



On the Future of Rural Texas

A step-by-step guide to sparking meaningful conversations on the most pressing issues facing your rural community.

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PRESENTED BY:



Agriculture Division of DowDuPont



Texas Tribune Community Conversations: On the future of rural Texas

What are the most pressing issues facing rural Texans, and what can lawmakers do to address these concerns and help set rural communities up for success? This fall, The Texas Tribune will bring together lawmakers, advocates, business owners and top thought leaders in front of a live audience to answer questions about what rural Texans are facing in the current climate, and to lay out their plans for rural Texas. **But we also want to hear from you.**

The free event, [The Future of Rural Texas: A Texas Tribune Symposium](#), will take place Nov. 12-13 in College Station and is open to the public. Event panels and interviews will also be accessible through free livestreamed and recorded videos.

We know that many who are interested in these issues may not be able to travel to the event nor able to view the livestream, so the Tribune is also encouraging community watch parties to view the symposium content along with follow-up conversations to dive deeper into how the issues discussed at the symposium affect your community.

Through the Tribune's [Community Conversations](#) series, we hope to catalyze a constructive dialogue on the most pressing issues for rural Texas communities in tandem with this event. This involves fostering spaces where community leaders, neighbors, local business officials and other stakeholders can connect with one another, share stories and reach possible solutions. We hope this toolkit will help you organize these conversations.

If you are thinking about hosting a symposium watch party and/or a community conversation on issues facing rural Texans, please fill out [this brief form](#) so we can share your event with our audience. All we ask is that you [report back to us](#) on the outcome of your discussions. You will find more details on hosting a party below.

Thanks for your interest in facilitating this important conversation. Our team is here to help and answer any questions you may have along the way:
communityconversations@texastribune.org.



About The Texas Tribune

[The Texas Tribune](#) is the only member-supported, digital-first, nonpartisan media organization that informs Texans — and engages with them — about public policy, politics, government and statewide issues.

TEXAS TRIBUNE EVENTS



THE FUTURE OF RURAL TEXAS

A Texas Tribune Symposium

About the event

On Nov. 12-13, The Texas Tribune will host a symposium, [The Future of Rural Texas: A Texas Tribune Symposium](https://trib.it/future-of-rural-texas) (trib.it/future-of-rural-texas), in College Station. The event will touch on the future of rural education, health care, natural resource preservation, infrastructure investment and dive into the political climate in rural Texas and the state's economic future. The event will also feature a keynote conversation with state legislators on the rural agenda heading into the 2019 legislative session.

The free event will take place in front of a live audience and is open to the public. All panels and interviews will also be [livestreamed at texastribune.org](https://texastribune.org) and available as recorded videos after the event.

To view the full list of foundations and corporate sponsors for this event, [visit the event website](#).

Tribune events are also supported through [contributions](#) from our founding investors and members. Though [donors](#) and [corporate sponsors](#) underwrite Texas Tribune events, they play no role in determining the content, panelists or line of questioning.



Community Conversation Guidelines

A few important guidelines to note before you host a [community conversation](#):

- **Impartiality**

The Texas Tribune is an independent, nonpartisan media organization. While we support civic engagement, **we do not endorse any candidates, advocacy groups or positions on any issue**, nor will we endorse any advocacy that results from your event. We may use event feedback in our continued reporting and community engagement efforts on rural issues. If your event involves advocacy, or support for a political/legislative agenda, you must distinguish our reporting as being independent from this activity.

- **Branding & positioning**

We encourage you to use this toolkit as a framework for your community conversation, but please note that any **event that you convene is not an official Texas Tribune event**. All event-related print materials, invitations and web listings must include this phrase: “This is an independently organized event inspired by reporting from The Texas Tribune, a nonprofit, nonpartisan media organization that informs Texans — and engages with them — about public policy, politics, government and statewide issues.”

- **Registration**

Before you host a conversation on rural issues affecting your community, first [tell us about what you are planning here](#) or by signing up at texastribune.org/series/community-conversations.



First things first: Hosting a watch party

We hope this toolkit will serve as a guide to sparking meaningful conversation on the future of rural Texas and the most pressing issues your community faces. To begin the discussion, the Tribune is convening lawmakers, community leaders and experts on rural issues from across Texas for a live event in College Station on Nov. 12-13. These issues include access to health care, education for rural students, infrastructure development and the fight over natural resources.

