



RURALX 2022 RECAP

Loving Where You Live

Hybrid Conference
Vermillion, SD
June 7-8, 2022

YOUR RURALX EXPERIENCE

This year at RuralX we explored “Loving Where You Live.” What are the places you love? What does it mean to practice loving where you live?

We dove into these topics live from Vermillion, South Dakota, along with an in-person and online audience. Here’s a recap of all the amazing moments inspired by all who participated.

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MELODY WARNICK

Small is the Next Big Thing



The vast majority of Americans once lived wherever their job took them—usually within driving distance of a major metro area. Now the Covid-fueled rise of remote work has freed startling numbers of people to live exactly where they want. How can you convince them to land in your rural community? In her keynote, Melody Warnick, author of *This Is Where You Belong* and *If You Could Live Anywhere*, shared how to use the secret sauce of place attachment to attract and retain new residents. Hint: You don't have to offer \$10,000 and a free house to new move-ins. You just have to focus on the 3 Ps of profession, people, and purpose. You'll leave knowing why your small town is so great and what you can do to convince others to catch your vision.

Author Melody Warnick joined us to share her above talk, Small is the Next Big Thing, with our virtual and in-person audiences. Attendees had the opportunity to be the first ever to hear ideas from her newest book (to be released in summer of 2022), *If You Could Live Anywhere*. Check out her talk [here](#).

Twitter and Instagram: [@melodywarnick](#)

www.MelodyWarnick.com

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KNOWLEDGE CAMP BREAKOUTS



The Knowledge Camp Breakouts Experts spoke about the challenges, opportunities and victories of people living in rural communities today. They left us with actionable steps we can take back to our community and start shaping the future of rural today. Take a look at the topics they covered:

Savannah Barrett - watch session [here](#)

- Exploring the Currency of Connection with the Rural-Urban Exchange
- [kyrux.org](#)
- Living With Complexity (Case Study) [Resource link here](#)
- Rural-Urban Exchange Handbook [Resource link here](#)

Audrey Lutz - watch session [here](#)

- Mapping Your Welcome
- [mcofgi.org](#)
- Welcoming Web [Resource link here](#)


Beth Osborne and Chris Zimmerman - watch session [here](#)

- Where to Get the Money and How to Spend it
- [t4america.org](#), [smartgrowthamerica.org](#)
- Compendium of Resources [Resource link here](#)

Sandra Kern Mollman - watch session [here](#)

- Shaping the Future of Rural

OPENX SESSION GUIDE





OpenX
RURALX

HYBRID =
VERMILLION +
ONLINE
AUDIENCE

	ROOM 1	ROOM 2	ROOM 3	ROOM 4	ROOM 5
ROUND 1 2:15 - 2:55 PM CT	Revitalizing Small Town Main Streets - Marty	How do we draw our communities together? - Lawrence	Citizen engagement tactics - Rhiannon	Hearing rural success stories (small easy projects) - Deb	Big data precision ag and its effects - Chan
ROUND 2 3:05 - 3:45 PM CT	How to reach people through different medias, meet them where they are - Ally	How do we draw our communities together? - Lawrence	Creative Ways to Address our Child Care Provider Shortages - Vince	Hearing rural success stories (small easy projects) - Deb	Activating Untapped Entrepreneurial Talent: Sitting on the Sidelines in Rural Places - Andrew Button

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RESOURCES**

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Revitalizing Small Town Main Streets

Topic convener:

Marty Doll, AE25

What are the highlights?

Why people are here:

Integrating art

Streetscape

Vacancies - good ideas always welcome

Main Street always a topic in coaching towns

Connecting tourists to art

Sees Main Streets not being busy

No one wants a mushy core

Wants to hear other ideas, hiring ec dev director

Sharing organization resources

Marty called this session because:

1. Org provides services to rural communities, and they ask for revitalization
2. Moving back to hometown and sees similar challenges downtown

General/initial discussion:

Where have people had success? Or not success?

Tear it down and mow the grass until new things come up?? Preserve the heritage?

A lot of work, a lot of expense to maintain old buildings.

