



Rural-Urban Exchange Handbook

The Currency of Connection

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Table of Contents

- 4 - Acknowledgements
- 7 - What is the RUX Framework?
- 8 - The History of RUX
- 12 - What have we learned in Kentucky?
- 15 - RUX's Currency of Connection: People, Place, & Partnership
- 20 - Impact
- 22 - Summary
- 23 - A testimonial from Founding Steering Committee Member Ivy Brashear

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KYRUX Co-Founders & Staff: Savannah Barrett (2014 - current) & Josh May (2014-2016)

Expansion Team: Savannah Barrett (Director), Ivy Brashear, Nick Covault, Stefani Dahl, Gerry James, Mark Kidd, Sarah Schmitt, Ada Smith, Tanya Torp & Richard Young

Founding Steering Committee Members: Alexia Ault, Shane Barton, Landee Bryant, Cate Becker, Ivy Brashear, Christy O'Connell, Nick Covault, Stefani Dahl, EMI, Shavaun Evans, Jim Guthrie, Gerry James, Mark W. Kidd, Maria Lewis, Sarah Schmitt, Ada Smith, Ashley C. Smith, Tanya Torp & Richard Young

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The Kentucky Rural–Urban Exchange

Mission

Together, we are growing relationships across divides to build a more collaborative and connected Commonwealth.

Vision

We envision a future in which Kentuckians value each other, create common ground, and understand our interdependence.

Imagine a Kentucky where:

- Kentuckians have a shared sense of place and can see beyond the boundaries that exist between people and places.
- Kentuckians are ambassadors of their communities and of Kentucky, working together to create solutions to the challenges we face.
- Kentuckians are welcome as neighbors in other communities across geography, ideology, identity, race, class, gender, sector, and other barriers.

“Being in ‘forced’ space with people over time asks us to either retreat or engage, and for me the process of seeking something positive to focus on from people I might otherwise have retreated from has strengthened that emotional muscle in ways I find myself using in other contexts.”

– RUX Participant

“People that I have met at RUX have stayed in my home, called on me when I'm sick, helped me with personal challenges, and become important people to me in ways I haven't even experienced yet, I'm sure of it. If connection is the goal, I think these kinds of personal connections are very significant. If I am going to be able to continue to fight for a more just and beautiful Kentucky, it's probably gonna be because my friends inspire me, motivate me, and lift me up. Making friends is not a small thing when it comes to imagining and realizing cultural and political change!”

– RUX Participant

“Having had the chance to learn so much from others – refugees in Bowling Green, vets in Muhlenberg, people experiencing homelessness in Covington, folks in recovery in Knott County – has deepened my sense of Kentucky and Kentuckians significantly. Stereotypes don't hold up well to the sustained voices of people's experiences in context.”

– RUX Participant

“When I joined RUX, I had just moved to a new part of my town that, as an outsider, seemed fraught with issues. Half a year into living in the neighborhood, and after one year of RUX, I have a different perspective on not only what the real issues are but also what/who might best solve them. I've learned to take a step back and actually immerse myself in the community before trying to change anything about it.”

– RUX Participant

What is the RUX Framework?

What is RUX?

The Rural-Urban Exchange (RUX) is a creative leadership model for building social capital and bridging the geographic and societal divides that separate Exchange members from one another.

How does it work?

Since 2014, the Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange (RUX) has developed and supported Kentucky's creative leadership. Each year, the Steering Committee oversees a competitive application process. A committee of RUX alumni and staff select a 75-member RUX cohort that includes Kentuckians in various stages of life, leadership, and career development. They are leaders in the arts, agriculture, community development, health, and business. The cohort is diverse, representing at least 25 of Kentucky's 120 counties and has varied experiences of age, expertise, sexuality, gender, race, geography and origin, culture, and class.

Upon acceptance, cohort members commit to six Community Intensive conferences over a two-year period, with three intensives scheduled between May and October each year. Over two years, each cohort is hosted in at least four communities of varied size and geography. We choose to meet each year in both rural and urban communities across Kentucky to build connection across cultural, racial, economic and geographic divides.

In each community, locals design an itinerary that uplifts the hidden treasures in their community and reflects their diversity of people, cultures, organizations, and businesses. Alongside these place-based experiences, RUX integrates workshops, trainings, and facilitation from our Currency of Connection framework into the agenda.

What is the RUX framework?

The RUX framework guides year-long programming cycles that consist of three intensive sessions in rural and urban Kentucky. These Community Intensives are designed to build connections across cultural, racial, economic and geographic

divides by reflecting the diverse identities, histories, and cultures of the places where it is used.

