

The following information will assist and inspire you in developing local exhibitions and public humanities programs to complement the themes of *Crossroads: Change in Rural America*.

Summary of Exhibition Themes

Crossroads addresses big ideas about a big subject – Rural America.

Crossroads tells this story by exploring the source of rural **identity** and its perpetuation in literature, art, film, television and rhetoric. Different media, the hands of different artists, authors, and storytellers, convey the values they associate with rural people and their perceptions of rural places.

Few people control the **land** and other resources that feed, clothe and house the majority of the U.S. population. Everyone has a stake in rural America because of the ways that the land, and the people who own and manage it contribute to the general health and welfare of all. Americans also have a vested interest in the land that individuals do not own. A 2017 report by the Congressional Research Service indicates that the U.S. government owns 28 percent of the total U.S. land mass of 2.27 billion acres. Four national land management agencies, plus the Department of Defense, manage these 640 million acres. Those agencies include the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, and the Forest Service. See “Federal Land Ownership: Overview and Data,” <https://fas.org/sqp/crs/misc/R42346.pdf>.

Communities anchor local government, cultural institutions, businesses, transportation services, and rural society. Rural communities thrived during the 20th century but many now appear as mere shells of their former selves. Main Streets, once the destination for rural populations who frequented theaters, schools, banks, general stores, and churches, now serve as refueling stations, with many passing through on their way to somewhere else. Residents did not just sit and watch these changes occur. They instigated a series of reform efforts throughout the century to ensure a high standard of living and pride in place. Local boosters remain invested in rural communities.

Reformers reorganized rural places. Disagreements over the meaning of “progress” can create divisions. Some view building a new school as an investment in the future that can help sustain a place, while others view the consolidation and closing of smaller community schools as too high a price to pay. Every place wrestles with these changes. **Persistence** will ensure the future of the land that supports the people and communities and businesses that feed, clothe, and house us all.

Managing Change in the countryside requires dedication, communication, and cooperation.

Rural Americans speak to all these themes, sharing “what rural means” to them, and explaining the reasons why they came to rural places, remain in rural places, and advocate for rural places.

Each *Crossroads* host contributes to the ongoing effort to understand the complexity of rural people and places and the critical role that each plays in the local, state, regional, and national context.

Collaborate!

All Museum on Main Street exhibitions encourage state humanities councils and host communities to collaborate and partner with a variety of state, regional and local organizations. Such partnerships are particularly important for *Crossroads*. Many have significant interest in rural America. This exhibition offers an opportunity to engage different groups and encourage your constituents to share their passions, issues, and concerns as well as the opportunities that they see and challenges that they face. *Crossroads* community discussions will be most effective when they involve partners that share many points of view on the subject – rural America.

The program and exhibition ideas below offer some suggestions for potential partners. Historical societies and organizations are critical to understanding who we are as a community. Local and regional governments and state, local and regional government agencies will play a significant role in discussions about the future of your rural communities. Arts organizations can engage with *Crossroads* hosts to explore how Americans have viewed rural places through the past century. So much of our understanding of rural America comes from stories. Partnerships between historical organizations, schools, libraries, and other groups can result in creative programming (plays, performances, poetry readings, essay contests, exhibitions and dramatic readings) that encourages both reflection and conversation. The process can prompt reflection on past perspectives but also generate new work about our rural places.

Humanities programming can also draw in experts in environmental sciences, agricultural sciences, soil and water conservation, and resources management. Inviting diverse perspectives to informal discussions or more formal panel presentations will broaden access to perspectives not often heard in humanities program, but whose perspectives are vital to understanding rural land use and resource management. Such conversations should include representatives from local and county agencies (including elected and appointed officials as well as individuals who engage with such agencies), state departments or bureaus such as the department of agriculture, or conservation, or sustainability, and from national agencies such as the U.S. Bureau of Land Management or the U.S. Forest Service. Discussions with many perspectives around the table that all can speak to a shared concern will help local residents gain information about local, state, and national organizations that have affected rural places in the past and present, and that will affect it in the future.

See the Partnership Ideas document for additional suggestions for partners and collaborators.

Understanding Rural America

Crossroads provides an opportunity to:

- 1) ask questions and build understanding about rural America
- 2) consider how people in different disciplines define rural America, and
- 3) reflect on the characteristics of rural in your community.

What Is Rural?

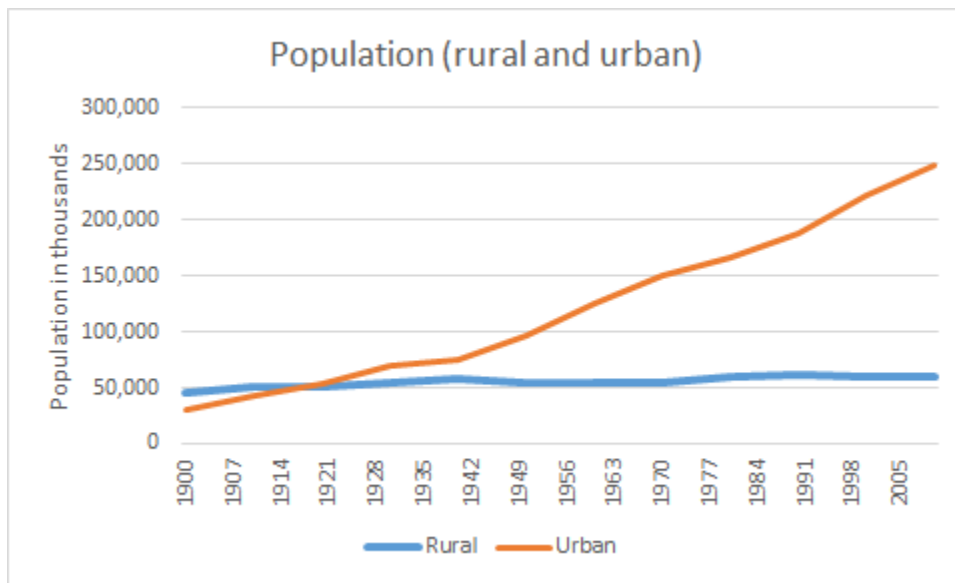
The definition of “rural” is often debated, but it seems most significant to realize that the U.S. Census Bureau has redefined what constitutes “urban” often since 1950, but the Census Bureau’s definition of “rural” remains locations with fewer than 2,500 people. This affects policy decisions, resource allocations, and infrastructure investment, regardless of how accurate or inaccurate a population-based definition may be.

