

# INVEST *to* ELECT

ILLINOIS

ITE Organization Recommendation

Organization: New Rural Project, North Carolina

Principals–Cynthia Wallace, Co-Founder & Executive Director

Helen Probst Mills–Co-Founder

Mission: New Rural Project’s (“NRP”) mission is to increase civic and electoral engagement of historically marginalized and under age 40 residents in Union, Anson, Richmond, Scotland, Robeson, Hoke, and Moore counties with a goal of helping to build successful, vibrant communities.

Landscape: **In the 2020 General election in NC, then Chief Justice Cheri Beasley lost her election by a mere 401 votes out of 5 million cast.** In NRP’s focus counties **almost 60,000 voters of color** did not vote in that election which negatively affected the outcome. The data shows that in NRP’s focus counties, the number of African American men participating in elections has steadily declined since a high in 2008 and 2012 (Obama years). In the 2020 General election, the voter turnout rate for Black men in Anson County was 63% while the voter turnout rate for White men was 75%. This means that **1,200 Black male registered voters** did not vote in the 2020 General election. This voter turnout disparity also occurred between Black and White women meaning that while African Americans make up a higher percentage of the registered voters in Anson County, they were only 46% of the actual voters in 2020. In Scotland County, we saw only 62% of registered non-white voters turning out to vote compared to 73% of white registered voters resulting in **~4,500 registered voters of color** not voting. Since 2008, this trend of a steady drop-off in participation of voters of color is evident in all of the seven counties, although it is much less pronounced in Hoke County where there are experienced advocates and younger African American elected officials who are focused on engaging the community in the electoral process.

NRP’s work begins and ends with listening to the needs of the community. In 2021, NRP worked with Change Research to conduct focus groups with infrequent African American, Hispanic, and Native American registered voters, and held “County Conversations” in all seven of our focus counties to gain an understanding of what

the barriers are to civic and electoral participation and our constituencies areas of concern.

Plan of Action:

**Barbershop Conversations:** In conjunction with Triad Barber School of Anson County (one of NRP's community partners), NRP plans to hold a series of conversations in barbershops. In the rural NC community, barbershops are a familiar gathering place for African American men. The goal is to further understand the barriers African American men have faced when voting, and the critical issues that they care about which can be solved if they are more civically and electorally involved. Focus groups indicated that providing non-judgmental supportive spaces to educate African American men about their community, government, and the impact of their voice and vote resulted in infrequent/non-voters wanting to learn more and increase civic engagement.

**Deep Canvassing (Front Porch Conversations) and GOTV Canvassing:**

Front Porch Conversations (deep canvassing) have several purposes: 1) understand the barriers that have limited voting behavior, and 2) identify the issues that are of concern to the resident, and, to the extent possible, uplift that need and help to have it addressed, and 3) increase voter turnout in the 2022 election. NRP speaks with voters on their doorstep, by text, and by phone. NRP will track the number of attempts and successful interactions made by methodology. They will also be measuring results by comparing the number of individuals who vote in the municipal election in Scotland County this spring with historical municipal election turnout numbers.

Recommendation: We recommend funding New Rural Project for the following reasons:

- Clarity of Mission
- Impactful Plan of Action with Measurable Results
- Experience of Co-Founders
- Meets ITE Mission Objectives to fund organizations in battleground states focused on voter engagement with a clear mission to educate unregistered/infrequent voters.