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Oregon Voices survey reveals common cause in rural and urban counties

More than 4,300 Oregon households shared lived experiences from their corner of the state

ROSEBURG, Ore. — An innovative survey released today by The Ford Family Foundation and research partners at ECONorthwest and Portland State University shares insights into the lived experiences of households across Oregon. The findings set the table for conversations in backyards, town halls, schools, workplaces and the state Capitol.

A first-of-its-kind survey, Oregon Voices focuses on people’s lived experiences. The resulting data set is rich with information — pairing statistics with personal stories. Generous responses from rural and urban residents alike reveal areas of common cause, including these topics where there was higher consensus across counties:

- Oregonians share pride for where they live and for the natural beauty of the state.
- Everywhere, the majority report that people take care of each other during hard times and show up for community events.
- In all counties, people share concern for the lack of affordable housing and the rise of homelessness where they live.
- People observe that families in their community are having trouble making ends meet.
- Everywhere, it was felt that youth do not have places to hang out, although this trend was even more pronounced in rural counties.

“Oregon Voices is data by people, not about them,” said Kasi Allen, director of learning and knowledge management for the Foundation. “The power of the data comes from the honest, authentic reflections from people across Oregon about the realities they experience day to day.”

More than 4,300 Oregonians responded to the 46-question Oregon Voices survey, yielding more than 60,000 open-ended responses to questions such as, “What is one thing you appreciate about the place where you live?” Wheeler County, where 88 households responded, was the top reporting county in the random household phase, despite having one of the smallest populations in the state. The Foundation’s home county, Douglas County, was the top reporting county



overall. Enough households responded in each county in order to draw representative comparisons.

Oregon Voices was designed to offer rich and nuanced insights into rural parts of the state. Findings suggest that rural residents exhibit greater love of place, rating their towns more positively and showing more pride in their community, than their urban counterparts. In general, rural respondents report higher rates of volunteerism and are far more likely to state that they truly care for their neighbors and appreciate how their community shows up in times of need. Although urban households report greater access to healthy food, medical services, cultural opportunities and other amenities, they report lower levels of community pride.

Users of Oregon Voices can use the data to start conversations in their communities:

- Policymakers can better understand the primary concerns and lived experiences of the constituents they serve.
- People working in schools, nonprofits and health care settings can use the data to identify housing, financial and food security needs in their communities.
- Curious learners and community builders may glean more insight into areas where they could work with neighbors, colleagues and friends to improve community conditions.

“This is only the beginning,” said Anne Kubisch, president and CEO of the Foundation. “We are eager to support conversations around the trends we’re seeing in the Oregon Voices data in ways that bridge divides across our state and bring Oregonians together around common causes.”

At the Oregon Voices website, orvoices.org, users may learn more about the survey methodology and explore the data by using an interactive data tool and by downloading county-by-county data summaries. As the research team continues to analyze responses, a series of data summaries and research briefs that dive even deeper into the trends that emerged will be released in the coming months.

About The Ford Family Foundation

The Ford Family Foundation believes in the power of rural communities. It is a private, nonprofit foundation proudly headquartered in Roseburg, Oregon, serving rural Oregon and Siskiyou County, California. Its investments through grants, scholarships and community building create the conditions so that children have the family, educational and community supports they need to succeed in life. www.tfff.org



About ECONorthwest

ECONorthwest is an independent consulting firm based in the Pacific Northwest that specializes in economics, finance, and planning. Since 1974, ECONorthwest has worked with a variety of public and private clients to offer economic perspectives on issues ranging from wildfire recovery to education inequities and affordable housing. www.econw.com

About Portland State University

Portland State University has been emboldening students and challenging the status quo in Portland for 75 years. Since its founding, Portland State University has grown into Oregon's most diverse urban public research university with 26,000 students and more than 200 degree programs. www.pdx.edu

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