A Museum on Main Street exhibition from the Smithsonian traveling to 30 states through 2024
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Museum on Main Street

The Smithsonian invites hundreds of small museums, in towns with populations of 500 to 20,000, to participate in a national exhibition program.

With support and guidance from state humanities councils, host communities have the opportunity to create their own educational programs, cultural activities, and exhibitions that center on local culture and history.

To date, Museum on Main Street exhibitions have visited over 1600 communities in all 50 states.
Exhibition Overview
Crossroads’ Guiding Questions

What does “rural America” mean?

How has our attraction to and interaction with the land formed the basis of rural America?

How have rural communities and small towns evolved and changed?

What makes these places unique?

How do we identify with them?
Changes transformed rural America (including global influences), especially during the 1900s.

What are some of these changes, and what have they meant for rural life?

People are holding on in their rural communities. Why and how?

What is rural life like today? How are rural Americans shaping their future?
Introduction

Americans come together at crossroads. Small towns are centers for:

• Commerce and trade
• Local politics
• Culture and ideas

Rural America changed significantly in the 1900s:

• Demographics
• Education
• Access to services
• Economic viability

Rural communities may face challenges as well as opportunities.
American culture is filled with romantic views of rural life and culture.

Living and working in a rural place can also be difficult.

How is rural America represented in books, songs, poetry, and art?

How do rural ideals square with American ideals?

• Economic opportunity
• Personal liberty
• Equality
Land is core to our concept of rural life.

Our sense of place is powerful. Many Americans express strong connections to the rural landscape. Memories of recreation in rural places. Natural beauty draws people to rural areas. For some, rural landscapes represent hard work and isolation.

Not everyone is a landowner. Most Americans connect with rural places through public lands.

How do attitudes towards land ownership and access differ among Americans?

Are there stories of conflict over land in your state?
Community

Communities grew at rural crossroads
• People connect, exchange ideas, work towards common goals, rely on neighbors, and build the future of their community.

Sustaining communities
• Country Life Movement
• New Deal and rural electrification programs

Accelerated change
• Change in the second half of the 20th century
• Erosion of political power in some states
• Demographic changes
• Civil rights struggles
• Aging populations
• Challenges of inequality and poverty
Rural Americans believe in their communities and many choose to work to resolve issues rather than leaving.

Economic survival requires revitalization of small towns, and inspires new ways of thinking about farming and extractive industries.

Many Americans are discovering the benefits of rural life. The slower pace and quiet surroundings, proximity to natural resources etc.

Popular culture connects urban and suburban Americans to rural life. Rural life and people are often romanticized or satirized.
Managing Change

Some rural communities face significant challenges.

Americans are confronting these issues and finding new and unique solutions.

There are many different voices to welcome into these conversations.

What will your town look like in ten years?

What has your community lost that matters most?

What change for good would you make in your town?

As a Major, what would you do?

Name three things you would miss if you had to leave.
Specifications
Specifications

• Six free-standing sections
• Installation requires 750 square feet of space
• Five audio and video media components
• Mechanical, tactile, and low-tech interactives
• Various sized object cases
• Packed in 16 wheeled crates that fit on a 26-foot U-Haul truck
Statistics
Where is *Crossroads*?

Please note: Except for Utah, 2023 host states have placed holds but have not yet contracted.
Types of host organizations

- Museum: 49%
- Library: 18%
- College/School: 8%
- Historical Society or Organization: 3%
- Community Center: 3%
- Other: 19%

Data based on combined numbers for MoMS exhibitions.
Volunteer Profile

Hosting an exhibition happens through the help of many volunteers.