Old construction has valuable character in rock and brick and it draws people in.

Becoming year-round instead of seasonal. People resist trying, worried about finding help.

Walking tour - outsider view of the good and bad.

Start a dozen ideas in a single building instead of betting on one.

Absentee landlords, empty buildings:

Building owner not answering communication? Just take action non-destructively to improve it: community put plywood over broken windows and painted murals

Use incentives or disincentives to get the landlord's attention.

Empty building/Occupancy ordinances in use in Sturgis and Centerville, SD. Connect building owners with nonprofit organizations like the arts council or youth programs.

You don't have to rely only on local funding. Tap state and federal sources.

Coworking: negotiate for good terms.

Murals/Arts

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How do you celebrate mural completion? Ribbon cutting, open house. Locals get in free! (which gets them to bring guests)

Ongoing: hashtag and contest campaigns: take your selfie at the mural and use the hashtag, give out prizes.

Resources:

Creative Community Development: A Resource Guide for Artist-led Development of Vacant Spaces in Southwest MN, released in summer 2020. The how-to guide provides examples and resources for engaging local artists in a process of redesigning and reactivating empty Main Street buildings.

<https://extension.umn.edu/rsdp-happenings/artists-and-community-reactivate-vacant-spaces-southwestern-minnesota>

Creative Uses for Downtown Buildings in Small Towns, University of Wisconsin Extension and Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, Bill Ryan, Emily Lutz, and Melissa Kono of UW-Extension, working with Errin Welty of WEDC, 2016.

<https://fyi.uwex.edu/innovativedowntownbusinesses/>

Here is a bit of a case study of a small town in Newfoundland, Canada of taking a LOT of run-down buildings and turning them in to several thriving year-round businesses, many of which sell their products / services around the world:

<https://www.saltscapes.com/roots-folks/3102-sweet-home-bonavista.html>

Happy to share some of the 'keys to success' that we've seen in other rural places (Andrew Button)

How to use media to meet people where they're at

Topic convener:

Ally King

What are the highlights?

Start with WHO - who do you want to communicate with. Learn about that demographic, and learn where they go typically for information, then use that channel to cater to them.

Make your message adjustable to fit who you're trying to reach. Making it generic will reach nobody. That's not always compatible with efficiency, and it can be a challenge in small orgs. Streamline what you do to be more efficient. Focus.

Communication is as vital as planning for the event itself.

Writing for the community - simple language.

What can we expect from the average citizen - how much time do they spend consuming information? People can get lost in data and you miss the human element. Ask people: what communication do you want? Where do you get your information?

Quality over quantity perspective. But have to also communicate that to funders and help to change their perspectives as well.

What do the data studies say? Folks are moving toward podcasts and videos to get their information.

Use a free profile - through Survey Monkey. Lots of ways to track if your advertising is reaching the people you want it to.

There's also scroll tracking through Google Analytics, to see how far down on your website someone has scrolled. Are they actually reading the information? (It might look different than the info Facebook says about engagement, so use this as a cross reference.)

Utilize the networks you have, through reciprocal relationships, to amplify each other's communications. Send people the information to make it easy for them to share.

Collaboration with partners - cross advertising for everything the other is doing.

Work creatively with the local paper - they can be a huge help.

Utilize the church bulletins.

Have to be in more than one medium to attract more audiences.

Help people figure out where the go-to place is.

Utilize lawn signs!

How do we draw our communities together?

Topic convener:

Lawrence Diggs

What are the highlights?

How do we start & sustain a conversation?

What are some ways that we can get people more comfortable with talking to each other?

What are some non-verbal ways of gathering and working together on something? (Like making quilts).

What stands out?

