



The Art of Community: Rural SC

A creative community development initiative of
The South Carolina Arts Commission

Together, we are learning, advancing, connecting and celebrating local communities.



The Art of Community: Rural SC

As part of its mission to help create a thriving arts and culture environment for South Carolina, the South Carolina Arts Commission launched an initiative, *The Art of Community: Rural SC*, in 2015. It creates a new framework to support new leadership, generate energy and motivate action in South Carolina's rural regions.

Purpose: *The Art of Community: Rural SC* initiative provides a path for deep engagement, learning and action in rural communities that results in new relationships between people and place; generates understanding of the power of arts and culture as community building tools; and spurs creative community development practices relevant to rural South Carolina, the region and nation.

Beginnings & growth: As national conversations were taking place about dynamics in rural communities, including small towns and crossroads across the country, the South Carolina Arts Commission was taking a deeper look at the complexities within our own state to ask: How can we demonstrate our commitment to rural development through arts, culture and creative placemaking? How can we build new and deepen existing relationships within our predominantly rural state? And, how can people living in rural communities be better connected to new resources that amplify the value of arts and culture as tools for community building, especially within the health, economic development and education sectors?

With seed funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Rural Development from 2015-2019, *The Art of Community: Rural SC* initiative was born and established in South Carolina's six rural Promise Zone counties. Six Mavens (community connectors) were invited to join the effort and agreed to build local teams that represented their communities. In 2019, in a significant expansion to nearly one-third of the state's 46 counties, new Mavens were invited to represent their rural or tribal communities, including Aiken, Beaufort, Berkeley, Chester, Marion, Newberry, Pickens, Richland and York/Catawba Indian Nation.

Our approach: Through a guided exploration of each county's natural, built and human assets, the program convenes Mavens and their teams to consider what's possible within each community's cultural context and physical landscape. While the discussion may include what *has been*, the central focus in *The Art of Community* is on what *can be*.

"Through this initiative, South Carolina is at the forefront of the merger of arts and culture with community development, and we're doing it two ways: as thought leaders and as practitioners. As a native South Carolinian, I am proud that this work is leading the way nationally as we rethink the essential ingredients that make places where people want to live, work, play and raise families." -Bob Reeder, Co-Chair

Questions we ask local communities: What makes rural places unique? What characteristics define each place? And how can those positive characteristics serve as the basis for new ideas and ways to celebrate small communities in South Carolina? Who leads change in each rural community, and how can we bring more community members to the table so that more voices are heard? How can we better tell the stories of our places to generate more funding, engagement, support and community cohesion?

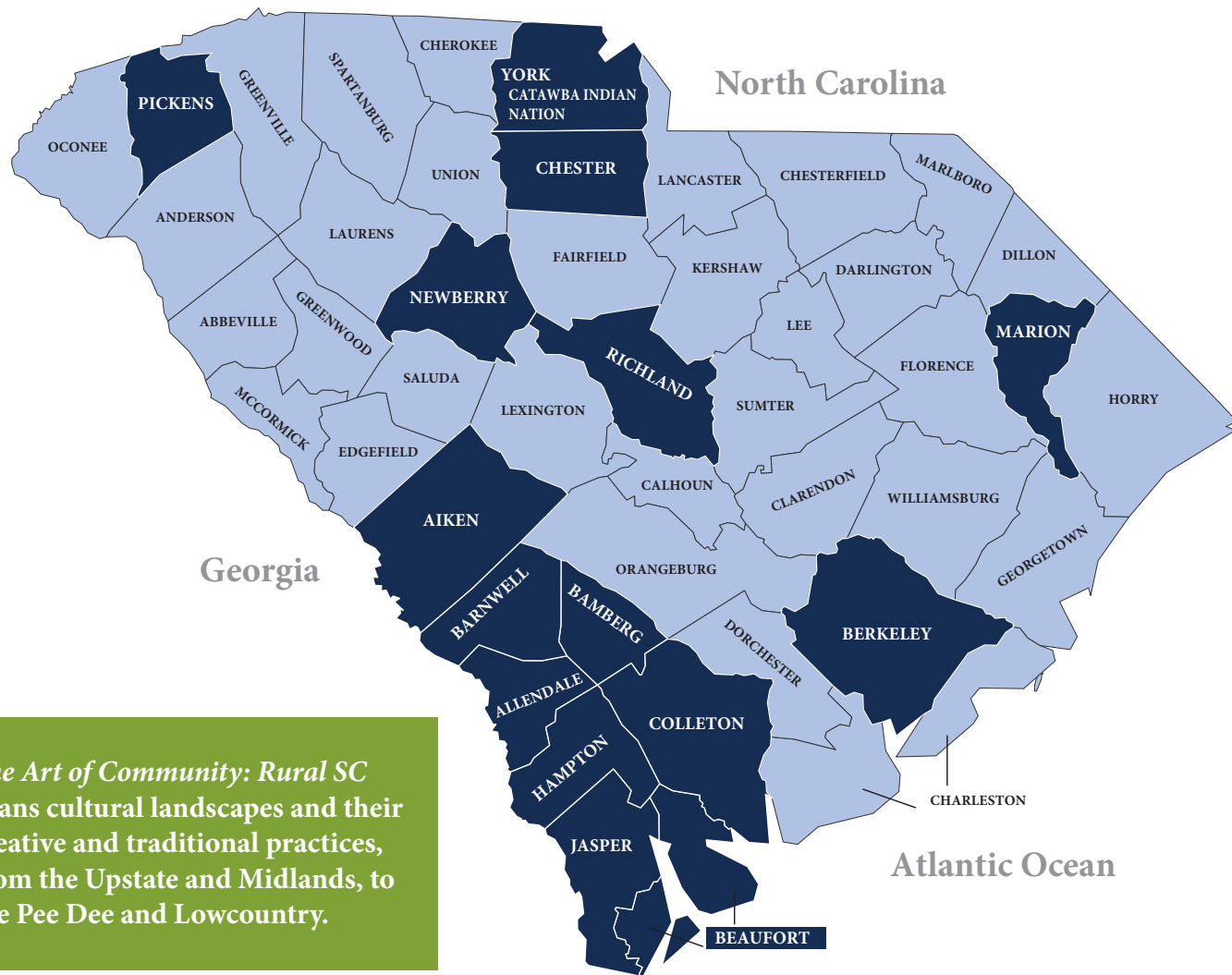
The Art of Community: Rural SC's primary objectives are to:

