

# Join in a National Celebration of Rural Communities

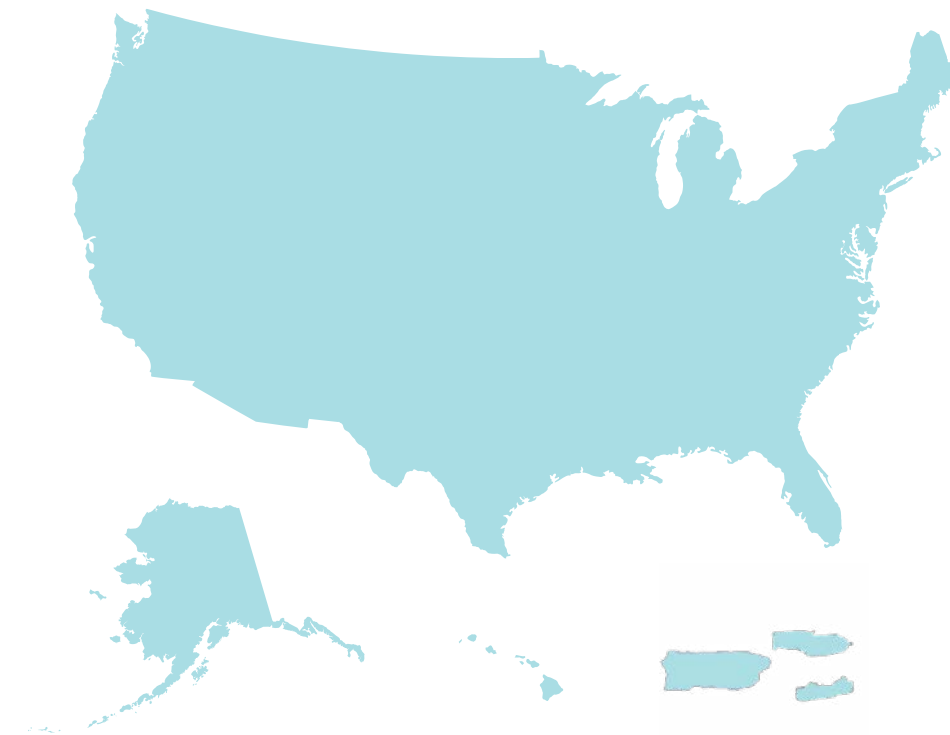
## Rural Homecoming Toolkit



Presented by the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP). Rural Homecoming was launched in 2019 by RCAP and the LOR Foundation.

