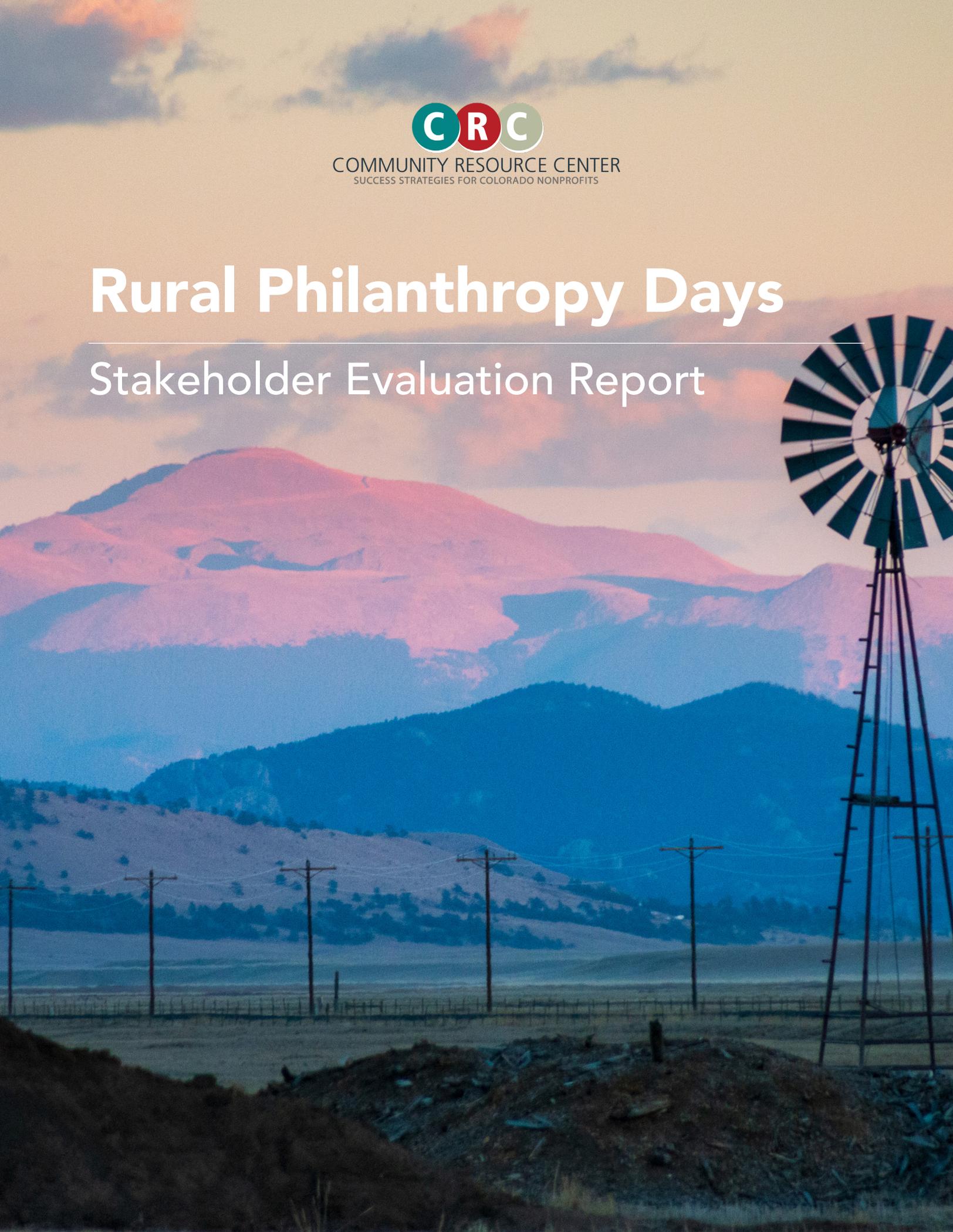




COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTER  
SUCCESS STRATEGIES FOR COLORADO NONPROFITS

# Rural Philanthropy Days

## Stakeholder Evaluation Report



# To Our Stakeholders,

For 40 years, Community Resource Center (CRC) has worked across the state of Colorado to build the capacity of the nonprofit sector and, in turn, build stronger, more resilient communities. We know that our impact has been a direct result of the passion and commitment of leaders, activists and doers who believe that together, we can create a better Colorado and world.

