



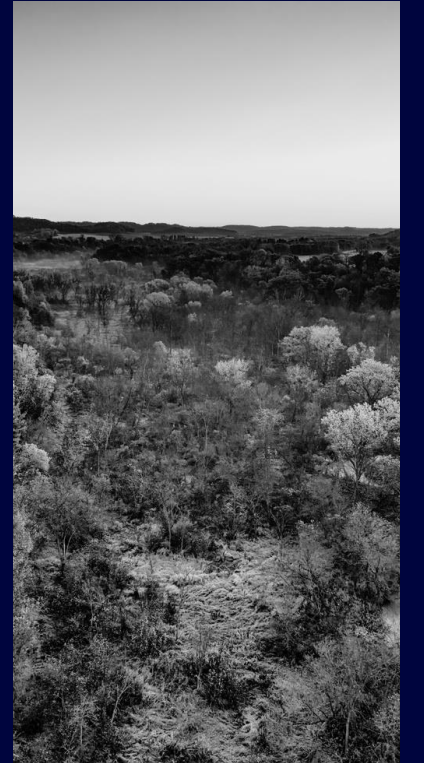
# ADDRESSING SUBSTANCE USE IN RURAL APPALACHIA

MARY JO HEDRICK, PH.D & ANDI CLEMENTS, PH.D.

RURAL HEALTH VOICE CONFERENCE

NOVEMBER 19, 2025 - NOVEMBER 20, 2025

# Goals



- Building authentic relationships with rural communities
- Transportation as a bridge to treatment access
- Volunteer networks & training to expand service capacity

# HISTORIC DISTRUST IN CONTEXT

When you hear “Appalachia,” what words, images, or feelings come to mind?



---

**01** Coal extraction, opioid crisis, external decision-making → cycles of distrust

---

**02** How these histories shape relationships with outsiders

---

**03** Transportation challenges are one way historical inequities continue to limit access to care.

---

# SAMHSA's Pillars of Trauma Informed Care



## SAFETY

Creating an organizational environment allows individuals to express themselves freely without fearing negative impacts on their self-image, status, or career, even when challenging common beliefs.



## TRUST & TRANSPARENCY

In an organization, it is vital to demonstrate openness and honesty with others, regardless of how difficult the feedback may be.



## PEER SUPPORT

Systematic efforts connect individuals with similar experiences, allowing less experienced individuals to gain wisdom and advice from those more experienced.



## COLLABORATION & MUTUALITY

In an organization, promoting collaboration among individuals while reducing hierarchical power differences is vital.



## EMPOWERMENT, VOICE, & CHOICE

Individuals feel valued and recognized when their experiences, talents, and strengths are acknowledged and maximized by others.



## SOCIOHISTORICAL IDENTITY

An organization goes beyond cultural stereotypes by implementing inclusive policies, providing culturally responsive services, utilizing traditional cultural connections for healing, acknowledging historical trauma, and actively preventing re-traumatization.



## COLLABORATION & MUTUALITY

- Leveling power differences, co-creating solutions
- Nothing about us without us.
- What does mutuality look like in your work?



# Defining “Being There”

Presence, reciprocity, and relational accountability all require physical and emotional access — and that means reliable transportation.