On average, a single community is supported by:

• **32 volunteers**
• ½ of the volunteers is new to the organization
• **2000 volunteer hours**

Resulting in a volunteer value of about **$50,860,--** per community.*

* Based on the Independent Sector’s estimate of the average value of a volunteer hour for 2019
Attendance Profile

**Average number of exhibition visitors per community**

3175

**Average number of program participants.**

5,821

Data based on numbers reported by former communities.
Heard on the road!  
(Case Studies)

“The value of the exhibit to our community can not be measured. Not only was it a great display but the community felt pride in being selected to display it. Many people in the community will never be able to visit the Smithsonian exhibit so this traveling exhibit gave our residents something new, interesting and lasting memory.”  -- Live Oak, FL
Bartow, Florida

Polk County Historical Center

Population: 19,597 people
Attendance: 22,473 (239% increase)
In kind support: $16,818

The local exhibition focused on changes in Polk County that have impacted jobs, health, technology, and transportation. It sparked conversations about the agricultural roots of the town and how rural landscapes have been replaced by emerging urban areas.

Residents and elected officials participated in a panel discussion, Managing Change: Polk County’s Future. The Audience appreciated being part of the planning for the future of their county.

Student answered the postcard questions brainstormed about problems and solutions for changes in the county and completed an activity pack with their parents.

The local exhibit included information on Pughsville, an African-American community. The exhibit attracted many former members of this community, who had never visited the history center.
Live Oak, Florida
Suwannee River Regional Library
Population: 44,190
Attendance: 12,183
In-kind support: $14,168
Oral History projects: 147
Preservation workshops: 1,872

Their local exhibition, “Photos of the Past,” attracted many residents, who could identify people in the photos and reminisce about a bygone era. Topics in a series of lectures ranged from agriculture to art, and from bootlegged alcohol to music and gardening.

The museum took the opportunity of hosting a Smithsonian exhibition to explore a wide variety of marketing reach across three neighboring counties. Their marketing efforts included flyers, postcards, road signs, and social media, and resulted in increased attendance and over 1000 likes on Facebook.
Cedar Key, Florida

Cedar Key Chamber of Commerce

Population: 700
Attendance: 19,377
Value of Volunteer hours: $5,579

The host organization in Cedar Key used the Crossroads Exhibition to talk about the local working waterfront. It created an opportunity to explore how changing transportation methods have impacted the community over time.

Additionally, the community created a video about Cedar Key to accompany the Crossroads Exhibition. The video reached over 70,000 viewers on Facebook, and is now a permanent fixture of the Cedar Key Visitors Center.

In preparation to hosting Crossroads, the community hosted a beach clean effort.
The main topics of discussion were changes over time with regard to transportation, innovation, industry, and recreation.

Host organizations worked with a variety of community businesses to create an companion exhibition that featured model tractors, old bank ledgers, and patents. By creating this type of community buy-in, it received over $60,000 of in-kind support and involved lots of new volunteers.
The local exhibition focused on rural health and changes in farming. Two centennial farms were used in the local exhibition as case studies highlighting changes in family farming over last 100 years.

Presented the screening of a documentary film about Dr. Tom Catena, one of the world’s 100 most influential people by *Time Magazine* in 2015 for is work in the war-torn Nuba Mountains of South Sudan. He was trained in a rural medicine curriculum that was developed at a clinic in Marshall.
The local exhibition, “Classrooms & Community: Changes in Rural America’s Sense of Community” explores how changes in the educational structure, moving from one-room buildings to consolidated schools in the town, shaped ideas and perceptions of what community means. They were able to highlight oral interviews done in 2018 that focus on their sense of place, memories, and values.

By the end of the project, they created a community mural at their new Visitor and Welcome Center which highlights changes in their community over time. A professional artist worked with local residents, especially students at Olympia High School, to design and paint it.

Atlanta, Illinois
Atlanta Public Library District / Atlanta Museum

Town Population: 1,640
Attendance: 1,159
Donations: $10,000

“This was an amazing experience for our board and staff. It increased our capacity to integrate ideas, think about our community’s history, and work together in meaningful ways. It also generated considerable pride among members of the community.”

- Atlanta Public Librarian
Dillsboro, Indiana
Aurora Public Library District, Dillsboro Branch Library

Population: 1,404
Attendance: 1,650 (72% increase)

Their local exhibition, “Dillsboro: Where We Were, Where We Are, and Where We’re Going” showed the resilience of the Dillsboro community over the course of the past 50 years.