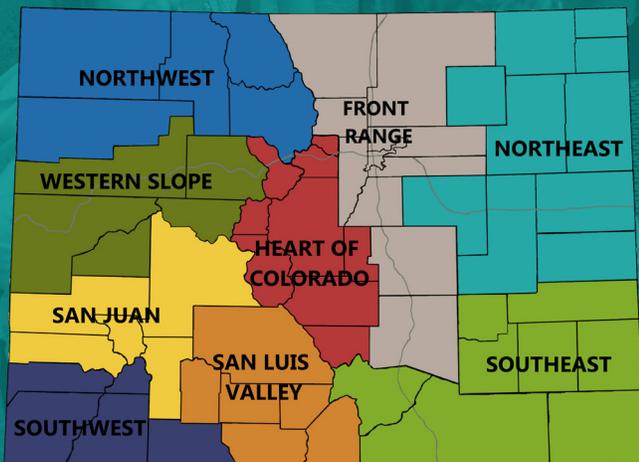
Throughout much of our history, Rural Philanthropy Days (RPD) has been the cornerstone of our work in rural communities. What started as a single event for Mesa County nonprofits and Front Range foundation representatives in 1990, has grown into a statewide, year-round program that remains rooted in developing and strengthening rural leaders and nonprofits and increasing philanthropic investment in rural communities. As the program has evolved, it has remained rooted in CRC's values and been driven by the needs of rural nonprofits. The leadership and engagement of hundreds of volunteers serving on RPD Steering Committees and Regional Leadership Committees has ensured rural voices are heard in the planning of each conference, and by our philanthropic partners who attend.

In recent years, stakeholder feedback has been leading us toward meaningful changes

to the RPD model. The COVID-19 pandemic greatly accelerated the need for a new vision and strategic direction to meet the evolving needs of rural communities. After pivoting to Rural Action Network programming to address immediate concerns of rural leaders early in the pandemic, CRC recognized the importance of getting more in-depth stakeholder input to shape the future of the program. We launched an external stakeholder evaluation process in early 2021. This report summarizes the evaluation findings and provides a preliminary overview of our new vision for rural engagement.

We envision a strong and sustainable nonprofit sector leading our state toward a more just future. We are committed to listening to stakeholder feedback and evolving our programs, including RPD, to meet changing needs. The RPD Stakeholder Evaluation has provided invaluable feedback to inform our work. It is clear that a shared leadership model and equitable decision-making practices are integral to the success of the program and CRC plays an important and unique role in this work.

We are pleased to share this report and look forward to ongoing engagement as we strive to deepen our impact in rural communities.



## With Gratitude,

**Maria Fabula**  
*President & CEO*

**Mary Zanotti**  
*Board President*

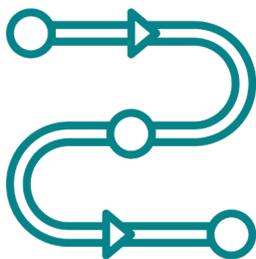
# The Process

---

CRC engaged Kim Smoyer of Smoyer & Associates to conduct the RPD Stakeholder Evaluation, which occurred February to June 2021. Kim has significant experience with past RPD events as a participant, committee member and event coordinator. She is an innovative, collaborative changemaker who resides in the San Luis Valley and is dedicated to supporting rural communities. Kim conducted a mixed method evaluation process that involved RPD’s two primary stakeholder groups: rural nonprofit leaders and Colorado funders who regularly attend RPD events and currently provide financial support for the RPD program.

The process solicited broad input from nonprofit stakeholders through a survey of nonprofit leaders, with responses from 245 individuals across all eight RPD regions. In-depth feedback was provided by 13 rural nonprofit leaders with significant experience as Steering Committee volunteers and RPD attendees across all regions, who participated in three facilitated focus group meetings. These leaders brought their lived experience as rural residents and nonprofit leaders to a process of ideation and prioritization to pinpoint urgent, emergent and future issues and opportunities to guide change within the program. Funder input was provided through one-on-one interviews between Kim and 12 Front Range RPD grant-maker representatives.

