

# 2021-2022 Learning Cohort

## Citizens' Institute on Rural Design (CIRD)

*The Citizens' Institute on Rural Design™ is a National Endowment for the Arts leadership initiative in partnership with the Housing Assistance Council.*

### CIRD Design Learning Cohort 2021 Overview

Since 1991, the Citizens' Institute on Rural Design (CIRD) has provided design assistance to more than 100 rural communities in all regions of the United States, empowering residents to leverage local and regional assets in order to guide the civic development and future design of their own communities. Focusing on communities with populations of 50,000 or less, CIRD's goal is to enhance the quality of life and economic viability of rural America through planning, design, and creative placemaking.

The Design Learning Cohort program brings together leaders from approximately 20 rural communities from across the country to learn and share how design can address particular community needs. The program includes interactive online learning sessions led by nationally-recognized design experts, inspiring and informative webinars, and one-on-one technical assistance to address a cohort community's specific design challenge. Training sessions will be supplemented by opportunities for communities to learn from one another through breakout groups, social activities, online resources, and remote site visits.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the entire 2021-2022 program will be conducted online. The program will take place between May 2021 and December 2022, with activities hosted roughly once a month. All sessions will be recorded and shared with the cohort for those not able to attend. The CIRD Design Learning Cohort program is free and does not require travel.

At the completion of the program, communities who meet the following criteria will become a CIRD-Certified Cohort Community:

- Attend at least 9 out of 11 learning sessions and webinars, including breakout sessions
- Demonstrate progress on a community-specific design challenge between May 2021 and December 2022
- Complete exit survey

## CIRD Design Learning Cohort Goals

The goal of the CIRD Design Learning Cohort program is to develop a national peer network of rural communities engaged in design, arts, and creative placemaking. Specifically, the program is designed to:

- Build design capacity in rural communities to plan comprehensive revitalization strategies;
- Introduce creative placemaking, arts, culture, and design strategies as drivers of economic development in rural America;
- Facilitate a network of rural communities for design idea exchanges and peer learning; and
- Prepare communities to be ready and competitive for arts- and design-related state and federal funding opportunities.

## Curriculum Plan

The curriculum for the Design Learning Cohort combines relevant design training and customized technical assistance, exposure to case studies about real-world, successful design projects, and engagement with peer rural communities to share experiences and ideas about design challenges. The curriculum is delivered through three main program elements: cohort-exclusive learning sessions, public webinars on rural design, and community-specific technical assistance consultations.

### **Learning Sessions**

Seven (7) serialized, interactive, virtual learning sessions will cover a wide range of rural design topics, led by nationally-recognized architects, landscape architects, community and transportation planners, and community development experts. These sessions will utilize a “split lesson” approach, starting with curated presentations and followed by small breakout discussions. This approach allows for high-level knowledge combined with actionable takeaways and peer engagement.

### **Webinars**

Four (4) webinars led by design field experts and CIRD resource team members will explore a special topic of design, community planning, or architecture. Webinars will be open to the public and archived on the CIRD website, but a learning cohort-exclusive debrief session afterwards will give cohort members the opportunity to interact directly with experts. Webinars will address topics such as historic preservation and adaptive reuse of community buildings, creating public space that integrates local culture, or leveraging design to revitalize Main Street.

### **Technical Assistance**

*Resource Team One-on-One Coaching:* Resource team members will be available throughout the cohort program period for community-specific coaching, to provide inspiration and advice, and to help troubleshoot issues in your design challenge.

*Resource Team Office Hours:* On a quarterly basis, resource team members will host on-line Office Hours - an informal time for cohort members to connect with experts and discuss their projects, seek advice, and talk through ideas.

*HAC National Conference:* Planned for December 2021 in Washington, D.C., this national conference will include a track on rural design, architecture, and other topics alongside its rural affordable housing agenda. The conference is an opportunity to link with rural housing and community development thought leaders, government officials, non-public funders, lenders, and peers. Attendance is not required.

*Online Site Visits:* Outside of the Design Learning Cohort, CIRD will be working with four communities to hold a rural Design Workshop, which may include virtual focus groups, livestreamed site visits, or presentations. Interested cohort members can “audit” Design Workshops to learn more about community design planning in real time.

*Online resources:* The CIRD website ([rural-design.org](http://rural-design.org)) provides a variety of additional resources such as grant projects, toolkits, blog articles, and other actionable resources. Regular CIRD newsletters keep organizations up-to-date on the latest in rural design.

## About Our Partners

Established by Congress in 1965, the **National Endowment for the Arts** is the independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities. Through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector, the Arts Endowment supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America’s rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America.

The **Housing Assistance Council (HAC)** is a national nonprofit that strengthens communities across rural America through investment and assistance with affordable housing and community and economic development. Based in Washington, DC, HAC is actively involved in shaping federal policy and the affordable housing industry with its research, lending and conferences. We also deliver technical assistance, training and affordable loans to local organizations that help rural communities prosper.

**To Be Done Studio (TBD)** harnesses the inherent goodness in people and the power of design to create sustainable solutions to the endemic problems that our world faces. We seek a relevant practice, one which is accessible to all rather than the few. To do so, we design and build spaces that uplift, inspire and support power within the communities we work.