Local students were inspired by the exhibit postcard question, "If you were mayor, what would you do?," and 275 students submitted essay responses. The town appointed a “Mayor for the Day: who enacted some of their wishes—giving popsicles to everyone in town. Younger residents could see that they have a voice in their community. They could be inspired and empowered to make change in their town.

“Crossroads” truly brought regionalism to Dillsboro. Some of our businesses have been working towards regional marketing and the new Dillsboro Arts/Friendship Gallery also attracts visitors from outside of our area. But, the Crossroads exhibit had a message that resonated with rural America far and wide.”

- Susan Greco, Town of Dillsboro Economic Development Director
Hopkins, South Carolina

Historic Harriet Barber House

Population: 3,023
Attendance: 836
Funding support: $24,969
Value of volunteer hours: $15,343

Crossroads was shown in the historic Harriet Barber House located on a 42-acre tract of land purchased in 1872 by Samuel Barber, who was a well-digger as a slave, and his wife Harriet. Barber was a farmer and a minister after the Civil War.

Over 100 people gathered at the exhibition opening for food, music, and to pay historical tribute to the Harriet Barber House. “Front Porch Music” was a popular event using traditional roots music to celebrate local culture and bring people to see Crossroads.

They hosted a series of teacher workshops in preparation for the exhibition to engage local teachers.
Moscow, Idaho
Latah County Historical Society and Moscow Chamber of Commerce

Population: 24,000
Attendance: 2,335
In-kind Support: $3,950

Moscow is a thriving rural community that sits at the crossroads of traditional American Indian trails, wagon roads, railroads, and now highways. It has seen major changes to local industries, but also still relies heavily on agriculture to sustain itself.

The local exhibit, “Then and Now: Latah County Communities at the Crossroads,” juxtaposed historic photos and contemporary photos of various towns in the county. The exhibit focused on the ways transportation and agricultural technology remade areas communities. Some towns faded away while other re0imagine their futures.
Smithsonian exhibit provides opportunity for school students
Selected Press Coverage
‘Change in Rural America’ exhibit attracts crowds – Farm Week Now (Illinois)

‘Crossroads: Change in Rural America’ – The Sault News (Michigan)

Smithsonian to Rural Regions: Your Wealth Is In Your Culture – PEW Charitable Trusts

Smithsonian exhibit visits Voorhees – The Times and Democrat (South Carolina)

EMCC Scooba library chosen for Smithsonian exhibition – The Meridian Star (Mississippi)

Smithsonian Exhibit About Rural America Makes Tracks to Salem – WBIW.com (Indiana)

At the Crossroads: Rural communities spotlighted in traveling Smithsonian exhibit
- REMC Magazine (Indiana)

“Museum on Main Street” comes to Dillsboro
- Vevay Reveille Enterprise & Switzerland County Democrat (Indiana)

Smithsonian exhibit kicks off Indiana tour at Dillsboro library - The Journal Press (Indiana)

Coming to a Crossroads: Traveling Smithsonian exhibit explores six rural communities across Indiana.
- AAA Crossroads Magazine
Smithsonian exhibit settles in at Old School - My Journal Courier (Illinois)

Crossroads: Change in Rural America reopens at DeKalb County History Center - Daily Chronicle (Illinois)

Smithsonian ‘Crossroads’ exhibit on tour in Illinois - AgriNews (Illinois)

SC Artist represents state’s rural landscape in Smithsonian exhibit - The State (South Carolina)
https://www.thestate.com/entertainment/article221835760.html

Grand opening for Smithsonian exhibit Saturday - The Monroe News (Michigan)

Rural America at a Crossroads: Smithsonian traveling exhibit opens at Atlanta Museum - The Herald News (Illinois)

Smithsonian exhibit opens at the Atlanta Museum - The Courier (Illinois)

Indiana Humanities Crossroads review video
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iUyKdJl23r8