1. Create pride of place and learn together.
2. Build new relationships with South Carolinians living in rural communities.
3. Inspire new community building using arts and culture.
4. Fuel local action with new resources.
5. Identify people and businesses that make up the 'creative economy.'
6. Provide new opportunities for engagement with young voices, the next generation of leaders, entrepreneurs and makers.
7. Create new stories of place and people that transcend stereotypes and generate hope for the future.

Framework:

1. An advisory council of national, state and local leaders support this initiative, providing insight and connections.
2. Fifteen community members serve as 'Mavens' (community champions). They build local teams to join them for community-based brainstorming, activities and local project development.
3. Regional and local meetings provide time and space for working together; for understanding the variety of assets and cultural richness of each community; and for practicing telling the stories of place.
4. Each team identifies a community challenge and develops a plan to use arts and culture to address that challenge. Projects become local models through which further learning occurs. As part of the process, the South Carolina Arts Commission provides grants to support these projects.

Map of South Carolina Counties



The Art of Community: Rural SC spans cultural landscapes and their creative and traditional practices, from the Upstate and Midlands, to the Pee Dee and Lowcountry.

5. Rural cultural exchange: Traveling within South Carolina and to other states including Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Mississippi, Minnesota and Colorado, for instance, Mavens, team members and Creative Connectors (local arts ambassadors for creativity) have explored how other communities have addressed challenges through the use of arts and culture.
6. Documentation has been a key ingredient to tap multiple voices that tell the stories of change in rural South Carolina. How? Through films, photographs, meeting notes, newsletters, creative writing, and a folklife field school program.
7. Strategic partners are identified to support the work of local teams and the overall work of the initiative.
8. Leadership and professional development: Mavens, team members, and Creative Connectors attend and present at national, state, and regional conferences and are featured in films documenting this initiative.
9. Engagement of next generation residents in teams, project activities, and program coordination.
10. Responsiveness to opportunities by developing relevant programming to support the creative community development field. Examples include Communal Pen, a writing workshop; Folklife Field School, a partnership with Appalshop to teach documentation skills; CREATE: Rural SC and Personal Branding 101, programs to engage and support next generation creatives.

The Original 6 Mavens



Allendale County

Lottie Lewis has been a community leader since her return to her hometown of Allendale in 2000 from her corporate career with Bell Atlantic in New Jersey. Building neighborhood associations, developing interests in the ties between community

gardens, farmers markets, local business, nature and health, she and her team have spurred interest in beautifying Allendale and generating more connection between citizens for a bigger vision of what Allendale can be. Serving on town council, she has led efforts towards more local participation in town government and generated a new awareness of place-based opportunities like the white-tailed kite birds' annual migration to Allendale. Her group is called the Allendale Rural Arts Team.