As many may not be able to attend the Tribune's event in person nor able to access the livestream or panel videos, we encourage you to host a symposium watch party, either while the event is taking place, or by watching videos of the event afterward. The next few pages outline two watch party event models you could emulate.

Live watch party

The Tribune's event, which will take place Nov. 12-13, will touch on the most pressing issues faced by rural communities — like the future of rural education, health care, natural resource preservation and infrastructure investment — as well as the political climate in rural Texas and the state's economic future. It will also feature a keynote conversation featuring several state lawmakers representing rural areas to discuss the rural agenda heading into the 2019 legislative session.

All panels will be [livestreamed on the Tribune's website](#). By tuning into the event in real time, you and your audience can follow along with the discussions as they unfold and virtually submit questions to event organizers in College Station that may be asked to the panelists on stage. This model works well for groups of any size, and it may be of most interest to those in communities with limited broadband access.

You can view the full event schedule [here](#) and find more information on the technical requirements of hosting a watch party and accessing the event livestream on page 9 of this toolkit.

Post-event watch party

If you are unable to tune in to the event in real time, or if you want to tune in for only a portion of the symposium's panels, you could choose to host a post-event watch party using videos of specific panel discussions.

Full video of each discussion will be posted to the [Tribune's website](#) in the week following the symposium and can be streamed online at any time. This watch party model works well for groups of any size, and it may be of most interest to those who wish to dive deeper into one topic or a few specific rural issues of most interest to your community.

You can find more information on the technical requirements of hosting a watch party and accessing the event videos on page 9 of this toolkit.

If you plan to host a watch party — either in real time with the Tribune's event or after the fact — [let us know by filling out this brief form](#). If you wish, we will include your event in a [public list](#) of watch parties that community members across Texas can attend.

Accessing the event livestream and post-event video

To access the free, livestreamed video from The Texas Tribune's event, [The Future of Rural Texas: A Texas Tribune Symposium](#), for your watch party or community conversation, follow the step-by-step guide below. If you have any questions about accessing the livestream of this event or any post-event videos, email us at communityconversations@texastribune.org.

- **Check your internet speed**

To stream the event, you'll need to make sure your internet connection is fast enough. If you already stream videos on Netflix and YouTube without issues, you should be fine. If you are unsure, you can use a free [speed test](#) to test your connection. You'll need 0.5 Mbps at a minimum to reliably stream the program, but 1.5 Mbps will give you better results, especially if playing on a larger screen. Five Mbps will provide the best HD viewing experience.

- **Tell us about your event**

If you host a live watch party of the Tribune's Future of Rural Texas symposium, let us know by completing [this online form](#) or emailing us at communityconversations@texastribune.org. We will post all open-to-the-public watch parties [on our website](#) for community members across Texas to be able to find a watch party to attend near them.

- **Bookmark the event livestream landing page**

When the Future of Rural Texas symposium kicks off on the evening of Nov. 12 and again on the morning of Nov. 13, we'll livestream the entirety of it [here](#). Bookmark this page (trib.it/rural-event-watch) in advance of your watch party to make it easier to find on the day of the event. All videos will begin approximately 10 minutes in advance of the listed panel start time.

- **Identify which event panels you wish to livestream at your watch party**
The Tribune's [Future of Rural Texas symposium](#) will host over eight hours of in-depth and on-the-record discussions with top lawmakers and community leaders on a variety of challenges facing rural communities across Texas. For your watch party, you may wish to stream the full event or only a select portion highlighting specific topics most important to your community.

Make sure you consult the [event schedule](#) in advance of your watch party so you know the appropriate time to convene your event.

IMPORTANT: [The Future of Rural Texas: A Texas Tribune Symposium](#) is being **livestreamed** Nov. 12-13 as lawmakers, community leaders, residents and other stakeholders gather in person for the event in College Station. While all panels from the event will be available via video after its conclusion, the event is only **live** and open to virtual audience questions at the time and date listed [here](#).