Participants engage in conversations that can challenge their identities as Kentuckians, and also help them discover commonalities, especially with those they assumed to be unrelatable or opposing. By inviting members to share their stories with one another, we reveal and emphasize connections across divides, which develops intercultural competence. RUX facilitates this cultural exchange while integrating workshops and seminars that support leadership development and inspire cross-sector collaborations that are unique to the context of 21st Century Kentucky.

The RUX framework emphasizes cultural work as a key to leadership development because we view leadership as a process of deepening connections and accountability to others. Program evaluations from the Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange show that RUX members experience a heightened sense of connections within the cohort, are inspired to contribute to the issues facing their communities, and increasingly believe that they can impact the destiny of their communities through their skills and connection.

The History of RUX: 2014-2018

Savannah Barrett and Josh May began discussing the creation of an Exchange in 2013 with eventual steering committee members Nick Covault and Mark Kidd. At the time of this toolkit's publication, the Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange was in its third stage of work. The pilot for the basic rural-urban exchange idea happened in 2014. Phase I of the RUX program happened from 2015-2019. During this time, we developed the organizational structure and articulated the Currency of Connection framework. The beginning of Phase II happened in 2020, and was characterized by capacity building, knowledge sharing, infusion of new leadership, and expansion into new regions. The following history shares our experience with the pilot and Phase I of the Rural-Urban Exchange.





2014

The Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange launched in 2014 as a shared program of Art of the Rural and Appalshop, two nonprofit organizations with missions that are aligned with the values of the Exchange. In addition to the founding partners, RUX's first year was made possible through a \$500 sponsorship from the Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts (now Kentucky Performing Arts), and the in-kind contributions of many individuals and businesses in Whitesburg and Louisville. This first iteration of RUX was conceived as an informal experiment with friends of the organizers in Whitesburg and Louisville. However, RUX organizers shared an aspiration for the program to be hosted in all regions of the state within five years.

2015

RUX launched into Phase I of its work when the founders invited a dozen emerging leaders working across sectors and regions of Kentucky to join the RUX steering committee to help guide the development of the program. Together, we wrote the RUX mission and vision, and began to define the values that underpin the RUX framework. The program also benefited from a discretionary grant from the Kentucky Arts Council, which, along with sponsorships, helped raise the project budget to \$5,000. These partnerships helped RUX expand into the three-region model we operate from today. Paducah became the third community intensive site in 2015, joining Louisville and Whitesburg. This was also our first attempt at disseminating our learning from RUX. We shared program videos, gave national presentations, and were featured in Landscape Architecture Magazine in 2015.

2016

RUX launched a competitive application process, established the host partnership model, and developed the standard to shift host communities after two years of intensives in this year. As such, Community Intensives previously held twice in Louisville and Whitesburg, were now held in Harlan and Lexington, with Paducah rounding out the host communities because RUX had only visited there for one year at this point. Richard Young founded the Communications Committee and designed RUX's website, and several Steering Committee Members hosted our first Fall Fair Fundraiser, which raised \$7,000 to support the next year's program budget. Co-founder Josh May transitioned from staffing RUX in 2016, and Ada Smith supported Appalshop's staffing role in the partnership. Staff presented talks on the RUX model in six states and in Canada.

2017

By 2017, RUX had partnered with 50 Kentucky businesses and organizations and had served 130 Kentuckians from 24 counties. Savannah Barrett wrote the first draft of the Currency of Connection framework, and Steering Committee members developed guides to determine the methodology's approach to distributed leadership roles. EMI and Mark Kidd established the RUX member handbook that year, and grew the programmatic budget to \$10,000. We began working with the communities of Bowling Green and Horse Cave through partnership with the Kentucky Folklife Program, which also afforded RUX a graduate intern. RUX was featured in the Wall Street Journal and US News and World Report.