Based on the feedback gathered through this process, from past RPD evaluations and conversations with nonprofit leaders, CRC further developed the Rural Action Network concept into a more comprehensive model for rural engagement. The results of the evaluation process and a framework for a more in-depth Rural Action Network program were presented at a convening of both stakeholder groups on June 17, 2021. Attendees provided feedback on the evaluation results and the new Rural Action Network framework both during and after the meeting through online tools. CRC will continue to incorporate feedback and invites ongoing stakeholder input and engagement as the program evolves.



- Survey of rural nonprofit leaders from all 8 RPD regions (245 respondents)
- Three focus group meetings involving 13 rural nonprofit leaders active in RPDs from all 8 regions
- 1:1 interviews with 12 Front Range RPD grant-maker representatives
- Combined stakeholder meeting of 23 nonprofit leaders and funder representatives

## Goals of Rural Philanthropy Days (RPD)

---

<b>GOAL 1</b>	Rural Colorado’s nonprofit sector will have increased access to resources that support the operation of sustainable organizations in order to strengthen social impact.
<b>GOAL 2</b>	Grantmakers are increasingly engaged with rural Colorado community leaders to ensure a better understanding of regional challenges and collaborative opportunities.
<b>GOAL 3</b>	Rural communities have the resources needed to effectively collaborate on a regional scale.

# What We Learned

**RPD stakeholders – nonprofit and funder representatives – are aligned on many elements.**

**RPD is important, appreciated & valued.** Across the board there was resounding support from stakeholders who spoke to how important and valuable RPD events are to their work.

Out of 245 survey responses from rural nonprofit leaders:

**98%** believe that RPD provides a meaningful opportunity and is valued in their community and region.

**93%** believe the needs of their community are reflected within the goals of the RPD program.



## What are people saying?

“No other organization is engaging the rural communities in this way. CRC is the rural community support organization.”

“I haven’t heard “someone else is doing this”. There is no other organization that is on CRC’s bandwidth for this work.”

“BIG fans of RPD!!!”

“Having funders visit our area is golden. Nothing can compare to having their physical presence in our rural communities and seeing what our needs look like.”

**Making connections is critical.** For both funders and nonprofits, the unique opportunity for relationship building over the course of several days is the most critical aspect of the event. Many mentioned the informal opportunities to connect as being particularly meaningful.

**“For me, the magic happens in those personal interactions like standing in line at the buffet, the roundtables, and tours. Both formal and informal settings where I can talk to folks and build relationships – that’s what’s most valuable.”**

**There is strong support for virtual elements of RPD and other programs.**

**76%** of nonprofit respondents believe that virtual programming would benefit their communities.

**80%** believe that virtual programming is more accessible for rural nonprofit staff.

**83%** believe that the magic of RPD comes from in-person interactions & favor in-person for networking & collaborating.



*“While I prefer in-person meetings and I believe they help build relationships in a stronger way, sometimes time and distance constraints make online a better option, allowing more people to participate.”*

**There is a lack of awareness of the ongoing work in the rural regions.** Many stakeholders, particularly in the funding community, were not entirely aware of the full statewide scope of CRC’s rural leadership and development programming, engagement work, capacity building and convening that occurs year-round, within all eight regions. While familiar with the RPD conference itself, knowledge of the ongoing work that is foundational to CRC’s approach to rural engagement is limited.

*“RPD is more than philanthropy - there is definitely a need and interest by NPOs for more support and more engagement.”*



**Address the power dynamic, inequities & barriers.** The funder roundtables were specifically called out as perpetuating an unhealthy power dynamic between funders and nonprofits and there is strong desire for changing them or developing more equitable alternatives. The inequity in funding and support for the RPD conferences across regions creates stark differences in the conference experiences across the state and is a big concern for funders. Both stakeholder groups acknowledge the time commitment to serve on Rural Leadership Committees and Steering Committees is a barrier to participation for many nonprofit leaders and excludes key voices within the sector.

