

Coming HOME

STORIES FROM
MAIN STREET



Creating Rich Discourse in Rural America Programs for Community Engagement

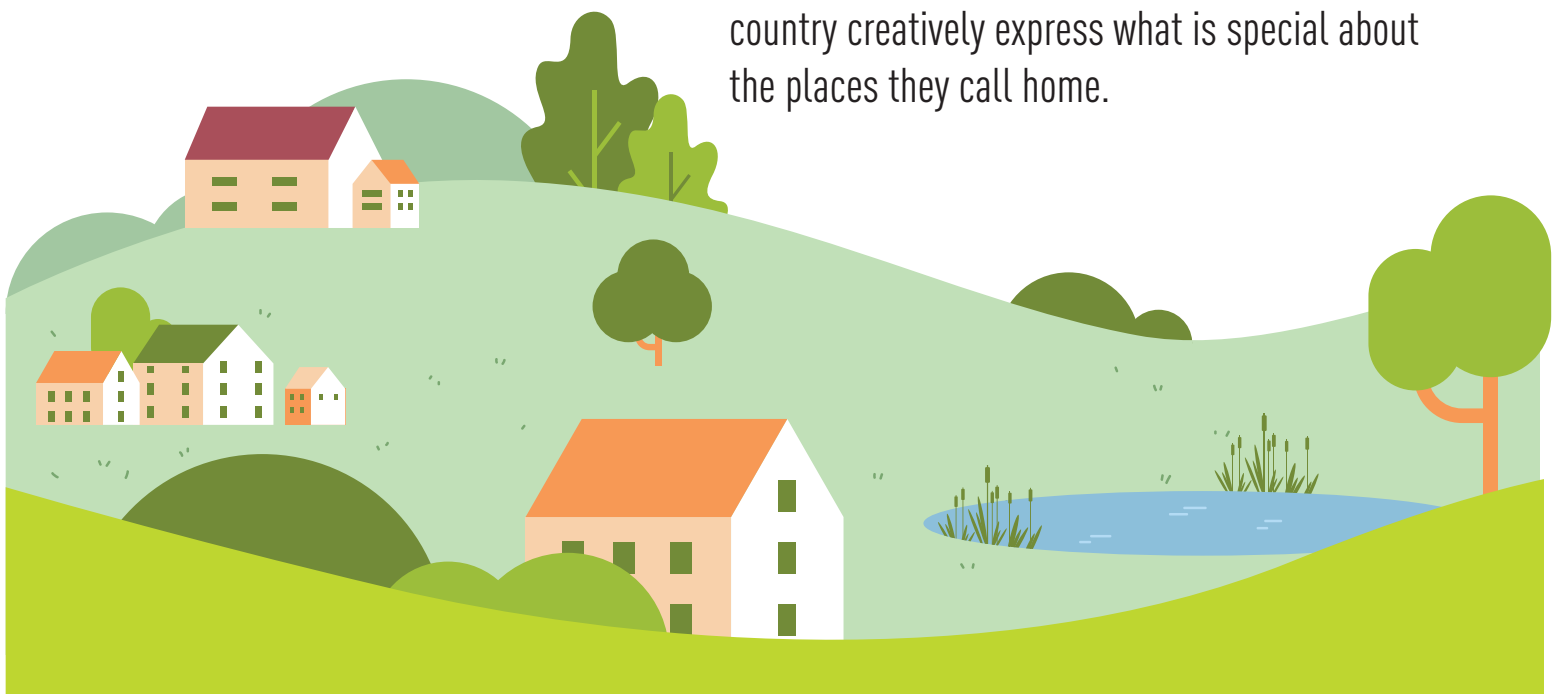
How do you engage your community in its own rich culture and history? Are you interested in getting students involved in the exploration of their hometown?

What makes your community special and how can we work together to realize your dreams?

For more than 45 years, the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) has worked with tens of thousands of rural and tribal communities to build capacity at the local level and raise stories of the innovation and collaboration happening across rural America.

Museum on Main Street (MoMS) is a signature Smithsonian program for rural America, which works with state partners to provide traveling exhibitions, rich humanities programs, and capacity development. Since 1994, MoMS has served more than 1,800 rural towns across every state.

MoMS and RCAP are combining their resources to support citizens in small towns across the country creatively express what is special about the places they call home.



