



Central
Oregon
Recession
Convening

April 14, 2009



THE OREGON
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

Here for Oregon. Here for Good.

“We in Oregon do not wait for answers to be handed down to us, we assess the ever-changing situation and respond with our own action.”

– Governor Tom McCall

“Central Oregon is a place where people are vested in our community. We are here by choice... We are deeply involved in the success of our neighborhoods, our communities. We are a people who find innovative, unusual and creative solutions.”

– Matt McCoy, Central Oregon Community College

On March 31, 2009 The Oregon Community Foundation (OCF) gathered approximately 70 people in Bend, representing different sectors in the local business, government and non-profit community, to discuss ways to navigate the rapidly changing economic climate in Central Oregon. The goal of the meeting was to identify gaps in social services and to create a stronger safety net for Central Oregon’s most vulnerable citizens, focusing on innovative solutions for supporting and delivering services to those in need.

The meeting was sponsored by OCF in partnership with Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, the Oregon Business Council, the Oregon Department of Human Services, the Oregon Food Bank, the Central Oregon Family Resource Center and the United Way of Deschutes County.

Prior to the meeting, OCF established a baseline understanding of the issues facing Central Oregon communities by reviewing research from numerous local sources and conducting meetings, interviews and a pre-convening survey with Central Oregon stakeholders. Details of this research are included in Appendix Two of this report.



Community Landscape

At the Bend meeting, statistics from service providers and anecdotes from various participants began to paint a picture of the region's shifting economic landscape. Participants introduced themselves and briefly stated trends they are seeing in their work. Notable points in this landscape review included:

- Most agencies are serving many people who have never sought assistance before. These non-profits are struggling to meet this huge increase in demand with less staff.
- Several agencies report an overall decrease in family functioning, increased substance abuse, child abuse and domestic violence along with diminishing access to mental health treatment.
- **Oregon Department of Human Services** caseloads in Central Oregon have risen dramatically, with the need for food stamps having gone up 36 percent. One in four people in Jefferson County is on food stamps.
- More seniors are seeking **Meals on Wheels** and overall those on fixed incomes in Central Oregon are struggling. **La Pine Community Kitchen** has doubled the number of food boxes it's delivering and is now serving over 450 meals per week — 150 more than last year.
- **United Way** has raised less money this year than the previous year, something that hasn't happened since 1992.
- **Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council** has had 300 people request help in searching for work, versus 40-50 people at this time last year.
- **Assistance League** clothed 1570 school children this year compared to 1420 last year as of this date and the need is still growing.
- **Family Access Network** has had a 50 percent increase over last year in clothing assistance and increased demand for school supplies and housing and utility assistance.
- **Saving Grace** is seeing a drastic increase in families looking for shelter and counseling.
- **Neighbor Impact** counted the number of homeless on January 29 at 2,247 people (30 percent children). Shelters are seeing many people homeless for the first time in their lives.
- There is a much longer waiting list for **Head Start**.
- **Family Relief Nursery** reported an increase in children on its waiting list and is nervous about future funds, as 70 percent of their funding comes from the private sector.
- **Sisters Food Bank** noted that many families with small children cannot afford basic living expenses, but that Sisters is a strong community that is good "at taking care of ourselves" which is manifest in increased donations to the food bank.
- **First Presbyterian Church** hopes that the silver lining to the economic downturn will be the creation of a "system of collaboration that will change the whole system and carry on in the future."
- Several organizations reported increases in people wanting to volunteer to help.



Identification of Service Gaps

After establishing this understanding of the challenges, attendees identified current gaps in service that exist throughout the region. The responses to the following question were mentioned several times in different ways.

What are the barriers and service gaps that prevent us from doing our best work?

- Lack of coordinated and/or centralized service points and weak transportation; lack of a map of community services; lack of communication between agencies
- Difficulty in locating space to provide after-school programs and places for family activities
- Diminishing cash resources to provide basic services; challenges in working together to leverage the money available
- Lack of creative resource development strategies, especially to help people pay rent and secure job training
- Staff turnover; loss of skilled workers in the human service system
- Lack of services for adults without children
- Lack of a central clearinghouse for matching volunteers with needs



Themes

“This gives us a great opportunity to allow creativity to flow in a new way. To look at what maybe isn’t working as well as it could be, to see how we can work together to identify the opportunities that we may not have thought of.”

