



Join in a National Celebration of Rural Communities

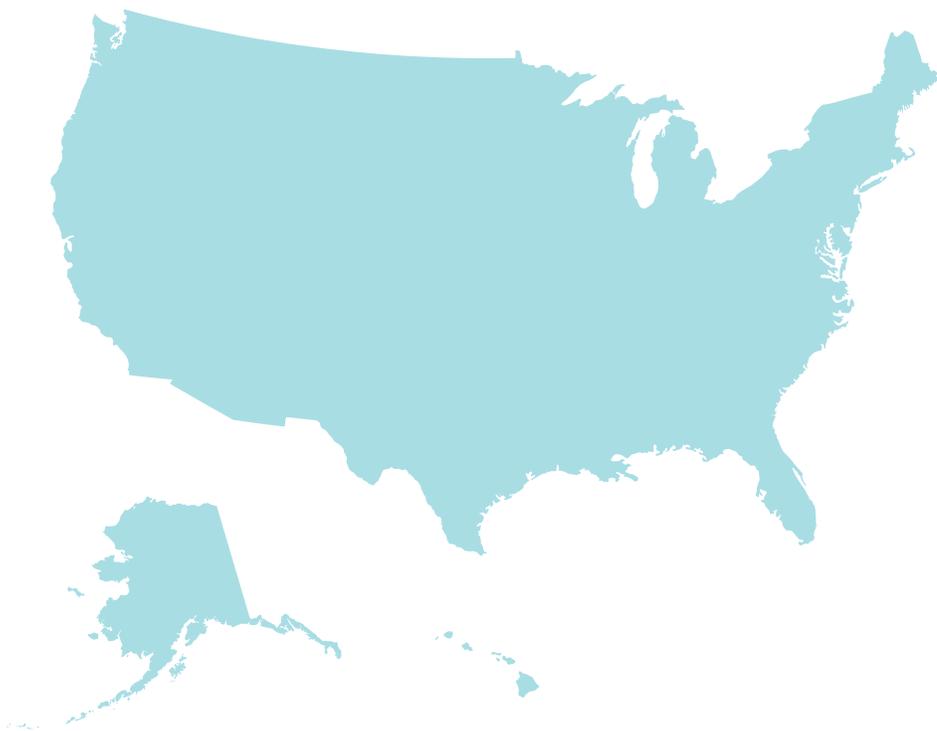
Rural Homecoming Toolkit



Presented by the Rural Community Assistance Partnership
in Partnership with the LOR Foundation

Thank you for your interest in Rural Homecoming. This toolkit:

