

The Rural Development Philanthropy Framework

RDP Definition

Rural Development Philanthropy (RDP) is a community-led approach that creates locally controlled assets and invests them to strengthen rural places. It builds a community’s ability to shape a better future and promote the well-being of all community members. It unites the tools of community, economic and resource development, engaging all people to come together with their voices, ideas, strategies, talents and giving.

RDP Outcome/Vision

Rural Development Philanthropy seeks rural community transformation. It delivers on four fronts in a rural community.

- **People.** It improves the skills, confidence and economic success of people who live there, especially marginalized and low-income people.
- **Culture.** It advances a culture where everyone belongs and everyone’s participation is eagerly sought and valued.
- **Place.** It maintains and strengthens the value of natural and built resources that are critical to a place’s present and future health.
- **Economy.** It increases ownership and prosperity in the local economy.

Overall, RDP communities build *wealth* at home and in their wider regions, and that wealth is more widely shared among individuals, families, organizations, institutions and businesses.

RDP Defining Characteristics: The Fine Fifteen

More and more organizations in and across rural America are embracing Rural Development Philanthropy. Organizations that practice RDP are distinguished by how they act. These are the fifteen characteristics that distinguish an RDP organization – five characteristics in each of three major categories.

We produce results that matter.	We forge and fortify community leadership, connections and control.	We use, leverage and build every asset.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We address the tough or critical issues facing communities. 2. We are persistent and patient – working over years if that’s what it takes. 3. We unite the tools of community development, economic development and philanthropy to produce substantial and sustainable results. 4. We are flexible, responsive and creative in identifying and addressing community ideas and opportunities. 5. We are measured by our community – based on community results, not on our financial assets or the interests of a chosen few. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. We seek, respect and listen to voices within all cultures and classes in order to build a more just community. 7. We actively engage those who are most often left out of decision-making. 8. We work to ensure that power and decision-making are in the hands of all those affected by the decision. 9. We partner with those willing to work for change. 10. We build capacity in the community to do more and do better to control its own future. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. We identify every asset – hidden and known, from inside and outside the community – that communities can use to make things better. 12. We encourage the giving of time, talent, creativity and dollars. 13. We champion and celebrate giving by everyone in the community, no matter the amount. 14. We build locally controlled unrestricted and permanent financial assets that provide flexibility to meet changing needs and opportunities. 15. We strengthen capabilities and develop assets that “stick to” the community and provide long-term value and resilience.

Living the RDP Characteristics: The “A List”

The basic belief of RDP practitioners is: If we get better at living these **Characteristics**, the community will get better at producing the results it seeks.

Organizations working to improve lives and living in rural America have many choices about what they do and how they do it. RDP organizations use and follow the **RDP Characteristics** as they choose and design their work in and with the community. We do so because we believe that doing our work in line with the **Characteristics** is the best way and the essential way to produce *wealth that sticks* in rural communities over the long term, better lives for all the people who live there, more prosperous and sustainable economies, and a more just, fair and welcoming community.

These **Characteristics** are set forth as guidelines for how community foundations and other local charitable organizations might do their work. But they can be used in practical ways by any organization or group that actively unites aspects of community philanthropy and community economic development in rural communities – a community development organization, a business group that takes on community betterment projects, a religious organization trying to innovate and provide helpful services to families in the congregation, a community development credit union, and so forth.

The **Characteristics** can be used in these four ways to sharpen the RDP thinking and action of an organization or group.

	Purpose: “The A List”	Use the Characteristics as tools to reflect on your organization’s RDP status, goals, plans and results, by answering such questions as:
➔ ↑	1 Assessment <i>How RDP ready are we today?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Which of these characteristics do we currently pursue? <input type="checkbox"/> How competent are we at each of those we do pursue: fair, good, very good? <input type="checkbox"/> What practices do we currently use to pursue them? <input type="checkbox"/> Which characteristics are not yet true of our organization or effort?
↑ ↑ ↑ ↑	2 Aspiration <i>How do we want to strengthen our RDP capacity?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Priorities: Which one or two characteristics do we most want to strengthen or become more competent at right now – for work we plan to do in the next six months, or year (work that we want to do in a more-RDP way)? <input type="checkbox"/> What is our goal for becoming stronger? In other words: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What specific indicator(s) – within the organization and in community outcomes – would we examine to tell us we were better at this RDP characteristic? ▪ In what way do we want each indicator to move, and by how much? ▪ When will we regularly take stock of progress on these indicators? And how?
↑ ↑ ↑	3 Action Planning <i>How will we do that?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> For our Priority Characteristics, what current practices do we use to pursue them? <input type="checkbox"/> What RDP practices are others using that we should consider? What can we invent? <input type="checkbox"/> Having reviewed what’s possible, which specific practices <u>will</u> we use and/or improve to strengthen each Priority Characteristic? <input type="checkbox"/> What do we need in order to do that, and over what time frame?
↑ ↑	4 Analysis and Accountability <i>How did we do? And what next?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> How did we act on our plan? What have we done so far in this effort? <input type="checkbox"/> What has resulted so far? <input type="checkbox"/> Where are we on our indicators? <input type="checkbox"/> How does it compare to our goals – and our last assessment? <input type="checkbox"/> What will we do differently next time?

Using the RDP Characteristics as a framework for better thinking and doing, the Rural Development Philanthropy Collaborative is developing tools and materials for organizations that want to adopt and practice RDP. These include:

- RDP Competencies:** What skills, knowledge and abilities do RDP organizations need to have in-house or connect to?
- RDP Critical Practices:** What are specific ideas, programs, activities that RDP organizations are using today to pursue these **Characteristics**?
- RDP Case Stories:** What are examples of where doing something the RDP way has made a difference in results on the ground?