



**AMERICAN
LEADERSHIP
FORUM
OF OREGON**

**Urban Rural Connection Project
Interim Summary Report of the Regional Dialogues
December 2018**

The American Leadership Forum of Oregon

The American Leadership Forum of Oregon (ALF Oregon) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that brings a diverse range of corporate, public and non-profit leaders together to build effective networks of collaboration and service throughout Oregon. By creating a network of leaders with established bonds of trust and mutual support, ALF Oregon strengthens the ability of leaders to utilize collaboration to solve community issues. The mission of ALF Oregon is to join and strengthen leaders in order to better serve the public good. ALF Oregon enhances leadership by building on the power of equity and promoting collaborative problem solving.

Urban Rural Connection Project

Communities across Oregon are facing a host of challenges that impact their ability to thrive. Whether it is under sourced educational systems, limited housing options, diminished economies and/or the breakdown of long-held community cores, urban and rural communities are suffering under a wide range of systemic problems. While every community in Oregon has challenges and opportunities, changing demographics demonstrated through growing urban centers and declining rural populations amplify differences in communities. A perceived “urban/rural” divide of values, resources and opportunities persists and feels like it continues to grow. ALF Oregon launched the Urban Rural Connection Project in August 2017 to document and explore this division, seeking connections between communities.

The project began with six meetings, called Regional Dialogues, in six regions in Oregon (Salem/Willamette Valley Area, Coastal Region, Southern Oregon, Central Oregon, Eastern Oregon, Portland Metro Area) over six months between January and June 2018. The attendees, called Regional Participants, were ALF Oregon Senior Fellows (individuals who have completed the ALF Oregon fellows program) and other high-level, seasoned community leaders. Between 30-45 Participants attended each Regional Dialogue. A targeted effort was made to have a diverse group of participants that represented different cultures, professions, perspectives, and, of course, geographies.

The Regional Dialogues were a place for these experienced leaders to work in collaboration to identify the rifts that exist in Oregon between urban, suburban, and rural communities and key bridging opportunities specifically through a leadership lens. Each Dialogue asked the Regional Participants to explore their own and other participants’ realities by defining and describing the urban/ rural divide in their own words and by naming the biggest challenges in their own community. In dialogue with one another, participants also shared their personal stories, hopes for Oregon, and stories of successful tactics implemented to address community issues.

This is an interim summary of these Dialogues and is a precursor to a more in-depth report summarizing and contemplating the full conversations of all the six Dialogues. This interim report was created through the review of all of the notes of all of the Regional Dialogues, including all of the sub-groups where the bulk of the conversations occurred. The full report, to be released in the first half of 2019, will include the review of the audio recordings from the Dialogues to capture the entirety of Participant’s statements and reflections, as well as outside demographics and discussion of other reports and findings related to the urban/ rural divide. Regional Participants will have a chance to review the full report before it is final.

Defining and Describing Urban and Rural Communities

In the Regional Dialogues, the Participants used personal experiences and observations and their view of community challenges to define urban and rural communities. Some also used the geographic boundary of the Cascade Mountain Range as the line dividing urban (Portland and the Willamette River Valley) and rural (eastern Oregon), with the region south and east of Eugene also being included within the rural description. Some of the themes of the definitions and descriptions of urban and rural communities, and thus the divide, are shared below.

Rural communities were described as...

- Having to travel farther for groceries, work, medical services, and other basic needs. They have fewer options for all services and fewer transportation options.
- Being more self-sufficient as they are farther from services. They call on their neighbors more to help them in times of need.
- Communities where people know their neighbors, other community members, and elected official. There is also less anonymity.
- Having limited access to educational opportunities, job training, and career options. Incomes are lower in rural areas. Businesses have a hard time finding skilled labor.
- Transitioning away from natural resource economies and trying to find good jobs to replace them.