**01**

## Presence

Showing up consistently

**02**

## Reciprocity

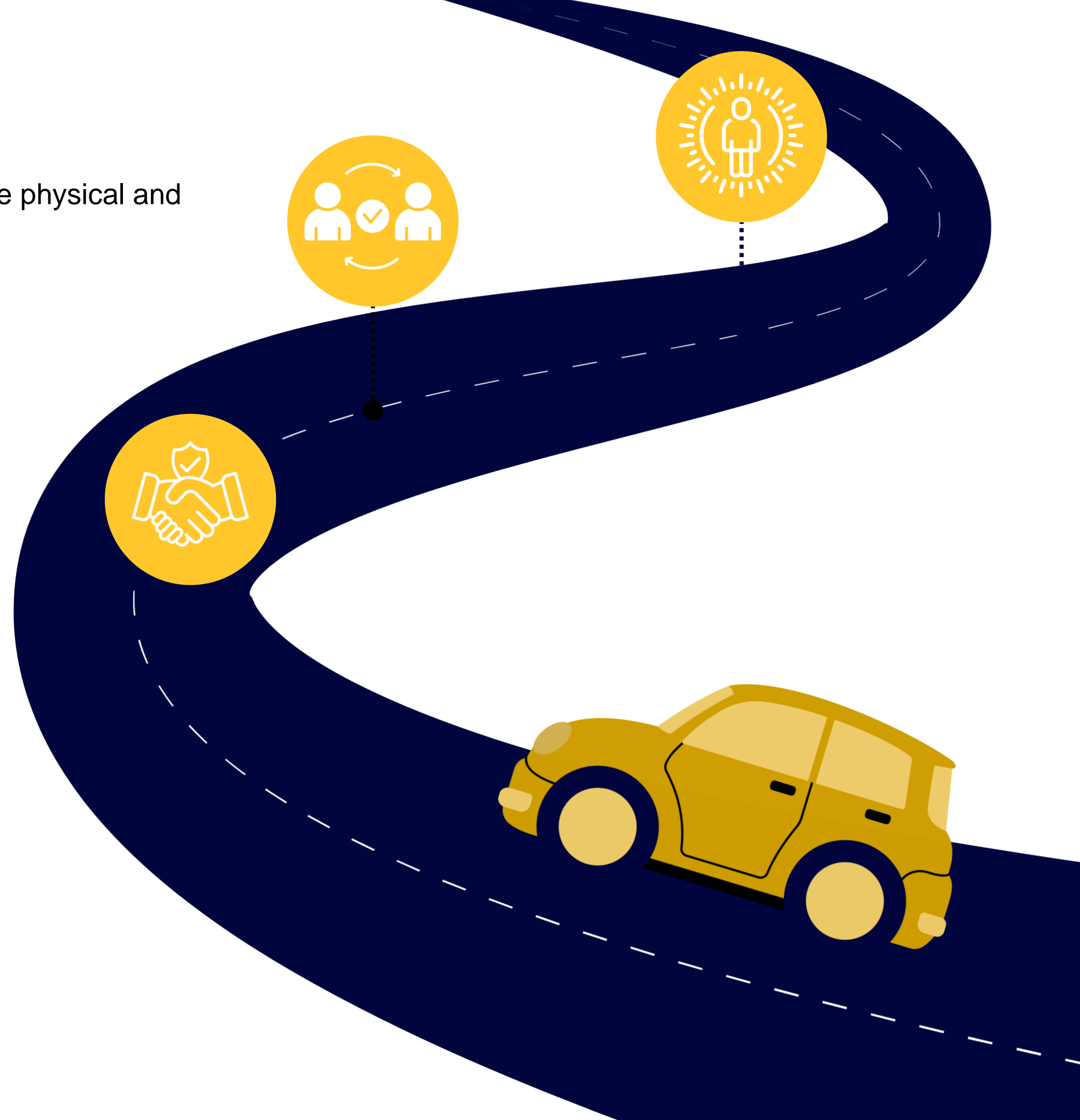
Two-way benefit, not extraction

**03**

## Relational Accountability

Response to community voice

What does “being there” look like when transportation is the barrier?





# Case Study #1

## Community Learning Events





## Case Study #2

# Expert Contractors

- What worked? What didn't?
- Stigma both ways: experts seen as outsiders, locals not seen as "credible"
- How do we balance expertise and lived experience?

## Case Study #3 SW VA Learning Days

Showing up without an agenda

Trust & future collaboration

What changes when you show up just  
to listen?





# Case Study #4: Transportation as Connection

- Uplift Rides builds interpersonal connections through volunteer driver programs coordinated by local faith communities.
- Volunteer drivers receive trauma-informed training to reduce stigma and intentionally build relationships with riders.
- In the first 10 months:
  - 114 riders transported
  - 12 volunteer drivers + 1 paid driver
  - 22,000+ miles driven

# Transportation Builds Connection

Domain	Measure	Direction of Change
Basic Needs	Employment as a concern	↓ Fewer reported employment concerns*
	Food as a concern	↓ Fewer reported food concerns*
	Transportation as a concern	↓ Fewer reporting transportation as a concern
Stigma	“Perceived stigma from churchgoers”	↓ Felt less stigma from churchgoers
Social Connection	“I wish I felt more connected”	↓ Fewer expressing loneliness
	“How connected do you feel to others?”	↑ Improved connection
Faith / Community Engagement	Frequency of gathering with a religious community	↑ Modest increase
	Religious commitment	↑ Modest increase
* $p < .05$		

