



Urban Rural Connection Project Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Draft Summary

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. Its purpose is to join and strengthen leaders in order to better serve the public good and to enhance leadership by building on the strengths of diversity and by promoting collaborative problem solving within and among communities.

Since 1985, ALF Oregon has led cohorts of proven, experienced leaders through year-long programming designed to advance this mission. Upon completing their first year, the graduates, called Senior Fellows, have the option to complete a project together that builds on what they have learned and puts them in service to themselves, to their classmates, and to Oregon.

The Urban Rural Connection Project is a revisit of engaging Senior Fellows and other experienced leaders in multi-month projects to work in service to Oregon. For more information about the Project, please [CLICK HERE](#) or visit our website. The Project's first phase involved Regional Dialogues taking place in six cities around Oregon. Below is a draft summary of the Regional Dialogue conversations surrounding inequity, racism, and the hope to live in welcoming, inclusive communities. The full report, due in May, will provide summaries of each of the six Regional Dialogues.

Please note: Below, individuals are described frequently according to the Regional Dialogue that they attended. This is not necessarily where they live, nor does it indicate if they identify as urban, suburban, or rural. All Regional Dialogues included Participants from all of these settings.

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Discrimination came up in each Regional Dialogue as something experienced as part of life for many, as did the vision of breaking down barriers to build trust and understanding and the pursuit of creating equitable, inclusive communities. Regional Participants consistently named the dissolution of bias, the provision of equitable education for all children, improved economic opportunities for marginalized populations, and diverse representation as the most challenging issues within their communities.

Many referenced Oregon's blatant history of racism – its violent oppression of communities of color in the state constitution, policies and actions – and how this history challenges Oregon. Businesses don't locate here because of the concern that existing non-white employees may not feel welcome and they see Oregon's workforce as non-diverse. This is relevant because employers want their workforce to

represent the country and states changing demographics, to have cultural competency and to represent the people that they are serving or courting.

Some diverse Participants in a Portland Dialogue discussed the fear with which they live with and how this shapes their definition of the urban rural divide. In rural areas, women of color shared that they would never go jogging alone on a rural road. One woman of color always had a safety plan when she traveled to rural areas. For her, this meant that she told her friends and family where she was going to be, when, and then called to check in. She explained that she has traveled quite a bit across Oregon and those experiences have lead her to this. A Portland Participant added, "It's not just fear of the unknown. There's actually a documented like supremacy groups in some of these rural areas."

This is a fear not completely based in rural areas nor with just women of color. A woman of color living in Portland said, "There's a consciousness for me about stepping outside of my home and what I'm going to confront any each day, no matter where I'm navigating in my town or in the world." A white woman from the Portland dialogues who described her dress and haircut as obviously queer recounted a time she was traveling for work in rural Oregon. As she traveled on a rural road that became rougher and rougher, her thoughts went to worry and fear, pondering different scenarios should her car give out. These examples also came with expressions that the public is generally friendly towards them, sometimes being overly friendly in a reassuring way. Still, these warm gestures are not enough to stop the contemplation of the safest route to get across Oregon or across town.

Hearing these accounts of fear and understanding what goes through a person of color's mind on a daily basis could potentially help bridge the divide. As stated earlier, the Dialogues included these themes of understanding people better. A Warm Springs Participant acknowledged that it's not easy to do every day, "I think for human beings to walk up to somebody who looks different from them or anyone in a different environment, just approaching people in general... It's really hard to take that first step to say, you know, tell me something about you." Several Participants noted that they had attended diversity, equity and inclusion trainings. These gave them the time, space, and setting to better understand the perspectives and experiences of their non-white peers.