- What insights, ideas, questions are emerging?
 - The Art of Conversation
 - Important to 'do' something together to help focus those interactions
 - There is a difference between being busy and being productive
- What is the group learning from each other?
 - Faulkton example: Host meetings to break down silos within communities across different organizations (development corp, hospital, chamber of commerce, etc)
 - Random gathering spaces that encourage people to interact. Example of closing down a street to set up some lawn furniture.
 - Importance of inviting generations to connect and work together
 - Incorporate the Art of Conversation into an 'Artist in Residence'
- What needs are becoming more clear?
 - Create a list of projects that can be done? Then extend an invitation to gather together.
 - Need to get younger generations involved. Find ways to get them engaged.
 - Be open to possibility and carry the conversation forward from there.
 - Events focused on giving people the opportunity to work together on a fun project
- How do we connect with one another?
 - Dr Mogel invited people to a party - watched stress levels when they met new people- levels would spike. Had people play air guitar together and the stress levels went to a normal level. Research shows we have stress when meeting new people that makes it hard for us to make new friends.
 - Research on how to engage people. How do we make people feel comfortable?
- What may lower stress levels?
 - Food
 - Activities
 - Creating events that people can use as props to get out of their comfort zones. Parade spontaneously around the crowd.

- Listening to what people have to say afterwards is how their stress levels/ comfort levels change.
 - Positive feedback comes from people requesting these props at other events
- Activities to bring all of these communities together
 - Something that is comforting
 - Tailgate parties
 - Halloween parties
 - Water balloon volleyball
 - Toss the water balloon- catch with towel people that drop it gets a point
 - MIX TEAMS UP WITH DIFFERENT GROUPS
 - This is where the magic happens because they have to cooperate with the others
 - Blind Safari
 - Walk a group around town, holding hands, in a line, discuss where they think they went for about 30 minutes
 - Pay attention to smells, sound, wind
 - INTERESTING TRUST BUILDERS
 - Sidewalk chalk decorations to make people days
 - Decorate big rocks with positive affirmations
 - Town scavenger hunts- use a talent and leave a little piece of talent around town. example : glass blower
 - Town Potluck - centered around food with your heritage
 - Advertise the same event, at the same time but towards different groups with different marketing- trick them into coming to the same event unbeknownst to the other group, BUT EVERYONE MINGLES.
 - Homemade cards- Anonymously send them to people. Bond within the group- make a secret group name
 - You're going to get something, not sure what it is and not expecting anything but you know when you get that, that people are thinking positive thoughts about them.

Citizen Engagement Tactics

Topic convener:

Rhiannon Israel

What are the highlights?

How are events communicated? Does that impact engagement?

- Sometimes the easiest way to get people's attention in my town is often via signage on the roadside
- Call people and personally invite them
- Newspaper
- Online monthly newsletter and paper newsletter, too
- Flyers and poster at the post office
- Newspaper is no longer a local voice
- Not being intentional with your communication can subset the group you're communicating with

How are people deciding what events they attend? Do we need to have incentives for people to show up?

- Being happy with who shows up. Realizing that your group is small.
- Making it clear what they should expect and what is expected of them in the event

Collaboration... has collaboration for events been more or less beneficial?

- Good to start with mutual agreements.
- Getting on the same page about what the event is.
- Repeating yourself... might feel like you're saying it over and over again, but people likely aren't seeing it.
 - People need to see things 7 times in four different forms.

How do you get the people involved?

- Is it one on one conversations? Is it personal invitations?
- With boards, recruit for specific roles on the board so they can understand who is needed and why they would be specifically needed.
- Making personal touches
 - Seeing people in person
 - Reaching out to them specifically
 - Giving them money (haha)
 - Feeling fulfilled
 - Implementing what they said
 - Great point about using a personal touch and personal connections. We're all so closely linked that let's say you want a local CEO involved in your event but you don't know that person....however, your neighbor might! Use all those

connections and "influencers" to reach the people you think can help advance your project or event!

- Reaching out to multiple degree connections... "tell 5 people about X."
 - "Do me a favor?" connects people to you
 - \$50 for \$50 for community people
-
- What about non-event based?

Creative Way of Addressing Child Care

Topic convener:

Vince Robinson

What are the highlights?