There are two ways rural communities can choose to participate:

RURAL HOMECOMING

Rural Homecoming activities reconnect people with their rural hometowns and connect young people with the innovative and cool things happening in their community, while helping rural communities tell their stories.

Participation in Rural Homecoming offers a free toolkit for rural and tribal communities that:

- provides communications and social media toolkits to help tell the story of rural America
- provides ideas for events that are driven by local communities, utilizing existing events or creating new ones to engage young people and reconnect those who have left. Some examples include town cleanups, virtual events, town council meetings, or a high school alumnus social.

Rural Homecoming events aim to connect past and present community members with their rural roots. This provides a unique opportunity to form relationships with different parts of the community, including businesses, non-profits, students, and local government.

Rural Homecoming events can also be adapted to be virtual. Online events even allow for past residents who are unable to be there in person to participate! Organizers can partner with schools to stream events like football games. Town council meetings can be streamed as well to provide individuals with the opportunity to listen to local leaders and have their voices heard.

The Rural Homecoming toolkit provides communities with the resources and ideas to create a successful and engaging Rural Homecoming event based on their own goals. Many communities in the past have adapted their town's traditions with Rural Homecoming. In October 2019, Rocky Ford, Colorado, hosted their annual Rocky Ford Fall Festival as a Rural Homecoming event. The town partnered with a local non-profit and vendors, centering the event around celebrating family and featured an interactive Kid Zone and activities for the entire family.

Dillon, Montana, also celebrated Rural Homecoming with their 2019 Fall Festival. The event featured all day activities including an axe tournament, flag football, a hike on local trails, and live music. Dillon's Fall Festival highlighted activities that community members love and encouraged them to celebrate!

To learn more about Rural Homecoming, visit RCAP's website and download the program toolkit at: <https://www.rcap.org/events/ruralhomecoming/>





COMING HOME: STORIES FROM MAIN STREET

Coming Home: Stories from Main Street is a new collaboration that combines RCAP's Rural Homecoming initiative with the Smithsonian Institution's MoMS program. Coming Home engages youth in exploring their town's past and thinking about its future. This program is a remarkable experience for local participants. Rural youth often feel disconnected from local culture. They may feel that adults do not listen to them or that their town's history does not matter. This project helps to overcome those barriers.

Through this program, your community will start conversations that bring generations together, incorporate a rich exchange between diverse cultures, and help young people understand their hometowns better by exploring local history and giving them an opportunity to be a part of their community's future. Young minds provide a fresh lens for viewing, compiling and interpreting community stories. Their perspectives offer new ways of thinking about the past and help them feel connected to their town's future. Students come to appreciate their community's past. Through their cooperation on these youth projects, local cultural organizations, schools, and local businesses and governments find new pathways for working together for the common good.

Coming Home: Stories from Main Street helps rural communities showcase their future while honoring the past. America's small towns are rich in history and steeped in cultural traditions. At the same time, they are changing rapidly – incorporating new voices and experiences into local culture and responding to social and economic changes.

Through a competitive process, communities that are selected to take part in the Coming Home youth program will work with young people in their community to create video projects with interviews from their local community members and from individuals who have left their rural community. Selected communities, in association with their local museums and cultural organizations, will also hold an event to encourage individuals to return to their rural hometowns and to connect with youth.

Whether your interest is in hosting homecoming events or working with young people to develop multi-media projects, this partnership is a wonderful way for communities to include the voices of rural people as they express what is unique and special about their community in a national narrative. The purpose of this notebook is to give you some ideas about how your community could be involved in these activities. We are looking forward to working with you to help young people find their future right at home.

WHAT DOES “COMING HOME” OFFER YOUR COMMUNITY?

- You will have access to the expertise of the Smithsonian, RCAP, and our partners. Our specialties are in technology, education, capacity building, storytelling, and much more.
- Educational materials and resources will be made available to you to help students create an incredible project.
- We offer tools and resources to help you fundraise for your local project, and these tools can be used again after the first Coming Home project is over to create other projects using different themes.
- You will join a network of rural cultural organizations across the country.
- Your community’s story could be included in future MoMS projects such as podcasts, exhibitions, and videos.
- The final project and story you create is yours; however, we will help elevate your story at a national level, via our website and social media.