- **Pull up the video page on the days of the event and press play**
At the times listed on the event schedule, the [live video](#) from the event happening in College Station will be available and accessible. All videos will begin approximately 10 minutes in advance of the listed panel start time. If you are tuning in to the event live, you will be able to virtually send questions to event organizers in College Station that may be asked live on stage.
- **Missed the livestream? Don't fret**
After the event, video of each panel from the symposium will be available [here](#) for you to access and stream at any time, along with a recap of the event, including highlights from the conversation, written by a Texas Tribune reporter.



Next Up:

Hosting a community conversation follow-up discussion

The discussions of rural issues and the future of rural Texas at the symposium are only the beginning of the conversation — **we also want to hear from you.** Using the Tribune’s event as a spark, we also hope you’ll convene members of your community for a meaningful conversation on the future of rural Texas and the most pressing issues your community faces.

To foster a successful follow-up discussion, you will need to create a space for attendees to share their individual experiences and examine specific rural challenges faced by Texas communities. Below are some questions to consider before organizing a community conversation.

Set a goal

What do you want to accomplish with your event? Which community voices do you need to include to make sure you are getting a complete view of the issue? Goals could include:

- Raising awareness in your community about the impact of a specific rural challenge (such as education, health care or infrastructure) on local residents by providing virtual access to state lawmakers and other policy experts
- Bringing together members of various groups within your community (residents, business owners, etc.) for a broader understanding of the issues your rural community faces, and to discuss systemic problems and solutions from their unique vantage points
- Educating local residents about the realities of rural Texas, exploring how public policies can address these issues moving forward and proposing solutions for your community

Your goals should drive your planning decisions, with everything you do designed to help you reach them.

Identify which voices should be at the table

Which perspectives from your community will help give a holistic view of the issue you've chosen to address? Who is most affected by this issue? How are people affected differently? Which voices are most often heard, and which ones are often left out or ignored?

Making sure your event includes a diverse set of viewpoints (both among speakers and attendees) is critical to creating a meaningful dialogue. This is the foundation of a successful event.

Choose a conversation model that makes the most sense for your community

Who are you inviting, what specific needs do they have regarding access to resources, and what is the best way to structure the conversation to accomplish your established goal? The Texas Tribune has tested a variety of event models that serve different audiences and goals. A few examples you may consider:

- **Panel Discussion**

This is what we refer to as the “traditional” Texas Tribune event model, and it entails a panel discussion with experts on the issue representing a diverse set of perspectives and viewpoints, along with a knowledgeable moderator whose role is to get the panelists to provide the audience with a base

understanding of the issue and answer the tough questions. The panel is then followed by an audience-led question-and-answer period, where those in attendance are invited to ask questions of the panel and offer their perspectives. This model works best for large groups.



Texas Tribune event with Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings on Feb. 9, 2018.

- **Roundtable Discussion**

This model entails dividing attendees into small groups (four to eight people per group) to dive deeper into one aspect of a broader topic (e.g. the challenges around access to health care in rural communities) through small group discussions. Attendees at each table work together to compile a list of key insights from their discussion and proposed solutions or takeaways to be shared with the larger group. This model works well for groups of any size.

- **Reading and Video Club**

This model entails inviting a small group (20 people or less) of diverse participants to read a book or set of articles — or watch [video of a specific panel](#) after the Texas Tribune symposium — on various aspects of an issue, and then discuss the readings. You can find a list of recommended reading and video on a variety of challenges faced by rural communities on page 22 of this toolkit.

- **Virtual AMA**

While it can be difficult to convene a group of people with busy schedules for an in-person event, a well-organized online discussion can provide a meaningful alternative. You can host an online discussion in the Ask Me Anything format, in which an expert on your chosen topic answers questions from a virtual audience. To convene this discussion, you will need to identify one or more experts and an online platform (such as Facebook, Reddit, etc.). You'll also want to define the scope of the AMA as a topic that your expert(s) can speak to for at least an hour, though you may also want to limit the duration of the discussion for experts and participants alike (Will questions be answered live? Over the course of a day? Or a week?). This model works well for groups of any size.



Planning your event

Please remember: Community conversations inspired by Texas Tribune content and this toolkit **are not** endorsed by The Texas Tribune and are not official Texas Tribune events. For a full list of upcoming official Tribune events, visit texastribune.org/events. Texas Tribune logos, official slogans or likeness may not be used for community events inspired by Texas Tribune reporting.

