



Convening Communities: 2015 Mountain Rural Philanthropy Days

Convening Communities Overview

An important component and recent addition to Community Resource Center's rural programming has been the addition of the "Convening Communities" opportunities. This programming includes the regional Listening Tour, Community Solutions session at Rural Philanthropy Days and ongoing interim programming post-RPD that is catered to meet the needs of local communities. This report describes the Convening Communities programming as well as details the discussions that took place at the 2015 Mountain Rural Philanthropy Days Community Solutions sessions.

Listening Tour

On February 25-27, 2015 a delegation of 10 foundation executives met with 100 high-level community leaders from five counties in candid discussions about the character of the Mountain 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 MRPD 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. Download the report by visiting www.crcamerica.org/convening-communities

Community Solutions Sessions Overview

On June 25, 2015, at the MRPD conference, a gathering of executive directors, topic experts, funders, and state and local government officials convened 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 resonated 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 explored vital regional partnerships and potential collaborative solutions. Community Solutions sessions are designed to strengthen relationships and encourage dialogue across sectors and communities.

Interim Programming

An Interim 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 Solutions. The Committee's purpose is to coordinate local nonprofit educational opportunities and identify regional projects and resources to strengthen local communities.

Community Solutions Sessions

Community leaders, local and Front Range funders, and government officials came together for a three-part, all-day session that included a Listening Tour debrief, topic area breakout discussions, and a wrap-up session on next steps for success.

Listening Tour Debrief

During the Listening Tour debrief, participants from the community convened to gain a broad understanding of the five community meetings that took place during the Listening Tour. Participants from the Listening Tour delegation shared their impression regarding key issues that emerged. The following delegates participated to share on specific topics:

- **Behavioral Health:** Amy Latham, The Colorado Health Foundation
- **Education Continuum:** Matt Carpenter, El Pomar Foundation
- **Transient/Invisible Populations:** Abel Wurmnest, Anschutz Family Foundation
- **Senior Care:** Dan Dunlap, Corporation for National and Community Service
- **Economic Development:** Janice Fritsch, Kenneth King Foundation

From the Listening Tour, two overarching themes were common throughout the region: *1) Increasing Access to Behavioral Health Care and Substance Abuse Services*, and *2) Basic Needs: Strategies for Inclusiveness*. Community leaders from the region were invited to discuss collaborative efforts that have been implemented in response to these issues.

- **Behavioral Health:** Ken Davis, Mountain Family Health Center; Amy Gallagher, Mind Springs Health
- **Substance Use Disorder Services:** Jill Kovacevich, Doctors Plus
- **Senior Care:** Jennifer Ludwig, Eagle County Public Health and Environment
- **Family Engagement:** Tamara Drangstveit, Family and Intercultural Resource Center

Topic Breakout Session: Increasing Access to Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Services

The need for more behavioral health services, with an emphasis on substance abuse prevention and education for youth, is an issue that emerged in each of the five counties. As “Colorado’s Playground”, resort communities in the region face an influx of adults promoting a party atmosphere, which infiltrates the permanent community and schools. Special events catered to tourism are frequent across the region, and are designed to encourage and facilitate this behavior in public settings.

Celebrations

Leaders and stakeholders recognized a vibrant culture of partnership and resource sharing within the counties of the Mountain Region, specifically cross-sector collaboration, partnerships between behavioral health care providers and community agencies. A frequently cited example was the partnership between Mountain Family Health Centers and MindSprings Health. Participants also praised the growth of school-based health alliances across the region that “reach kids where they are,” and recognized the Cradle to Career initiative as a program that is making impactful progress. Participants vocalized the need for an “attitude directed towards change” regarding the significant stigma that still surrounds the field of behavioral health.

The University of Denver - Masters of Social Work offerings in Glenwood Springs have allowed established professionals in the Mountain Region to take these classes while continuing their professional and personal lives locally. For the first time, Garfield County has an active psychiatrist. The Early Childhood Tax in Summit County supports behavioral health programming for young children, and ever increasing digital access to psychiatric treatment have ameliorated the shortage of qualified paraprofessionals and specialists.

Solutions

In addition to celebrating ongoing efforts, partnerships and successes in the region, participants took advantage of the opportunity to brainstorm additional solutions that communities could implement. Solutions discussed included: 1) Improved cultural competencies, 2) Increased number of health care professionals, 3) Resource sharing across counties and programs, 4) Social norming of behavioral health, 5) Continued improvement of school-based behavioral health options, 6) Home-based services and place-based parental education, 7) Technological advancement, and 8) Improved services to middle-tier families and individuals.

Access to More Professionals and Bilingual Providers

A more culturally diverse suite of behavioral health care providers can connect with and effectively serve the increasingly diverse population of the Mountain Region. Next steps for advancing this goal include: supporting and creating opportunities for Latino leadership in local communities, promoting outreach efforts within local schools that articulate to community youth how valuable a bilingual skill set is, and actively recruiting and creating training opportunities for bilingual behavioral health care professionals in the Mountain Region.