Some facts:

The majority of the U.S. population (62.7 percent) lives on only 3.5 percent of the U.S. landmass. Beyond these cities, suburbs, and exurbs, with high population densities, lies the remaining 96.5 percent of the U.S. land mass.

One out of five Americans live in these rural places, defined as areas with fewer than 2,500 people, and in open countryside with population densities less than 500 people per square mile.

The rural population has remained remarkably consistent, even as the urban population has increased exponentially during the 20th century. See the chart below for a graphic depiction that shows the persistence. While small towns may have bled populations, a “rural” constituency of around 50 million remains.



Note: The years across the bottom axis should be decades; 1900, 1910, etc,

Data: Rural and Urban Population, United States, 1900-2010, compiled from U.S. Census Bureau data (in 1,000s).

	RURAL	URBAN
1900	45,997	30,215

1910	50,165	42,064
1920	51,768	54,253
1930	54,042	69,161
1940	57,459	74,705
1950	54,479	96,847
1960	54,045	125,269
1970	53,565	149,647
1980	59,495	167,051
1990	61,656	187,054
2000	59,061	222,361
2010	59,492	249,253

Putting Your Place in Context: Is Your Region Rural?

Crossroads provides an opportunity for local hosts to document the demographic changes in their county and state, and compare local situations to other rural and urban places.

In crafting local exhibits, think beyond the accepted story line of rural population decline. Urban populations did not grow because Americans left rural places. What? The “Great Migration” of the 1890s through 1910s occurred as rural dwellers moved to industrial jobs in the cities, but cities grew because of immigration and natural increase, too. See for yourself. Analyze your county population over time – from 1890 to 2010 – to see what sort of shift took place. Mine your state compendium published by the U.S. Census Bureau for each decennial census to document growth and change.

The U.S. Census Bureau first distinguished rural from urban in 1870 when the Bureau defined “urban” as places with 8,000 or more people. In 1910 the Bureau defined “urban” as any population, housing, and territory located within incorporated places of 2,500 or more population. In 1950 the Bureau defined “urban” as places with 50,000 or more people. Currently the U.S. Census Bureau is debating changing the definition of “rural” for the first time. For more on “rural,” see “Rural America at a Glance,” compiled by the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=85739>.

Rural-Urban population data is available in compendia of the U.S. Census reports (1790-1970) Series A 57-72 <https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/histstats-colonial-1970.pdf>

Reports compiling rural-urban statistics from each decennial census, including county and state level data, is available at <https://www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/hiscendata.html>.

Rural definitions, rural statistics, and strategies to generate rural wealth should interest local hosts.

Choose Words Carefully

Making the most of *Crossroads: Change in Rural America* starts by choosing words carefully. It is easy to use the words “brain drain” to describe the seemingly one-way path out of rural communities. But this term is not exactly accurate. Young people who choose to remain rural or who return to rural communities are not less intelligent than those who live elsewhere. Use terms that convey the reality. For instance, it might be true that of 100 graduating seniors in a rural school, 10 attended college out of state. That is not a brain drain; rather, it is an affirmation of persistence in a rural place, and the young perspectives that can bring change.

Discuss Rural Philosophy

People invest a lot of thought in writing about Rural Philosophy. A recent example full of short essays “to young farmers” by seasoned rural philosophers, conveys the connections between rural, and agriculture, and local food sources. Too often, Wendell Berry, and Wes Jackson, receive mention, but this collection: *Letters to a Young Farmer on Food, Farming, and Our Future* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2017) includes Berry and Jackson, but others such as Ben Burkett, Amigo Bob Cantisano, Karen Washington, Nephi Craig, Mary Berry, Anna Lappé, Joel Salatin, Wendy Millet, and others. Local hosts can consult the Bibliography (Appendix C), for additional collections of essays or short books on rural and agrarian thinking.

Note that “agrarian” strictly defined, means a belief in the inherent good of rural and country life, and of the higher moral and ethical standards of rural people. This idea is closely associated with American identity and the agrarian argument that landowning farmers made the best citizens because of their independence (due to private landownership) and morality. The new United States had a vested interest in supporting these farmer-citizens, and committed to land policy that ensured access to affordable land from the nation’s beginning. Thus, agriculture and farming co-exists with rural ideals (and the threats to rural independent) in much rural philosophy.

Suggested Reading:

Agrarian Writing (philosophies of “rural”); Rural Identity; Rural Attributes; Rural Biography /Autobiography

Suggested readings for more in-depth study of theoretical or philosophical approaches to understanding “Rural.” These can support programming or community reading circles and critical thinking exercises that consider how people perceived (and/or defined) “rural” in the past, and over time and place, and how such opinions affect policy, rural livelihoods, and rural influence.

Berry, Wendell. *What Are People For?: Essays*. Berkeley, Cal.: Counterpoint, 1990; 2010.

Freyfogle, Eric T., editor. *The New Agrarianism: Land, Culture, and the Community of Life*. Island Books, 2001.

Hodgkins, Martha, editor. *Letters to a Young Farmer on Food, Farming, and Our Future*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2017.

Jack, Zachary M., editor. *Black Earth and Ivory Tower: New American Essays from Farm and Classroom*. University of South Carolina Press, 2005.

Jackson, Wes. *New Roots for Agriculture*. University of Nebraska, 1980

Twelve Southerners. *I’ll Take my Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930)

Wirzba, Norman, editor. *The Essential Agrarian Reader: The Future of Culture, Community, and the Land*. 2003.

**Suggested Reading:
Rural Issues, Rural Revitalization (Current):**

Couch, Julianne. *The Small-Town Midwest: Resilience and Hope in the Twenty First Century* University of Iowa Press, 2016.
Rural Policy Research Institute - <http://www.rupri.org/> (see “Library”: Definitions of Rural; Papers and Reports, etc.)
Rural Wealth Creation. Routledge, 2014. Edited by John L. Pender, Bruce A. Weber, Thomas G. Johnson, J. Matthew Fannin.

