

USING RURAL CREATIVE PLACEMAKING TO BUILD CONNECTIONS



From [SaveYour.Town](https://www.saveyourtown.com/)

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FROM [SAVEYOUR.TOWN](#)

What Placemaking is

Placemaking is local people working together to make the public spaces in your town better, with a focus on building a stronger sense community. Public spaces are all the places we share, the places where community happens. Think of your downtown, parks, squares, sidewalks, streets and more.

What Rural Creative Placemaking is

Rural Creative Placemaking is local people working together to make your rural community's public spaces better through arts and creativity, with a focus on building a stronger community.

Who is talking about Creative Placemaking

Many different groups are having conversations about different parts of placemaking and creative placemaking today; they're just having them separately and may not use the same terms. One single project, like putting sculptures in the downtown area, might attract the interest of artists, the arts council, downtown businesses, the chamber of commerce and even economic developers. These folks don't normally move in the same circles or speak the same jargon. Creative placemaking is one way of bringing together different groups in your community to work together on shared projects that improve quality of life.

THE CHECKLIST: WHO TO LOOK FOR

Your community probably doesn't have all these different organizations. Not all of them will be active or even interested in working on creative placemaking projects. This long list isn't intended to intimidate you with what you don't have. It's to help you expand your thinking and reach people you might not otherwise reach.

Individuals

Start with individuals who care and want to shape the future of your community. They may be the driving force behind local groups. If you reach the individual, they often bring along the groups they belong to.

1. Civic clubs, including Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, Masons
2. Professional organizations, including bar associations, NAWBO, and many more
3. Social media, or marketing organizations such as social media clubs, social media breakfasts

Government

It's tempting to assume government officials won't be interested in creative and artsy projects. The truth is that it just depends on the people. Reach out to them and find out.

1. Municipalities, local governments, towns, cities, townships, counties, parishes
2. Mayors, city managers, county commissioners, county judges, county executives
3. Planning, zoning agencies
4. Economic development, jobs development authorities, industrial development groups

Institutions

Not necessarily government, not necessarily private, but still important institutions in your community.

1. Educational institutions, public schools, private schools, tech centers, community colleges, universities
2. Extension, 4H, university outreach programs
3. Leadership training programs
4. Libraries and friends of libraries groups
5. Utilities, electric cooperatives, telecommunications cooperatives, water and wastewater utilities

Organizations and Groups

Every place has some groups and organizations that are interested in making the community better. They are doing projects right now that you want to know about.

1. Downtown groups, Main Street, merchants' associations, retail groups
2. Chambers of Commerce, independent business alliances
3. Tourism, convention and visitors bureau, destination marketing organizations
4. Museums, heritage associations, trails groups, scenic byways, agritourism
5. Religious groups, interfaith alliances, ministerial alliances, ecumenical associations
6. Arts groups including community theaters, visual arts, galleries, performance spaces
7. Youth groups and clubs of all kinds
8. Newspapers, radio, rural media, online media
9. Community foundations
10. New residents groups, ethnic and cultural associations

Businesses

Community-oriented businesses have a vested interest in seeing your community improve. Many have their own projects and activities you'll want to find out about.

1. Community banks, credit unions
2. Real estate agents and professionals
3. Developers

4. Tourism-dependent businesses, agritourism operators
5. Agriculture-related businesses like Farm Bureau, farm suppliers, rural lifestyle dealers
6. Downtown businesses

Larger Organizations

Getting beyond your local boundaries, many organizations and groups include you in their territory. They're good potential partners and can help expand the reach of your projects.

1. Councils of Government, inter-governmental groups
2. Stronger Economy Together, regional groups
3. Tribes, Native and First Nation governments and organizations
4. Workforce boards and organizations
5. Community foundations

HOW TO USE THE CHECKLIST

1. Sit down and go through the checklist. Add names of people you know who are part of these groups.
2. Add more detail. What do you know about them? (art lover, farmer, goes to church every Sunday, won't volunteer but will give money – or vice versa, etc.)
3. What type of project might be best to reach them? You're not looking to add new projects; you're looking to connect them to the right project that someone in town is already working on. For example, artist in residence, community work projects, downtown revitalization, kids' activities, etc.
4. Who is a connector across different groups? Many rural people are involved in multiple organizations.
5. Who can help you meet people in the groups you don't already have a connection to?

WAYS TO USE THE VIDEO TO GATHER YOUR CROWD

Your focus will be to start building connections. Connect people to each other and to the resources they need. *"Without the relationships and without the network, we will not succeed,"* Matthew Fluharty of Art Of The Rural said. *"Without the connections, money is not enough."*

1. Post the link on your Facebook page or profile and invite people to join you in a gathering. That's how Dennis Hodges did it in Pratt, KS. He wanted his town to be more involved in the arts and arts projects so he thought of people and groups he thought might be interested in doing more for art in Pratt and called a meeting.
2. Send an email to likely connections you identified on the checklist. Include the link and a short note. Something like, *"I want to hear more about what you're doing, because I would like to bring together lots of creative people to work together here in (town). I thought you might be interested in participating. Here's a short video that explains the idea of Rural Creative Placemaking. Let's get together. How does*

(insert a date and time here) or (insert another date and time) work for you?" People are busy, and we know that if you leave the invitation open ended, it can (and will) get forgotten.

3. Post it online. Facebook and Facebook Groups, Instagram (with a picture of you in your town doing something cool or a notable piece of local art), Twitter, Snapchat, blog posts. Wherever you are, start asking people to watch the video and begin connecting with each other.
4. Write a press release or news article and share it with your local papers, radio stations and any other media. Follow up with a phone call. Ask your local reporter to come do an interview and see the video too. Turn the tables, and ask them questions! Maybe they would like to get involved.
5. Email the video to your friends and ask them to share it in their newsletters, Facebook Groups, Instagram posts, etc.
6. Add the link to your email signature, encourage everyone to watch and connect.
7. Send the video to your local government. You might even want to get on the agenda and show the video at a meeting, then invite everyone to your follow up get together. Invite people to the meeting with you to see the video as well. If meetings are televised, publicize the time and way to watch.

WHAT TO DO AT YOUR GET TOGETHER

1. Invite each person to introduce themselves and tell any groups they belong to. We think we know everyone in our place because we're rural, but we don't know everyone *deeply*.
2. Let each organization or group tell what they do that is creative, artistic, or designed to make your community better. That may be all you have time for in the first get-together. People will start to think about potential connections.
3. Set another get-together. The plan for that one is to share calendars for the next three months. When each person shares events and projects they're working on, connections will happen.
4. Repeat the calendar sharing sessions every quarter. See what develops.

ORGANIZATIONS TO FOLLOW, NEWSLETTERS TO SIGN UP FOR

You'll gain strength when you realize just how many other people are working on creative placemaking globally. You'll learn from their materials, examples and newsletters. Here are a few we especially like.

[SaveYour.Town](#)

[Rural LISC](#)

[Project for Public Spaces](#)

[Art of the Rural](#)

[USDA Rural Development](#)

[Spaces to Places blog](#)

[Rural Policy Research Institute](#)

[Bank of I.D.E.A.S.](#)

[Citizens' Inst on Rural Design](#)