Increased Number of Health Care Professionals

An insufficient number of behavioral health care providers who are licensed to bill Medicaid, and a lack of training opportunities to increase these numbers, has created a gap in behavioral health services for low-income individuals in the Mountain Region. To increase the number of licensed professionals, participants in the Community Solutions propose establishing educational tracks at Colorado Mountain College for students to become licensed providers. Additionally, participants support the continued, collaborative and grassroots work that MindSprings Health has led through the region.

Cross-sector Partnerships and Resource Sharing

Regional resources are currently disparate, with no case manager (or similar role) to connect one client with a variety of resources. Participants suggested creating a single point of entry for data sharing across counties, creating a single location to access behavioral health care resources, and generating a “best practices” or referral document.

Education and Awareness

A mismatch exists between reality and the outside perception of the Mountain Region. Participants agreed that making behavioral health an accessible topic of conversation is necessary in order to combat the prevalent “party culture” misconception of the community. To accomplish this, participants discussed creating a marketing campaign to address the stigma around substance abuse as well as to educate visitors about regional realities. Additionally, expanding the “Healthy Kids Survey” to adults in the region, and tapping into the National “Most of Us” campaign could be helpful. Participants also suggested collecting baseline data to identify areas of need in this area.

Continuing to Improve School-based Behavioral Health Care

Participants expressed a need for expanded behavioral health programming within schools. Proposed solutions include: 1) Creating “peer to peer” groups in local high schools, 2) making services accessible for all kids, not just high-risk, and 3) not overburdening school counselors with other administrative tasks. Sustainability of these programs was highlighted as a potential challenge, which can be addressed through ensuring that kids, parents, and local behavioral health providers are all engaged and committed.

Home-based Services

Transportation is a significant barrier to health care in rural Colorado. Relying on public transportation to travel to medical appointments is not always practical, or possible: currently no public transportation connects the towns of Parachute and Rifle, which are a mere 15 miles apart. The creation of a traveling health provider would break down the transportation

barrier by bringing health services into isolated communities. A successful traveling health provider would offer care for individuals of all ages, including childhood screenings. These providers could also be trained on “motivational interviewing.”

Parent Education

Infant and young child behavioral health is achieved through stable relationships with caretakers. Creating programming opportunities for parent education would create communities and discussions focused on nurturing social-emotional development in young children, while providing opportunities to share community behavioral health resources and highlight best practices.

Improved Technologies

Technology also has the capacity to ameliorate the challenges of distance and unreliable transportation in rural communities. While tele-health is not applicable to every behavioral health crisis, it can help fill a need by having counselors available remotely. Ensuring communities know how to access telehealth services, and are comfortable doing so, is essential to improving rural mental hygiene. Resources needed to advance tech resources in the Mountain Region include software platforms and strong nonprofit collaboratives to promote these virtual tools. The creation of online “best practice” guides, as well as supporting existing tech efforts, including Rocky Mountain Health Partnership and Aspen Strong, will also advance this initiative.

Serving the Middle Tier

Many middle class families have inadequate insurance, and their access to healthcare is limited by their reluctance to pay exorbitant co-pays. Important health care services, such as wellness checkups and behavioral health appointments, need to be insured “from dollar one.” For health issues that need follow-up, like behavioral health counseling, checkups are often not covered. Participants suggested addressing this problem by first generating awareness about these issues and creating connections between funders and middle-class healthcare consumers.

Topic Breakout Session: Basic Needs – Strategies for Inclusiveness

The workforce of the mountain region of Colorado is increasingly diverse. In order to thrive, businesses and communities must embrace this diversity and strive to be complete in their work. Creating an inclusive workplace is good for business; however, the myriad cultural backgrounds and experiences of the workforce must be taken into consideration to create a harmonious community when nonprofit organizations develop their programs and services.

Celebrations

Community leaders and stakeholders who attended this session agreed that strides have been made to address the issue of basic needs and the region’s struggle to meet them. For example, they discussed the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority (RFTA) and the positive effect it has had on the communities directly outside of resort towns. The RFTA is an affordable public transportation option for employees of the resorts who do not own a car but cannot afford to live closer to the resorts because of the high cost of living.

The leaders in this session agreed that communities in the Mountain Region are innovators and willing to work for results. Grassroots efforts in the region include the New Castle Volunteer Corps and the Third Street Center in Carbondale. The New Castle Volunteer Corps is a volunteer-run organization with over 100 volunteers who work on various projects around their community. The Third Street Center in Carbondale is a renovated elementary school that has become a community center. The center has two full-time staff, a multitude of programs and ample meeting space. The center was a project that the entire community helped see through.