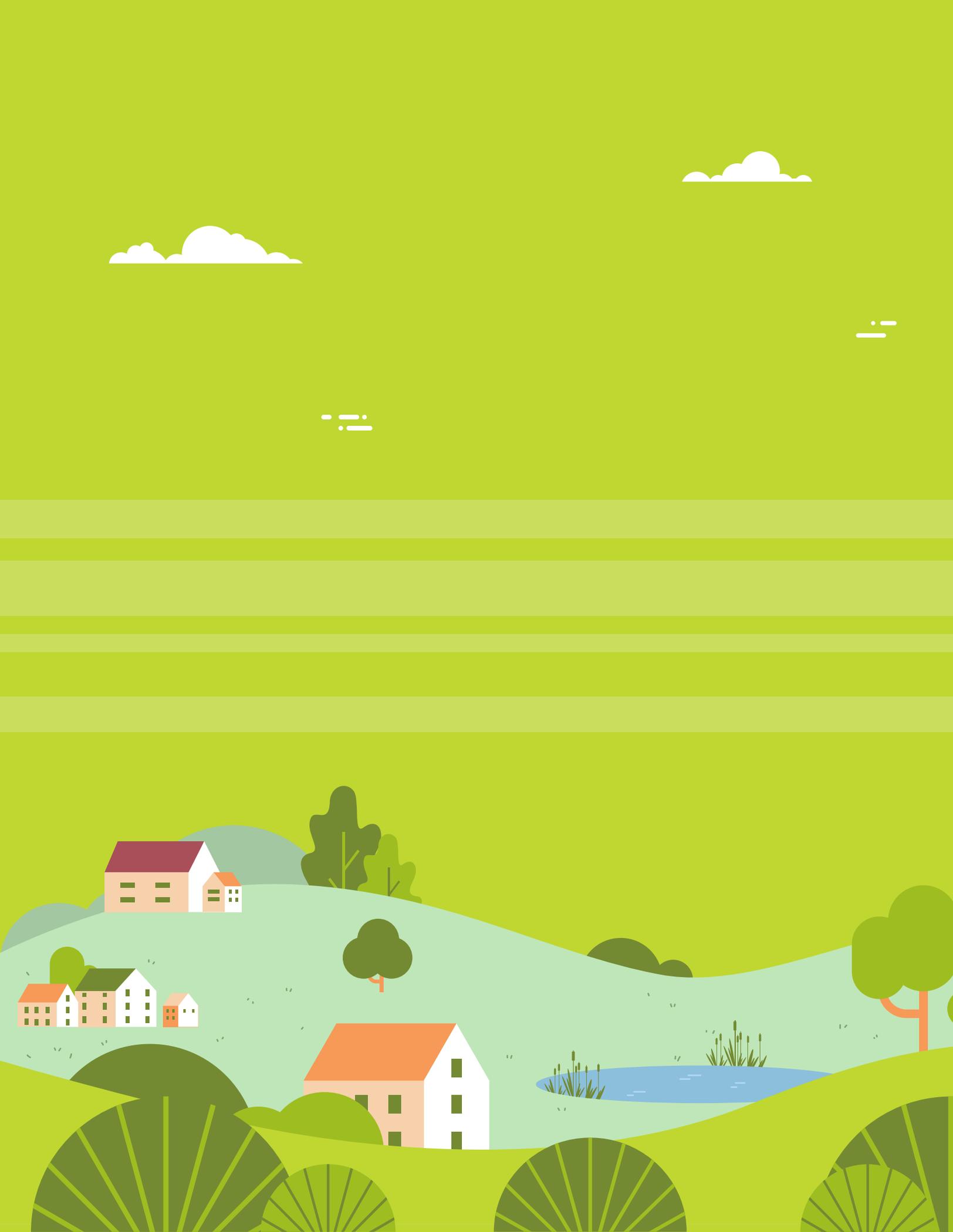
- Shares the background on why this national celebration matters
- Gives you ideas and templates for bringing Rural Homecoming to life in your community
- Offers you methods to document your participation and provide feedback on your experience



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PART ONE: How to Participate

Rural Homecoming is a national celebration of rural communities across all corners of the United States.





THE BACKGROUND

From our country's beginning, rural communities have been one of the most important driving forces of the American economy. They provided good-paying jobs and a comfortable lifestyle that allowed families to grow and thrive. Over the last few decades, populations of rural communities have faced economic pressures (rapid growth or loss of industry) that have threatened their cultural identity and way of life. These communities have been and continue to navigate this changing environment. It's within this context that exists the opportunity for storytelling and to celebrate the journey, the challenges, and the progress that has been made in these rural towns.

Many of these communities have seen people leave for a variety of reasons, but those who leave still feel a strong connection to their hometown. They value and understand their rural hometown's assets and unique qualities and hope for a brighter tomorrow for their family and friends at home. With so many holding these views, an opportunity exists to provide them a chance to reconnect. This is where Rural Homecoming comes in.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Rural Homecoming is a time to reaffirm and strengthen connections for those living away from rural hometowns, and also to connect young people into the rural communities they call home, to ensure that they stay connected whether they choose to stay or leave to pursue other opportunities. By participating, your community will open its doors and host a gathering or event that celebrates what makes it special. As you highlight the innovation and opportunity happening at a local level, your community members will have a chance to amplify their voice and experience; and those reconnecting with home will have a chance to give back.