**There is a desire to go deeper.** There was a call from funders and nonprofits alike to go deeper in many areas, such as higher level capacity-building, wider collaborative work tackling systemic issues and exploring collective impact funding opportunities. Both groups want more dialogue, in-depth exploration of regional issues, and opportunities to build deeper connections that lead to transformational partnerships and impact.

***“I would like a more strategic approach. RPD should focus on issues in a region. Funders want to know what the regional issues are and what we can do to help address them. This could lead to collective funding opportunities. We need to hear from strategic thinkers from NPOs who have bigger picture perspective of the issues in the community. This is not always who attends.”***



***“Create space for authentic interactions that result in true shared commitment to regional issues.”***

## Stakeholder needs and interests differ in a few key areas.

**Nonprofits want more of everything. Funders want more depth, learning, transformational opportunities and interaction with high-level regional leaders.**

Nonprofit leaders find value in all aspects of RPD programming, including capacity-building workshops, higher-level dialogues on regional issues, informal networking opportunities, funder panels and the roundtables, while noting there needs to be more available for senior-level, experienced nonprofit leaders.

### NONPROFIT IDEAS

#### HIGHLIGHTED RECOMMENDATIONS FROM NONPROFIT LEADERS

- Opportunities for cross-region connection & collaboration
- Greater engagement, growth and inclusivity of the Rural Leadership Committees
- Have CRC staff who live and work in the regions
- Establish a statewide rural advisory group
- Statewide conference that brings together rural leaders from all regions

***“Let’s take advantage of opportunities to do cross-region, statewide work and to realign regions.”***

Funders acknowledge the capacity-building workshops are useful for nonprofit organizations but noted they tend to be at a basic level, which doesn’t draw experienced nonprofit leaders to the conference, which is who they believe are needed to engage in higher-level dialogue that will lead to more transformational opportunities. Funders don’t find the capacity-building workshops relevant to their needs and prefer opportunities to take deeper dives into learning about the regions and engaging in conversations about the critical issues and needs. Several funders indicated that past Listening Tours were extremely valuable.

### FUNDER IDEAS

#### HIGHLIGHTED RECOMMENDATIONS FROM NONPROFIT LEADERS

- Have opportunities to support RPD planning that doesn’t take as much time as the current Steering Committee model
- Connect funders with more community leaders, such as county commissioners, economic development and other key stakeholders in the region
- Create opportunities to interact with other funders such as government and community foundations
- Develop program tracks for two specific audiences: strategic level and tactical level



***“There are many many options for basic / entry level topic training. What is more meaningful is a) next level training for seasoned professionals and b) practical and applicable tools and strategies that can jump start the application of the information learned.”***

**There are diverse opinions and mixed emotions about the roundtables.** Feedback on the roundtables varied within and across stakeholder groups. Many dislike their transactional nature and prefer more meaningful interactions between nonprofits and funders. Some funders find them valuable to their work – although for varying reasons, and not necessarily to help them make grants. Others noted they are contrary to how their foundations strive to work with communities, rarely lead to good grant opportunities and create a feeling of competition that is not aligned with the event’s spirit of collaboration. Some feel they cause too much stress on the nonprofits and shift the attendee population towards development staff rather than experienced, senior leaders. Funders also acknowledged and expressed concerns about the unhealthy power dynamic the roundtable structure perpetuates.

While some nonprofits dislike the structure of the roundtables, they appreciate the opportunity to connect face-to-face with funders and hearing what other nonprofits are doing. Many nonprofits attend RPD for the opportunity to make a pitch for grant funding and appreciate a structured format for doing it.



### What are people saying?

“Our staff attend to have exposure to NPO leaders in the area. This happens through the roundtables. Most valuable part of RPD. This is where they find out what people are doing, their missions and visions and get a chance to talk about who they are and what their challenges are for the region.”

“The structure and format of the roundtables sets up an unhealthy power dynamic. It’s not the mode of philanthropy we aspire to practice.”

“Reformat or even get rid of the funder roundtables. It leaves a shadow on the event for NPOs – the competitive nature makes it stressful.”