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

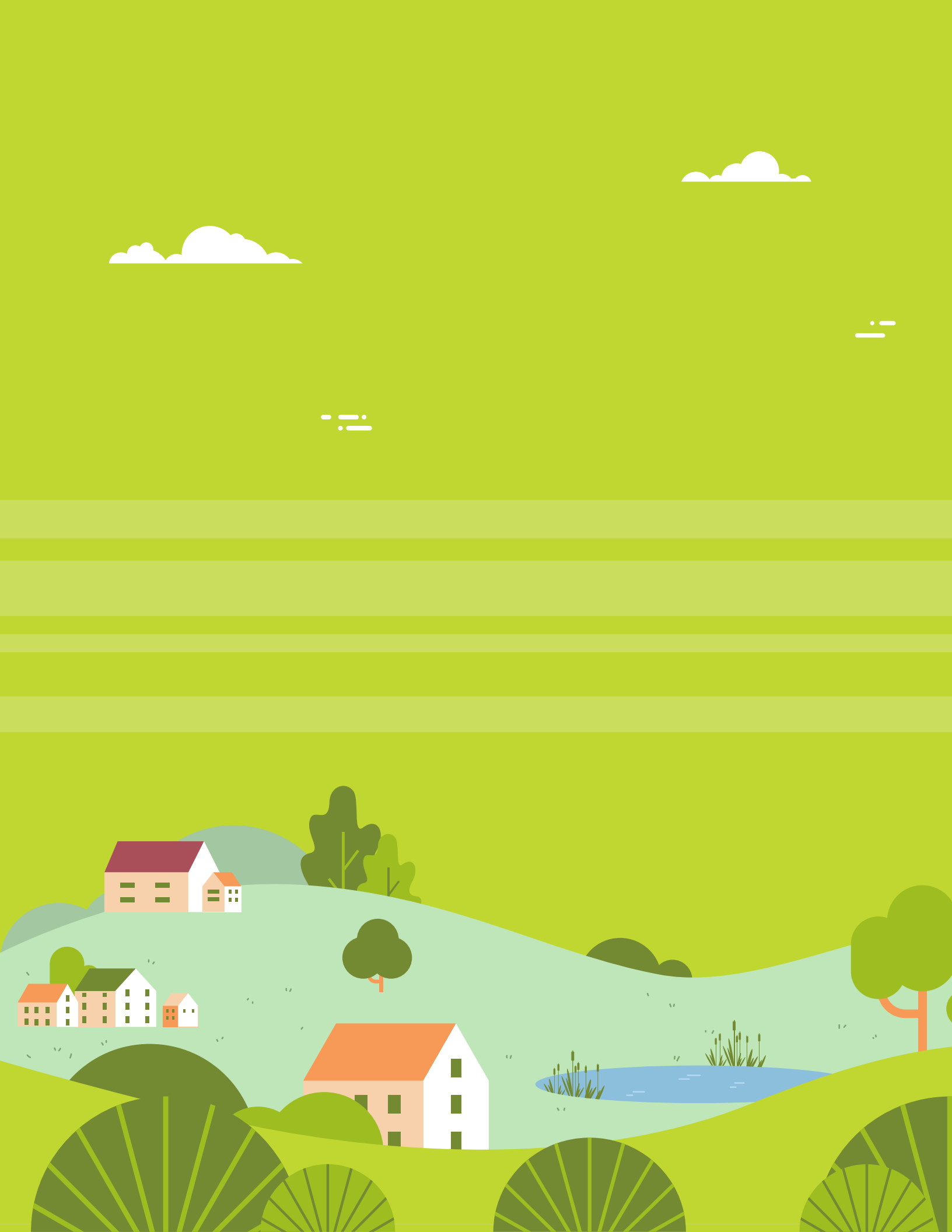
- Shares the background on why this national celebration matters
- Gives you ideas and templates for bringing Rural Homecoming to life in your community
- Offers you methods to document your participation and provide feedback on your experience
- Helps you tell your own community's story in your own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



## **PART ONE: How to Participate**

# 01

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. Those connections were built through a childhood spent in rural communities. The importance of reconnecting people who might have left, and connecting young people still in rural communities to the innovative and exciting features of their community has never been more important. Helping them understand the value of their rural hometown's assets and unique qualities leads to hope for a brighter tomorrow for their family and friends. This is why Rural Homecoming was created.

## THE OPPORTUNITY

Rural Homecoming is an opportunity to reaffirm and strengthen connections for those living away from rural hometowns, and 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 can reconnect people virtually or at in-person events to celebrate what makes your town special. As you highlight the innovation and opportunity happening at a local level, your community members will have a chance to unite and celebrate your town, and reconnect with those that may have left. It is also an opportunity for each community to tell their story in their own words.

Participating in Rural Homecoming is an investment in your community, and an opportunity to tell your story. The toolkit is designed to provide ideas, but any community can participate in whatever way makes sense for them. Rural Homecoming is free to participate in, and you can choose how you want to engage. The goal is to reconnect people who have left and connect young people 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.**

# The Details



## When:

Rural Homecoming can happen at any time during the year. Many small towns have programs or events already built into the fabric of the community. Rural Homecoming provides a platform for you to share these events and what makes your community so special.



## Who:

Anyone can organize a Rural Homecoming campaign to unite their community in whichever way they choose. Organizers may be a mayor or local elected official, a leader of a community college or economic development director, a student or group of young adults, 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.