Bamberg County

Yvette McDaniel, a soprano performing nationally and internationally from the age of 16, currently is Director of Choral Activities at Denmark Technical College. With a long interest in developing opportunities for local youth, she and her

team developed CRAWL: Community Rural Arts Work League of Bamberg County. This grassroots entity has recently attained its nonprofit status. It is committed to enhancing and promoting health, education and workforce development. Early efforts included creation of an 'art park' and Fifth Friday Lawn Chair Leisure Concert Series to bring community together.



Barnwell County

Evelyn Coker, Executive Director of the Blackville Community Development Corporation, is a native and lifelong resident of Blackville. Serving as a member or advisor for numerous boards including the Southern Palmetto

Regional Chamber of Commerce and Lowcountry Health Care Systems, she has a keen interest in connecting Blackville's youth and the lowcountry region with larger opportunities. Through early efforts with this initiative, she and her team, now called Blackville Phoenix Rising, have worked with local and national artists to create pride and interest in place through murals that depict the history and capture Blackville's spirit through the words of local residents.



Colleton County

Matt Mardell, executive director of the Colleton Center, Museum and Farmers Market, landed in the U. S. in 2008 from the U.K., a graduate of the University of Portsmouth School of Architecture. With an avid interest in environmental design, sustainability and art, he

was intrigued by the Walterboro model. From program coordinator to director, Mardell succeeded Maven Gary Brightwell, Maven Emerita, at this important county-run organization. He and his predecessor have led their team to make vital connections between arts, culture and the local economy using powerful videos that showcase the assets of Colleton County.



Hampton County

Audrey Williams is an advocate for her hometown of Estill where she has worked to increase opportunities for youth over the years, including a major exhibit in 2010, *The Arts of the Humanities*, in which more than 5,000 students participated. With her team and

an interest in creating a healthy community, she has helped generate a new focus on the Estill Nature and Walking Trail through local activities and amenities. Through this initiative, a month-long residency with a nationally known artist led to the development of 'creative stations' placed throughout the trail.



Jasper County

Johnny Davis has been working in the field of recreation for more than 24 years and is currently director of Jasper County Parks and Recreation. With a grassroots team, a partnership with The Morris Center for Lowcountry Heritage, and support from the

county, he has led an effort to address the challenge of literacy and create new connections with local community centers. Working with a regional artist, young people have been invited to participate in fun workshops to play and paint with words. The effort continues to generate new partnerships with a variety of stakeholders, from reading coaches to local nonprofits who value this approach to engagement and learning.

The New 9 Mavens



Aiken County

Write to Change Foundation, was founded in 1994 to support vulnerable youth in South Carolina and beyond who use literacy and the arts to encourage social change and equity. Write to Change works with Kayla Hostetler, Aiken High School teacher and Lillian Reeves, UofSC

Aiken School of Education faculty, and an advocacy team of youth who face challenging circumstances. These youth are effective community organizers, literacy and writing leaders, artists and athletes who are resources to local organizations and groups, recognized and in demand to present stories and data about issues from race and equity, poverty, school and neighborhood safety. This approach highlights skills and talents that children and young people bring to community change.



Beaufort County

Victoria Smalls is currently the History and Culture Director, Program Development Director, and Assistant to the Executive Director at the Penn Center on St. Helena Island. Smalls is a creative and knowledgeable public historian and educator, arts

advocate, and cultural preservationist. Currently, her areas of focus are Traditional and Contemporary Gullah Geechee Artists and Artwork; Praise House Systems and the Building of Community; and Identifying Extant Praise/Prayer Houses in South Carolina and the Gullah Geechee Corridor. Formally, Smalls served as Program Manager to help build the \$85 million International African American Museum in Charleston, S.C. due to open in 2021.



Berkeley County

Lydia Cotton was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico. She visited South Carolina at age 25 and fell in love with the culture and people of the state. She moved to North Charleston in 1989. Cotton is a Latina Ambassador, Hispanic Liaison, Commissioner, Spanish

Radio Host, and Maven. Cotton works to bridge the gap that exists between the Hispanic Community and the government, businesses, agencies and organizations in the Lowcountry. Since 2005, Cotton has been a Chairperson for Art Pot, the area's first multicultural Latino center, located in Hanahan, South Carolina. Cotton has been a brain cancer/stroke survivor since 2003 and believes that "time is everything."