2018

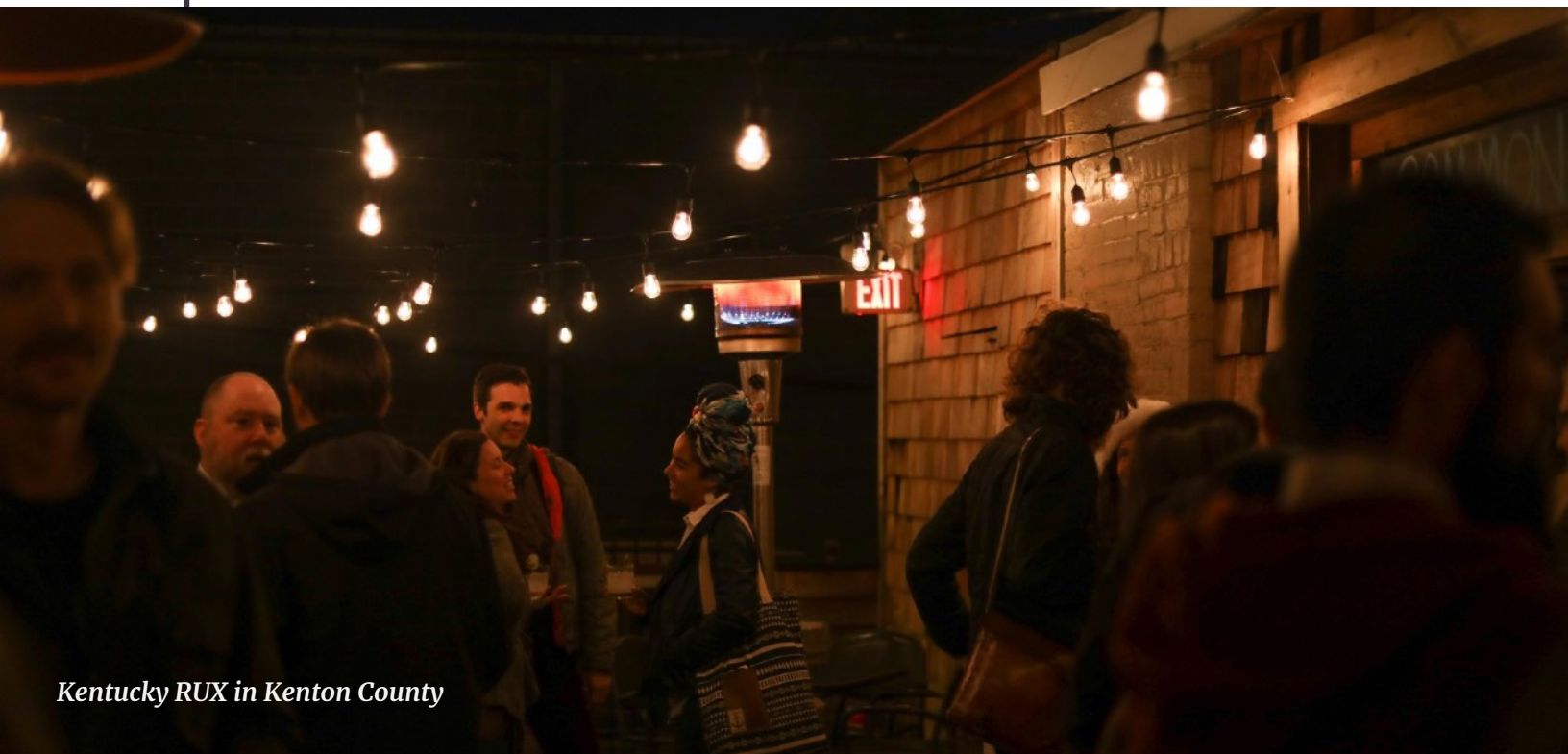
RUX reached the landmark of being hosted in every region of Kentucky in this year, and served 200 Kentuckians from 42 counties. We partnered with Covington, Bowling Green/Horse Cave, and Knott County as host communities. We adjusted the organizational structure to balance the artistic vision and organizational leadership between staff and steering committee, and as a result, further defined the Currency of Connection framework as role based and non-hierarchical. Examples of distributing leadership roles include the establishment of peer helpers to provide accessibility and emotional support during RUX weekends, the formation of an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee to assess ongoing commitment to those values within RUX, and organizing the cohort into “home rooms”, small groups of cohort members led by a Steering Committee member who facilitates the Currency of Connection through group discussions/seminars.

These internal adjustments were key to achieving greater cohort cohesion and impact. Additionally, we hosted a cultural organizing workshop with the Kentucky Foundation for Women. We also benefited greatly from Appalshop's administrative attention, which helped us develop protocols for financial management and liability protocols to address the program's sustainability. We raised about \$15,000 to support the program, and the RUX Steering Committee also launched a strategic planning process. RUX was featured in the Atlantic's CityLab, the National Governors Association report on Rural Prosperity, and was invited to present at the national conferences for Americans for the Arts and the National Consortium for Creative Placemaking.

2019

This was a year of unprecedented transition and growth for RUX. The program's first five-year strategic plan was developed, a National Endowment for the Arts grant provided capacity for the development of the *Living with Complexity* case studies, and we hired our first Field Manager. We implemented a planned leadership succession of our founding Steering Committee members, and partnered with Alternate ROOTS on a January 2020 anti-racism training for the new leadership team. We hosted a “friend”-raising event in Louisville that resulted in a \$15,000 private donation. We also launched our Expansion Team in 2019 with a grant from the McKnight Foundation to develop these materials and design a learning exchange to support program expansion/replication in Minnesota. We raised \$80,000 for Kentucky RUX this year.

