

The road to progress runs through rural America. Even beyond the electoral college, our system favors rural votes—60% of the U.S. Senate is elected by just 25% of the population, in mostly rural states, and two-thirds of U.S. House districts are classified as “[Pure Rural, Rural-Suburban, or Sparse Suburban](#).” Serious engagement with rural and small-town voters is essential to create a stronger democracy and shared prosperity across all our communities.

Rural America is changing; [24% of rural residents are people of color](#), and many are immigrants. [Of all voter demographics, young rural voters \(under 35 years old\) are the most undecided and have demonstrated the largest recent swings in partisan support.](#) However, they are among the least contacted by nonpartisan and political campaigns. And young rural voters of color, who lean towards policies and candidates that advance progress, are significantly underrepresented. [Approximately 48 million eligible young voters live outside the metro areas, but 30 million of this group are undecided or infrequent voters. Only 37% are frequent voters who have generally made up their minds.](#)

Our experience shows that we cannot depend on urban-centered strategies to effectively activate these voters. Only by investing in the existing trusted local community messengers and groups can we realize the potential of this powerful voting bloc.

[Rural Democracy Initiative](#) (RDI) is the first funding collaborative built to support and connect local leaders and organizations working for progress across diverse communities in rural areas, towns, and small cities. In partnership with [Clean and Prosperous America](#) and [Movement Voter Project](#), RDI created the new **Rural Youth Voter Fund** to nurture the extraordinary promise of rural youth by investing in authentic long-term engagement of our young community members.

INCREASING YEAR-ROUND Youth Civic Engagement

Rural Youth Voter Fund aims to support and expand year-round civic engagement and power-building strategies to mobilize young voters under the age of 35 in small towns and rural areas. In our 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) grantmaking and programming, we will focus on young people, especially young voters of color, taking a creative, layered approach to achieve the following:

- Invest and align \$10 million by 2025 in **grantmaking and capacity building** for young voter-focused, locally-based power-building organizations to increase their capacity, train their leaders, expand civic engagement efforts, support transformative deep canvassing, and organize across multiple issues.
- Build a stronger **network** equipped to engage young voters by creating frequent opportunities to come together to share lessons, challenges, and innovative solutions.



- Support **policies** and groups that aim to improve the lives of rural young people and ensure representation of their values.
- Amplify highly persuasive **communications** through arts and culture strategies, tailored influencer and digital outreach, and peer engagement—focused on issues they care most about including healthcare, reproductive rights, climate, and education.
- Invest in **leadership development**, especially strengthening leadership pipelines of rural young people of color.
- Support rural groups mobilizing **young voter participation** at scale through grassroots civic engagement efforts, targeted communications and digital outreach, and media.
- Maximize **rural voter data** collection and new tools such as the [Rural Map and Dashboard](#) to improve our analysis and targeting.

BUILDING ON RDI Success With Young Voters

The Rural Youth Voter Fund will draw from the expertise of RDI’s network of over 100 grantee groups across more than 20 states—thought leaders, advocates, and organizers who are transforming the way we build rural civic infrastructure. RDI has a history of incubating innovative new projects, and building and sharing proven tools, research, and resources for our grantee partners. In addition to grantmaking, we convene our grantees to share strategy and lessons, and connect them with a larger network of rural practitioners advancing policy and narrative change.

In 2022, RDI supported many successful youth-focused organizations. [Loud Light](#) used creative strategies like cowboy-themed campaigns and short educational clips on digital platforms to mobilize young people in Kansas to protect reproductive health care. [Mano Amiga](#) activated young students on San Marcos campus to successfully end Texas State University’s automatic-expulsion policy for students with drug offenses, impacting over 87,000 students across 13 campuses. [Collective Renaissance Georgia](#) hosted compelling events to bring many first-time young voters of color together to register and invite their friends and classmates to get more involved. For highlights from RDI’s recent work, please see our [2022 Impact Report](#).



Activating young voters in small towns and rural areas is one of the strongest investments we can make for our democracy. **We invite you to join us!**

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