**Nonprofits and funders have different wants, needs, and understanding of what builds capacity in nonprofit organizations and the regions.** Nonprofits view the full spectrum of the RPD conference, Steering Committees and the ongoing work of the Rural Leadership Committees (RLCs) as contributing to building capacity within and generating funding for rural regions.

Funders have a more limited view of how RPD programming builds capacity in the regions. Most did not mention Rural Leadership Committees, trainings outside of the conference or the ongoing support and resources CRC provides to the regions. Additionally, funders don't view the RPD conference as a capacity-building opportunity for their organizations or themselves.

***“We need more support from CRC with seasoned staff who live and work in the region as well as more staff dedicated to working with us year-round.”***

**“Huge disconnect between what the goals are for the grantees versus what the goals are for the funders. Sold the same event but come at it from different perspectives.”**

Several stakeholders commented that nonprofits and funders have different expectations for the RPD conferences, expressing a need for clarity on the overall goals and purpose. While it's clear the work should be centered on rural nonprofits and regional needs, there are disparate views on what the benefits are to funders and how that relates to what nonprofits want from their interactions with them. There was considerable feedback regarding the need to market the event differently to clarify its purpose, goals and who should attend, including experienced senior regional nonprofit leaders. This aligned with funder input to change the perception that the purpose of RPD is for nonprofits to get grants, as that is not how most funders view the event.

### **Items Specific To Funders.**

There were a few items of particular interest to funders:

- More transparency on the costs of the RPD program statewide and what their funding specifically supports.
- Concern that the local fundraising component for RPD conferences puts unnecessary burden on the regional leadership and could diminish local support that goes directly to nonprofits in the regions. Nonprofit respondents were generally in favor of local fundraising or neutral about it.
- In addition to connecting with rural nonprofits, funders greatly value the opportunity to connect with each other at RPD, as well as with regional funders such as community foundations.



## Key Takeaways

TAKEAWAY 1	<p><b><i>Regional Leadership Committees (RLCs) are the heart of this work.</i></b> The RLCs are the lifeblood of CRC’s rural engagement work. Investing in that ongoing community presence, evolving support, and network building is the key to success.</p>
TAKEAWAY 2	<p><b><i>RLCs need to be inclusive and accessible and provide meaningful leadership opportunities.</i></b> Members of these committees are leading and driving solutions-based work to issues in their region. The current structure and time commitment inhibits many nonprofit leaders from participating.</p>
TAKEAWAY 3	<p><b><i>The RPD Conference is important, but only one piece of the pie.</i></b> While valuable, the RPD events are only one component of the comprehensive support for rural regions. The focus and emphasis on just the conference discounts the importance of the year-round regional work and the critical role the RLC’s play in strengthening the nonprofit sector.</p>
TAKEAWAY 4	<p><b><i>Rural nonprofit and regional needs cannot be met through a three-day conference every four years.</i></b> The challenges Colorado’s rural communities are facing, and their vision for the future of their communities, are far too expansive to be met through a three-day conference every four years. Transformational work requires long-term, trusting relationships, collaboration, and investment.</p>



# A new vision for rural engagement – The Rural Action Network (RAN)

The last year highlighted the possibilities for greater impact through comprehensive rural programs, illustrated the importance of shared leadership and decision-making, and demonstrated the necessity of deeper engagement in rural communities. Through CRC’s ongoing work with stakeholders and this evaluation process, a new vision for the Rural Action Network emerged.