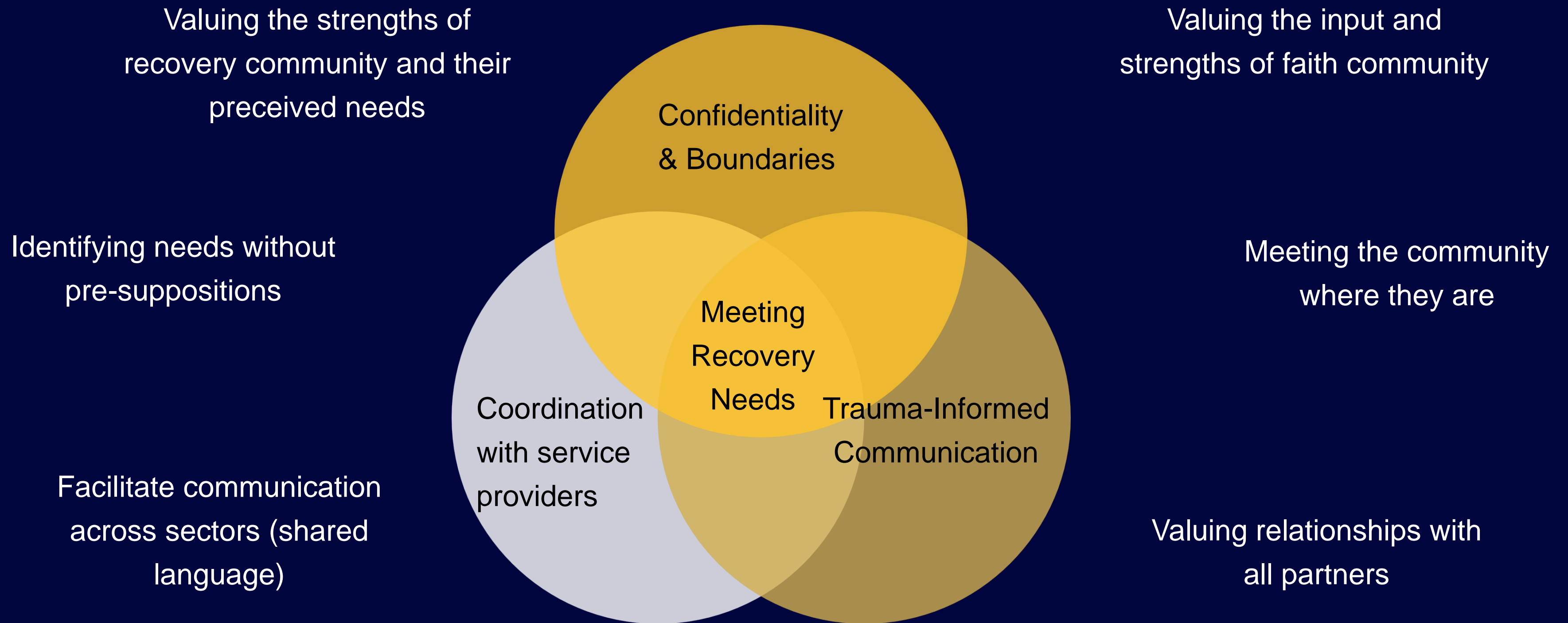
# Scenario Set: Transportation & Addiction Recovery In Rural Virginia

At your tables, you have situations where a significant barrier to recovery or maintaining recovery is transportation. Use the expertise and personal connections in your group. Answer these questions on your flip charts:

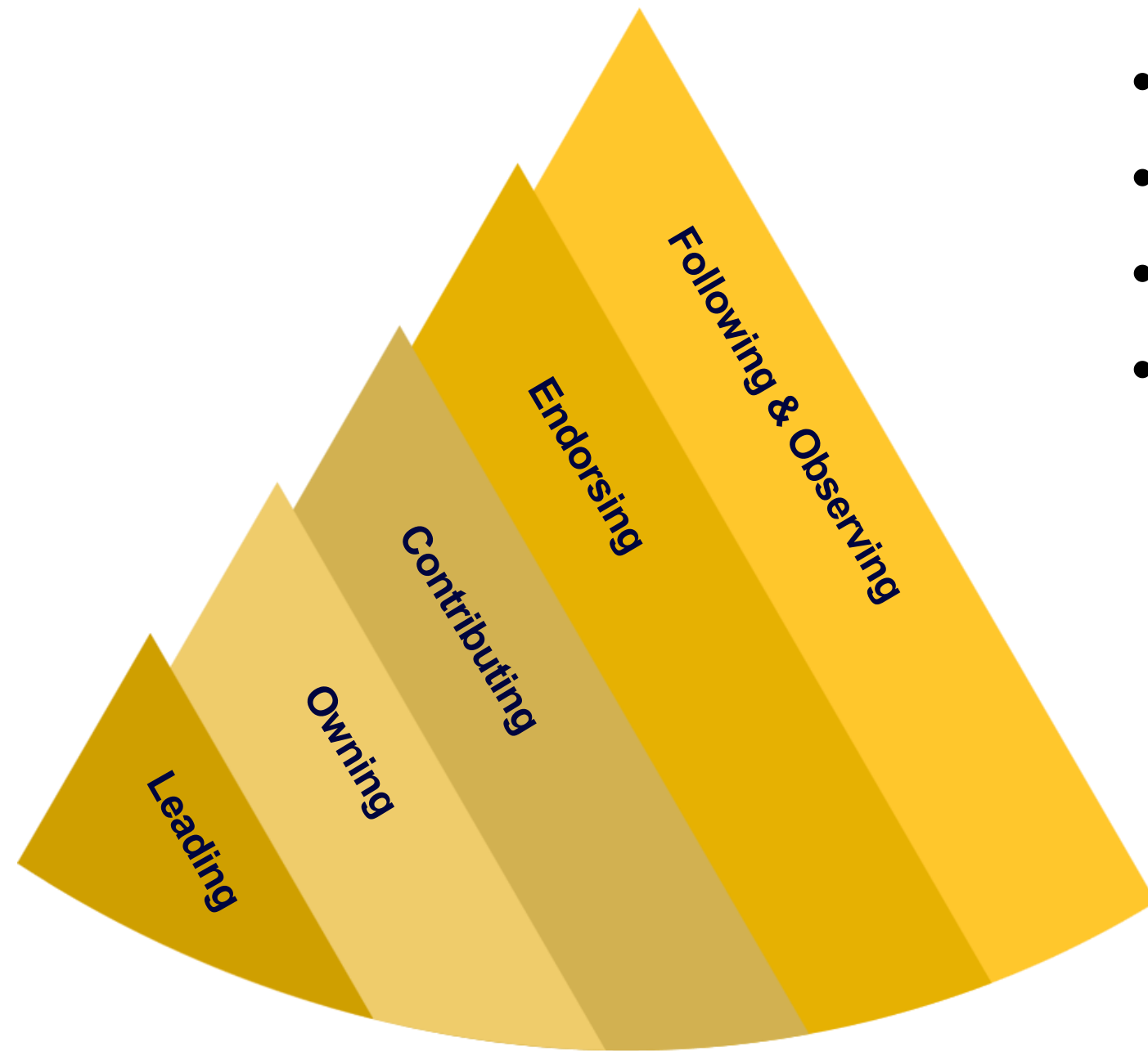
- Immediate fixes (what can be done tomorrow)
- Long-term solutions
- What will be the biggest challenge?
- Who else should be “at the table” to address it?



# Developing Volunteer & Peer Networks



# Principles for Engagement



- Consistency over intensity
- Share data back in plain language
- Local co-leadership on every project
- Avoid “drive-by” research or programming

# Pulling it Together



Being there = presence,  
reciprocity, accountability



Collaboration & Mutuality  
= power sharing, voice, co-  
creation



Transportation =  
connection that makes  
presence possible

When we show up—literally and relationally—we  
create just, sustainable systems.

# Thank you!

## Contact Us!

Mary Jo Hedrick- [olivermj@etsu.edu](mailto:olivermj@etsu.edu)

Andi Clements- [clements@etsu.edu](mailto:clements@etsu.edu)