## How:

As a participating community, you will create your own Rural Homecoming story with the support of this toolkit that offers ideas, communications templates, and ways to track your celebration. We can also work with you to develop new templates to meet your needs. How your community participates is up to you. Each community participates in whatever capacity makes sense for them.

## THE PROGRAM ORGANIZERS

### RCAP

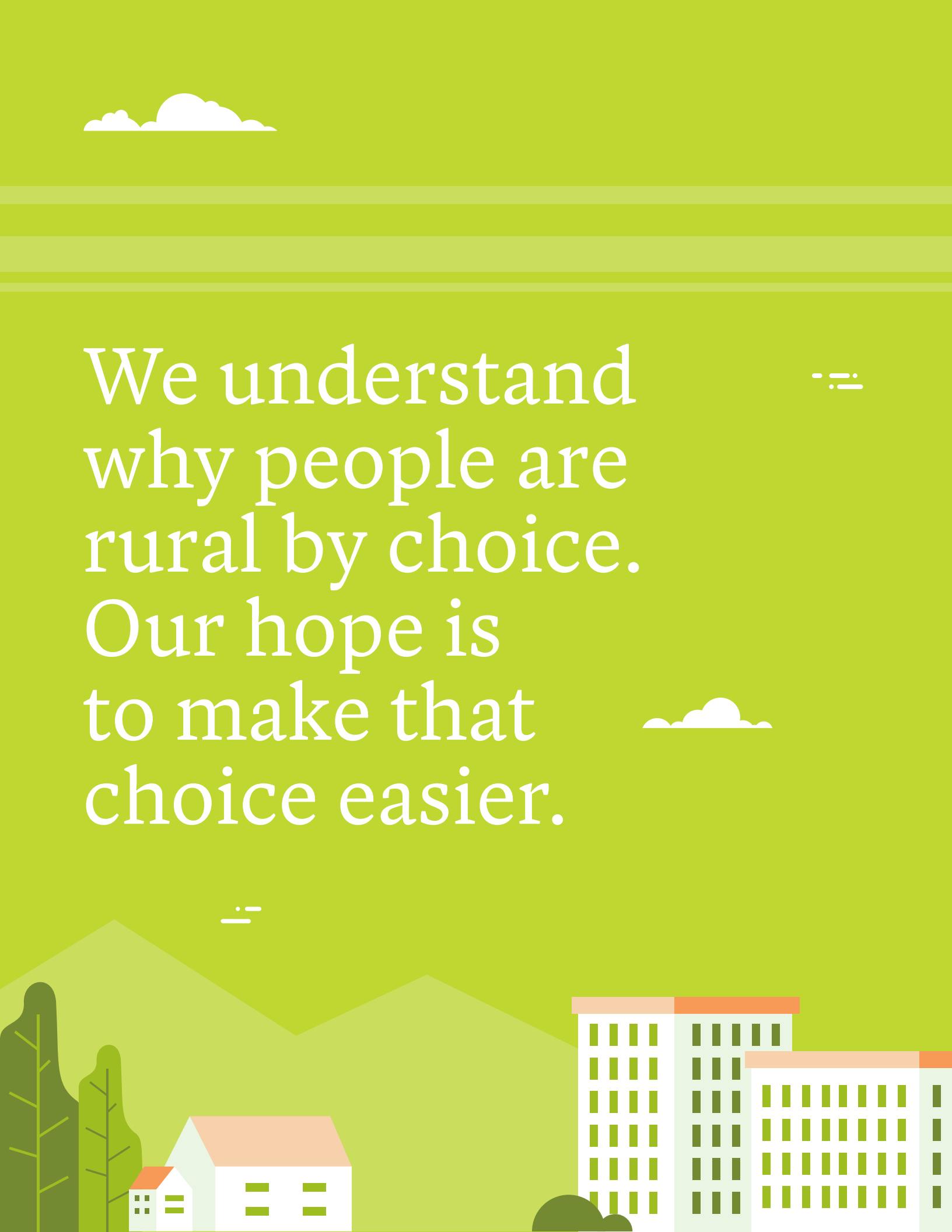
RCAP is a national network of non-profit partners, focused on building capacity in rural and tribal communities across the country in work around access to safe drinking water and sanitary wastewater disposal, economic development and disaster recovery. RCAP works in every state across the country, including Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands.