**Suggested Reading:
Surveys and Overview Works:**

For broad themes in rural history and a regional/national overview, David Danbom’s *Born in the Country* remains the standard survey. It provides a broad overview to topics related to rural life and culture, and puts agriculture and rural businesses into that context. The more recent collection of essays, *The Routledge History of Rural America*, includes essays that explore topics related to rural life. Chapters or essays in these books can lay a foundation for more focused discussions about the relation of local history to larger themes.

For information about national policy related to rural life and to agriculture, see the “Timeline: National Policy and Agrarian Legislation” from *Interpreting Agriculture in Museums and Historic Sites* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017) available at: <http://alhfam.org/InterpAg>

Danbom, David. *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, 2nd ed. 2006.

Hurt, R. Douglas. *American Agriculture: A Brief History*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994; rev. ed., Indiana University, 2002. [more policy/technology/agriculture; less about rural]

Riney-Kehrberg, editor. *The Routledge History of Rural America*. New York: Routledge, 2016. [Essays by individual contributors address rural history and relations between that history and issues today. Each author cited numerous reference works as evidence and also contributed a “top ten” list of books related to the topic for the “selected readings” bibliography at the end of the book. Robert Wuthnow contributed a chapter on rural depopulation, and he suggested six books for added information. See also Debra Reid’s essay on race and rural America, Michael Swinford’s history of rural-urban exchange, and Jenny Barker-Devine’s essay on rural women and suggested readings.]

Regional and Topical Studies that Focus on Rural

Collections of essays provide quick reads about historical and more current issues affecting regions of the country.

State history journals, often published by the state historical society, include numerous essays focused on rural life. Many have tables of contents in a digital format and easily searchable. Editors might be willing to provide PDF files of selected essays for use in a community during

the six-week exhibit to support reading circles and/or article discussions. See, for example, the *Florida Historical Quarterly*, published by the Florida Historical Society in cooperation with the Department of History at the University of Central Florida (members-only access, but the editor's email appears on the webpage).

University presses also publish book series that feature studies of regional and state-focused rural subjects. See, for example, the University of Arizona Press has twelve books in its "Modern American West" series.

Anderson, J. L., editor. *The Rural Midwest since World War II*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2014.

Evans, Sterling. *Farming across Borders: A Transnational History of the North American West*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2017. [Series on "Connecting the Greater West" at Texas A&M University Press, replete with information about people in the far west and transnational relations between cultures within and between Canada, the western United States, and northern Mexico].

Hurt, R. Douglas, *Indian Agriculture in America: Prehistory to the Present*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998. [A broad overview; and much more regional focus could help; but it addresses a woefully understudied topic.]

_____. *The Big Empty: The Great Plains in the Twentieth Century*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011.

Hurt, R. Douglas, editor. *African American Life in the Rural South, 1900-1950*. Columbia: University of Missouri; Reprint edition; 2011.

_____. *The Rural South since World War II*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998. *Encyclopedia of the Midwest*.

_____. *The Rural West since World War II*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998.

Creating Community Dialogue

One of the key opportunities *Crossroads* presents is community dialogue. Take this time to engage your entire community in discussions about the past, present, and future of your rural communities. Involve as many community partners in this discussion, including local governments and elected officials.

Starting the Conversation: Encouraging Civic Dialogue

Americans have strong opinions about each of the themes addressed in *Crossroads*. The exhibition offers an opportunity for starting conversations about rural communities by drawing people with different perspectives to the same location. Resources exist to help manage the conversations.

Animating Democracy, a program of America for the Arts, defines civic dialogue as dialogue about civic issues, policies, or decisions of consequence to people's lives, communities, and society. Meaningful civic dialogue is intentional and purposeful. Dialogue organizers have a sense of what difference they hope to make through civic dialogue and participants are informed about why the dialogue is taking place and what may result. The focus of civic dialogue is not about the process of dialogue itself. Nor is its intent solely therapeutic or to nurture personal

growth. Rather, civic dialogue addresses a matter of civic importance to the dialogue participants. <http://animatingdemocracy.org/resources/glossary-0>

Everyday Democracy, formerly known as Study Circles Resource Center, explains the basic steps to launching civil dialogue in Dialogue to Change, available at: <https://www.everyday-democracy.org/resources/everyday-democracys-dialogue-change-process>

Conflict resolution starts by bringing people together (all people but particularly those involved in a conflict) to have an open dialogue about issues, grievances, and possible solutions. The Peaceable Stories project of the Maine Humanities Council provides an example of resolving conflict through conversation: <https://mainehumanities.org/blog/peaceable-stories/>

Community discussions

Community discussions can focus on a variety of topics highlighted in the exhibition. Be sure to include the full community to hear their voices. Draw in representatives from local, county, state and national offices to ensure breadth of coverage and diverse perspectives. Document your work and create written records of these discussions to share with others as the community continues to plan for its future.

- **Exploring your community's past:** What is significant about your past? One of the key topics in the exhibition is identity. How has the past shaped and defined your community identity? What is your community's identity now? How can you incorporate elements about your community's past and identity into your plans for the future? Discuss also how your community has persisted through periods of change? What does that persistence reveal about your community's identity?
- **Assessing the present:** Use the *Crossroads* exhibition as an opportunity to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your community today.
- **Planning for your future:** This exhibition provides an ideal time for your community to consider its future. What issues and concerns do you see? What are your strengths? What direction should your community take as you move into the future?
- **Explore and discuss public policies that relate to rural communities:** Engage your community in discussing policies that are related to rural areas at the local, regional, state and national level. Bring in local planners and elected and appointed officials to learn more about issues. Take time to explore what these policies might mean for your local community and your region.
- **What is important to preserve?** Community discussions can and should focus on elements of rural communities that tell important stories and should be preserved, from the built environment to land.

One of the frameworks that you might consider as you assess the strengths and the future of your community is that of **Rural Wealth Creation**, a program sponsored by the USDA. Rural wealth creation is a "21st century approach to community and economic development that is demand-driven, focusing on market opportunities that capitalize on a community's existing assets or underutilized resources".

- A resource handbook entitled *Measuring Rural Wealth Creation: A Guide for Regional Development Organizations* is available at <https://www.nado.org/measuring-rural-wealth-creation-a-guide-for-regional-development-organizations/>

- Read more about *Rural Wealth Creation* at <https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/reports/rd-ERR131.pdf>

Dialogue in the schools

Use the *Crossroads* exhibition opportunity to engage young people in your community in conversation. They are the future of your community, and they have ideas about what is important to them. Engaging students in this dialogue also encourage them to think about the roles that they can play, in the future, in a democratic government.