Looking back on our first six years, we are confident that we've proven our concept. As a result of the RUX program's recognition at national conferences and in publications, we regularly receive requests to expand the program into other regions. We're keenly aware of the potential of the RUX model to offer a progressive platform for engagement amidst a national enigma of disconnection. We intend to grow our program's capacity to improve the lives of all Kentuckians while also sharing our methodology to impact other regions struggling to achieve a thriving culture of rural-urban interdependence.



What have we learned in Kentucky?

In the 2014 RUX purpose statement, Josh and Savannah described their hope for a series of convenings that would build understanding, mutual concern, and human relationships among creative communities across the Commonwealth. We hoped that we would generate a sense of common ground across Kentucky's regions and find opportunities for collaboration.

We had a hunch that cultural exchange between rural and urban Kentuckians could achieve these goals because we recognized that sustainable partnerships are grounded in mutual respect, common vision, and personal investment. RUX was designed to cultivate these values by inviting Kentuckians from diverse backgrounds to share extraordinary experiences in special places, and use those shared experiences as a springboard for conversations about their own life experiences. These conversations often reveal commonalities and complexities, and provide an opportunity to identify Kentucky's defining issues and brainstorm new solutions.

We initially envisioned RUX as an incubator, working to match cross-sector teams from across the state and tackle persistent community challenges that aligned with expertise. After the first two years, we realized this kind of traditional leadership approach had actually done harm by exacerbating social divides instead of building collective capacity. After all, a system that upends inequities cannot be modeled after the systems that have historically upheld them. Based on member evaluations, we began to understand that RUX could provide a solution to this paradigm if we adjusted the framework to focus on grassroots network building and individual leadership development. Member evaluations have shown that this approach grows skills and confidence, social capital, and collective efficacy.



Kentucky RUX in Bowling Green/Warren County

We learned a valuable lesson in redirecting our programming. We realized the most valuable aspect of RUX was not incubating new projects, but investing in personal and professional development for those who hadn't experienced leadership support in the past. We came to understand that building human and social infrastructure within communities of people who had been marginalized by inequitable narratives and policies was an investment in individual transformation that would lead to community transformation. While our effectiveness in creating equity is always in process, we have found value in an approach to leadership development that endows members with skills, confidence, intercultural literacy, an awareness of best practices, social capital, and regional mobility. As a result, these individuals are more prepared to contribute skills, share ideas, and affect change in their communities. This commitment to people as the remedy to community challenges became central to our framework, and has shaped values that guide us:

1. We believe that the people who live here have the experience and knowledge to address our challenges, steward our resources, and model our collective future.
2. We see connection and belonging as vital community capacities, and we value social cohesion as key to community health.
3. We believe that providing opportunities for exchange and peer learning inspires people, evokes a shared sense of purpose, sparks innovation, and can begin to bridge solutions.
4. We believe that Kentucky's strength is our diversity, and that our future relies on leaders who value the diverse people, cultures, and regions of Kentucky, and who build support across these diversities, and leverage resources collaboratively to achieve statewide prosperity. We aim to amplify a more complete, diverse, and nuanced Kentucky story, and skill more Kentuckians' in working across difference.

Evaluating our program through these values has been instructive, and has revealed some of our most significant realizations:

We have learned the value of listening and adaptive response, both in terms of interpreting feedback in real-time during the community intensives and adapting to the needs of the group by making adjustments throughout the year. An example might be shifting the prompt for a story circle, or spending more time in home room seminars than large group sessions after a particularly challenging community conversation.

We have learned that this work is necessarily emergent, so our framework is designed to deliver consistent learning outcomes while also embodying the nimbleness required to respond to shifting contexts. For example, we augmented our framework

to include consultancy protocol tools and personal strategic planning, as well as more intentional place-based content, which invites participants to engage in conversations and activities that can challenge their identities as Kentuckians and help them discover their similarities with others.

Finally, we have learned that our strategy couldn't be both directive *and* sustainable. We couldn't just tell people what to do and expect them to keep showing up to do it. They have to be finding personal value in this process through finding their voice, developing their professional practice, and connecting with a community of support.

As a result of this learning, RUX is increasingly using a distributed leadership approach to movement building. Partners, staff, steering committee members, host committees, alumni, and cohorts each have meaningful opportunities to contribute through program design, facilitation, committees, and evaluation.