While we are not able to help you find a venue for your event or reach out to community partners on your behalf, our team is here to provide guidance or answer any questions you may have along the way:
communityconversations@texastribune.org.

Before your event

Finding a location

When considering where to hold your event, first consider your invitation list. If you are familiar with all of the event invitees, your home or a neighbor's backyard may be a good choice. If you are inviting people you may be less familiar with, consider a neutral place such as a private room at a local restaurant, a community center or a public library. Ask yourself, "Does the location fit the guest list and tone of the conversation I wish to host?" Here are a few additional questions to consider when selecting a location for your event:

- How many people do I think will attend this discussion? What is the seating capacity?
- Where is a convenient, community-friendly space where people naturally congregate?
- What area of my community would encourage attendance by a diverse audience? Which areas would limit a diverse audience?
- When are my guests most likely to be available to attend, based on their schedules? What venues have available space for those times?
- Can the venue accommodate my audio/visual or other technical needs?
- Is parking available at the venue? Is it easily accessible to those with disabilities?
- Is there a fee to use this space? If budget is a consideration, a few low cost venue options may include: libraries, school auditoriums, community centers, churches, synagogues, temples and mosques.

Securing speakers

This section applies to your follow-up community conversation.

If you choose a community conversation event model that involves speakers or experts, be sure to choose speakers with broad expertise related to the challenge your event is focused on. If you choose to have multiple speakers at your event, make sure their expertise and perspectives represent the diversity of your community. Speakers at your event could include:

- City or local officials
- Community leaders working in the field of your chosen topic (administrators, health care officials, etc.)
- Local business owners
- Residents impacted by that specific rural challenge.

A few best practices after securing speakers for your event:

- After you have received confirmation from your speaker(s), introduce them to the other speakers you've invited. Additionally, if they will be speaking in a moderated discussion, introduce them to the moderator.
- Inform your speakers if you will be recording the event or have invited press to attend. Be mindful that because of the intimate nature of this issue, some might not be comfortable speaking publicly about their personal experience.
- Ahead of your event, share a draft of the event agenda — and your desired outcomes and goals — with your speakers.

Promoting your event

It is essential to promote the event within your community in a way that encourages a diverse audience to attend and participate. Here are a few suggestions to help you get there:

- **Send personal invitations.** One of your most effective strategies will be to send personal email invitations to local organizations, businesses and individuals who have a stake in or affinity for the specific topic your event is focused on.
- **Ask community partners to help promote your event.** Make a list of key local groups and advocates you can work with to bring more diverse voices to your discussion and help get the word out about your event.
- **Advertise at popular community gathering places.** If your event is open to the public, a good way to get the word out is to create flyers and hang them at community centers, restaurants, local businesses and other popular gathering locations. Be sure to include your event title, time, location and a clear and direct invitation for community members to attend. We've created a few promotional material templates you are welcome to use on page 26 of this toolkit.
- **Create an online event posting.** Promote your event online by creating a Facebook event, Eventbrite listing or other online event promotion. This will also help you collect RSVPs so you can message attendees event information as needed.
- **Use social media.** Post about your event on social media platforms that your community uses regularly (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Nextdoor, etc.). Encourage your event attendees, partners and speakers to post about your event by sharing sample social media posts with them that they can easily copy and send to their networks.

- **Collaborate with community partners:** Which local groups and advocates in your community can you work with to help bring more voices into the conversation? Which organizations can help you diversify the viewpoints at your event? Potential partners could include:
 - Neighborhood associations
 - Rural advocacy groups
 - Local businesses
 - K-12 schools and community colleges
 - Parents and families
 - Veterans groups

Make a list of local leaders and organizations you could join forces with. Partnering with them will strengthen your efforts to bring a diverse group of perspectives to your event, identify experts on the topic and promote your event.

If you're thinking about hosting a watch party of the Tribune's Future of Rural Texas symposium or a community conversation on issues facing rural Texans, please let us know by filling out [this brief form](#) so we can share your event with our readers. All we ask is that you report back to us on the outcome of your discussions.

During your event

Discussion questions

We encourage you to use your event to communicate about the issues that are most important to you and your community. Feel free to use these questions as a starting point to springboard your discussions.