Practice community dialogue in your schools, using the five themes of the *Crossroads* exhibition to engage students. What is the *identity* of their community? What are the issues they see surrounding *land*? What are the strengths of *community* life? How have their families and others persisted through the many changes that have occurred, and how might they continue to *persist* through the challenges today? What future would they like to see for their community?

Discuss, in advance, how you will collect and preserve the dialogue that will take place. Encourage students to help with the collection and organization of their ideas. Take some time to share these ideas with elected representatives of your town, city, or county governments. Consider other ways to share their thoughts. Could they publish a series of articles in the local newspaper? Could students use these discussions to become advocates for causes and issues in their community? School clubs or organizations could take on some of the suggestions as service projects. Encourage students to realize that their opinions and ideas do matter and that they are essential for the future development of their community.

Additional lesson plans

Many groups interested in rural America have created lesson plans that you can consult for more structured approaches to formal instruction connected with *Crossroads*. See the Educational Partners and Lesson Plan Resources list for more possibilities.

COLLECTING AND SHARING STORIES

Stories share the human experience, and they figure prominently in this exhibition and other Museum on Main Street exhibitions and programs. Everyone in rural America has a story. We encourage you to use stories prominently in both your local exhibitions and programs. Communities can collect and share local stories but also hear and discuss state and national stories.

What is cultural storytelling?

To put it simply, cultural stories are historic, community or factual events and information told in creative and immersive ways. Your cultural stories inspire others with your passion for your communities. Visitors don't just want to hear dry facts. Tell them about the personalities of the people you are talking about. Help them imagine your community through different points of view – what is the story behind that architectural style, how did that artwork get here, what are the stories behind this neighborhood?

Stories from Main Street

Consider adding your local exhibitions and history projects to the Stories from Main Street project, available on the Museum on Main Street website at <http://www.museumonmainstreet.org/stories>. This program is an effort to learn about small-town America through stories told by rural communities themselves.

For help with creating a storytelling project, check out resources from our partner MuseWeb Foundation at <https://www.museweb.us/be-here-main-street-resources/> and on the Stories from Main Street resources page at <https://museumonmainstreet.org/content/resource-center>. Resources include storytelling toolkits and field guides, along with helpful webinars and videos.

Research community histories

Historical societies, museums, archives, and other history organizations focus on capturing the stories--the history--from your community. These organizations are some of the most important community partners for this exhibition. The exhibit encourages communities to think about their past and the stories that are distinctive to the development of their own history.

Historical organizations can develop programs and exhibitions that focus specifically on areas of the community's past, including its identity, public and private lands, farming, community, and persistence. For example, local history exhibits could focus on the Country Life Movement and its accomplishments in the region, New Deal programs and their community impact, and the role of World War I and II in the region's development.

Consider as well exhibitions or programs that focus on the challenges your community faced after World War II. What happened to your downtown businesses and local industry? What has agriculture changed? How did your community experience the Civil Rights movement or other movements for equal rights? Has your community become more diverse? If so, focus on why and how those diverse populations came to live in your area. Engage all of these community members in helping to develop exhibitions on their stories. Ask them to participate in discussion programs. Invite business and industry owners to come in and discuss the changes in the business environment after World War II. Include workers to discuss the impact on the changing economy has had on their lives. How have these changes impacted labor in your community? How have community members worked together to persist? Develop exhibitions featuring stories about schools and organizations that have helped sustain communities in the face of significant change. How did school consolidation, for example, have an impact on your community?

Collect and use historical photographs to interpret change over time in your community. Perhaps your historical society, archive, museum, or public library might sponsor a History Day event in which local residents can bring their photographs of the community to be scanned and preserved. Use these photographs to create exhibitions with timelines of the community's growth and development.

Oral Histories

Another great way to engage the community is through collecting oral histories. States may coordinate oral history projects, or your local community could organize this work. Preparing for an oral history project involves planning: what are the goals of your project? Who will you interview? How will you collect those stories? Who will participate? What questions do you want to ask? How will you use the oral histories? Will you transcribe the interviews? Where will you archive the interviews? You might even consider developing a small "story corps" type setting at your exhibition and invite local residents to come in on certain days to share their stories.

Remember that you will need an oral history release form and be sure that all participants sign this at the time of the interview. You may choose to partner with a local historical society or archive and use their forms. It is also helpful to record significant biographical information about your informants and keep that in a file with the release form. There are many types of equipment that can be used. Most oral history projects now utilize digital recorders, but you can even download apps to your phone! Research equipment carefully, and be sure that you know how to use it in advance. Plan to archive your oral histories in a local repository.

For assistance in oral history projects, partner with someone in your community, region, or state. Your state humanities council may have suggestions for potential partners in your region or for trained oral historians with whom you might work. Develop an oral history workshop for your community. Oral histories can fit with educational standards, especially in English and social studies. Work with teachers in your community to engage students in oral histories.

Here are some additional resources that will be helpful to you in conducting oral histories:

- The Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide, 2017, available at <https://folklife.si.edu/the-smithsonian-folklife-and-oral-history-interviewing-guide/smithsonian>
- Stephen Winick and Beter Partis, *Folklife and Fieldwork: An Introduction to Cultural Documentation*, 2016, from the American Folklife Center, available at <https://www.loc.gov/folklife/fieldwork/>
- The Oral History Association website available at <http://www.oralhistory.org/>

Creative Writing

Creative writing programs provide another opportunity to share stories and perspectives on rural America. Consider sponsoring programs where local writers share their stories and poems about the themes in the exhibition. Develop creative writing contests for different members of your community, from adults to children. Provide prompts relating to the exhibition--themes of identity, land, community or persistence. Engage local writing clubs or guilds in these activities. Find opportunities to promote these creative writing endeavors on social media or community websites. Create an exhibition that showcases this work at your showing of *Crossroads* or at the local library. Perhaps these works could be published locally to share with the community. Archive these stories with the local historical society for future generations.