TIMELINE

- Applications are accepted on a rolling basis. Upon approval, a participation contract will be sent.
- March 15th – Signed contracts and deposit are due to the Smithsonian’s Museum on Main Street staff
- April 1st – Invoice for balance of participation fee is sent out
- April 1st - Communities hear about possible support from RCAP
- May 1st – Training materials provided to host organizations
- May 1st (Year 1) to September 1st (Year 2) – Youth work on their projects
- September 1st (Year 2) – Youth Projects are completed and shared with the MoMS staff
- September 15th (year 2) – Evaluation and all closing paperwork due
- October 30th (year 2)– Annual report completed by MoMS and shared with all participants

To be a Coming Home community, you must first submit an application, found on the Museum on Main Street website, museumonmainstreet.org/cominghome. Museum on Main Street will review your application, and upon approval you will receive a contract.

Applications will be reviewed by the RCAP and MoMS staff for possible financial support provided by RCAP and their partners. Once decisions are made communities will be notified by April 1. The level of financial support can be up to \$2,000 and will vary based on the complexity of the envisioned project. Youth projects often involve the purchase of recording, editing and presentation equipment, along with honoraria for a project coordinator and a technical expert, who each work with youth as they develop their projects.

The participation fee for Coming Home is \$1000. A \$300 deposit is due with the signed contract. An invoice for the balance of \$700 will be issued in the first week of April. Once the contract is signed and returned, all training materials will be provided during the first week of May.

Starting May 1, each community will have sixteen months to complete the project. Many communities follow the school year as the timeline for their project, but you are free to complete it at any time that works best for you. By September 1 of the following year, all final projects and any raw footage are due to the Coming Home Program Coordinator. Any remaining paperwork or evaluation information is due by September 15.

EXAMPLES OF PROJECTS

Youth across the country have developed powerful projects. In Lanesboro, Minnesota and Monticello, Georgia, students ran with the projects and offered enlightening insights on their communities. In Springdale, Arkansas, the Helen Tyson Middle School's project is a great example of creative thinking. Students not only produced videos from their oral history interviews, but they also created an app and an interactive exhibit. A group of Choctaw students in Poteau, Oklahoma, chose to focus on their community's traditions and culture, interviewing tribal elders and scholars to create an exhibition on Choctaw traditions at a local museum.



01



LANESBORO, MINNESOTA

Three young girls in Lanesboro researched, interviewed, and created videos about their town. They interviewed people on the street, business owners, political figures, and each other about the future of Lanesboro. All three students looked at different topics related to water, but each came to the same main theme of change in their community. Read more about their project here:

<https://museumonmainstreet.org/blog-node/what-makes-hometown-home>

02



MONTICELLO, GEORGIA

Jasper County High School and the Jasper County Chamber of Commerce created a 50-minute video about the county's history and character, the challenges of living in a rural area, and the future of Monticello. They interviewed over 100 people varying in age, race, and gender. Youth in Monticello gathered interviews through Flipgrid, an educator's tool to create video discussion amongst classes, which they used to encourage people in the community to post their own videos. Students then conducted deeper in-person interviews. View their project here:

https://youtu.be/E9St_C6xD14

<https://flipgrid.com/monticellocrossroads>

03



SPRINGDALE, ARKANSAS

Students involved in the EAST STEM program at Helen Tyson Middle School worked with the Tontitown Historical Society to show how the culture of Italian immigrants changed local foodways. The students created an interactive exhibit with tables where important Italian ingredients were displayed. Students installed touch screens in the tables so museum visitors could learn the history behind each ingredient by watching videos using an app that was designed and coded by students. Helen Tyson Middle School students also conducted 20 oral history interviews with Tontitown residents that were archived for future projects at the historical society. Watch one of the touchtable videos here:

<https://youtu.be/GvjEjqRDhi8>

04



POTEAU, OKLAHOMA

Students from the EAST program at Kiamichi Technology Center focused on their own Choctaw heritage by creating an exhibition titled Key Ingredients: Faith, Family and Culture, in association with the LeFlore County Museum. Footage from in-depth interviews with tribal elders and scholars provided the foundation for a series of short films shown in the exhibition. As a result of their deepened awareness of local culture, students became more interested in researching the Choctaw Nation for academics, scholarships, and genealogy. One student even became a board member of the Youth Advisory Board for the Choctaw Nation. In addition, six students started regularly volunteering at the county museum.

<https://museumonmainstreet.org/content/joe-perry-faith-family-and-culture-oklahoma>

To find out more about Coming Home: Stories from Main Street visit the program website at museumonmainstreet.org/cominghome.