- A lot of grandparents are bailing out parents when they need help.
- Creating a child care space but rolled it into their bond
- Hospital was going to use medicare dollars to establish a daycare
- An incubator of people who are well trained to run a daycare facility themselves
- Utilizing churches
 - They already have the facilities for a daycare. How could you make that work?
 - Churches can be possessive over the physical space resource.
 - It is a win / win.
 - Have people who are interested, but can't get the space. Having a hard time getting churches on board.
 - Jefferson example, St. Peter's Childcare
 - Who is the decision maker when it comes to utilizing the church space? Is it one person, a board, the whole congregation?

Hearing Rural Stories – Small Steps

Topic convener:

Deb Brown

What are the highlights?

- Beth Simonson - Highmore - started an arts council they have music on the porch
- Sandra Mollman - Vermillion - gathered people around food for the purpose of "What you want to see in your community" Discovered ideas around family friendly cardboard and duct tape boat race. 100 people showed up at the pool to watch. This year they are hosting the 3rd annual. They give unique prizes and cardboard ribbons.
 - How did people know to show up? personally invited to a community gathering.
- Chad Pinkleman - Chamberlain - applied for a DANR tree grant.. Needed a \$2500 match. He leveraged Modern Woodman and raised a total of \$7500. Accessed 130 students to plant 28 trees around Arbor Day. City provided labor. Used Facebook Live and the parents liked seeing their kids. The newspaper also came.
- Becky Wiswall - Yankton Thrive - teamed up with a local credit union to host Lemonade Day, an entrepreneur program for kids. The community will host one day for all the lemonade stands on July 23.
- Joe Bartmann - Montrose - Rural Shapers walk videos on TikTok. He just talks and walks 3 or 4 times a week. Shared on Twitter, Instagram or Facebook. #ruralshapers
- Paula Jensen - Langford - her three boys have all moved home to the town where they grew up. Two have started their own businesses.
- Deb Brown - Webster City - saw a bar that looked closed because of weeds and dirty windows in the front entrance. The back door was clean because that's . Note - thank you for owning and doing business here. We appreciate you.

Big data precision ag and its effects

Topic convener:

Chan Johansen

What are the highlights?

- There's a lot of farm data being collected by various entities as farming becomes more automated and precise. Who controls the data and what will be the outcome of this?
- There's concern that this will lead to further consolidation. Wealth transfer from private individuals/family farms to industrial complex and consolidation of control. Will it lead to further decline in small towns?
- Can ag focused universities partner with small towns for transition plans?
- Farmers Mutual Telephone Company of Stanton, Iowa is working to create a business that will help farmers own, control, and benefit from their data. Not only do they believe that farmers can benefit financially, but they believe it can create jobs in their community. What are the ancillary jobs that can be created from this data?
- Data centers are opportunity but mainly for revenue less about permanent jobs
- Farm labor will continue to decline with automation. Perhaps there will be more remote work.
- Will there be a new generation of ghost towns? Which towns survive and why?
- Are extension agencies hosting conversations in communities to be affected?

Untapped Entrepreneurial Talent – How can we activate this talent?

Topic convener:

Andrew Button

Check-in:

“What drew you to this particular conversation?”

Paula Jensen, Langford TREP\$ entrepreneur program for youth at library

Darwin Van Den Oever - Vermillion

Sandra Kern Mollman Vermillion–unleashing rural potential–every person has a valuable way to serve in their community. They each serve a vital role–how do we engage them

Heather from Canistota, works with entrepreneurs

Becky–CoStarter Entrepreneurial program

Shannon - Wakonda–survival of small towns–which will survive and why?

Kristi Wagner–Dakota Rising Program with Dakota Resources. Working with Co-Starters, mentor network for entrepreneurs.

Marty Doll - AE2S communications and strategic planning in MN and ND, getting homegrown talent bringing ideas to store

Judy Larson, Lemmon

Terri LaBrie, Dakota Resources/Startup Sioux Falls co-starter program

Erik Giakowski, AARP SD State Director, support 50+ entrepreneurs across the state. Digital equity and literacy also need to be funded.

Michael Scott, Winner, SD. Hard to spur enthusiasm for entrepreneurs.

Becky McCray SaveYour.Town

What are the highlights?

100% virtual business incubator–what is preventing people from showing up in person for classes, etc.

What is preventing folks from taking the first few steps toward entrepreneurship?