Chester County

Libby Sweatt-Lambert is currently the director of the Fort Lawn Community Center. Sweatt-Lambert has extensive non-profit work experience, and is especially grateful to have been involved in the development of many programs for persons with special needs and

abused, abandoned and neglected children. Sweatt-Lambert has served on several human service and recreational boards, and currently serves as President of the Friends of Andrew Jackson State Park. Sweatt-Lambert is a South Carolina native and values the important role arts can play in the revitalization of rural areas. She is a Winthrop University graduate, with degrees in special education and non-profit certification.



Marion County

Luis Rodriguez has been the President and CEO of Santee-Lynches Affordable Housing and Community Development Corporation since 1997.

Rodriguez is responsible for day-to-day operations, multifamily complexes, shopping plaza and new venture development, grant-writing, and the arts and culture program. Rodriguez is a certified Housing Finance Professional, Homebuyer Counselor and a Licensed Property Manager-In-Charge. Rodriguez was valedictorian of the 40-day Bank of America Leadership Academy, representing "Community Economic Development," sponsored by the State Association of CEDs, Class of 2001. Santee-Lynches is a partner organization with Rural LISC (Local Initiative Support Corporation).



Sunny Mullarkey, Artist

Awards and recognition

- The Justice Sunday Award, 2020, Denmark Technical College
- Inaugural Power of Rural Award, 2017, South Carolina Office of Rural Health
- Allendale's Maven was invited to present the story of Allendale to the South Carolina Department of Commerce 2018 Community Economic Development Class
- The story of Blackville's creative community development project was included in the 25th anniversary compilation of success stories for the South Carolina Association of Community Economic Development.

The New 9 Mavens, continued



Newberry County

Marquerite Palmer has been the Director of the Newberry Arts Center since its opening in 2014. Palmer helped start after-school art programs, taught art in the school systems, taught pottery at Newberry College, and actively volunteered her time and talents in community

organizations. With the help of mentors and friends, the Newberry Arts Center launched the annual South Carolina Clay Conference in 2015. Palmer is both an artist and arts educator, and she believes strongly that art enriches people's lives and helps individuals to find a voice within their communities.



Richland County

Michael Dantzler is the owner and photographer of Michael Dantzler Photography, where he specializes in portrait, documentary, and fine art photography. Dantzler is not only a photographer and artist, but considers himself a community interconnectivity professional.

Currently, his focus is on creating a healthy cluster of small businesses and a creative community approach in his hometown of Eastover. Dantzler spearheaded the Eastover Community Garden, and manages the Town of Eastover's newsletter and social media presence.



Pickens County

Betty McDaniel is an adjunct professor at Southern Wesleyan University, and a former kindergarten teacher. In 2008, she founded Preserving Our Southern Appalachian Music, Inc., which supports the Young Appalachian

Musicians learning to play traditional music. McDaniel helped found the Holly Springs Center, where she is currently on the Board, and has been both Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Board for the Hagood Mill Foundation. McDaniel received her B.A. in Elementary Education from University of North Carolina, and later went on to receive her Ph.D in Elementary Education from UofSC.



York County/Catawba Indian Nation

Brooke Bauer is a citizen of the Catawba Indian Nation and a professor of Native American and U.S. History at the University of South Carolina Lancaster. Bauer serves on the Native American Studies Advisory Board and the

Town & Gown Advisory Committee at UofSC Lancaster. She has published chapters about Catawba Indians in two scholarly anthologies. Bauer is also an artist and specializes in pottery and baskets. She earned her Masters in U.S. History at Winthrop University, and went on to earn her Doctor of Philosophy in U.S. History from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Major accomplishments and recognitions of *The Art of Community: Rural SC*

- Participation in more than 25 national and state conferences and webinars in the initiative's first four years including Grantmakers in the Arts, Americans for the Arts, Springboard for the Arts' Rural Arts and Culture Summit, Rural LISC Annual Seminar, S.C. Department of Commerce Rural Summit, National Association of Counties (NACO) Annual Conference, the National Rural Women's Summit, the Southeastern Creative Placemaking Summit, the Rural Generation Summit and the Rural Policy Research Institute's Creative Placemaking Summit, as examples.
- Contributed to the development of a national report, *Rural Prosperity Through the Arts & Creative Sector*, a rural action guide for Governors and States. Participation in the report's rollout at the National Press Club as one of three featured programs. https://www.nga.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/NGA_RuralArtsReport.pdf
- Inclusion on the Smithsonian's Museum on Main Street working group which created a rural focused exhibit, *Crossroads: Change in Rural America*, which opened in rural South Carolina, Florida, and Illinois in 2018; and in 2019, participation on the *Water/Ways* exhibit launch. <https://museumonmainstreet.org/content/crossroads>
- Participation in three national working groups formed by ArtPlace America's research arm and its partners, examining creative placemaking and food; immigration; and local government. <https://www.artplaceamerica.org/>

Advisory Council

Providing insight and connections, advisors participate in conference calls, provide guidance and new networks within the state and beyond. An annual advisors' gathering, INSIGHTs, located in one of the fifteen counties showcases new learning and opportunities; it also offers the chance for all participants to know one another better.

