



# Convening Communities: 2015 San Luis Valley Rural Philanthropy Day

## Convening Communities Overview

An important component and recent addition to Community Resource Center's Rural Programming has been the addition of the Convening Communities programming. This programming includes the Listening Tour, Community Dialogue Session at Rural Philanthropy Days and ongoing interim programming post-RPD that is catered to meet the needs of the local communities, and potential further the opportunities discussed at the Community Dialogue Sessions. This report describes the Convening Communities programming as well as details the discussions that took place at the 2015 San Luis Valley Rural Philanthropy Days Community Dialogue sessions.

## Listening Tour

On April 22-24, 2015 a delegation of funders met with high-level community leaders in candid discussions about the character of the San Luis Valley region, existing needs, community priorities and current collaborative initiatives in place to address such issues. The purpose of the regional Listening Tours was to provide a platform for statewide and local foundations to learn more about the broad challenges and various issues facing our rural Colorado regions. Three primary questions were asked:

1. *How would you describe the personality and culture of your community?*

2. *What do you see as a key issue or need in your community?*
3. *What successful efforts are currently underway to address these issues?*

Using the information provided by community attendees during the SLV RPD Listening Tour, CRC staff distributed a summary report of regional characteristics and cross-cutting needs to attending regional stakeholders, Listening Tour attendees, and conference participants.

### Community Dialogue Sessions Overview

On September 24, 2015, the second day of the RPD conference, a gathering of executive directors, topic experts, funders, and state and local government officials convene to discuss opportunities for regional success through collaborative dialogue. Representatives from approximately 20 Colorado foundations joined to de-brief on the results of the regional Listening Tour and discuss the topic that most resonates with their funding priorities and interests. Session participants identified potential resources, regional successes and challenges, and learned from their local counterparts as well as statewide experts and stakeholders. This session explores vital regional partnerships and potential collaborative opportunities. The sessions are designed to strengthen relationships and encourage dialogue across sectors and communities.

### Interim Programming

An Interim Steering Committee of community leaders and nonprofit individuals will form after the official RPD conference to move forward partnerships and collaborations which were explored during Community Dialogue Sessions. The Committee's purpose is to coordinate regional nonprofit educational opportunities and identify regional projects and resources to strengthen local communities.

### Community Dialogue Sessions

Community Leaders, local and front range funders, and government officials come together for the three Community Dialogue sessions: Listening Tour Debrief, Topic Area Breakout Discussions, and a wrap-up around the next steps for success and closing remarks.

From the Listening Tour, three overarching themes were repeated throughout the region:

- 1) *Increasing Access to Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Services*

- 2) *Creating Opportunities for Youth Development and Engagement*
- 3) *Establishing Partnerships to Create Sustainable Year-Long Economies.*

## Listening Tour Debrief

During the Listening Tour Debrief Session, participants from the community and Front Range convened to gain a broad understanding of the discussions that took place during the Listening Tour. Participants from the Listening Tour delegation joined regional experts to share their impression of key issues that emerged on the tour. The following delegates facilitated discussions on their respective topics:

### Behavioral Health:

Amy Latham, *The Colorado Health Foundation*  
Kristina Daniels, *San Luis Valley Behavioral Health Group*

### Youth Development:

Kumella Aiu, *Anschutz Family Foundation*  
Adrienne Atencio, *High Valley Community Center*

### Economic Development:

Pattie Snidow, *USDA Rural Development*  
Heather Brooks, *Alamosa City*

## Creating Opportunities for Youth Development and Engagement

Every community voiced a desire to better engage parents and families in youth development efforts. Leaders wish to create a community where youth thrive. Unfortunately, gaps exist in providing a venue for this to happen. These gaps include the need to strengthen local educational opportunities, foster family support systems, provide opportunities for community engagement and recreation, and create job opportunities for the growing generation. The top opportunities that emerged from the brainstorming session include:

- Place-based education paired with distance learning
- Developing a mentorship program
- Job skills training for SLV industries
- Traveling roadshow to generate motivation that celebrates career or scholastic success

- Creating a fiscal sponsor in the region
- Continual and regular conversations between schools and nonprofits with a common goal of youth development
- Valley-wide grants and nonprofit support system

Youth Development participants identified three top opportunities to address as a community. These top three opportunities include:

1. Regular Meetings of Youth Development Stakeholders
2. Multi-Generational Mentorship Opportunities for Youth
3. Capacity Building Opportunities

### ***Regular Regional Meetings***

In an effort to promote collaboration in the San Luis Valley, participants in the Breakout Session discussed the need for regular meetings in the San Luis Valley. Specifically, create a board to oversee all youth development programs. Participants expressed a desire for an avenue for all the Valley youth development leaders to meet quarterly. They also expressed an interest in convening youth leaders on an annual basis to meet, celebrate and discuss challenges of the Valley. These meetings would provide Youth Development stakeholders the opportunity to share experiences, ongoing challenges and needs in the Valley. They could also celebrate successes and discuss additional opportunities in the region. Ideally, youth would also be involved in this opportunity, bringing their important perspectives to the decision makers.