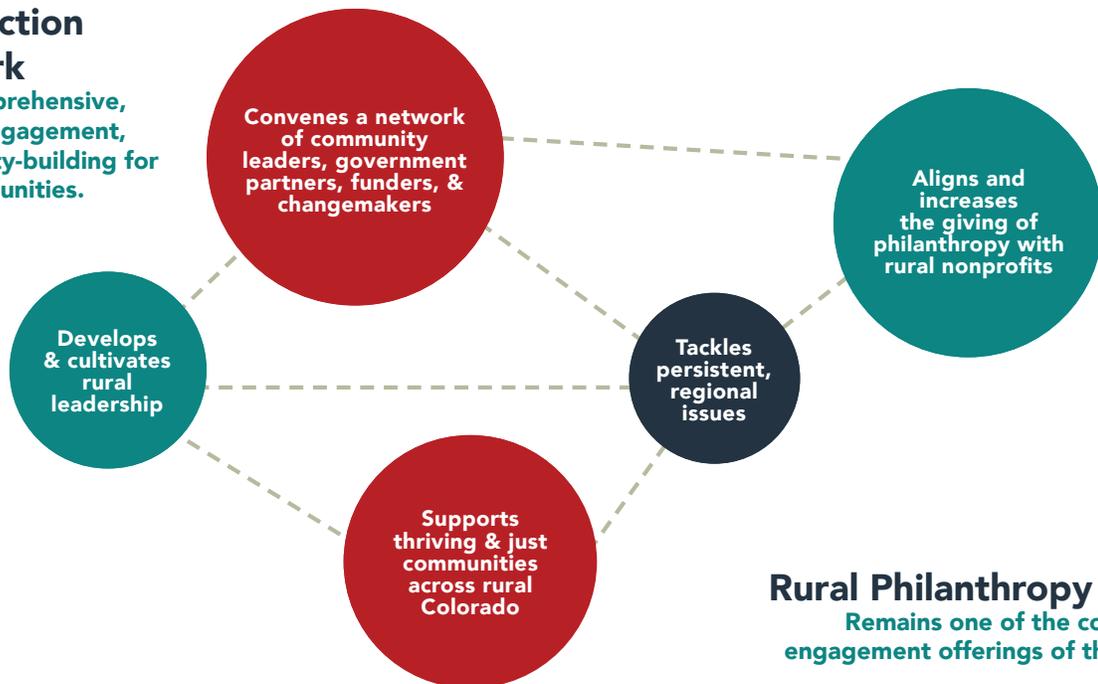
**Through the Rural Action Network, CRC will convene a powerful, dynamic, and responsive network of nonprofits, community and government leaders, funders, and changemakers to tackle persistent issues in regions, develop and cultivate rural leadership, align and increase the giving of philanthropy with the needs of rural nonprofits, and support thriving, just communities across rural Colorado.**



The RAN is the umbrella under which Rural Philanthropy Days conferences, Steering Committees, Regional Leadership Committees, rural trainings and other rural programming sit within CRC’s programs and services for Colorado’s nonprofit sector. This approach bridges, supports, and catalyzes the changemakers who are deeply committed and invested in rural Colorado - *nonprofits, foundations, government, community members* - and builds the capacity of the entire field to have a greater impact in rural communities.

## Rural Action Network

CRC’s comprehensive, ongoing engagement, and capacity-building for rural communities.



**Rural Philanthropy Days**  
Remains one of the core rural engagement offerings of the RAN.

## Rural Action Network Cycle of Programs & Events

The RAN organizes rural efforts to facilitate deeper engagement within a program design that builds momentum, sustains investment over time, connects the dots, and ultimately, is more transformational for the participants and regions. RAN shifts the rural development work from focusing solely on the RPD conference every four years, to a continuous cycle of strategic programming that builds off the conference and provides ongoing investment and support of rural communities. In between RPD conferences, statewide and regional partners and funders and rural leaders and nonprofits will have additional facilitated immersive engagement opportunities to learn and connect in rural regions.



**Regional RPD Conferences**



**Regional Virtual Funder Roundtables**



**Immersive Engagement Opportunities**



**Regional Leadership Committee-led Programming**



**Statewide Rural Leadership Summit**



**Rural Advisory Council (RAC)**

## RAN RURAL ACTION NETWORK CYCLE IN A REGION

### YEAR 1

Capacity-building focused on most pressing regional issue(s)

### YEAR 2

Immersive Engagement Opportunity & Virtual Funder Roundtables

### YEAR 3

Capacity-building focused on nonprofit management & leadership

### YEAR 4

Virtual Funder Roundtables & RPD Conference



## A Shared Leadership Model

A shared leadership model is core to the vision for this comprehensive program. CRC is committed to collaboration and to working with diverse stakeholders. The RAN shared leadership model will be formalized and built into the program structure.