Essay Contests

Essay contests provide opportunities for students, in particular, to reflect on the past, present, and future of their community. Develop contests based around the exhibition themes and share the results at the opening or another public program. Students could write about what is important to them about their communities and what they would like to see in its future. Essays can be shared in a community program, on social media, or on a partner website. Students could also share their essays as part of a communication conversation about the future of the community. Invite elected officials and government staff to come and hear what local youth value about their communities, and what they would like to see in the future!

Stories in Literature, Film and Television

Discussions on literature and film are staples of humanities programs. The reading and film lists provide plenty of ideas on small town and rural life, but there are many others that you could use as well! Encourage book clubs to add books on this topic. Develop a special book

discussion series at the local libraries for the exhibition tour. Create programs for children that engage them in stories about rural America and their small town, at the exhibition venue, the public library, the school, or other partner organizations. State humanities council may develop book lists more focused on their region. Communities, including libraries, may identify additional local authors who speak directly to the issues related to your region.

Films and television series are another form of stories about rural America. These films or episodes from the television series listed with this resource packet could be utilized for movie nights at the exhibition venue, the public library, the local theater, or another partnering venue. Engage humanities scholars to lead discussions about these films.

CONNECTING TO THE VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

The visual and performing arts reflect the themes found in the *Crossroads* exhibition. The arts provide additional ways to explore these topics and new partnership and collaboration opportunities with regional, state, and local arts organizations. State arts councils are excellent sources for ideas in this area, including artists, performers, and art that you might consider in your exhibitions and programs.

New Deal Public Art

Many states and communities still have examples of public art relating, including murals painted in public buildings of local and regional subjects. Under the New Deal, the federal government created programs that put artists to work in these lean financial years through the Public Works of Art Project and its successor, the Works Progress Administration. Artists depicted small town life, from schools and church to industry, and the rural landscape with its farms and fields and focused on regional culture and lifestyles. For more information, see <https://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/1934>, and its accompanying catalog, as well as a review of the exhibition at <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/1934-the-art-of-the-new-deal-132242698/>

Does your community or region have public art surviving from the 1930s? Or are there surviving examples in your broader region? If so, this art would be an excellent topic for a local exhibition or public program. Take some time to explore the ideas that viewers see in the artwork. What themes does the art represent? What does this art suggest about your region or community? Invite an art historian or a historian to come and talk about the federal arts programs in these years and to show other examples from your state or broader region. Contact your state art museum or state arts council for potential resources.

Host sites might also encourage children or adults to develop similar murals for the community today. Is there a permanent location where such artwork might go? Perhaps a downtown business might commission artists to paint an outside or inside wall of their building. What stories would you tell about your community? Art teachers at the middle or high schools might create a lesson around New Deal public art and ask students to create their own examples that could be showcased in an art exhibition along with *Crossroads*. Perhaps students in an art class or arts center in the community might undertake painting a mural for the community as well.

New Deal Federal Art Program

The Federal Arts Project, established in 1935, featured a variety of arts which included posters, sculpture, and paintings. Communities can use the resources of this program to reflect on American life in the 1930s—including daily life as well as the challenges and opportunities of small town, rural America at that time. The Library of Congress has extensive collections of online materials to consult, as well as a list of other collections. Please see <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/newdeal/fap.html#online>. Communities could use these resources as part of their local exhibitions or programs.

Some examples of New Deal art may still survive in your community. Talk with cultural and educational institutions in your community and region to identify any such examples. Your state arts council may also know about some of these resources. Incorporate this art into your local exhibition, if possible. Perhaps some examples are also available at state or regional art museums. Maybe a local or regional art museum could sponsor an exhibition on this topic. Invite historians and art historians to lead discussions on the role of this art at the time and on the subjects that this art features.

New Deal Photography

One of the best known art programs during the New Deal focused on photography, spearheaded by the Farm Security Administration and the Farmers Home Administration between 1935 and 1943. Roy Stryker, who directed the program, asked photographers to “document America,” and their photographs provides an intimate and honest portrait of American ideals and values during the Depression years. Well-known photographers who participated in this program included Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Ben Shahn, Arthur Rothstein, Russell Lee, Marion Post Wolcott, Jack Delano, John Vachon, and others. Together, these photographs present an unforgettable view of rural America at a time of great change. This New Deal photography is now available digitally, including various websites from the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian Institution, Please see:

- <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/farm-security-administration-fsa-selected-records-and-photographs-8898>
- Documenting America, 1935-1943: The Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Photo Collection at <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/journey/fsa.html>
- Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Negatives: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/fsa/>
- Farm Security Administration: Office of War Information Materials: <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/newdeal/fsa.html>

Utilizing the online collections and your state and regional archive, communities can identify photographs that represent their region and its stories. These photographs can be incorporated into local exhibitions, or used for public programs. Participants can explore the themes and ideas in these photographs and compare them to the community and/or region today. What do these photographs tell us about American identity? How do these photographs depict the American landscape? What has changed from the 1930s? What is the American spirit reflected in these images?

Additional New Deal Arts Resources

The Library of Congress has developed a variety of on-line exhibitions and presentations using New Deal arts resources that would be useful for local discussion programs, for all ages. Please see: <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/themes/great-depression/exhibitions.html>

Photography and Visual Art Contests

Just as New Deal artists and photographers documented rural American in the 1930s, your community could document life now, both on the farm and in your small town! Consider developing a local photography or visual arts contest among different age levels of your community, from children through adults. The contest could be divided by the different themes of the exhibition. Include this artwork in a local exhibition. You might even allow the community to vote through your website or at the exhibition or both. Feature the artwork in a local exhibition and invite the artists to share their stories in a program.

Local and Regional Art

Do you have local or regional artists who focus their work on rural America? Many artists are attracted to the power of regional landscapes or small town life. Consider hosting an exhibition of local artwork that focuses on the exhibition themes. Ask artists to come and share their perspective in a public program accompanying the exhibition. Why do they focus on these topics? What are they trying to show? What do they consider their most powerful messages? You might ask some of the local artists to lead workshops on depicting the local landscape in different visual arts mediums. Contact your state arts council for ideas about other arts in your region.

Architecture and the Built Environment

Architecture is a critical element of the landscape, both on the farm and in town. Buildings hold special meaning in our community's history. The exhibition creates discussion about our built environment and asks us to think about what we should preserve as we consider our community's future. Are there particular elements of the built environment that are critical to our community's identity? How does architecture reflect our community? Which buildings are most significant and why? What should we preserve and why should we preserve it? What importance do buildings have in our community?

