

**COME TO
THE TABLE**

rafiUSA

2019 Gatherings Evaluation Summary

During the summer of 2019, the Come to the Table program of the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI-USA) held two Gatherings as follow-ups to the statewide Come to the Table Conference hosted in March of the same year. The first was the Justice Gathering for Faith & Community Leaders held May 1-2 at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. The second was the Gathering for Rural Faith Leaders held on August 29 at Pink Hill United Methodist Church in Pink Hill, North Carolina.

The Gathering in Charlotte centered on deepening participants' understanding of equity as it relates to food justice, building relationships to support and sustain the work, and envisioning how participants can move from knowledge to action. Rev. Dr. Fatimah Salleh shared a keynote on radical experimentation, the complexity and challenge of justice work, and self care, and participants used the "5 Whys" activity to examine why justice work is so hard. Rev. Dr. Stephanie Hand led a break out session on racial equity work in faith communities while Vivette Jeffries-Logan and Tina Vasquez led a session on how organizations do equity work internally. We finished the day with a visit to the Catawba Cultural Preservation Project. The second day began with a timeline and gallery walk of the history of race and land in America, followed by the "Storytelling Activity" which frames different kinds of stories that are told. We closed with a visioning and implementation session led by Nykke Ford.

The Pink Hill Gathering focused on navigating life as a rural pastor through deepening participants' understanding of community engagement and learning and practicing how to have difficult conversations. Jabe Largen shared stories of "Life Together," chronicling his church's growing relationship with the Faison community through community-based partnerships, ending with critical reflection on how churches can relate to their rural contexts. Justine Post of Resourceful Communities discussed Uplifting Inclusive Strategies for Community Engagement that focused on practical methods that rural faith leaders can utilize to create change in their communities effectively. Liz Styron helped us shift from charity to justice, utilizing biblical texts to draw out distinctions between charity- and justice-based models of addressing systemic poverty, creating a holistic perspective that ties the two together, and offering a framework for balancing the two. Finally, the event ended with a role play illustrating how to navigate difficult conversations.

We collected information on each of the Gatherings through registration forms and evaluation surveys that participants completed at the end of the event.

Who came to the Gatherings?

- The Pink Hill Gathering included 28 attendees and 3 staff. The Charlotte Gathering included 33 attendees and 3 staff.
- The attendees at the Pink Hill Gathering were primarily rural pastors, with many of them being elders in the United Methodist Church. Additionally, several attendees were community organizers and representatives of various area non-profit organizations. The vocations of the attendees at the Charlotte Gathering were considerably more varied: in addition to non-profit coordinators and project managers, there were several community organizers, retirees, community gardeners, and university employees.

Demographics

CTTT strives to develop events and experiences that are inclusive and reflect the diversity of lived experiences across the state. In order to check our success with this, we tracked certain demographic information of Gathering attendees during the registration process of each Gathering. By doing so, we can understand who is and who is *not* attending CTTT events. With this information we can better tailor our programming and outreach in the future.

The **gender** representation at each of the Gatherings differed somewhat, with a stronger majority of female participants at the Charlotte Gathering (67%) than the Pink Hill Gathering (55%).

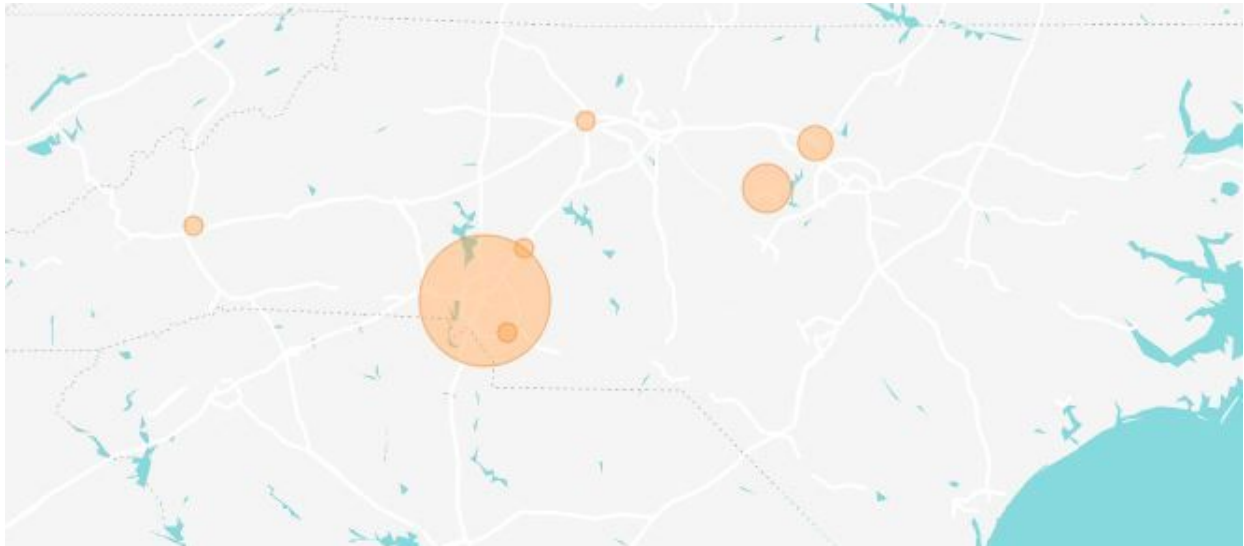
The **racial/ethnic identities** represented by the attendees at each of the Gatherings were significantly different. While three out of four attendees at the Pink Hill Gathering were white, the majority of attendees at the Charlotte Gathering were black. We believe that this difference was greatly impacted by our decision to primarily target rural UMC pastors for the Pink Hill Gathering. The racial/ethnic breakdown is as follows:

Charlotte: 51% black, 33% white, 5% multiracial, 3% Native American, 8% did not respond
Pink Hill: 76% white, 19% black, 5% Asian-American

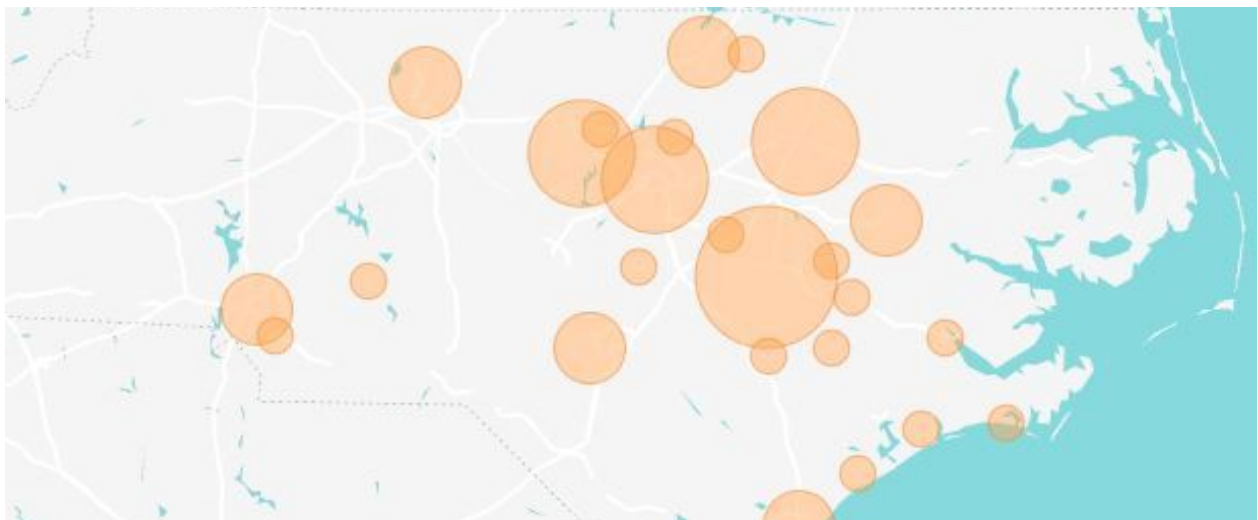
RAFI will continue to expand our network in order for our programming to reach communities of all races, ethnicities, and gender identifications. One area we hope to focus on in particular is increasing our connections with the Latinx community as none of the Gathering attendees identified with this race/ethnicity although almost 10% of NC citizens identify as Latinx (US Census Bureau).

The following maps represents the **geography** of both the Charlotte and Pink Hill Gatherings attendees based on the ticket purchase location. RAFI staff and Gathering facilitators are included in

each of the maps, many of whom live in the Triangle region, which results in a slightly skewed geographic representation. The Charlotte Gathering had a core of attendees from the Charlotte metro area. The Pink Hill Gathering had representation from the Northeastern and Central Eastern parts of the state, with few attendees coming from Central Western North Carolina.