Organizing a Rural Homecoming event is an investment in your community. It is free to participate, and you can choose how you want to engage. The goal is to reconnect people who have left or connect young residents to what is happening in your community and get them involved with a local nonprofit, business, or other opportunities. It allows your community to tell your own story, rather than it being told for you. That story is valuable locally, and will also be amplified on a national level through Rural Homecoming's organizing partners who want to share uplifting stories about rural America and rural innovation across the country.

The Details



When:

Rural Homecoming will take place nationally **October 18-20**; however, your community can plan an event at any time during the year and participate in nationwide social media engagement. Many small towns have programs or events already built into the fabric of the community. Rural Homecoming wants to hear about those events, whether they happen during this weekend in October or anytime throughout the year.



Who:

Community leaders will organize a Rural Homecoming event to engage their community in whichever way they choose. Such leaders could be a mayor or local elected official, a leader of a community college or economic development director, a business owner or entrepreneur, members of downtown business associations or chambers of commerce, or any volunteer or local leader that wants to help activate their community in a unique way.



How:

As a participating community, you will create your own Rural Homecoming event or engagement with the support of this toolkit that offers event ideas, communications templates, and ways to track your engagement. How your community participates is up to you. It could be an event or weekend of events, or it could simply be about telling your story. Each community participates in whatever capacity makes sense for them.



THE PROGRAM ORGANIZERS

Rural Homecoming was created by its organizing partners: the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) and the LOR Foundation.

RCAP

RCAP is a network of non-profit partners, focused on building capacity in rural and tribal communities across the country in work around access to safe drinking water and sanitary wastewater disposal, economic development, and disaster recovery. RCAP works in every state across the country, including Puerto Rico and USVI. Our mission is to help rural and tribal communities build capacity that leads to long-term sustainability based on the needs of each community.

Not only do we provide technical assistance to communities, we also provide policy and advocacy to represent those communities and their needs, and try to raise the voice of those communities through a variety of avenues. We have served more than 20,000 communities in the past decade, focusing where possible on impoverished and diverse communities.

LOR

LOR is a family foundation that works to increase prosperity in the rural Mountain West while preserving the character that defines these iconic places. Together with communities, we revitalize main streets, protect clean water supplies, preserve agricultural land and open space, and improve access to the outdoors and recreation.

The organization was founded in 2007 on the simple premise that communities can find economic sustainability without sacrificing what they love about the place they call home. To get there, LOR provides locals with the resources to tackle problems using solutions that fit the community's character and unique needs.



We understand
why people are
rural by choice.
Our hope is
to make that
choice easier.





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PART TWO: Event Types & Ideas

As a participating Rural Homecoming town, you are encouraged to organize an event or build out an opportunity that will engage your community. This toolkit provides 10 event ideas that you can use and adapt to fit your town's resources and needs but is in no way a comprehensive list of ideas that can be utilized to participate in Rural Homecoming. We hope you find these ideas helpful as a starting place for designing a Rural Homecoming event that is uniquely meaningful.

Celebrate Your Community

01



High School Alumni Social

- **Purpose:** Bring together community members with a shared background - possibly targeting former students.
- **Example:** Alumni and Teacher Recognition Event
- **Potential Organizers:** Local high schools, alumni association, school district, or parent council
- **Potential Partners:** Local restaurants, breweries, catering companies, or local radio stations

02



Community Service Day

- **Purpose:** Allow people to give back or improve the community in some way that they see as meaningful.
- **Example:** Clean-up Event
- **Potential Organizers:** Local church, nonprofit, business, philanthropy, or association
- **Potential Partners:** Local high school student volunteers

Appreciate Your Town's History

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Field Trip

- **Purpose:** Help community members understand the history of their town and develop a greater sense of place.
- **Example:** Historical Site Visit
- **Potential Organizers:** High school, university, or historical Society
- **Potential Partners:** Library, historical society, or museum

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Historical Designation/ Remembrance

- **Purpose:** Help community members understand the history of their town and develop a greater sense of place.
- **Example:** Historical Place Marker, Plaque, or Sign Ceremony
- **Potential Organizers:** High school, university, or municipality
- **Potential Partners:** Local high school student volunteers

