tracts, Hispanic majority tracts, and combined majority minority tracts are significantly represented in rural areas and small towns in the West when compared to other regions of America. In the year 2000, African Americans were the largest minority group in rural and small town areas. However, as of 2010 Hispanics comprise 9.3 percent of the rural population, surpassing African Americans (8.2 percent) as the largest minority group in rural and small town areas. While white non-Hispanics comprise nearly 80 percent of the rural and small town population, they made up less than one-quarter of rural population gain between 2000 and 2010³³.

Rural arts development and regional economic development

As noted in work on rural development hubs, regional cooperation and planning may be a key ingredient in next generation rural development strategies. An early step in this process is defining and better understanding the regional context in which rural development initiatives take place. WESTAF research on rural creative economies in California³⁴ uses “arts and culture regions” defined by the James Irvine Foundation and the Public Policy Institute of California to situate rural communities within arts and culture ecosystems and present the industries and occupations that define creative economies within rural subregions.

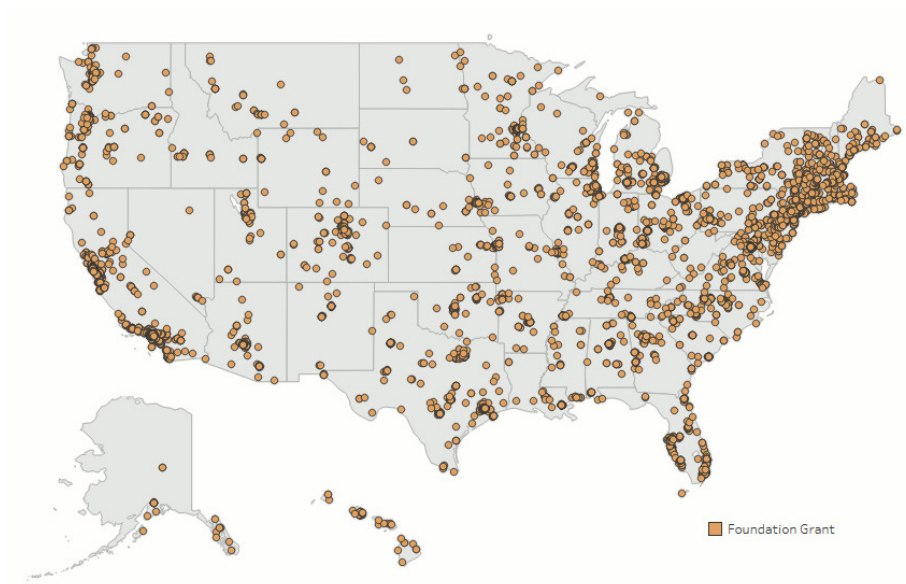
33 Housing Assistance Council. “Race and Ethnicity in Rural America.” HAC Research Brief, April 2012.

34 WESTAF. 2016. “A Guide to Rural Creatives in California.” WESTAF, November 2016. https://cvsuite.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2016/09/CVSuite_Rural-California.pdf

Arts funding and the Rural West

The Rural West seems to face a regional arts funding gap when compared with other regions of the United States. Resource gaps exist in state, Arts Endowment and private foundation funding and though targeted research needs to be done to identify the precise nature of these gaps, it appears that rural areas in the West may be particularly affected by these gaps. Rural arts development maneed to be supported by other state and federal programs, through local philanthropic support and by using entrepreneurial models of organizational development.

Figure 7. Public and private arts investment in the United States



Source: National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 2020

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