Justice Gathering for Faith & Community Leaders (Charlotte)



Gathering for Rural Faith Leaders (Pink Hill)

Finally, we asked **what type of organization**, if any, attendees represented at each of the Gatherings. At the Charlotte Gathering, secular non-profits were by far the most represented type of organization, outnumbering religious non-profits, churches, and other types 3-to-1 combined. This was largely a result of the more diverse demographics of the Charlotte Conference, a primary source of recruiting for the Charlotte Gathering. In contrast, churches outnumbered all other kinds of organizations at the Pink Hill Gathering, 2-to-1, which was highly impacted by our targeting rural United Methodist pastors.

Feedback on Gathering Content

At the end of each Gathering, we asked attendees to complete an evaluation to provide feedback on the overall quality of the event and give specific feedback on various components. Between the two Gatherings, there was a 44% evaluation response rate. Most of the questions on the survey had open fields rather than multiple choice answer options, so responses were categorized according to similar themes.

Attendees ranked their satisfaction with aspects of the **overall event** as well as specific **components of the Gathering** on a scale from excellent to poor. The vast majority of responses from each of the Gatherings ranked the overall event and individual components as either excellent or good. While “fair” “poor” and “N/A” options were available for each rating, these were not selected.

Pink Hill Gathering						
	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor	N/A
Overall Event	87.5%	12.5%				
Food & Venue	75%	25%				
Usefulness of Information Presented	81%	19%				
Facilitators & Speakers	94%	6%				
Networking Opportunities	56%	38%	6%			

Charlotte Gathering						
	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor	N/A
Overall Event	78%	22%				
Food & Venue	76%	24%				
Usefulness of Information Presented	72%	17%	11%			
Facilitators & Speakers	72%	22%	6%			
Networking Opportunities	53%	47%				

Individual Gathering Components

Each Gathering had a different audience and agenda; so comparing and contrasting the ratings of each component, or section of the agenda, across Gatherings would be difficult. Overall, each event component was rated highly by attendees. All of the Pink Hill Gathering components were rated as “excellent” or “good” by at least 85% of attendees, while six out of seven components of the Charlotte Gathering were rated as “excellent” or “good” by 75% of attendees. While some Gathering components were ranked lower than others, all components received a “Excellent” or “Good” designation from the vast majority of attendees.

Attendees had great things to say about the Charlotte Gathering. Through our series of impactful presentations, attendees felt that they were powerfully brought into the space by the keynote and Fatimah’s modeling of truth-telling. They were moved by experiencing the content, particularly during the gallery walk, and also as a group brought a deep well of wisdom to share. In evaluations, several people commented on how much they enjoyed meeting new people and having conversations in between sessions that led to significant networking opportunities. Other aspects that were specifically mentioned included the trip to the Catawba Cultural Preservation Project (CCPP), each of the concurrently-held internal equity conversations, and the visioning and implementation session. Ultimately, **learning through discussion and group participation grounded in diversity** and differing backgrounds was most-cited as useful at the Charlotte Gathering.

The Pink Hill Gathering was also incredibly relevant and meaningful for attendees. Participants enjoyed the narrative storytelling aspects of the Gathering that included both real-life examples of how to relate to their communities, along with practical guidance on how to understand these examples. Additionally, attendees appreciated Scripture being incorporated into discussions of how they can balance charity- and justice-based models of community engagement. Similarly to the Charlotte Gathering, multiple people indicated that they enjoyed the conversational aspects of the Gathering and the networking opportunities afforded. In evaluations when asked about the most useful aspect of the Gathering, participants most frequently responded with broad appreciation. The even distribution of praise speaks to the coherent narrative expressed through the Gathering’s curation of presentations and the balance that emerged.

When asked **what should be added** to each Gathering, attendee responses were mixed.

Multiple participants at the Charlotte Gathering noted that adding more time to the length of the event overall, particularly for more exercises, would have been beneficial to their experience of the event. More topics related to funding, additional content directly related to food systems and food justice, and increased disclosure regarding what other participants are already engaged in through purposeful networking were all mentioned.

Attendees of the Pink Hill Gathering consistently desired additional interaction, conversation, and intentional networking space, with five of seven question respondents requesting some form of structured conversational space.

What Attendees Want to See at Future Come to the Table Events

We asked attendees what topics they hoped to see included in future Come to the Table events. Answers to these questions varied significantly between each of the Gatherings. In the Charlotte Gathering, multiple responses centered on learning more about grant-writing, funding, start-up finance, and non-profit organization. In the Pink Hill Gathering, attendees consistently cited wanting more localized and concrete approaches, such as how to start a community meal and concrete guidance regarding how a rural congregation can get involved in justice work.