### ***Multi-Generational Mentorships***

Participants identified the need for multi-generational mentorship opportunities for youth. Through these mentorship opportunities, youth will gain a deeper understanding of the history and heritage of the San Luis Valley region, and will also receive important one-on-one guidance.

### ***Capacity Building Opportunities***

Nonprofits throughout the San Luis Valley region struggle to gain access to the resources necessary to run quality programs for youth in the region. Participants identified the need for additional shared capacity building resources. Building on the need for capacity building resources, participants also indicated the need to collaborate with one another

in seeking out and utilizing additional capacity building resources in the San Luis Valley region.

### Increasing Access to Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Services

A major theme that emerged in each of the six counties was the need to increase access to substance abuse and behavioral health services in the Valley. Participants identified a significant connection between the use of addictive, mind-altering substances and mental illness. Community leaders throughout the Valley are concerned about the growing use of drugs and alcohol as a means for self-medicating behavioral health issues. Regional collaborations throughout the Valley have formed to address these challenges; however, Listening Tour participants indicated that additional support is needed to assist with combatting this regional challenge.

The top opportunities that emerged during the Behavioral Health Breakout Session include:

- Ensuring each public and private middle and high school has a mental health professional on staff
- Training school teachers to identify at-risk students
- Training first providers (teachers, police, physicians, paramedics)
- Building resources to support coalitions and collaborations
- Creating PSAs and community education to reduce the stigma of mental health – providing information about services that are available
- Addressing generational health issues
- Using law enforcement to identify at-risk individuals – community policing model
- Using tele-health to connect with healthcare providers via cable network
- Assessing the needs of each county by working with an Epidemiology department to gather data
- Establishing regional acute treatment units
- Integrating behavioral health assessments and services into primary health care
- Tele-psychiatry for those who cannot drive or commute to a mental health professional

### ***School-Based Behavioral Health***

Participants identified “putting a mental health professional in every public and private middle and high school” as the top solution to addressing behavioral health. Teachers, behavioral health providers, law enforcement, school districts and community members will be most affected by this potential solution; however, school districts, funders, students

and their families, and providers should all be engaged in building out the potential solution. The group also discussed the possibility that not all school districts will welcome the addition and teachers or community members may not support students leaving the classroom during school hours.

### Establishing Partnerships to Create Sustainable Year-Long Economies

Economic sustainability is a concern throughout the Valley; however, the needs vary widely between counties. Concerns that were identified include a lack of meaningful employment opportunities, shortage of qualified employees committed to the long-term growth of the community, and the need for economic development and diversity. Opportunities in the region include utilizing the space for geothermal or solar energy, unmanned aircraft training facilities, and recreation.

The top opportunities that emerged during the Sustainable Economies Breakout Session include:

- Leverage regional identity (build SLV brand)
- Develop value added food production & niche agricultural products
- Connect secondary education to higher education
- Valley wide chamber of commerce paid for by valley wide mill levy
- Shared tourism marketing; higher a regional marketing director
- Inter-valley bus (transportation)
- Light manufacturing network supply chain
- Creating a nonprofit collaboration. Network between the counties; sharing overhead costs, bringing in consultants that help everyone, share calendar & online system
- Collaborating workforce development, training force, create local jobs
- Develop an asset map of the Rio Grande corridor
- Develop SLV money to keep in the Valley
- Develop data to show what funds do for the community

From these concepts, the Valley identified the top opportunities opportunities to be 1) Asset mapping, and 2) Regional Marketing Board.

### ***Asset Mapping***

Participants identified the need to develop an Asset Map of recreational opportunities in the Valley. This Asset Map would include GIS Analysis (layering) and a Tourism Map.

Businesses, nonprofits, community members, and public land managers all need to be involved in this project.

### ***Regional Marketing Board***

The second project that the group identified was the need to create a Regional Marketing Board. Businesses, community members, visitors, and service providers would be most affected by this project. Next steps include getting county buy-in, and identifying participants for the regional board.

### **Wrap-up Session**

Following the breakout sessions, participants came back together to discuss the top opportunities identified in the previous sessions. Funder and Government Engagement committee co-chair, Gena Dellet, reported on behalf of Youth Development; Steering Committee member, Jan Oen, reported on behalf of the Economic Sustainability; and Chris Wiant, President and CEO of the Caring for Colorado Foundation reported on Behavioral Health. Each representative reported on the projects that were identified in the individual sessions.

### **Next Steps**

Rural Philanthropy Days Program Manager, Amanda Barlow, will contact Community Dialogue participants to form an Interim Steering Committee to move forward partnerships and collaborations discussed during the Community Dialogue Sessions. The Committee's purpose is to coordinate regional nonprofit educational opportunities and identify projects and resources to strengthen local communities with the support of Community Resource Center.