It's important to remember, though, that distributed leadership does not happen overnight, nor is it a set-it-and-forget-it solution. Distributed leadership requires training, experience, trust, and confidence. We are continuously working to de-center the founding leadership and dismantle hierarchy by defining member roles that help distribute power, and re-balancing the distribution of staff and volunteer leadership roles as new leaders enter and exit the work. This process is never-ending, but is a meaningful strategy for prioritizing people and collective decision making within the network, and as a result, offers RUX an improved capacity for change.



Kentucky RUX at Need More Acres Farm in Allen County

RUX's Currency of Connection: People, Place, Partnership

The **Currency of Connection** framework was developed through long-term collaboration among staff and other Kentucky artists to articulate our strategies for collaboration and program-building during the first five years of the Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange. This framework describes our approach to the three primary focus areas of our work: **People, Place, and Partnership**.

The Currency of Connection Framework

People	Place	Partnership	Overall
1. Constellation network of statewide collaborators.	1. Fine tuned literacy of Kentucky identity, history, and culture.	1. Toolkit of place-based strategies, skills, & facilitation available to all participants	1. Shared Values
2. Members enjoy a deep connection to one another and their shared experience.	2. Deepened relationships across all regions of Kentucky.	2. New projects that improve Kentuckians' quality of life.	2. Accountability to one another.
	3. Articulating the values, commonalities, and challenges of each region.	3. Issue-based learning that builds "fields of practice" in Kentucky	3. Best practices in working in a network

People

RUX enables proactive conversations about Kentucky's most complex challenges by building relationships across difference. By so doing, we are uplifting a Kentucky story that is as exciting, diverse, and complex as Kentuckians. A story in which all Kentuckians can recognize themselves.

Each Community Intensive weekend is designed to allow for complex conversations and personal sharing that inspires cohort members to relate to the people and places they are getting to know. Participants engage in conversations and activities that challenge their identities, but that frequently help them discover similarities they share with those they may have assumed to be opposing. By inviting members to share their stories with one another, we reveal and emphasize connections across divides, which in turn develops intercultural competence.

The Exchange is most successful when members feel they belong to a community and have experiences that take place in a heart space, in addition to the usual head space of civic or social issues. RUX is often described as a family, and members describe deeply impactful friendships and relationships within RUX. We encourage “deep listening” to one another, which we have found open up new possibilities for connection and empathy. The effect of being listened to can be stirring, healing, and transformative. It can greatly impact a person's confidence and belief in their own self-determination.

RUX strives to create open and compassionate spaces for people from different backgrounds and experiences to meet, learn more about our communities, engage in respectful dialogue, and move forward together. A range of cultural traditions and facilitation techniques are used to guide Exchange members through explorations of common identity, history, and culture. This aspect of programming draws on practices including **story circles, seminar discussions focused on readings and viewings of cultural materials, cultural cartography, cultural organizing workshops, narrative stages, home rooms, and personal writing prompts.**

We also encourage each individual member to set intentions for their personal and professional development during RUX. Through a series of journaling prompts and goal setting, we aid members in understanding the value they offer the group, the barriers they face to reach their full potential, and help them reflect on the practical steps they have taken to grow throughout their participation. We also encourage them to share their goals and intentions with members of their home room, who are prompted to check on them throughout their RUX experience.

We intertwine personal development and relationship building because we have found that leadership is a process of deepening connections to others. This connection often becomes the pipeline through which expanded perspective, creativity and new ideas flow. We have found that ideas coalesce into positive change when diverse peoples intersect.

These “themes” look different in every community, but 2019 examples include bringing seven Mayors and elected officials together from the Northern Kentucky region to talk about municipal collaboration, and organizing a conversation in Muhlenberg County that brought mine owners and new economy organizers together to talk about the coal transition in Eastern and Western Kentucky. Other examples include natural amenities/outdoor recreation, military service, development and displacement, the Underground Railroad in Kentucky, and contemporary Native American experience in urban Northern Kentucky.

Place

Profound understanding of regional culture and geography is a key aspect of building stronger statewide identity. RUX brings rural and urban people together in unique community settings that activate, educate, and inspire.

In each RUX community, local hosts (some of which are cohort members) design an itinerary that uplifts the hidden treasures in their community and reveals challenges and complexities. Each weekend is designed and facilitated in partnership with Regional Partners and a local Host Committee, which includes representatives from cultural institutions who help make sure that the Exchange cohort can respectfully access and experience the diversity of each Host Community. RUX intentionally acknowledges that the essential expertise about places and issues comes from those with first-hand experience, and therefore those people should play a significant role in designing a community intensive in their community.