Recognize Local Businesses

05



Business Highlight Event

- **Purpose:** Showcase the local economy and raise public awareness of local businesses.
- **Example:** Shop Local Day
- **Potential Organizers:** Chamber of commerce or downtown business association
- **Potential Partners:** Business sponsors

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Innovation Day

- **Purpose:** Showcase the innovative spirit that already exists locally and create an environment that could help to create a circular-economy — connecting local suppliers, buyers, and funding.
- **Example:** Innovation Showcase
- **Potential Organizers:** Chamber of commerce
- **Potential Partners:** Local businesses

Recognize Key Contributors

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Award to Current Resident or Local Organization

- **Purpose:** Allow the community to recognize and celebrate resident(s) or organization(s) which have had a positive impact on the community.
- **Example:** Community Impact Award
- **Potential Organizers:** Local government, local community organization
- **Potential Partners:** Business sponsors

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Award to Non-Resident or Previous Resident

- **Purpose:** Allow the community to recognize the impact that a non-current resident has had on the area. This could include someone who grew up in the town, but is successful somewhere else. An event could also be arranged for a business leader (e.g., CEO) from one of the large employers in the area. By highlighting these individuals, the community could attract more investment and possibly gain national attention.
- **Example:** Achievement Award
- **Potential Organizers:** Chamber of commerce
- **Potential Partners:** Business sponsors

Engage Former Community Members

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Virtual Sporting Event

- **Purpose:** Help former community members re-engage and perhaps encourage their return.
- **Example:** Streaming of High School Football Game
- **Potential Organizers:** Local news/broadcasting station
- **Potential Partners:** Business sponsors

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City Council or Town Hall Virtual Listening Event

- **Purpose:** Allow former residents to provide some valuable insight on where the community has strengths and where improvements could be made. These participants have both the insider understanding of the community and its people, while also bringing an external viewpoint. By getting engaged in the future of the community, there may be more interest in these participants to explore moving back to be a part of that change. Events could be hosted both in-person and virtually.
- **Example:** Listening Session with Former Residents
- **Potential Organizers:** Local government
- **Potential Partners:** Local businesses



03

PART THREE: Customizable Media Outreach

To promote your #RuralHomecoming event, social media graphics are available for your use and can be accessed from the Rural Homecoming website. Use these graphic files to customize social media posts. Include hashtag #RuralHomecoming on all posts and encourage participants to do this too.



Sample posts to accompany graphics:

- {Insert town name} is a part of national #RuralHomecoming campaign and hosts {name of event}. Join us on {date/time}!
- We are rural. {Insert town name} hosts our very own #RuralHomecoming celebration! {insert details}
- We are rural by choice and proud of it. Celebrate #RuralHomecoming with us! {insert details} #whatisrural #ruralbychoice
- Need an excuse to come back home to visit? Join us for {insert town name}'s very own #RuralHomecoming. #whatisrural #ruralbychoice
- See what's been happening while you've been away. Attend {insert town name}'s #RuralHomecoming {insert details}. #innovation #rural #whatisrural #ruralbychoice

PRESS RELEASE

To promote the #RuralHomecoming event, use this template to customize an announcement to local media outlets. You can also access this Press Release template as a separate document [here](#).

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact:

{Name}

{Organization}

{Email address}

{Phone number}

{Insert town name} Hosts {name of event} to Celebrate National Rural Homecoming

{Insert town name, state abbreviation} — (insert date) {Insert town name} joins communities across the country that will be hosting events or engaging members of their community as part of #RuralHomecoming. In its first year, #RuralHomecoming was created to honor rural America and kickstart a national dialogue on what being rural truly means. These events will bring communities together to celebrate what makes them so special and give current and former residents a reason to reconnect with their hometown.

{Insert town's name} own version of this will be a {insert event format}.

What: {event name}

Who: {event partners and sponsors}

Where: {event venue}

When: {event date and start and end time}

Why: {reason for picking this type of event}

How: {any logistical info that needs to be communicated here, as in cost to attend, parking, RSVP needed,etc.}

{Insert quote from local leader organizing event}

The Rural Homecoming campaign concept was developed by the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) and the LOR Foundation, and includes a number of other partners across the country making this a local opportunity to participate in a national program focused on rural communities.

