

For Immediate Release

October 21, 2024

Utopia Rural Roundup: How to Win Grants in the Rural Hill Country

On October 19, 2024, the Hill Country Alliance and the Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country joined forces for a Rural Roundup in Utopia, focused on winning grants in the rural Hill Country. This event brought out more than 50 participants from Bandera, Kerr, Kimble, Llano, Medina, Real, and Uvalde counties and offered a day filled with success stories and lessons learned from local groups in Utopia that have secured funding for vital public services, including recycling, parks, fire, and EMS, as well as from funders in our region.

"We're proud of the work we're doing in Utopia," said Allan Boutwell, a volunteer with Keep Utopia Beautiful. "This event was not only an opportunity to showcase what has worked in our community, but also a chance to learn from and connect with others who are passionate about making their ideas for community projects a reality."

The agenda for the day included:

- **Opening Remarks:** Allan Boutwell of Keep Utopia Beautiful and Municipal Judge Cindy Casburn of Sabinal welcomed participants. Grace Gilker and Cliff Kaplan of the Hill Country Alliance got the dialog started, asking participants what had brought them to the workshop.
- **Building Parks and Community in Utopia:** Valerie Moore of the Utopia Parks Board, Allan Boutwell of Keep Utopia Beautiful, and Mayor Rebeca Gibson of Bandera discussed successful strategies for long-term, ongoing, and project-based fundraising success.
- **A Walking Tour of Utopia Square:** Valerie Moore, James Trotti of Utopia Volunteer Fire Department, and Doug Carlyle of Utopia Emergency Medical Services, led a walk around the square and public safety facilities, highlighting the fundraising that supported the acquisition of these community assets.
- **Funding Safety in Utopia:** James Trotti, Doug Carlyle, and Judge Cindy Casburn discussed how to identify and secure funding for critical public services in an unincorporated community.
- **How to Win Big: Regional, State, and Federal Funds:** Austin Dickson of the Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country, Carol Faulkenberry of the Texas Department of Agriculture, Regional Director Regina Aviles of US Rep. Tony Gonzales' office, Raul Serna of USDA's Rural Development Uvalde office, Sara Walters of Keep Texas Recycling, and Cliff Kaplan of the Hill Country Alliance discussed the ins and outs of grant applications, from a funder's perspective.
- **Utopia Recycles Tour:** Greg Harmison led a tour of Utopia's Recycling Plant, which is grant funded and an incredible regional asset.
- **Community Connect - Live Music at Castlerock Gym:** The day concluded with drinks and networking at Castlerock Gym, providing attendees with a chance to unwind and connect.

The Rural Roundup series is a traveling community showcase and a program of Leading in the Rural Hill Country - a collaborative initiative dedicated to empowering rural communities in the Texas Hill Country. Leading in the Rural Hill Country seeks to foster innovation, leadership development, and community resilience in rural areas through partnerships with local organizations and stakeholders.

Find materials from the Utopia Rural Roundup, learn more about this collaborative series, and stay tuned for updates by visiting the Hill Country Alliance website or going to <https://bit.ly/LRHC2024>

Partners:

Hill Country Alliance: The Hill Country Alliance is a nonprofit organization that brings together a diverse coalition of partners to preserve the open spaces, starry night skies, clean and abundant waters, and unique character of the Texas Hill Country.

Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country: The Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country is dedicated to improving the quality of life for residents of the Hill Country region through philanthropic initiatives.

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Photos:



Rural Roundup attendees listen to a panel with funders, including Sara Walters, Program Director, Keep Texas Beautiful; Carol Faulkenberry, Region 2 Field Representative, Texas Department of Agriculture; Regina Aviles, Regional District Director, US. Rep. Tony Gonzales; Austin Dickson, CEO, Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country; and Raul Serna, Uvalde Specialist, US Department of Agriculture.



Doug Carlyle, Utopia EMS President, and Judge Cindy Casburn, Justice of the Peace of Sabinal, discuss how it takes multiple sources of income to fund Utopia's EMS service.



Rural Roundup attendees in front of the Utopia Recycles.



Rhonda Garofano, Utopia EMS Director, and Doug Carlyle, Utopia EMS President, demonstrate the hydraulic stretcher system acquired with an LCRA grant.



James Trotti, Chief of the Utopia Volunteer Fire Department, shows attendees the rain barrels the fire department won from an LCRA grant for fire suppression.