The Rural-Urban Exchange explores issues through the radically simple approach of getting to know those most affected. In Kentucky, we have done so by square dancing with folks in addiction recovery at a treatment facility in Eastern Kentucky, sharing traditional coffee service with Bosnian refugees in a mosque in Western Kentucky, and humanizing military sacrifice during our stay on an army base through the stories of veterans within the RUX cohort.

We plan unforgettable social experiences to create conditions for social cohesion. A pontoon tour of Lake Malone, a cookout with elected officials in an urban art alley, a Higher Ground theater performance in a bar in Harlan County, craft workshops at an Appalachian settlement school, or a fish-fry supper and Chitlin' Circuit history lesson at the Hotel Metropolitan in Paducah.

RUX offers a rare occasion to host a statewide forum about the opportunities and challenges that define a community, and how they relate to issues that others are facing across the state. The host committee identifies themes that become the focus of pre-reading materials, panels, narrative stages, community conversations, and community facilities that we visit.

The process of hosting RUX is often an act of self-discovery for communities. It is an experiential placemaking that can empower the host team members to be more inclusive, passionate ambassadors of their communities. All communities have diverse stories and histories that contribute to defining the place and the community's development. We seek to learn from and understand these many narratives as a part of a dynamic whole. Many cultures have experienced stereotyped media portrayals, cultural appropriation, marginalization, and/or underrepresentation in historical, social and cultural narratives. The Exchange strives to demonstrate integrity and ethical representation of the diverse cultures and history of every Community Intensive host community. This also means members of these cultures participate in Community Intensive programming, providing them ownership over how their story is told.

Sense of place requires both formal programming and unstructured time, so we build it into all programming. This unstructured time allows RUX participants to discover communities in their own organic ways, providing additional personal reflection and relationship building.

Because it is a two-year commitment, the iterative nature of RUX deepens the members' relationships to one another and the places they visit. This approach to leadership development helps Kentuckians remember our roots, reclaim our sense of belonging, and connect Kentucky's people and places.

Members often credit RUX with offering them a more panoramic understanding of Kentucky, and sometimes, members who have not previously felt a sense of belonging within Kentucky begin to discover and define their identity as Kentuckians.



Kentucky RUX at Pine Mountain Settlement School

Partnership

RUX facilitates cultural exchange while integrating content from our Currency of Connection framework. These workshops and seminars are proven to support leadership and network development while inspiring cross-sector collaborations that are unique to the collaboration, context, and cultural moment of Kentucky in the 21st Century.

We have seen potent results when people come together across geographic, cultural, racial, and economic divides in the spirit of exchange. Aligning disparate people in a focused and creative way empowers RUX members to discover new vision for themselves and their communities - and then, to *act* on that vision.

As previously discussed, RUX has experimented with various levels of formalized programming aimed at pairing RUX participants for the purpose of developing a project or collaboration. Our experience has taught us that the most dynamic partnerships form organically and when timetables and teams are determined by the RUX participants themselves. As such, project teams are not a formal part of the structure of the Rural-Urban Exchange. Instead, RUX programming uses consultancy protocols and other facilitation strategies to emphasize the potential for partnership amongst members and provides tools and best practices for creating lasting and powerful collaborations.

Building stronger relationships among Kentuckians with diverse backgrounds catalyzes cross-sector collaborations, and sometimes, these interactions inspire entirely new ways of addressing the opportunities and challenges that we all face. RUX alumni have developed partnerships, consultancies, and projects that touch every region of the state.

Thus, RUX achieves sustained resonance, impact, and value beyond the Community Intensive weekends. RUX creates lasting value for the members and communities who participate, and lasting value as an agent of connection and positive change for the people and places of the Commonwealth.

A note for new Rural-Urban Exchange Programs: RUX values collective decision-making, so the framework is designed to be flexible based on social context, internal feedback, and expressed needs of the communities with which we collaborate.

Impact

At the close of 2019, the Kentucky RUX network included 240 alumni, and had been hosted in 10 communities across every region of the state. Members hailed from 42 Kentucky counties, and represented a range of backgrounds and vocations, from farmers, nurses, and poets to factory workers, teachers, and elected officials.

RUX has offered Kentuckians the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships, explore the distinctive culture and amenities of local communities, and engage in proactive conversations about Kentucky's most complex challenges. As a result of evaluation and testimonials, we know RUX is building lasting relationships that bridge divides and inspire partnerships.