Not only do we provide technical assistance to communities, we also provide policy and advocacy to represent those communities and their needs, drive research to support rural communities, and raise the voice of those communities through a variety of channels. Last year RCAP served more than 3.2 million rural and tribal residents, 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.



02

**PART TWO:  
Event Types & Ideas**

In these unprecedented times, event planning can be scary. COVID-19 has caused many in-person events to pivot to virtual and creative ideas. In this toolkit, you'll find virtual event ideas to continue engaging community members and keeping the spirit of #RuralHomecoming alive during troubling times. As a participating Rural Homecoming community, you are encouraged to put together an opportunity to engage your community, whether they have moved away or are still local.

# 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 school/s, 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

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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 students, or municipality
- **Potential Partners:** Local high school student volunteers

# Recognize Local Businesses

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## 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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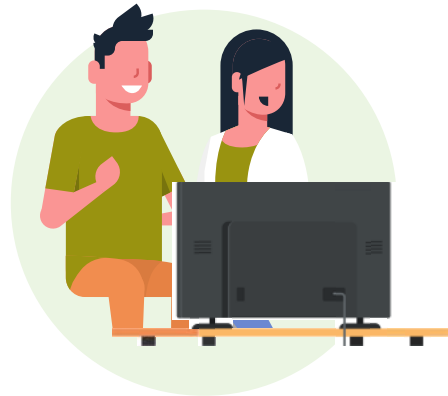


## Award to Non-Resident or Previous Resident

- **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

# Virturally Engage Community Members

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## Virtual Sporting Event

- **Purpose:** Engage community members safely and keep that team spirit ignited! Engage residents of the community by having local students live-stream a football, basketball, or baseball game.
- **Example:** Streaming of High School Football Game
- **Potential Organizers:** Local news/broadcasting station, high school/college students
- **Potential Partners:** Business sponsors

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## City Council or Town Hall Virtual Listening Event

- **Purpose:** Allow 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.
- **Example:** Listening Session
- **Potential Organizers:** Local government
- **Potential Partners:** Local businesses



03

## PART THREE: Customizable Media Outreach

To promote your #RuralHomecoming participation, social media graphics are available for your use and 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. We've also included a sample press release, invite, and a guest article so you can reach out to your local media outlets.





### Sample posts to accompany graphics:

- **{Insert town name}** is a part of #RuralHomecoming and is hosting {name of engagement}. Join us on {date/time}!
- We are rural. **{Insert town name}** is participating in #RuralHomecoming! **{insert details}**
- We are rural by choice and proud of it. Celebrate #RuralHomecoming with us! **{insert details}**
- Need an excuse to come back home to visit or stay connected? Join us for **{insert town name}**'s very own #RuralHomecoming.
- See what's been happening while you've been away. Attend **{insert town name}**'s #RuralHomecoming **{insert details}**. #innovation #rural



### PRESS RELEASE

To promote the #RuralHomecoming event, use this template to customize an announcement to local media outlets.

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact:

{Name}

{Organization}

{Email address}

{Phone number}

#### **{Insert town name} Participates in Celebrating National Rural Homecoming**

{Insert town name, state abbreviation} — (insert date) {Insert town name} joins communities across the country that will be engaging members of their community as part of Rural Homecoming. Rural Homecoming 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 celebration information}.

What: {name}

Who: {partners and sponsors}

Where: {venue}

When: {date and start and end time}

Why: {why is this important to your community}

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, RCAP’s CEO. “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.”