Pam Breaux, Co-Chair

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, Washington, D.C.

J. Robert "Bob" Reeder, Co-Chair

Rural LISC, Columbia, S.C. and Washington, D.C.

Graham Adams, South Carolina Office of Rural Health

Savannah Barrett, Art of the Rural, Kentucky

Dr. J. Herman Blake, Humanities Scholar, South Carolina

Andy Brack, Charleston City Paper, South Carolina

Dr. Ann Carmichael, (Ret.) UofSC-Salkehatchie,
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Washington, D.C.

Vernita Dore, (Ret.) USDA-Rural Development, Beaufort,
South Carolina

Charles Fluharty, RUPRI & Rural Cultural Wealth Lab,
Ohio

Kerri Forrest, Gaylord & Dorothy Donnelley Foundation,
South Carolina and Illinois

Sara June Goldstein, (Ret.) South Carolina Arts
Commission

Don Gordon, The Riley Institute at Furman, South Carolina

Dixie Goswami, Write to Change Foundation, (Ret.)
Middlebury Bread Loaf School of English, South Carolina
and Vermont

Ken May, (Ret.) South Carolina Arts Commission

Bernie Mazyck, South Carolina Association for Community
Economic Development

Bill Molnar, Lower Savannah Council of Governments,
South Carolina

Doug Peach, Indiana University, Ph.D. candidate

Brandolyn Pinkston, (Ret.) Consumer Affairs Director,
South Carolina and Georgia

Jane Przybysz, UofSC McKissick Museum

Lillian Reeves, UofSC Aiken

David Smalls, Political Consultant, South Carolina

Susie Surkamer, SouthArts, Georgia

Leila Tamari, ArtPlace America, New York

Javier Torres, SURDNA Foundation, New York

Dean Van Pelt, Savannah River Nuclear Site, South Carolina

Leonardo Vazquez, The National Consortium for Creative
Placemaking, New Jersey

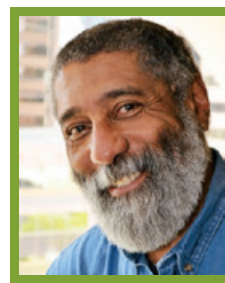
Chris Walker, (Ret.) Local Initiatives Support Corporation
(LISC), Washington, D.C.

Co-Chairs



Pam Breaux joined the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) in 2015. As president and CEO, she works with the association's board of directors and staff to advance NASAA's policy and programmatic mission to strengthen America's state and jurisdictional arts agencies. A native of Lafayette, Louisiana, Breaux has held leadership

positions at the local, state and national levels. While in Louisiana state government, she was secretary of the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism (CRT), assistant secretary of CRT (overseeing its cultural development portfolio), and executive director of its state arts agency (the Louisiana Division of the Arts). During her time at CRT, Breaux developed and led Louisiana's cultural economy initiative and spearheaded the successful UNESCO inscription of Poverty Point State Historic Site (an ancient Indian site) as a World Heritage site.



J. Robert 'Bob' Reeder, Program Director for Rural LISC, has built a 30-year career devoted to social and economic justice and equity; and comprehensive community and economic development. He is a National Charettes Institute certified community facilitator. Under his direction, Rural LISC created its

Arts and Culture Based Creative Economic Development funding initiative. Reeder has worked with several national arts and culture-based private and governmental entities that fund and support organizations working to include creative placemaking as a strategy in the economic revival of distressed rural communities. Reeder earned a B.A. in Government from Wofford College and a J.D. from Vanderbilt University School of Law.

The South Carolina Arts Commission works to develop a thriving arts environment, which is essential to quality of life, education, and economic vitality for all South Carolinians. The agency focuses on three priority areas: community development, arts education and artist development.

South Carolina Arts Commission



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*Executive Director David Platts and
Board Chair Dee Crawford*

“The Art of Community: Rural SC is a great example of how state arts agencies can be very forward thinking in deepening their relationships with the people whom they serve. This initiative is an exemplar of how government agencies can conduct their work by co-leading.” -Pam Breaux, Co-Chair

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Maven’s Meeting, Eastover, South Carolina, January 2020. Photo Credit: Sherard Duvall, OTR Media