RUX has documented and evaluated the program's ability to deliver desired impacts from the beginning. Our evaluations are structured as a series of surveys focused on each Community Intensive, as well as small group conversations about personal experiences within RUX with Steering Committee members, a town-hall-style evaluation with the full cohort during the final intensive, and written reflection at the close of each year. We supplement these many forms of data collection by producing videos that capture the member experience each weekend and offer members the chance to process their experience through interviews. The RUX leadership commits to processing data after each intensive and comprehensively at the end of each year. This robust evaluation strategy has resulted in a wealth of learning and has truly allowed us to test the effectiveness of our strategies. For example, the foundational claim of RUX is that the program develops the member's inter-cultural competency to aid in building authentic relationships that bridge divides. RUX is not effective unless it builds the competency of members to collaborate across differences. To ensure that we are serving our mission, we look across evaluative sources to confirm that impact.



Kentucky RUX in Covington/Kenton County

For example, our 2019 end-of-year survey indicated that 100% of survey respondents testified they had “gained skills and experience in connecting with folks from different backgrounds.”

Similarly, 100% of survey respondents testified that they “**felt a sense of belonging to a community while participating in RUX.**” That sense of belonging was not only personally meaningful for RUX members, but contributed to their commitment to advance cultural and political change.

We know that building a sense of place relies on immersive experiences, so we do our work in the community. This approach to leadership development helps Kentuckians remember our roots and reclaim our sense of belonging.

By revealing and emphasizing these connections, we develop the trust and shared values necessary to advance work for the long-term. We have found that the result of investment in hundreds of diverse people and places is far more than the sum of its parts. Change is not created in a vacuum, rather what we do to one we do to many.

RUX alumni become greater assets in their communities, because they:

- develop a greater understanding of Kentucky's many identities, histories and cultures;
- become more confident in sharing their own stories as Kentuckians; learn practical strategies to advance their work at home;
- and leave the program with an invaluable network of Kentucky leaders that bring resources, support, and inspiration back home.

We know the individual transformation that RUX members often experience pays dividends to communities, as RUX alumni return to home with an improved capacity to affect change and an understanding of best practices for ethical community development. As RUX has grown, we've witnessed individuals become more accountable to one another, while their organizations have become less competitive, more connected to fields of practice, and more adaptive to cross-sector collaboration.

Most significantly, RUX has contributed to a sense of practice among alumni and Steering Committee leaders that is unique to the collaboration, context, and cultural moment of Kentucky in the 21st Century. RUX is a weave of Kentucky cultural practices, organizing strategies, and leadership facilitation processes that have aligned to produce an entirely unique approach to creative leadership development that is place-specific. RUX's unique practice is in the DNA of several groundbreaking projects that have emerged from the RUX network, including the arts-based civic

engagement of CivicLex, the cultural experience of agriculture within Black Soil: Our Better Nature, and the community forum facilitation of Red River Gorge United.

In sum, while the growth pattern is different for everyone, the impact is significant. As members described in our *Living with Complexity* Case Studies, RUX offers Kentuckians significant personal and professional gain.