Colorado Mountain College is another resource that residents take advantage of. The college offers workshops, career opportunities and services, bilingual capabilities and serves as a convener for the region. Residents are truly grateful for the nonprofits in the region, and recognize the necessary services they provide and the community aims to collaborate on a variety of projects.

Solutions

In addition to celebrating ongoing efforts, partnerships and successes around Basic Needs and Inclusivity in the region, participants took advantage of the opportunity to brainstorm additional solutions that communities could implement and explore strategies toward making those solutions a reality. Solutions that were discussed include: 1) Developing a regional housing authority, 2) Developing infrastructure, 3) Creating community conversations, 4) Establishing a comprehensive regional data system and 5) Leveraging untapped resources.

Develop a Regional Housing Authority

Housing is a significant issue in the Mountain Region. Resort towns like Vail and Aspen have costs of living that are substantially more expensive than working-class wages. These individuals frequently rely on public transportation to travel long distances to work in the resort communities. Even in the outlying towns, affordable housing is rare and difficult to obtain. Participants voiced the need for a regional housing authority that would be modeled after RFTA, the successful public transportation program discussed above. This regional housing authority serve as a collaboration between the five counties and would require a significant amount of neighborhood buy-in. Stakeholders would have to be committed to the project and be willing to travel to ensure the collaboration was successful.

Creating Community Conversations

Oftentimes, discussions on inclusivity and basic needs in the region leave out key stakeholders who represent the target population. Including these key stakeholders would improve the quality of the discussions and promote buy-in on the results. Those who are already working on inclusivity issues need to work on engaging demographics in the community that are being left out. One suggestion included holding meetings in neutral locations. Another suggestion is to begin a "Neighborhood Navigators" program, which would invite a neighborhood liaison to crucial conversations in the region to be a spokesperson for their communities. "Neighborhood Navigators" would help build trust between under-represented populations and ideally provide candid feedback to community leaders.

Comprehensive Regional Data System

Collecting and analyzing data is time consuming and tedious; however, it is also incredibly important. Participants want to see data on nonprofits in the Mountain Region that includes information on service recipients. Additionally, attendees addressed the need to identify existing gaps in human services. The next step for this project is to assign an individual or organization to oversee data collection and analysis. Creating a comprehensive regional data system for nonprofit organizations will enable nonprofits to better create programs to match desired outcomes without duplicating services.

Develop Infrastructure

Infrastructure is essential to communities; however, maintaining it is costly and difficult to fund. One identified opportunity includes improving roadways to make access to communities in the region easier. Participants agreed that developing infrastructure would improve regional collaboration.

Leverage Untapped Resources

Communities across the region are facing similar issues in regions where resorts are the largest employer: a lack of job creation and an economy that is largely influenced by weather. To combat these issues, regional leaders need to examine gaps in service and develop plans for job creation. Diversifying the economy will increase job creation in the region.

Wrap-up Session

Following the breakout sessions, participants came back together to discuss the top three opportunities identified in the previous sessions. Funder and Government Engagement committee chair, Mikayla Curtis reported on behalf of Basic Needs: Strategies for Inclusiveness. The three topics that were identified include: *1) Creating a Regional Housing Authority, 2) Creating Community Conversations, and 3) Mass Data Collection*. The Listening Tour Chair, Matt Carpenter, and Funder and Government Engagement Subcommittee member, Mitzi Ledingham reported on the progress of the Access to Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Services Breakout session. The three opportunities identified by this group include: *1) Education and Awareness, 2) Access to Professionals and Bilingual Providers, and 3) Cross-Sector Partnerships and Resource Sharing*.

At the close of the sessions, Mountain RPD Co-Chair, Emma Bielski, invited participants to become Champions to move specific projects forward. A total of 6 individuals volunteered to be “Champions” and assist with moving forward specific projects.

- Carrie Benway, The Family Learning Center
- Jeanne Bistranin, The Summit Foundation
- Jill Kovacevich, Doctors Plus
- Sarah Provino, OMNI Institute
- Michelle Stecher, Eagle River Youth Coalition
- Michael Thompson, Fat City Farmers

Next Steps

Through strategic conversations and planning between the Anschutz Family Foundation and the Community Resource Center, the regional Rural Philanthropy Days (RPD) map has been updated to better align with the regional geographies of the state. As a result of this county re-alignment, The Mountain region will be divided into two regions. Eagle, Garfield and Pitkin Counties will join the Western Slope region; and Summit and Lake Counties will be incorporated into the Heart of Colorado region.

Rural Philanthropy Days Program Manager, Leah Rausch, will contact Community Solutions participants, who are now part of the Western Slope, to form an Interim Steering Committee to move forward partnerships and collaborations discussed during the Community Solutions 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. The Heart of Colorado is moving into the active planning of the 2016 RPD Conference. As such, the Interim Steering Committee will not form until November of 2016. Participants from Lake and Summit counties are invited to join this active Steering Committee in the planning and implementation of the 2016 Heart of Colorado Rural Philanthropy Days conference.