### REGIONAL LEADERSHIP COMMITTEES (RLCs):

Provide strategic leadership and direction for CRC's Rural Action Network programming in eight regions. This includes determining the focus for regional capacity-building efforts and issues-focused work, local outreach & local fundraising. Sub-committees will form to assist with planning and execution of events during the cycle, such as Listening Tours and RPD conferences.



### STATEWIDE RURAL ADVISORY COUNCIL (RAC):

Provides overarching guidance and an equitable decision making forum to shape long-term RAN strategies, cultivate rural expertise, expand cross-regional work and evaluate program effectiveness. Composed of nonprofit leaders, funders and key partners representing the eight regions, members serve over multiple years.



### COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTER (CRC):

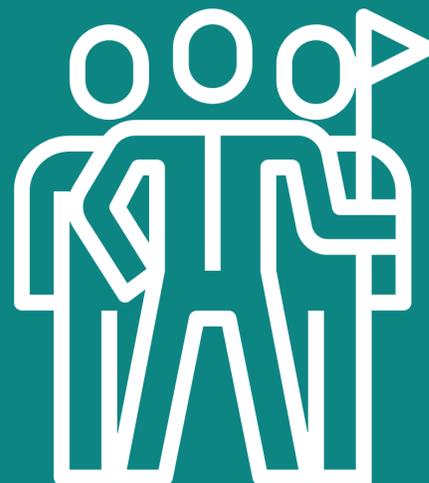
Provides increased staff support using equitable practices focused on community capacity building; facilitation of 8 RLC's and Rural Advisory Council; co-creation of rural programming; regional and statewide fundraising; committee/council member recruitment; outreach and relationship management.



## **An evolving process to achieve greater impact**

CRC deeply appreciates the stakeholders who have led, participated in and supported the evolution of Rural Philanthropy Days throughout the past 30 years. The program's success is the result of the leadership, commitment and resiliency of rural nonprofit leaders and the generosity, engagement and support of Colorado's philanthropic foundations.

As we move forward with a new vision for rural engagement, we will continue to engage our diverse stakeholders in shaping the evolution of the Rural Action Network and the Rural Philanthropy Days conferences. We invite you to join us as we work to achieve greater impact in rural communities throughout Colorado. Please visit our website [crcamerica.org](http://crcamerica.org) for more information about how you can help lead, support and engage in the ongoing development and implementation of the Rural Action Network.



## **Thank you**

---

### **Thank you to the participants in the Rural Philanthropy Days Stakeholder Evaluation.**

Carrie Tynan, Adolph Coors Foundation  
Roger Palmer, AmeriCorps Mountain Region  
Ruth Seedorf, Baby Bear Hugs  
Garrett Mayberry, Boettcher Foundation  
Linda Reiner, Caring for Colorado  
Carlton Mason, CASA of the 7th Judicial District  
Pamela Denahy, City of La Junta  
Owen McAleer, Daniels Fund  
Mikayla Curtis, Mountain Youth  
Matt Carpenter, El Pomar Foundation  
Lupita Garcia, Energy Resource Center  
Lisa Rucker, Gates Family Foundation  
Amy Scavezze, Griptape

April-Dawn Knudsen, Habitat for Humanity Summit County

Janice Fritsch, Kenneth King Foundation

Anne Marie Crampton, Lamar Community College

Vangi McCoy, Montelores Early Childhood Council

Lisa Sullivan Clark, NextFifty Initiative

Elaine Brett, Paonia Space to Create

Gretchen Van De Carr, Rocky Mountain Youth Corps

Chuck McAfee, TEAM-UP

Amy Latham, The Colorado Health Foundation

Ned Calonge, MD, MPH, The Colorado Trust

Joe Haines, Yampatika

**A special thank you to Kim Smoyer of Smoyer & Associates for conducting this evaluation and to the CRC staff who lead CRC's rural engagement programming and participated in the evaluation process: Elizabeth Berkeley, Nellie Stagg, Rebecca Gorrell and Maria Fabula.**



**COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTER**  
SUCCESS STRATEGIES FOR COLORADO NONPROFITS