For exhibitions and programs, communities could incorporate photographs and stories about both town and country architecture. Exhibitions could highlight significant buildings in the community, both those that remain and those that are gone, and the stories that these buildings tell. Downtown businesses and city governments could display old photographs, stories, and memories of their buildings in small exhibits in their windows or inside. Communities could recognize distinctive rural architecture that reflect the people who settled in the region and their cultural ideals and values. Does your community have any Centennial or Century Farms that you might highlight in your programs or exhibitions?

Programs and exhibitions could teach residents to identify styles of architecture within the community and teach residents how to identify architecture styles, plan types, or other distinctive features for their community. Consult style guides available in books or through your state historic preservation office. You might work with your local Main Street program to develop a guide to local architecture to showcase your community's heritage. Make it available to local residents, children, and tourists.

Community mapping is another activity or program that could engage local residents in reflecting on the building environment. Children could map out their communities, identifying various neighborhoods as well as the downtown commercial core and the industrial areas. Community members could engage in memory mapping, in which you share local maps and ask residents to post their stories or memories of special places or buildings in the town. These memories could be compiled to share with the community and with city planners, as they consider your future. Besides the actual town, are there special places that local residents enjoy, such as parks, recreational areas, rivers, mountains, or other aspects of the landscape? Record these as well. Perhaps an exhibition or program could focus on sharing the results of this project.

Host communities could develop walking tours to interpret the buildings and share these stories. Classes at local schools could develop their own walking tours of the community. These walking tours could endure after the exhibition leaves as heritage trails for visitors but also as programs for local organizations and governments.

Music

So much of American music focuses on rural and small town life and the ideals and values that these places hold. Some of the best examples come from American roots music: old-time string bands, bluegrass music, blues, and country music that speak to American identity, family, community, the power of the land, and the need to persist to overcome challenges. Early country and recording musicians like the Carter Family popularized many of these themes through their music, and bluegrass musicians epitomized by famed mandolin player Bill Monroe continued this tradition. Traditional ballads and gospel music were important in rural communities and they speak to the ideals of home, church, community, and struggle. Listening to current and historic programs from old “Barn Dances” or the Grand Ole Opry could provide insights into American ideals related to the country. Western Swing performers often sang about place, including Riders of the Purple Sage and Will Rogers. Classic country music performers from Patsy Cline, Johnny Cash, Loretta Lynn, and Dolly Parton through artists such as popular songwriters and performers Bob Dylan, Jim Croce, and James Taylor to more modern country musicians Trisha Yearwood, Dierks Bentley and others continue to incorporate these traditional ideas of the “country” and the power of the landscape and home.

American folksongs also reflect on the exhibition themes and provide opportunities for discussion about the exhibition. Woody Guthrie’s music, including the classic “This Land is My Land,” emphasize the challenges America faced during periods of great change. Pete Seeger and Mike Seeger collected, wrote, and performed music in this genre. Protest music from the 1960s and 1970s, including music in the struggle for Civil Rights, labor issues, and other rights, highlight both American values and the ways that people have persisted through challenging times. Blues music, rooted in the African American experience, including songs about the struggles that blacks face in rural communities.

Excellent examples of these many genres of this music can be found on the Smithsonian Folkways’ website at www.folkways.si.edu Folkways Recording reflect a variety of American experiences in rural America. Additional resources are suggested at the end of this document.

Perhaps your region has singer-songwriters who have written about issues that your community faced? Invite them to perform and share the stories behind their music.

In the field of classical music, composer Aaron Copland engaged regional music in his “populist” works for the 1930s and 1940s, including “Appalachian Spring,” “Billy the Kid and Rodeo,” “Fanfare for the Common Man,” and “Third Symphony.” Local orchestras could perform these pieces and a humanities scholar could engage participants in discussion about the meaning behind these works.

One of the classic events in small communities throughout the twentieth century was the band concert, both those within the community and in the schools. Communities could develop a concert much in the spirit of the old community band, held at a community park bandstand or another location. The band could play classic American music, including Sousa marches or Copland music. Humanities scholars could interpret the role of community bands and such concerts. Historic photos of local bands are always engaging. Host sites might also talk with school band directors to see if their bands might learn and perform some of this music and interpret it to their students and to the parents who attend the concert.

Even early rock music reflects these themes of rural America. Consider “Horse with No Name” (1971) by America and “Take it Easy” (1972) by the Eagles. Southern rock examples like “Sweet Home Alabama” by Lynyrd Skynyrd (1974) are classic now, especially with the popularity of the recent movie by this name. A program might ask young people to consider the extent to which rural ideals and themes are present in other music today.

Consider a music contest in which community members nominate their favorite songs that help define their “place.” Develop a program in which you listen to some of these songs and talk about them.

Songs that could spark discussions about rural and “country” and what these ideas mean include:

Dierks Bentley (2015), “Home”
Garth Brooks (1990), “Friends in Low Places”
Bobby Bare (1963), “Detroit City”
Zac Brown Band (2008), “Chicken Fried”
Glenn Campbell (1968, written by Jimmy Webb), “Wichita Lineman”
Carolina Cotton (1946), “Three Miles South of Cash (in Arkansas)”
The Carter Family or Flatt & Scruggs, “Homestead on the Farm”
Johnny Cash (1959), “Five Feet High and Risin’”
Johnny Cash (1968), “Cisco Clifton’s Fillin’ Station”
The Chuck Wagon Gang (1984), “The Church in the Wildwood”
J.D. Crowe and the New South (1975), “The Old Home Place”
Dick Curless (1968), “You Can’t Go Back Again”
Charlie Daniels (1973), “Uneasy Rider”
Iris Dement (1992), “Our Town”
John Denver (1974), “Back Home Again”
John Denver (1974), “Matthew”