Do we have the resources that entrepreneurs need to support them? Resources are piecemeal.

Leaders can be dismissive of peoples’ ideas.

Do they identify with the word “entrepreneur”? Mindset shift needed, definition of entrepreneur

Broadband? North of Vermillion, SD still doesn’t have good internet access.

Langford, SD – good broadband, bad cell service

80% of state of SD is well covered.

SDN communications is making an investment in the Black Hills. Big investment with the geography–granite, etc.

Legislature is also supporting this, former Gov. Janklow was adamant about wiring all of the schools a couple decades ago.

Barrier–Entrepreneurial Mindset.

Don't dismiss ideas that are small, they may develop into bigger things or maybe are just how people want to make a little extra money.

Selling products online helps in rural communities. Tools like Shopify are available, but it's a crowded, loud space. Need to stand out to connect to the niche group that you serve. Get creative with finding distribution partners in other states or provinces. Wholesale or consignment.

Provide opportunities for small entrepreneurs–pop-ups, tiny space in retail stores, infrastructure.

Use AARP's Community Challenge grant

Entrepreneurial Learning Initiative – Who Owns The Icehouse? book

Be conscious of the words used/language to describe entrepreneurship. Make it approachable.

Aberdeen Center on Rural Innovation Network (CORI) ecosystem with NSU and community with tech startups.

Look for people with ideas–that's approachable.

Does the word entrepreneur cause angst? "Guy who has a business"

Farmers are examples of entrepreneurs but don't think of themselves that way.

Is there a difference between a business owner and entrepreneur?

Try the idea as small as possible. Shed-based businesses in Miller for pop-up businesses done by the youth. Borrowed the sheds from the shed seller.

Apple computer started in a garage!

Invite people to do their idea in a small way.

Business owners need to be welcoming and mentoring to make sure rural communities stay vibrant. Fear of competition creates problems. Support of each other makes things better for everyone.

My candle does not dim because your candle shines brighter. My candle shines as bright as yours does if we work together.

CUPS ? concept from Kauffman Foundation entrepreneurs supporting entrepreneurs.

Need local people to help each other. Has an online community that helps connect people to each other from different rural areas as well.

Commonalities, next steps:

Heather: How do we lessen risk to create opportunity?

It's much easier to support entrepreneurs than to find the unicorn 500 employee business–plus that creates infrastructure problems.

REYNA HERNANDEZ

Feature Artist



Artist Reyna Hernandez utilizes mixed media across disciplines to investigate the concept of identity hybridity in relation to her Indigenous bloodlines and westernized education. Reyna's research examines the complex relationship between epistemic violence in western arts education and the discourse of Indigenous expression in the larger Artworld. Her work is a response to the history of systemic Indigenous erasure and the institutions that perpetuate reductive ideations of contemporary Indigenous life and expression.

Hernandez was the recipient of the Oscar Howe Curatorial Fellowship in 2015 and has continued to discuss her research while visiting colleges and classrooms across the country. She was the guest curator at All My Relations Arts in Minneapolis MN, for the third installment of the gallery's Bring Her Home Exhibition Series; A series highlighting the ongoing epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Hernandez's installment, Bring Her Home: Sacred Womxn of Resistance was on view from 12/2020- 02/2021.

Hernandez is Iháŋktuŋwaŋ Dakota (Yankton Sioux), and received her B.A in English and B.F.A in Studio Arts at the University of South Dakota in 2016. She was recently awarded the 2021 Northern Plains Indian Artist in Residence at The University of South Dakota in Vermillion, SD where she also lives and works.