A Lincoln City Participant stated that he simply wanted us to stop the game of "us versus them." That single idea is a challenge, however. While not all Regional Dialogues specifically mentioned systemic racism, Participants in all Regional Dialogues referenced community systems with overt bias and racism against people of color and favoring white populations. A Warm Spring resident described that she sees tracking in schools, where the children of color are placed in the least challenging or slower moving peer groups. A Medford Participant listed the need to provide culturally specific childcare and education for ethnic communities. Health care systems don't consistently have nurses and doctors speaking the language of their clients or understanding their culture. Non-white populations have varying degrees of trust with law enforcement and many would not ever call 911 in a time of need. These are some of the systemic disadvantages confounding personal and professional growth, not to mention not feeling safe or welcome. A Participant of color from Portland said, "Just acknowledging the role that intergenerational wealth has played... not just financial wealth but also the wealth of knowledge, things that just simply don't exist within all communities."

Trauma was another theme that came up in the discussions around communities of color and rural, disadvantaged communities. Participants mentioned historical trauma, with a few elaborating on past

genocide, violence, and overt discrimination in laws and policies directed at communities of color. The connection to these past atrocities, in addition to daily racism, can become powerful yet invisible weights to bear for a person or a whole community. One Medford Participant stated that public services are not trauma informed, leaving public service agents to do and figure out on their own.

Another Participant described the challenges and fear embedded in getting a valid driver's license or identification. Correctly completing the application and getting to a Department of Motor Vehicles office can be the first obstacle. Without a license, one cannot get insurance leaving one to either take public transportation or drive without a license to get to work. If a ticket is issued, that leads to more problems such as figuring out how to get to the courthouse and missing work. Many forms of public service require showing a government-issued identification card and those may come with background checks. People of color can be afraid to provide information. A Warm Springs Participant contributed, "There's this fear because I think we have probably lots of undocumented people in our community and I think they're scared. And when you look at the national dialogue that we have going on right now, why wouldn't you be scared? Why wouldn't you lay low?"

Some Regional Participants felt that these issues of disparity look different in urban and rural areas. One Baker City Regional Participant noted, "We don't have a diverse community here in terms of racial diversity, but we do in terms of income and other factors that we really have to learn to be able to speak to." Supporting this, another Participant said, "I want to see educational outcomes improved for all children in Oregon. And it's interesting, when you look at children of color in the urban areas and rural children. The outcomes are pretty similar and they're both pretty awful." Whether it is ethnicity, race, income, age, or other ways that people are different, representation is often lacking and participants discussed this. A Medford Participant contributed, "Too often we're represented by those that haven't had to struggle to make ends meet or struggle to find work...more diverse leadership would be great." There is also the impact of having so many tribes and the unique circumstances around that. Participants again and again brought up the importance of training diverse leaders to ensure more voices are heard and that leadership looks like the people that it is representing.

Census data indicates that populations of color are growing in both urban and rural areas of Oregon. This, combined with the growing understanding of the prevalence of painful experiences directed at non-white populations because they were non-white implore a sense of urgency to the issue. The lack of diversity, equity and inclusion in leadership, policymaking, and business impact all levels of decision-making, policies, and opportunity.

The Urban Rural Connection Project Cohort selected Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as a Priority Issue because they wanted the next phase of the Urban Rural Connection Project to tap into ALF Oregon's strengths of convening and training leaders to contribute to advancing our state to one of diverse leadership, inclusive spaces and decisions rooted in equitable processes and outcomes.

What's Next?

The second phase of the Urban Rural Connection Project will tap Senior Fellows, Regional Dialogue participants and other experienced leaders to come together to work towards solutions on one of three Priority Issue committees (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Broadband Connection: Access to High-Speed, Reliable Internet; and Land Use Planning: Decisions Made Without All Voices). Each committee

will be tasked with diving deeper into its issue and developing community based solutions that can be implemented over a timeframe from May – December 2019.

The goal is not to solve these problems but advance solutions. Think of each committee as an injection of time, expertise, and leadership into one challenge facing Oregon communities everyday. Committees may choose to focus on one community, a region, or across Oregon.

- Click [HERE](#) to apply to serve on a Priority Issue Committee.
- Click [HERE](#) to learn more about the Urban Rural Connection Project.
- Click [HERE](#) to provide comment on this summary.