



Tax Time Thursdays with Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative

Outreach to Rural Communities

April 20, 2023

Presented by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities' Get It Back Campaign

Presenter:

[Paheadra Robinson](#) – Senior Policy Consultant, Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative

Strategies to Engage Rural Communities

Paheadra Robinson, SRBWI

- SRBWI addresses social issues impacting Black women and girls in the rural south
 - o Established human rights commissions spanning 77 counties, led by Black female community leaders
 - o Provides technical, organizing support as commissions work on issues important to their communities
- About rural communities:
 - o 18-19% of the country's population lives in rural areas
 - o Common stereotypes of closed off, mostly white conservative communities are not always true; in SRBWI's states, rural populations are very diverse.
 - o One size does not fit all! You must learn the communities themselves to be able to identify outreach challenges and potential solutions.
 - o Major challenges: distance, broadband issues, young people moving away from rural areas seeking better opportunities, volunteer availability, and resistance to change
- Connecting with rural communities:
 - o Collaboration and partnership are essential
 - o Start with a scan of the community – learn as much as you can before you show up
 - Identify trusted voices & gatekeepers
 - Contact elected leaders
 - Consider how civically engaged the community is (for example, look at voter turnout data)
 - o Learn the major issues the community faces
 - Research the issues to understand the context and what has been the local response

- Be aware of any groups that might need to avoid sharing a room – who doesn't play well together?
- Listen, consistently engage, and be creative to build valuable relationships and become a key resource
 - Rural organizing is very relational – people want to know about who you are
 - Set up one-on-one and general community meetings as next step
 - Don't be afraid to ask how people prefer to be engaged!
 - Be respectful and thoughtful about the diversity of interests in rural communities
 - Give people autonomy and avoid paternalistic approaches
 - If community members give you advice, listen! They are the experts on their lived experiences
 - See projects through to the end; do what you say you're going to do (and don't overpromise) or you'll lose credibility
 - Word spreads quickly
- Outreach strategies:
 - The best approach to reach various age groups is a mixture of:
 - Traditional (radio, newspapers, flyers, etc.)
 - Progressive (texting, social media, etc.)
 - Create multi-tiered approaches to increase engagement
 - If canvassing, train & pay canvassers to support the local economy and provide skill development
 - Hold listening sessions since individuals can be great resources and may already have identified solutions
 - Connect with local organizations so that they can take some of the lead
 - Offer support and resources when you can
 - Reach limited English-speaking community members by working with leaders within those communities to facilitate meetings
 - Be intentional about not being extractive; see how you might support existing efforts
 - Budgeting for the payment of volunteers is extremely helpful with trust building, retention, engagement
 - Work to identify potential grants throughout the process

Outreach & Rural Communities: Key Takeaways

1. Communicate the importance of what you are working on. Tense relationships may exist between community members. If this is the case, try to connect individually with the organizations first and emphasize the common issue to come together around. For example, broadband access in schools is an issue that may affect most of a community. Stay laser focused on the uniting issue in outreach and during meetings. Keeping meetings short will help.
2. Be flexible to overcome rural outreach barriers. For example, SRBWI had difficulty setting a meeting time that would be convenient for everyone, so they explored having meetings on Sundays (generally a no-no in the rural south). It turned out that short, focused meetings on Sundays worked best for everyone. Providing food and childcare made meeting participation more accessible.

3. Use creativity to advance your work. For example, SRBWI struggled to find an appropriate meeting location for a spread-out community, so they connected with landowners and had meetings on people's properties. During COVID, virtual check-ins were helpful for maintaining momentum and connection.
4. Local partnerships are essential! Partner with schools, health centers, churches, community centers, local organizations to share information and gather volunteers. Where you don't have expertise, find out who does and how to build a relationship with them. Even outside organizations can be helpful, for example, in training local canvassers. Collaboration allows you expand your reach. Partnerships may also help with gaining resources to pay volunteers, fundraise, etc.

Audience Insights

- "In our state we have found radio to be effective in rural areas to get the word out, because our rural residents drive longer distances to get to services, which means they are often listening to the radio."
- "We shared our child tax credit flyer at back to school, backpack distribution events with our VITA information last fall."