About {insert local org info here}”

About RCAP: RCAP is a national 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](http://rcap.org).

###

## INVITE

A customizable event invitation is available for your use and can be accessed from the Rural Homecoming website. Use this invitation file to insert content. 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.

### **{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 engaging members of their community as part of Rural Homecoming. Rural Homecoming was created to honor rural America and kickstart a national dialogue on what being rural truly means. Rural Homecoming 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 format/location/time/etc.}.

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

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

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{add closing sentence or two on the celebration, 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.).

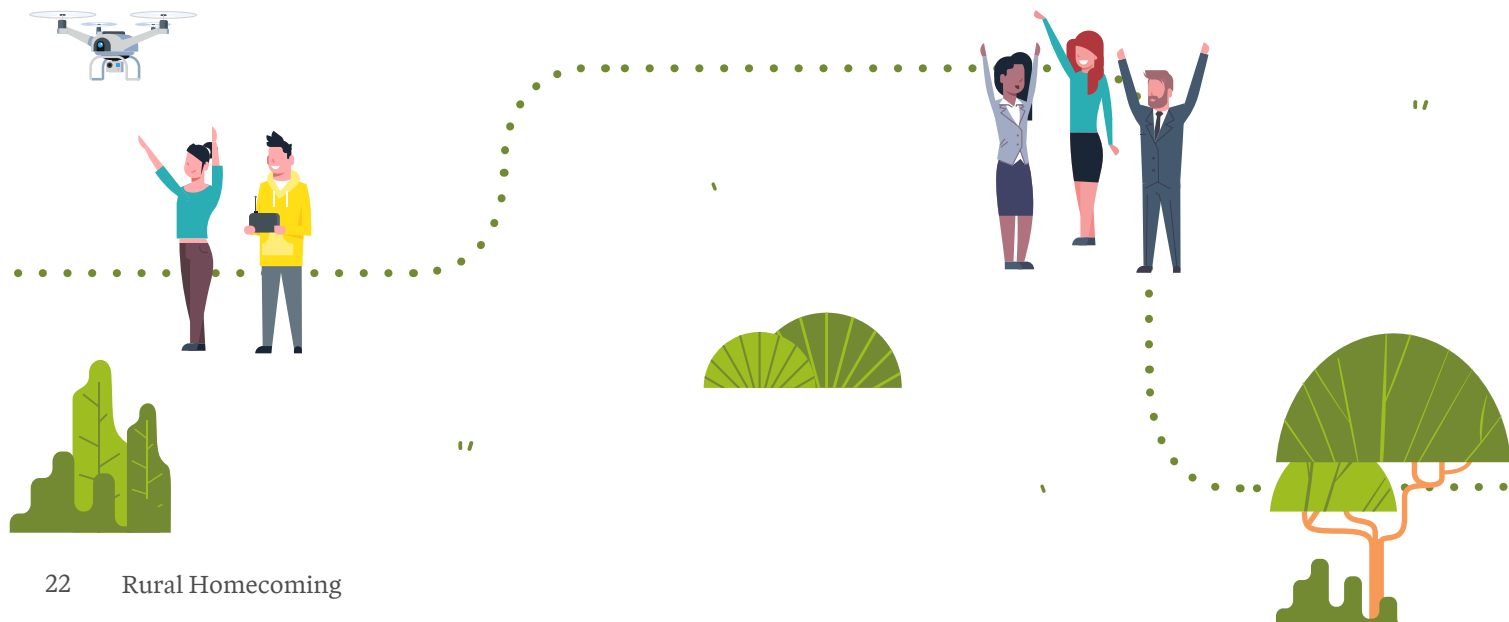
## UPLOADING PHOTOS

Share all photos, videos, and materials using this [link](#).

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. Please rename your files accordingly prior to uploading.

Please help us manage the submissions by using the following naming convention for your photos: Author.CityName.PhotoNumber



# RURAL HOME COMING

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In partnership with