- How do you define the leading issues of concern for rural communities in Texas?
- What issues concerning rural Texas would you like to see the Legislature address in the 2019 session?
- Rural hospitals are folding up at an alarming rate. What can be done about that?
- What can be done to offset those hospital closings to ensure medical care for rural Texans?
- Parts of rural Texas have become deserts of one kind or another: medical, food, education, information (internet access, for example) and so on. Is that something that needs to be addressed?
- What do urban and suburban Texans understand the least about what the state's rural communities are facing, and why should they be more concerned about these issues?
- What changes are needed in primary and secondary education, if any, that are specific to rural Texas? What about school finance-related issues?
- What does Texas need to be doing in higher education to benefit rural parts of the state?
- Are the state's conservation, land use and environmental laws properly set up for rural Texas? What are the issues that need conversation? (Eminent domain? Groundwater use and pollution? Solid waste regulations? What else?)
- Texas and its cities and counties regularly participate in competitions for corporate relocations, plant openings and other economic development operations. Are we accounting for rural Texas the way we should be with these policies? If not, what would be more helpful?
- Do you think the challenges facing rural Texas have more to do with where people want to be, or with the way we handle public resources, government and law? Is the problem with policy, or with cultural change, and what do you have to say about that?

Record your community's findings and report them

What key insights emerged from your event? What did your attendees agree on, and what were the points of tension? How did attendees' individual experiences compare to that of the larger group and to those mentioned during our event on rural Texas? What solutions were proposed?

Assign at least one note-taker to record the key insights, takeaways, solutions and action items that emerged from your discussion. You may also record the event (audio and/or video) for this purpose, or assign multiple note-takers for smaller breakout discussions. Share these findings with your event attendees and with us by [completing our post-event survey](#) or by emailing us at communityconversations@texastribune.org.

Please be sure to record the names and affiliations of your speakers, experts and other community members cited. We want to know about the challenges and insights identified by your community as we continue reporting on this issue ahead of the 86th legislative session, which begins January 8, 2019.

Provide relevant reading and resources to help inform the conversation:

Policy:

- **The Future of Rural Texas Symposium panel:** [The 86th Legislature and the Rural Agenda](#)
- Texas Observer: [Texas Democrats want to turn out rural voters, but what's their plan?](#)
- Texas Observer: [The 7 most pressing issues facing rural Texas](#)
- Dallas Morning News: [Blue in a red county: Rural Democrats, energized by Trump's election, push to overcome stigma](#) (\$)
- Dallas Morning News: [Rural Texas is on the front lines of the GOP's war for its identity](#) (\$)
- The Texas Monitor: [Travis Clardy: Too moderate to be House speaker or just moderate enough?](#)

Education:

- **The Future of Rural Texas Symposium panel:** [Educating the Next Generation](#)
- Texas Tribune: [When school's out, rural Texas towns struggle to feed their hungry kids](#)
- Texas Tribune: [This Texas school began arming teachers with guns in 2007. More than 170 other districts have followed](#)
- Texas Tribune: [Arming teaching with guns? West Texas A&M arms teachers with computers](#)
- Texas Observer: [Cash-strapped rural Texas schools look to universities for help](#)
- Dallas Morning News: [Texas' rural schools need help attracting teachers, and it's all about the pay](#) (\$)

Infrastructure

- **The Future of Rural Texas Symposium panel:** [Investing in Infrastructure](#)
- Texas Tribune: [Texas is making billions from oil and gas drilling, but counties say rural roads are being destroyed](#)
- Texas Tribune: [A new boom for oil but a bust for Texas' rural roads](#)
- The Architects Newspaper: [AN travels to West Texas for a photo essay on extraction infrastructure](#)
- East Texas Matters: [Tyler mayor announces #TimeToBuild infrastructure plan](#)

Natural resources

- **The Future of Rural Texas Symposium panel:** [Preserving Natural Resources](#)
- Yahoo Finance: [West Texas oil is gushing but pipelines can't handle it](#)
- Bloomberg: [Welcome to the 'Man Camps' of West Texas \(\\$\)](#)
- San Angelo Standard-Times: [West Texas Legislative Summit dives deep into energy, infrastructure, its effect on state](#)
- Wall Street Journal: [Bigger oil pipelines are coming to West Texas to ease bottleneck \(\\$\)](#)
- San Angelo LIVE!: [With the largest oil find in history of West Texas, are eminent domain laws fair?](#)

