



Southeast Colorado Listening Tour PSA – La Junta, Otero County

Through the Rural Philanthropy Days Program, Community Leaders and Front Range Foundation Executive Staff Convene to Address the Region's Needs

On April 28 - 30, 2014, the Southeast Rural Philanthropy Days (RPD) Listening Tour convened over 115 community leaders from eight Southeast Colorado counties – Baca, Bent, Crowley, Huerfano, Kiowa, Las Animas, Otero, and Prowers – with the executive staff of four foundations and two government agencies. Attending foundations included: the Anschutz Family Foundation, the Caring for Colorado Foundation, the Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation and The Colorado Trust. Staff from the Colorado Department of Local Affairs, including Reeves Brown, Executive Director and Lee Merkel, Southeast Regional Manager, as well as Serve Colorado – the Governor's Commission on Community Service, and the Community Resource Center (CRC). This delegation was convened by CRC and the Southeast RPD Steering Committee to better inform funders and state/local government officials about regional successes, challenges and needs prior to the upcoming Southeast RPD conference, which will take place September 24 – 26, 2014, in Trinidad, Colorado.

Chris Wiant, President and C.E.O. of the Caring for Colorado Foundation, and Susan Steele, Executive Director of the Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation, co-chaired the Tour. The delegation heard from high-level community leaders, in open discussions, about the character of the Southeast region, existing needs and current actions to address them. Two primary questions were asked: 1) How would you describe the personality and culture of your community? and, 2) What do you see as a key issue or need in your community? The Tour stopped in Walsenburg, Trinidad, Ordway, La Junta, Las Animas, Lamar, and Springfield. A scheduled Kiowa County meeting in Las Animas was canceled due to inclement weather, and instead took place via teleconference.

On Thursday, April 29, the delegation met with representatives of Otero County Inspiration Field in La Junta, CO. Topics that emerged as major concerns for Otero County residents included job creation, economic diversity, downtown development, outdoor recreation, substance abuse, community engagement, and access to mental health care. Government officials, nonprofit executives and business leaders discussed the capital and infrastructure obstacles that were preventing the community from fully addressing these issues. The group also considered how it might better address these needs collectively as a region.

At the tour's conclusion, several regional issues had emerged, including: youth recreational opportunities, economic diversity and job creation, downtown development, substandard housing, aging populations, access to health care and generational poverty.

The Listening Tour findings will be summarized into a comprehensive report and used to structure the Southeast RPD conference in Trinidad, CO. A "Community Solutions Workshop" will be held on Thursday, September 25 2014. Its purpose is to generate solutions through collaborative dialogue to the most pressing regional challenges, as identified during the Tour. At the conference, funders, government leaders, nonprofit executives and topic experts will seek to develop long-term strategies to address county-specific and regional needs, including identification of the required infrastructure and funding streams to support implementation.

Southeast RPD is a three-day conference where nonprofit professionals, public agencies, elected officials, business leaders and funders learn from one another and collaborate on projects and funding opportunities. Networking opportunities encourage relationships that lead to mutual understanding, successful grant proposals, and more resources for rural Colorado. The conference is designed, organized, funded and planned by community volunteers from the Southeast region of Colorado. Residents from the eight county region are invited to attend. Registration opens on July 15, 2014. For more information about the RPD conference on September 24-26, visit www.southeastrpd.org.

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