John Denver (1971), "Take Me Home, Country Roads"
 Joe Diffie (1993), "John Deere Green"
 Stoney Edwards, "Pickin' Wildflowers"
 Aengus Finnan (1999), "The Corinthian"
 Bobbie Gentry (1967), "Ode to Billy Joe"
 Steve Goodman (c. 1971); Arlo Guthrie (1972), Willie Nelson (1985), "City of New Orleans"
 David Grisman (1987), album *Home is Where the Heart Is*
 Jack Guthrie (1944), "Oklahoma Hills"
 Woody Guthrie (1963), "This Land is Your Land"
 Merle Haggard (1969; co-written with Roy Edward Burris), "Okie from Muskogee"
 Tom T. Hall (1971), "Trip to Hyden"
 Phil Harris (1949), "Is It True What They Say About Dixie?"
 Patty Loveless (2001), "You'll Never Leave Harlan Alive"
 Loretta Lynn (1969), "Coal Miner's Daughter"
 John McCutcheon (c. 1987), "Long Way Back to Georgia"
 John McCutcheon (1986), "Dearest Martha"
 Joni Mitchell (1970), "Big Yellow Taxi"
 Bill Monroe (1980), "Uncle Pen"
 Kacey Musgraves (2012), "Merry Go Round"
 Dolly Parton (c. 1964; released 1973), "My Tennessee Mountain Home"
 Dolly Parton (1982), "Tennessee Homesick Blues"
 Dolly Parton (1971), "Coat of Many Colors"
 Dolly Parton (1969), "In the Good Old Days (When Times Were Bad)"
 Angaleena Presley (2014), "Dry County Blues"
 Charley Pride (1996), "Mississippi Cotton-Picking Delta Town"
 Jeannie C. Riley (1968), "Harper Valley P.T.A."
 Darius Rucker (2013 cover and music video), "Wagon Wheel" (NOTE: Bob Dylan wrote "Rock Me Mama" (1973) which Ketch Secor of Old Crow Medicine Show retitled, added new lyrics and adapted in 2004, with co-writer credit to Bob Dylan)
 The Stanley Brothers (1950), "The Fields Have Turned Brown"
 Mel Street (1975), "Smokey Mountain Memories"
 Merle Travis (1947), "Missouri"
 Don Williams (1980), "Grand Ole Boys Like Me"
 Hank Williams, "The Log Train"
 Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, "Just a Plain Old Country Boy"
 Trisha Yearwood (2005), "Georgia Rain"
 Dwight Yoakam (1987), "Readin', Writin', Route 23"

Besides being part of programming (such as lectures or performances), music simply might serve as background for creating ambiance for visitors to your site. Just be sure to acquire the correct licensing for any music used.

Theater

Local theater groups may be interested in sharing plays that reflect stories in the exhibition. There are many plays that focus on small towns and rural issues. One of the most classic is Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, a 1938 play that introduces the story of the fictional small town of Grover's Corners between 1901 and 1913 through the everyday lives of its citizens. The musical

The Music Man takes place in another small midwestern town in 1912, as a traveling salesman stops and tries to organize a boy's band. Several Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals highlight rural America. Oklahoma, takes place on a farm in Oklahoma in 1906, as two young men court a farm girl--a cowboy and a more sinister farmhand. State Fair provides a glimpse into the Iowa State Fair in 1946 through the Frake family; parents Abel and Melissa hope to win a few blue ribbons, but their son and daughter are looking for romance on the midway. A more contemporary and edgier work is the *The Laramie Project* by Moises Kauffman and the Tectonic Theatre Company. The play was developed from interviews with community members in and around Laramie, Wyoming, and focuses on the Matthew Shepard murder. The actors portray real people.

Communities may also want to develop plays about their own history. Such productions could focus on the identity of the community, the way in which the land has shaped the community's history and values, or the persistence of community in the face of significant changes over the twentieth century.

Community theater groups may take on this project, and perhaps even continue the production of the play as a tourism product.. There may be talented writers in the community, including theater teachers or professors.. If not, there are several companies that can help them. Sojourn Theatre is a community engagement based theatre company that partners with communities across the country to make plays available at <http://www.sojourntheatre.org/company> . DNAWorks goes to communities to create works focusing on identity, culture, class, and heritage, available at <http://www.dnaworks.org/>

Dance

Dance is also an important art in your community. Old-time square dances were community events that drew people together to engage in fellowship and recreation. Host sites could plan a community dance that teaches some of the older dances in the community and shares the ways in which dancing supported community ideals and values. Engage a humanities scholar to interpret the stories about traditional dance forms. Some communities have groups that sponsor weekly or monthly contra dances or old-time square dances. They could also demonstrate these dances as a program associated with the exhibition. Dancing allows an opportunity to reflect on building and sustaining community, an important theme in the exhibition.

Creative Placemaking

The National Endowment for the Arts sponsors this program to assist "partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired." Read more about this exciting new program at:

<https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/CreativePlacemaking-Paper.pdf>

We encourage host sites to explore creative placemaking as an opportunity to engage the arts and celebrate your communities. States might consider offering special training programs or workshops for host sites on this topic.

CONNECTING TO SCIENCE, AGRICULTURE, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Crossroads offers opportunities to connect the Humanities to the Sciences (as popularized in STEM, STEAM and STEMI educational initiatives), including agriculture and the environment. The earth sciences, technologies and engineering essential to rural industry including mining and transportation infrastructure construction all relate directly to *Crossroads* themes. In addition the idea of “innovation” as an applied critical thinking resonates with *Crossroads* goals of generating conversations and proactive measures to address rural issues.

Interest in the changing environment blossomed during the environmental movement of the 1960s, but emotive writing that emphasized natural history and environmental philosophy predated the movement. Examples include the writings of conservationist and wildlife ecologist, Aldo Leopold. During the 1940s, the National Park Service Trust Fund Board commissioned Freeman Tilden to advocate for parks as cultural spaces (not exclusively wild places) that warranted preservation. Tilden’s 1940s publication, *The Fifth Essence: An Invitation to Share in Our Eternal Heritage*, resulted. He further stressed the mutual dependency between parks and people in *The National Parks: What They Mean to You and Me* (1951). After World War II, and during the Cold War, the nation’s parks were cast as the last vestige of the frontier, which many believed shaped the destiny of the United States. Furthermore, the parks protected unique historical assets that U.S. citizens needed to retain their rural identity. Tilden, knowing that parks could not speak for themselves, followed with the book that conveyed the power of sharing the human-nature relationship, *Interpreting our Heritage* (1957). The six principles of interpretation that he outlined in this short book remain influential in structuring park and recreation interpretation.