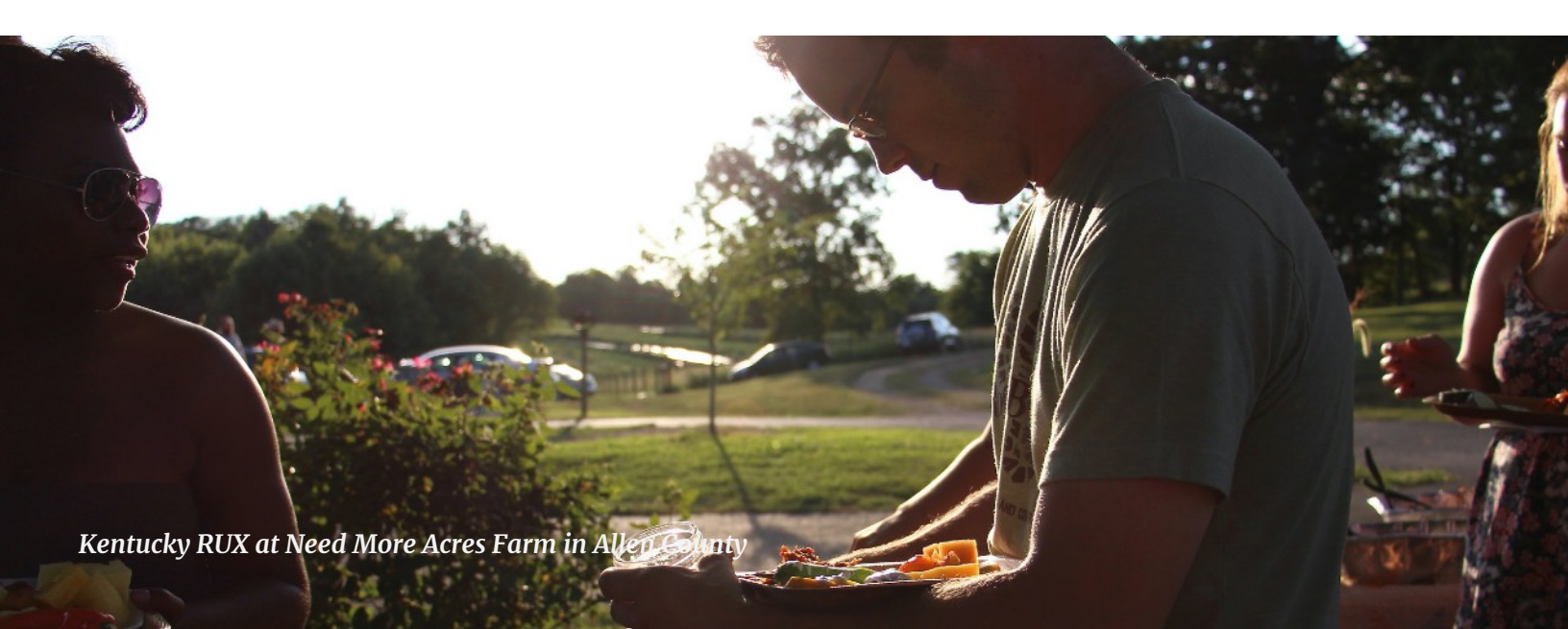
We will continue to document, evaluate, and build knowledge around the potential for the Rural-Urban Exchange to address the crisis of divisiveness, because our experience shows that investing in greater intercultural understanding, mutual concern, and human relationships creates the conditions for transformation.

Summary

After seventeen Community Intensives in ten host communities, Kentucky RUX has tested the durability of RUX cohort relationships and cohesion with conversations and experiences that mire many Kentuckians in disagreement and conflict, and it has come out stronger for it.

While the pilot and Phase I taught us about how to do the work of bridge building, we are now learning about how the program must evolve in focus from building to maintaining a dynamic network of relationships that bridge differences.

RUX has been celebrated by the Wall Street Journal, Christian Science Monitor, NPR's 1A, the Atlantic's CityLab, Huffington Post, Stateline, and NonProfit Quarterly. We've been featured at the Kennedy Center's Arts Summit and the National Rural Assembly, and in studies by the National Governors Association and Americans for the Arts. RUX is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and is working with Minnesotans to expand the program there with support from the McKnight Foundation.



Kentucky RUX at Need More Acres Farm in Allen County

A testimonial from founding RUX Steering Committee member Ivy Brashear

This is a program that takes folks from across the state who come from all kinds of different lives and backgrounds and places, puts them together in a room, and asks them to be open and vulnerable and real with one another. We are so hungry for this kind of connection in our world today, and not just because we can't gather right now during this pandemic. We have been hungry for this. We waste so much time arbitrarily dividing ourselves along lines that aren't even real. It takes so much energy to put yourself apart from people. And, we just aren't built for that kind of separation. We are built to be close to other people and to be in community with them, and to love them and care for them to the point that we see our own survival and happiness as being linked to their survival and happiness. We are built to want to help each other survive and be happy in that survival.

RUX breaks down all the walls and barriers that we construct to keep ourselves set apart from others. In fact, it obliterates them. It says to its participants that it's OK to feel connected, and in fact, it's the most valuable thing you could ever want or need. RUX allows its members the space to discover for themselves that we really aren't that different from each other after all, and in fact, we are intrinsically tied to one another. It is in that discovery that the magic of RUX is revealed. When you see another person as just as human as you, when you know their pain and their joy, when you have seen where they grew up and the place they call home and you, too, come to value that place's beauty because you've seen it through its peoples' eyes, there is no going back from that; you will forever care about the future of that place and the people who live there. And you will start to understand that you and your place are not in this alone, and in fact, you must be connected and put in the hard work of staying intentionally connected to build a better future.

You can't just build that understanding and deep care and commitment to others by any means. You must have time and a safe space in and through which to build trust. RUX has been so very careful to create that space and make that time because RUX knows how vital it is to start with trust. You can move mountains and change the world if your work is standing on deep trust.

And so, this program and this community isn't just another leadership program that puts on the mask of connection better known as "networking"; this program is connection itself. RUX lives and breathes connection; it is the life-force of the program. It is the blood in its veins. It is the essence of everything RUX is, does and stands for, and it is because the connection RUX builds means everything to building the state in which we all want to live.



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