“Rural Homecoming lets each community tell their own story,” said Nathan Ohle, Executive Director of RCAP. “It provides an opportunity to eliminate misconceptions about rural America by giving communities an opportunity to open their doors to reconnect people with their hometowns. Rural Homecoming is a celebration of what makes rural America so special that empowers each community to tell their story as part of a larger national partnership.”



“We’re all from somewhere,” said LaMonte Guillory, Chief Communications Officer of the LOR Foundation. “Cities or small towns — coastal or inland — East or West — plains or mountains, the concept of Rural Homecoming allows people to connect with their roots and think about where they came from. It also gives us a chance to talk about the innovation and accomplishments that are happening in rural right now, of which there are many.”

About {insert local org info here}”

About RCAP: RCAP is a network of nonprofit organizations working to ensure rural and small communities throughout the United States have increased capacity to drive access to safe drinking water, sanitary wastewater, economic development and disaster recovery that leads to economic prosperity. To learn more about this work visit: rcap.org.

About LOR: LOR is a foundation that works to increase prosperity in the rural Mountain West, while preserving the character that defines these iconic places. Together with communities, they revitalize main streets, protect clean water supplies, preserve agricultural land and open space, and improve access to the outdoors and recreation.

EVENT INVITE

A customizable event invitation is available for your use and can be accessed from the Rural Homecoming website. Use this invitation file to fill information in for your event. Print your invitations as flyers or send by email.

SAMPLE GUEST ARTICLE

This article can be submitted to your local newspaper as a guest article. Send in as is or customize as you see fit. You can also access this Sample Guest Article template as a separate document [here](#).

{Insert town name} Hosts {name of event} to Celebrate National Rural Homecoming

On {insert date}, {Insert town name} joins communities across the country that will be hosting events or engaging members of their community as part of #RuralHomecoming. In its first year, #RuralHomecoming was created to honor rural America and kickstart a national dialogue on what being rural truly means. These events will bring communities together to celebrate what makes them so special and give current and former residents a reason to reconnect with their hometown.





{Insert town's name} own version of this will be {insert event format/location/time/etc.}.

{Add quote from local leader organizing event on why the community chose to host and join the Rural Homecoming national event}

{A few more sentences here on what the event is all about, who is involved, how people can participate/contribute, what to expect, etc.}

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{add closing sentence or two on the event, summarizing the details, where people can RSVP and any additional thoughts}

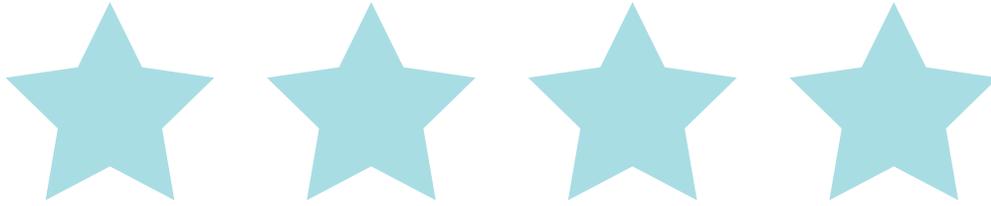


EMAIL BLAST (EMAIL HEADER/FOOTER)

A customizable email blast is available for your use and accessed from the Rural Homecoming website. Use it to spread the word about your event to your community contacts.



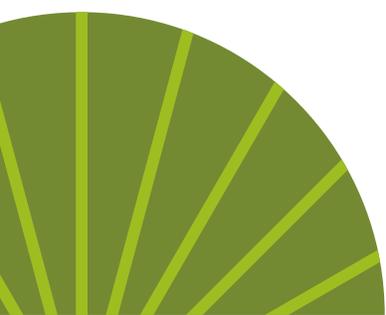




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PART FOUR: Capturing Experiences & Feedback

We're excited to have you take and share pictures and videos of your #RuralHomecoming celebration! Please share any promotional materials created too (flyers, posters, ads, etc.).