The American Society for Environmental History formed in 1977, twenty years after Tilden’s first edition of *Interpreting our Heritage* appeared. The organization supported historical - read objective - analysis of the human-nature continuum. Award-winning environmental historian, William Cronon, explained that those who studied the human-nature continuum believed that they could help change the world. His article, “The Uses of Environmental History,” singled out policy makers, activists, and the general public as beneficiaries. He believed his readers should embrace their approach to studying the environment. “Seeing the past as a story to be told rather than as a problem to be solved” was an asset, and it could have profound consequences to effect positive change. Museums and historic sites provide the perfect settings for telling stories about humans and the environment. Debra A. Reid and David D. Vail address this in *Interpreting the Environment at Museums and Historic Sites* (Rowman & Littlefield, expected 2018). They feature the environment as a subject around which stories about state and local history can be told.

Discussing ecosystems and the environment as part of local programming can address the following subjects:

1. Identify local, county, or region-specific earth science characteristics - soils, geology, geography, topography. These things affect the flora and fauna living in the space (the ecosystem). Identify which factors appear in stories about the people and the place over time.
2. Identify the ways that humans have extracted things, transported things, built things, and preserved and conserved natural spaces in your area over time.
3. These become the basis for telling stories about people and places that relate to *Crossroads* themes.

4. Engage representatives from special interest groups in the community that focus on earth sciences and the environment. Reach out to biology, agriculture, vocational and technical faculty and students. Each will have thoughts relevant to *Crossroads* themes.

Science affects policy, particularly policy that relates to health and nutrition. Recent farm bills fund two U.S. Department of Agriculture food and nutrition programs. These affect rural people as both operators of market gardens and truck farms, and as consumers of more locally sourced foods. The programs include WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children) and SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). A component of the exhibit could relate local statistics on national and state funding of local food and nutrition, including Meals on Wheels for Seniors, as well as WIC and SNAP and other programs that local residents may not be aware of.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) has become a popular way to link local food systems to interested populations. Members subscribe or purchase shares in a market gardens' production. The operator of the market garden receives the subscriptions at a time when they need the financial capital to plant the season's crops. In exchange, the subscriber receives produce regularly during the growing season. Representatives from both the producer and subscriber perspective could participate in programming or offer tours of facilities to inform the general public about the possibilities.

Crossroads also provides an opportunity for you to work with local, regional, and state agricultural organizations and agencies. Reach out to your local state extension office to see how you might partner with them to achieve mutual goals. County agents--as well as staff at the state agricultural extension offices--incorporate many of these topics and engage in humanities aspects of agriculture and community. The 4H program falls under the state extension service, and it provides opportunities to work with the youth who are interested in the present and future of rural America. Take time to identify other agricultural organizations who could be partners in your discussions. What programs could you undertake to involve these groups and constituents?

Crossroads programming can address management of working rural landscapes, including rangelands, soil and water conservation districts, and forest preserves. These spaces exist often because of cooperative arrangements between private farmer organizations such as the Farm Bureau, operating at the county, state, and national levels and county, state, and national government agencies. The goals seek mutual benefit, such as clean water, flora and fauna habitat rejuvenation, erosion mitigation, and reduced threats of fire and flood.

Panel discussions could bring multiple perspectives to the table. So could tours of local resources, farm fields, and conservation district projects. The key: all programming should provide factual information about strengths, challenges, opportunities, and risks with any program, and balanced of discussions of different perspectives about them. One person's perception of a threat on personal liberty because of lack of access balances against another person's perception of a community loss due to lack of access. Both are real, and the key lies in sustained dialog to mediate the conflict and secure a just resolution.

Professional and Scholarly Organizations Supporting the Study of Agricultural and Rural History

Get involved with organizations that support the study of rural history. These groups have dedicated themselves to studying rural, community, and local history, society, and culture. The offices can provide contact information for individuals who could serve as speakers and technical experts to strengthen local exhibit components and local programming. Most also recognize

Agricultural History Society (AHS): founded in 1919. The AHS exists “to encourage and support scholarship in the history of agriculture and rural life.” It launched its journal, *Agricultural History*, in 1927, and coordinates a conference each year. The AHS also recognizes exemplary research in agriculture and rural history, presenting two book awards, two article awards, and one dissertation award annually. <http://aghistorysociety.org>

American Association for State and Local History (AASLH): AASLH began in late 1940 after the American Historical Association’s Conference of State and Local Historical Societies disbanded. The AASLH “provides leadership and support for its members who preserve and interpret state and local history.” Support comes in many forms, including *History News*; books in partnership with Rowman & Littlefield; an annual conference; workshops and other professional training programs; and the Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations (StEPs). <http://aaslh.org>

Association for Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums (ALHFAM): launched in 1970 during an Agricultural History Society conference at Old Sturbridge Village. ALHFAM publishes a quarterly *Bulletin*, a *Proceedings* that contains papers delivered during the annual conference, and additional conferences each year delivered by regional networks in the United States and Canada in cooperation with professional interest groups. ALHFAM’s Midwestern region is the Midwest Open-Air Museum Coordinating Council (MOMCC): founded in 1978. MOMCC publishes the *Midwest Open Air Museums Magazine*, delivers two conferences each year, and serves as ALHFAM’s Midwestern regional affiliate. <http://momcc.org> ALHFAM reaches beyond North America in cooperation with the International Association of Agricultural Museums [<http://agriculturalmuseums.org/>]. For ALHFAM, see: <http://alfam.org/>

Rural Sociology Society (RSS): founded in 1937. The RSS supports interdisciplinary study of rural society and culture. It has published the journal, *Rural Sociology*, since 1937, partners with the West Virginia University Press to publish the *Rural Studies Series*, and presents annual conferences. <http://www.ruralsociology.org>

Rural Women’s Studies Association (RWSA): founded in 1998, after the Sixth Conference on Rural and Farm Women in Historical Perspective. RWSA is an international association dedicated to the advancement and promotion of farm and rural women’s gender studies in historical perspective. <http://www.ohio.edu/cas/history/institutes-associations/rwsa/>

Vernacular Architecture Forum (VAF): founded in 1979. The VAF supports scholars in many fields who study ordinary buildings and landscapes. It holds an annual conference and publishes original research based on fieldwork and interpretation of under-studied topics evident in the built environment. Scholarly articles appeared in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, volumes 1-13, between 1982 and 2006, and in the VAF journal, *Buildings and Landscapes*, launched with volume 14 in 2007. <http://www.vafweb.org/>