Health

- **The Future of Rural Texas Symposium panel:** [Ensuring Rural Health](#)
- Texas Tribune: [Why are Texas' smaller utilities not cleaning up drinking water?](#)
- Texas Tribune: [A shrinking number of rural Texas hospitals still deliver babies. Here's what that means for expecting moms.](#)
- Texas Standard: [Rural Texas is struggling to keep doctors. A proposed medical school wants to change that.](#)
- Texas Observer: [Report: Oil and gas production is making people sick in rural Texas](#)
- Tyler Morning Telegraph: [ET Health looks to improve health, reduce sickness in East Texas by hitting the road with mobile clinic](#)
- Tyler Morning Telegraph: [WIC aims to keep East Texas families healthy](#)

Economy

- The Future of Rural Texas Symposium panel: [The State of the Rural Economy](#)
- The Future of Rural Texas Symposium panel: [Building an Economic Future](#)
- Fort Worth Star-Telegram: [Large parts of rural Texas and the country lack high speed internet, and can't compete](#)
- Midland Reporter-Telegram: [Electricity use soars in booming Permian](#)
- San Angelo LIVE!: [Energy is the backbone of Texas' economy and it's getting bigger](#)
- Reuters: [Hundreds line up for gushing West Texas oil jobs](#)
- Longview News-Journal: [Gregg County property values show healthy increase after flat few years](#)

After your event

Feel free to send us a recap of your event by [filling out this form](#) or emailing us at communityconversations@texastribune.org. A Texas Tribune staff member will be in touch to follow up.

Here's a list of questions to consider when sending us your emails:

1. When and where was your watch party or community conversation? What was the turnout like?
2. What were your main insights from the event? What did your attendees learn and take away from the discussion?
3. What was the most successful aspect of your event? Did you see any challenges in your discussions?
4. What proposed solutions did you come up with?
5. Do you have any photos/videos from your event that you are willing to share with us?
6. What other resources would have helped your event that weren't included in this toolkit?
7. Which materials in this toolkit did you find most helpful?
8. Would you be interested in hosting another community conversation or watch party based on Texas Tribune events?
9. Anything else that you think we should know?

Promotional materials for your watch party or community conversation:

Below you will find a few printable and downloadable promotional materials that you may use to promote your watch party or community conversation.

Please remember: Community conversations inspired by Texas Tribune content and this toolkit **are not** endorsed by The Texas Tribune and are not official Texas Tribune events. Texas Tribune logos, official slogans or likenesses may not be used for community events inspired by Texas Tribune reporting.

All event-related print materials, invitations and web listings must include this phrase: “This is an independently organized event inspired by reporting from The Texas Tribune, a nonprofit, nonpartisan media organization that informs Texans — and engages with them — about public policy, politics, government and statewide issues.”

Promotional Poster ([download here](#) or page 28)



Community Conversation: On the Future of Rural Texas

Join us for a conversation on the most pressing
rural issues facing our community

LOCATION | DATE |

RSVP | TIME |

This is an independently organized event inspired by reporting from The Texas Tribune, a nonprofit, nonpartisan media organization that informs Texans — and engages with them — about public policy, politics, government and statewide issues.

Social Media Graphic ([download here](#))

Community Conversation:

On the Future of Rural Texas

Join us for a conversation on the most pressing
rural issues facing our community



Stay in touch

Thank you for using our toolkit! This toolkit is part of our Community Conversation series, which seeks to catalyze a constructive dialogue on important issues faced by communities across Texas. Learn more about Community Conversations [here](#).

Here are a few additional ways you can stay in touch with The Texas Tribune and our work.



facebook.com/texastribune



twitter.com/texastribune
@TexasTribune



reddit.com/user/texastribune



facebook.com/groups/thisisyourtexas/





Community Conversation: On the Future of Rural Texas

Join us for a conversation on the most pressing
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LOCATION

DATE

RSVP

TIME

This is an independently organized event inspired by reporting from The Texas Tribune, a nonprofit, nonpartisan media organization that informs Texans — and engages with them — about public policy, politics, government and statewide issues.