UPLOADING PHOTOS

Share all photos, videos, and materials with LOR using this special [link](#). It provides direct access to our digital asset management system. Don't worry about editing your photos or picking the best ones. We want everything! Please share as often as you can.

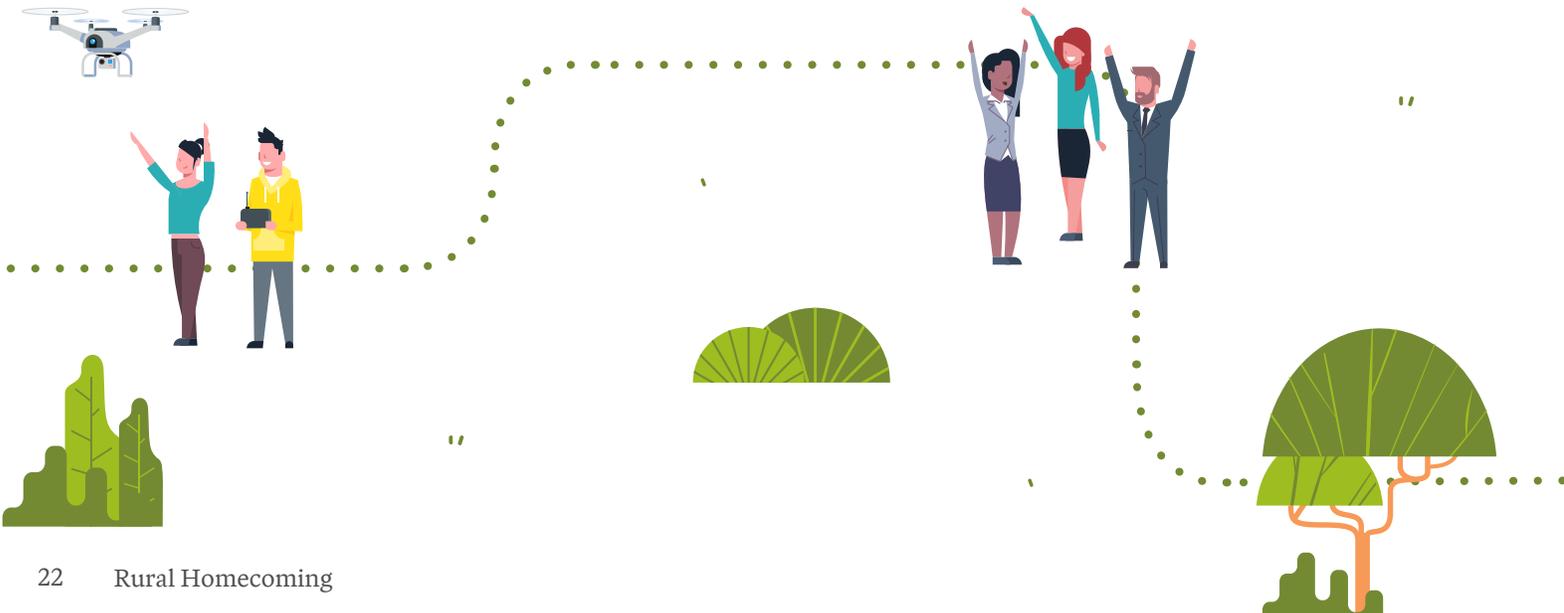
You will be able to drag and drop your photos directly from your desktop into the system using the link provided. You will also be able to share from your mobile device by using the uploader function and access photos from your library. You will only see the photos you upload.

Please help us manage the assets by filling in the following data fields:

- Author [name of your organization]
- City [your city or town]
- Description [name of the #RuralHomecoming event]

Below are the steps on how to bulk-add metadata to your images:

1. After adding your images, select one photo/media asset by clicking on the circle in the thumbnail image
2. You will see the "select all" option appear in the upper right corner of the browser, click it
3. Then select the edit option to edit all files at once
4. You will see the metadata window appear, add the 3 required fields and any other details you would like to include in the description.





RURAL HOME COMING

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