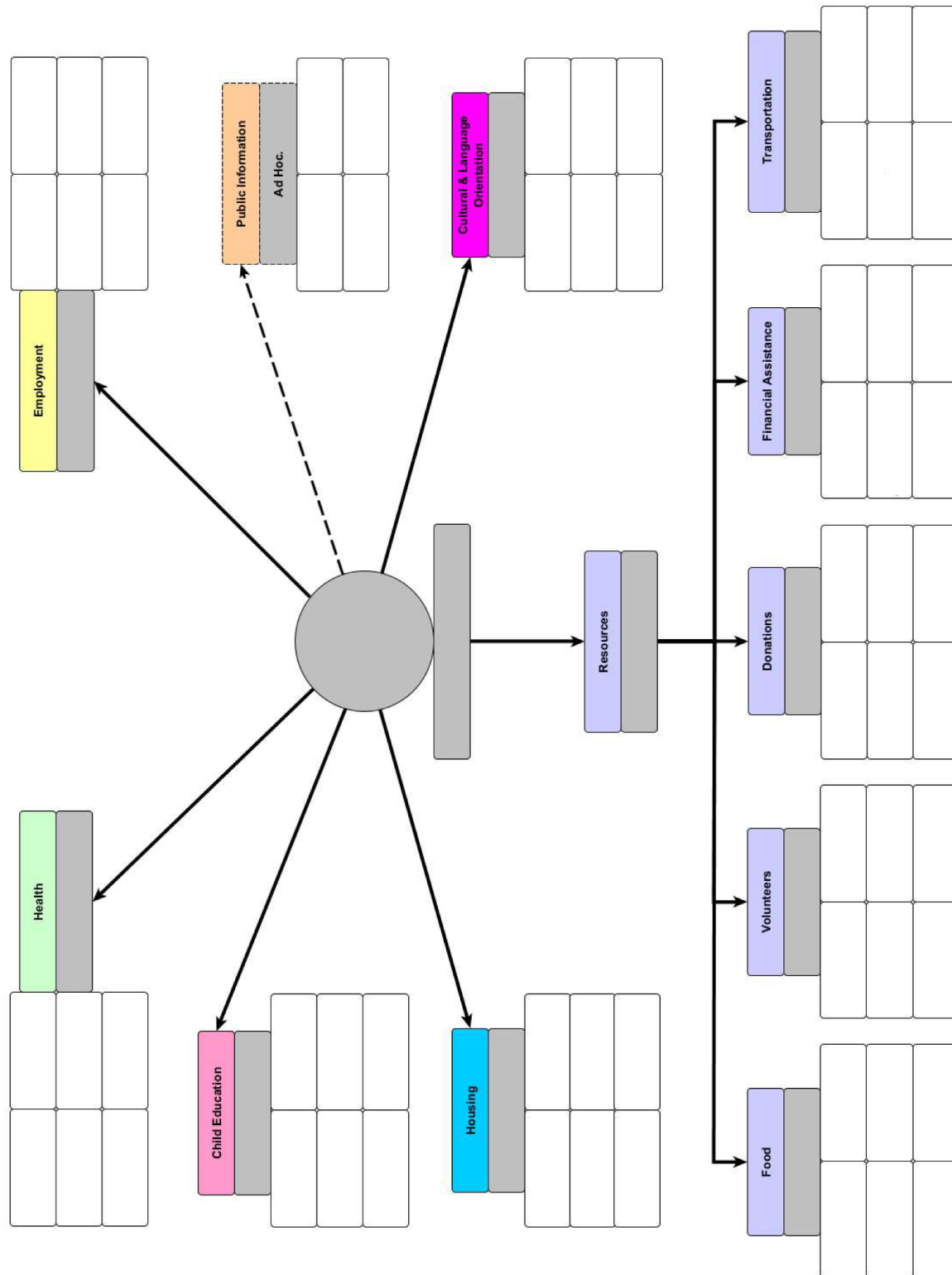
Reyna Hernandez joined us to share a little about her path to becoming a muralist, the process of creating a community-based mural, and sharing about the community mural creation she led in Vermillion.

Facebook: [@rayna.packard](https://www.facebook.com/rayna.packard)

ReynaHernandezArt.com

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Welcoming Web



Welcoming Web, courtesy of Audrey Lutz, Multicultural Coalition, Grand Island, NE

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Smart Growth America Compendium of Resources



1152 15th Street NW Ste. 450
Washington, DC 20005
Smartgrowthamerica.org

RuralX 2022 Compendium of Resources

In Dakota Resources' 2022 RuralX Conference, Transportation for America (T4America) Director Beth Osborne and Smart Growth America (SGA) Vice President for Economic Development Chris Zimmerman led two Knowledge Camp breakout sessions entitled "Where to get the money and how to spend it." The conversation focused on making the historic levels of federal funding in the infrastructure law work for rural communities. Below are resources to help participants dig deeper into topics that came up in the discussions.