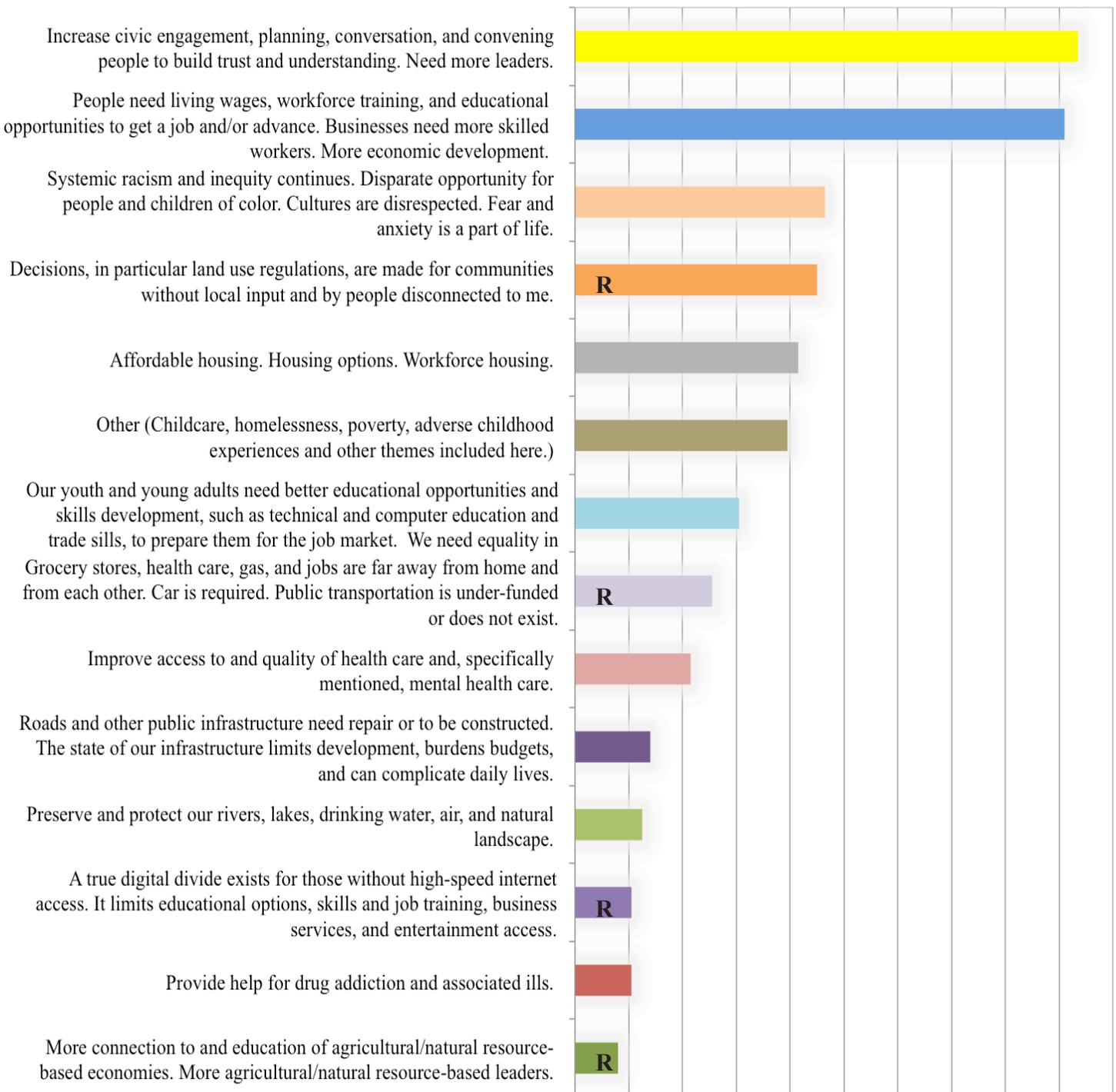
Urban communities were described as...

- Having an economic infrastructure supplying options and access to jobs, education, additional workforce training, and, for businesses, a skilled workforce. Having more access to capital.
- Being in close proximity to more and a variety of services, from the Internet, utilities, and water to grocery stores, health care, and jobs.
- Being geographically closer to Salem and Portland and thus the having better access to decision makers.
- Having schools with better access to technology, sports, and extracurricular activities and thus better preparation for higher education and the workforce.
- Having more help from mission-oriented groups that raise funds from donors and foundations to help in tackling community issues.
- Despite providing these resources and access for some, substantial portions of urban populations are challenged with issues around safety, financial security, health services, access to healthy food, high cost of housing, access to quality housing, police safety, and a host of other challenges.

Top Issues

At the Regional Dialogue conversations, Participants discussed the issues that challenge their communities the most. All Dialogues included people that identified as urban, rural and in between. The info-graphic below lists the issues that came up the most frequently in the notes taken at the Dialogues. It also highlights that urban and rural communities share many of the same issues and concerns.

However, some issues discussed came up predominantly, if not entirely, with regard to rural issues. These issues are marked with an “R” below.



Additoinal Notes

1. Participants made the point several times that Oregon’s rural communities are diverse and that these communities are disproportionately disadvantaged. Participants did not specifically define diversity in these comments.
2. Within the issue above, “Improve access to and quality of health care and, specifically mentioned, mental health care,” over one-third of the references were specifically mental health care.
3. Even though the issue of homelessness was a dominant issue within the Portland Regional Dialogue, it was brought up only a few times in the other Dialogues.

Survey by Attendees

Overall, Regional Participants appreciated the organization and facilitation of all Dialogues. Thanks to all Participants that completed the survey at the end of the Dialogue. Here are the results of the six questions:

1. I was able to participate fully in the conversation.
Agree or Strongly Agree – 99%
2. We were able to engage in discussion with mutual respect.
Agree or Strongly Agree – 98%
3. We were able to discuss different points of view productively.
Agree or Strongly Agree – 93%
4. The tone and format of the conversation felt inclusive.
Agree or Strongly Agree - 98%
5. There was a good amount of diversity of views and opinions in the conversation.
Agree or Strongly Agree – 83%
6. There was a good amount of diversity of people in the conversation.
Agree Strongly Agree – 80%

The overwhelmingly positive response to the first four questions can be attributed to the detailed attention to the ALF Oregon Senior Fellows and staff that contributed to the planning, facilitation, and constant reflection to improve on each Dialogue.

With Appreciation

Thank you to all Regional Participants for your time, thought and participation in the Regional Dialogues. Thank you also to Meyer Memorial Trust, Oregon Community Foundation and The Ford Family Foundation for your commitment and contribution to ALF Oregon’s Urban Rural Connection Project.