

## VI. Recommendations

After examining the current strategies being used to address these obstacles, NCRP offers the following recommendations to strengthen and promote more effective grantmaking to rural America:

**Recommendation 1: Grantmakers should fund organizations whose mission includes changing attitudes about rural America, advocating on behalf of rural interests, or conducting and disseminating research on timely rural issues so that grantmaking and policy-making reflects rural realities rather than outdated or incorrect perceptions.**

Overwhelmingly positive and negative perceptions and stereotypes of rural America may deter foundations from rural grantmaking. Because rural America often is associated with images of the traditional family farm, safe communities and serene landscapes, grantmakers may not be aware of the many needs of rural places and populations. On the other hand, because some rural areas often are associated with persistent poverty, out-migration and economic decline, grantmakers may not think that their grantmaking can or will make a difference.

**Recommendation 2: Seasoned rural grantmakers should take seriously their roles as sponsors of rural interests by funding and promoting site visits and events at which urban foundations and rural nonprofits can discuss rural needs and funding opportunities.**

Foundations agree that building relationships with foundations is important for nonprofits to secure grants, but rural nonprofits have little or no access to major foundations. Because rural nonprofits are isolated from grantmaking centers, they do not have exposure to large urban foundations or to professional networks that promote visibility.

**Recommendation 3: Foundations should develop impact measurements appropriate to rural areas with less-dense populations rather than applying metrics that are more appropriate to urban areas. Rural nonprofit leaders must take the lead in deciding what impact measurements are appropriate for their communities.**

Foundations look to achieve the greatest impact by funding large populations, but rural areas typically have small populations. Seasoned rural grantmakers and rural nonprofits agree that measuring impact in rural areas requires an appreciation of the breadth and depth of impact achieved by serving entire communities, counties, and even regions that would otherwise go unserved or underserved. Nonprofits serving smaller populations also are more able than their urban counterparts to personally engage with community residents.

**Recommendation 4: Organizational capacity deficits should not exclude rural recipients that serve disadvantaged populations from foundation funding. To build organizational capacity, funders should provide sufficient long-term core operating support to nonprofits with appropriate technical assistance funding to build the capacities of under-resourced rural nonprofits. Foundation grantmaking should reflect a willingness to fund organizational slack, as well as reserves for surviving crises and turbulence.**

Funders perceive a lack of organizational capacity and sophistication among rural nonprofits, which raises serious concerns regarding the level of effectiveness and sustainability of potential rural recipients. Because rural areas typically are under-resourced, many rural nonprofits struggle to afford the staff and the technical assistance necessary to build the degree of capacity and sophistication that

would allow them to compete on the same playing field as urban organizations.

**Recommendation 5: Seasoned rural grantmakers should actively scan the field for effective rural organizations and develop ways to effectively promote them.**

Because mainstream media and philanthropy news sources focus largely on urban issues and success stories, there are very few vehicles for promoting rural nonprofits. The lack of rural models and success stories, or the over-use of a few, often means that a handful of rural nonprofits become foundations' "favorite picks." The invisibility of effective rural organizations may be reinforcing stereotypes regarding the ineptitude of rural nonprofits.

**Recommendation 6: Regional and national foundations should identify infrastructure gaps in rural regions, and capitalize and help sustain organizations that will support and promote rural nonprofit and community interests.**

Rural nonprofits that are not close to major metropolitan areas often operate without the benefit of a strong local nonprofit infrastructure. Unlike urban organizations that are embedded within strong support systems, rural nonprofits have little or no access to capacity-building resources, regional intermediaries, nonprofit associations, and research organizations.

**Recommendation 7: Foundations should use intermediary organizations when they have neither the staff nor the expertise to meet nonprofit funding and capacity-building needs. Foundations funding through intermediary organizations need to develop strong, one-on-one relationships with rural grantees. Seasoned rural grantmakers and intermediary organizations should develop strategies jointly to effectively expose and promote intermediary organizations to foundations that cannot give to rural populations without them.**

Regranting and capacity-building intermediaries are important delivery systems in rural areas when foundations lack the internal capacity to meet grantee funding and capacity needs. Yet, because rural organizations have little access to urban foundations, intermediaries can reinforce gaps between rural nonprofits and urban foundations.

**Recommendation 8: Funders should consider forming new collaboratives when their purpose is to grant new and more money for rural populations. Rural funding collaboratives should elect a funder "champion," a foundation that can visibly and actively promote and campaign for new, flexible foundation dollars.**

Funding collaboratives can be most effective when members successfully draw in foundations that are not involved in rural grantmaking. There are many benefits to joining a collaborative, such as shared risk among members, ready-made administration and knowledge of rural issues, and maximum impact of grantmaking.

**Recommendation 9: Endowment-building should be promoted by urban foundations when they are willing to jointly fund local endowments and support current funding needs. Local endowment building is not a substitute strategy for nonlocal rural grantmaking, nor should it be a diversion for redistributing more foundation dollars to rural populations.**

Local endowment-building as a rural philanthropic strategy does not address pressing, current local needs and opportunities, and has serious limitations without the help of large foundations, especially in areas of persistent poverty. Both rural nonprofits and foundation interviewees suggested that community-based endowment-building can be an important strategy, but is not a silver bullet for addressing rural philanthropic deficiencies. Although locally controlled endowments are often perceived as necessary rural philanthropic tools, community endowments often are raised and structured in restrictive ways, meaning that grantmaking may not be flexible or responsive to rural community needs.