Main Streets, Downtowns and Town Centers

Focusing mixed-use development together in one place can help make investments more than the sum of their parts. When a variety of services, businesses and housing are close together, they support one another. Economists call this agglomeration effects. Through our USDA-funded Rural Development program, Smart Growth America has helped many small towns build more durable local economies by investing in their main streets and downtowns. Many case studies and materials from this work are available here: [SGA's Rural Community Development Initiative](#)

Rural Transportation Trends: Driving more, accomplishing less

While Americans' daily driving trips have gotten longer over the last 20 years, the trend is even more pronounced for rural Americans. As services are consolidated, smaller rural towns no longer have everything residents need, forcing them to drive further to accomplish their daily tasks. Fifty six percent of the 292 counties in America that have 10 percent or more households with no access to a car are rural.

Transportation for America's report in collaboration with Third Way below provides more detail on these trends and what rural communities can do to provide their residents with better transportation and access. [Rural Communities Need Better](#)

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[Transportation Policy \(pdf\)](#)

Fiscal Impacts of Land Use

With respect to local government costs and revenues, not all development is created equal. The type of development and its location can make the difference between a development that helps a locality balance its books and a development that makes the situation worse. SGA's report *Building Better Budgets*, found that more compact development saved on average around 38 percent on capital costs for roads, water lines, sewers, and other infrastructure. It also saved on average 10 percent annually on operating costs. More compact development meant that a given acre of land produced 10 times more revenue than the same acre developed at low density. Below are some reports that can help communities make land use decisions that can improve their fiscal health.

[Fiscal Impact Analysis Policies in Rural Communities](#)

[Building Better Budgets: A National Examination of the Fiscal Benefits of Smart Growth Development](#)

Placemaking

In today's economic climate where brick and mortar businesses must deliver unique experiences to draw customers who might otherwise shop online, and where attracting a talented workforce is a key to success for knowledge-economy businesses, creating places people want to be is essential for any community that wants to succeed economically. Many communities are indeed succeeding because placemaking is central to their economic development strategy. Below are three reports that can provide ideas and best practices on creating a strong sense of place in your community.

[\(Re\)Building Downtown: A Guidebook for Revitalization](#)

[Amazing Place: Six Cities Using the New Recipe for Economic Development](#)

[The Scenic Route: Getting Started with Creative Placemaking in Transportation](#)

Funding Opportunities in the Infrastructure Law

The 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA / infrastructure law) will deliver historic levels of funding to American communities in the next few years. The funding is very flexible, so it's up to states and local communities to decide how to invest this funding. Communities that set goals for what they want to do, and then pursue funding to accomplish those goals

will be more successful making a future vision for their communities a reality. Those that chase funding without a guiding vision and set of goals could become saddled with outdated infrastructure designs based on the status quo paradigms of our outdated national transportation program. The resource below provides a guide to opportunities in the infrastructure law oriented toward the goals of the reader.

[Understanding the 2021 Infrastructure Law](#)

[Smart Growth America](#) envisions a country where no matter where you live, or who you are, you can enjoy living in a place that is healthy, prosperous, and resilient. We empower communities through technical assistance, advocacy, and thought leadership to realize our vision of livable places, healthy people, and shared prosperity.

THANK YOU

for being a rural shaper.

Please do not wake up tomorrow morning and think about how fun or interesting or inspiring this was. Wake up and decide what you will DO about it.

Who will you connect with?

What will you start making happen where you live?

Because RuralX is NOTHING if it does not LEAD to something. So, go be SHAPERS of your communities. We all NEED you. YOU are the X in RuralX.

It's up to each of you to make where we go from here, BETTER.

SAY HELLO

we want to hear from you.

Share your RuralX eXperience with us.

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