

Building Common Ground: Fieldwork

Building Common Ground or “BCG” is a group of rural designers, leaders, and advocates working to strengthen support systems for rural communities.

Building Common Ground: Fieldwork is a new rural design program offering free design and planning support, alongside small project grants, for community-centered projects that amplify local history, culture, and identity.

Who is Fieldwork?

Co-led by Epicenter (Green River, Utah) and To Be Done Studio (Washington, DC), Building Common Ground is a group of rural designers, leaders, and advocates working to strengthen rural and Tribal places through community-centered design and planning.

What is Fieldwork?

We help rural communities and organizations move from idea to action, centering culture and local leadership at every step. Our goal is to help communities turn bold ideas into locally owned, culturally grounded projects.

We do this through:

- Design and planning for buildings and landscapes
- Guidance and strategy for fundraising efforts
- Training and support for carrying out building projects
- Coaching for leadership skills and partnership strategies

How can you apply?

Rural, tribal, and remote communities across the country are invited to apply by March 27, 2026, for the 2026–2027 cohort.

[Apply Here](#)





What is Fieldwork?

Fieldwork, an initiative of Building Common Ground, supports rural community leaders and cultural organizations with design and development expertise. By directing resources to rural communities, we help amplify and celebrate the vibrant history and rich culture in these places.

Together, we work on projects that help communities and organizations tell meaningful stories, honor local identity, and strengthen places where people gather.

Selected communities will collaborate with the Fieldwork team to:

- Plan and design cultural and civic spaces rooted in local context
- Engage residents and partners in shaping project direction
- Strengthen project readiness through planning activities, funding strategy, and leadership development
- Work alongside peer communities facing similar challenges and opportunities



What kinds of projects can Fieldwork support?

We partner with rural and Tribal communities on architecture, landscape, design, and planning projects, including but not limited to:

- Restoring or reusing older buildings for cultural uses such as museums, cultural heritage centers, or community gathering places
- Creating or improving public spaces that celebrate local culture and identity
- Designing new museums, cultural centers, archive facilities, or other community-serving spaces
- Creating exhibition spaces or public displays that tell local stories
- Developing collaborative humanities-driven projects that engage communities in preserving, interpreting, and activating the cultural, historical, and environmental significance of specific places

Who should Apply?

Groups that meet the following criteria are encouraged to apply:

- If your project helps your community share its history, culture, or identity, we want to hear from you
- Communities with a population of 35,000 or less
- 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations, fiscally sponsored groups, municipalities, or Tribal governments
- We especially welcome applications from communities that have historically had limited access to design or development support
- Individuals are not eligible to apply

See the Request for Applications for more detailed eligibility and selection criteria.

[Request for Applications](#)

What outcomes does Fieldwork hope to create?

Through Fieldwork, we aim to:

- Help transform community ideas into clear, fundable design concepts that can move toward construction or development
- Create practical tools, such as drawings and development recommendations, to support fundraising and implementation planning with grants, loans, or philanthropy in mind
- Build local design capacity and readiness for development and construction
- Amplify rural stories, histories, and voices that are often overlooked
- Connect rural leaders with peers, design practitioners, national support networks, and other partners
- Provide grant funding for small projects (such as public events, art installations, creative campaigns, murals, etc) that get community members excited and engaged
- Provide stipends for local project leads to help fund work that so often goes unpaid

What does Fieldwork include?

20 groups will be selected from the applicant pool. Of those 20, all selected groups will be part of the learning cohort, however only 8 will be selected to receive additional support through design workshops.

From May 2026 to December 2027, Fieldwork's activities include:

For groups selected to receive design workshops:

- A site visit from Fieldwork's team members to understand site constraints and context for your project and provide early design input.
- A 3–4 day, on-the-ground design workshop hosted in your community and focused on your project's story and goals.
- A tailored Design Book that includes project goals, strategies, site plans, renderings, and other design drawings (Schematic Design) as well as funding recommendations to support next steps.

For groups selected to be part of the learning cohort:

- A site visit from Fieldwork's team members to collaboratively develop a custom technical assistance plan for the group's specific design project.
- Regular one-on-one support to help shape your project's design.
- Peer-to-peer learning with fellow rural leaders, including open dialogue, peer exchange, and timely discussion of emerging challenges or opportunities.
- Customized Project Support to move your project forward, including but not limited to community engagement assistance, program design/strategy, and funding strategy and guidance.

For all Fieldwork projects:

- Access to small community action grants for placemaking, arts, culture, or humanities-based activities to support the project.
- Engagement in our virtual learning series is designed to walk community leaders through a tailored curriculum on rural design and project development.

Fieldwork In-Person Summit:

- Attendance at a three-day, in-person Summit in mid-October 2026 for all Fieldwork project communities. Two people from each selected project will be invited to travel for a combination of presentations, early design support for their place-based cultural project, and intentional community-building time to connect with each other.
- Travel stipends to the Summit for up to two people per selected project. Flights, accommodations, and incidental expenses will be covered.



Who is BCG?

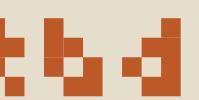
Building Common Ground, or “BCG,” is a group of designers, leaders, and advocates working to strengthen the built environment of rural communities. We search for common ground and leverage learning, design, and construction processes to work across the differences that may divide us.



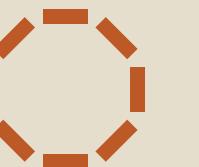
We believe that small communities, particularly those that are rural, tribal, and remote, can grow more resilient through enhanced social infrastructure: purpose-built, culturally and contextually specific spaces that offer opportunities for connection, celebration, and shelter in times of need.

EPICENTER

Epicenter, a rural 501(c)(3) nonprofit based in Green River, Utah (pop. 847), will serve as a co-lead for Building Common Ground: Fieldwork, and host the national Summit. For over 16 years, Epicenter has demonstrated what it means to do design with care—deeply rooted in place, built on trust, and sustained through creative persistence. Their award-winning work in housing, the arts, and community development has become a national model for what is possible in politically conservative, economically under-resourced rural communities.



To Be Done Studio (TBD), based in Washington, D.C., and co-lead for Building Common Ground: Fieldwork, is a mission-driven architecture and design firm with deep experience in participatory design across rural America. As the national design lead for the National Endowment for the Arts' Citizens' Institute on Rural Design, TBD supported dozens of communities in shaping inclusive, actionable strategies for public space, cultural projects, and housing.



A wide circle of BCG advisors amplifies the impact and capabilities of Building Common Ground’s core team members, programs, and communities. Composed of a hand-picked group of rural activists, advocates, artists, organizers, and technical specialists, advisors provide their unique expertise and experience to inform approach, business development, fundraising, governance, programming, or project strategy.

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