– Vicki Ertle, Central Oregon Family Resource Center

As a result of the brainstorming on service gaps, three key themes emerged:

1. **NETWORKING:** How do we work more cohesively together and create systems to support this?
IDEAS: Network via co-location, community mapping, coordinated communication systems, database of community resources, engaging community involvement and volunteers.
2. **LEVERAGING CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS:** How can we be creative with our resource development and utilization?
IDEAS: Examine best way to leverage money we already have. Identify new ways to work together via mentors, volunteers, program collaboration and sharing. Identify alternative revenue streams like barter systems and create new ways to address needs that result in jobs and money.
3. **CREATIVE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND UTILIZATION:** How do we think “out of the box” about new ways and systems to work together?
IDEAS: Leverage creative cross-sector relationships that broach challenges with housing/shelter via coordination with the private sector to identify shared interests. Work on developing a cohesive network for job training and talent identification.

Participants then looked more closely at these three focus areas to develop, together, innovative ideas based on these themes.

4. **NETWORKING:** This group decided to focus on the importance of community mapping. They stressed the need to track the use of services, combine with like-minded groups and create a “services database” that could be case-based.
NEXT STEPS:
 - Identify leaders to discuss coalition building, move solutions forward, and fill gaps.
 - Develop a clear plan for communication mapping and system navigation, form a coalition of small groups; look at the use of volunteers as mapping force; create network of services



that are offered by community members (who fixes roofs, grows lettuce, can provide child care, etc); create a bartering system.

- Strengthen the 211 system by integrating the web and expanding hours.

5. **CREATIVE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT/UTILIZATION:** This group focused their efforts on the effects of unemployment and proposed creating a job support group (possibly called Job Seekers Anonymous) that has its own organic structure and can grow with the needs of job seekers.

NEXT STEPS AND ADDITIONAL IDEAS:

- Bring job seekers together to identify their skills, what skills are needed and try to match that with needs in the communities.
 - Use existing systems to build jobs, apply for jobs and create a better mentorship system (there are businesses that can bring in folks to do job training or help mentor people on getting jobs, e.g., Rotary Club).
 - Create a volunteer program to take advantage of Central Oregon's large retiree population; use their experience to mentor and train those in the job market and help with child care so parents have the time to learn new skills and find jobs.
 - Look to local tribes where the youth are caregivers to the elderly, who in exchange teach them a skill.
 - Create a bartering system focused specifically on training and skills exchange.
 - Push those looking for jobs to spend time volunteering. Look at starting a job exchange and volunteer needs site on Craig's List; build on simple things that are already in place.
6. **LEVERAGING CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS:** One specific idea grew from this breakout group. Their session focused in on the coordination of neighborhood gardens to increase the food supply for needy and at-risk people.

The food grown in the garden could be combined with restaurant donations and donations from individual gardens to feed those in need and any garden surplus could be sold. As the garden grows, a restaurant could be established. This could also create an opportunity for job skills training within the garden, distribution and sales of produce. To coordinate transportation, they discussed using school or public buses during off hours.

NEXT STEPS:

- Centralize resources: Get Bend Community Center to take inventory of garden spaces that already exist (they have computers and the resources to execute this inventory).
- Figure out what organization would be willing to fold this idea into their programs or if there are a number of organizations that could partner to make this a reality.
- Look at a potential schedule for food production and preservation (Bend Community Center) and regionalize hunger prevention efforts.



Lessons Learned

“In the end, this convening gives us all a chance to connect, talk and step away from our daily lives to explore new opportunities. We have a chance here to have innovative conversation and see things differently.”

– Mike Bonetto, Cascade Community Health Care

One of the most beneficial aspects of the “Central Oregon Recession Convening” was the establishment of a common understanding of the challenges and a mutual willingness in the community to address them. Several specific lessons stood out:

- We learned that the nonprofit sector in Central Oregon is impressively rising to the challenge it faces in these tough economic times.
- We learned that individuals from across sectors are eager to identify new ways to work together. They are enthusiastic about dialogue exploring new collaborations and connections and they are dedicated to effectively meeting the needs of our most vulnerable citizens.
- We learned that the faith-based community would like to play a bigger role in motivating and organizing volunteers.
- We learned that across the community there could be a new resource of volunteers emerging as a result of the economic crisis.

The *Central Oregon Recession Convening* was a critical first step and a successful initiative. This gathering addressed the current service gaps in the community. It acknowledged the increasing needs of Central Oregon’s residents. Most importantly, it allowed us to realize our capacity to network, collaborate and create new ideas around alternative resources that can support us in providing a stronger safety net to our most vulnerable citizens.



Appendix One: Advocacy Council

An “Advocacy Council” was identified to help review the ideas presented, discuss the plausibility of each concept and advocate for the ideas identified. These self-identified individuals include:

1. Chris Schroeder, Smith Barney
2. Patrick Carey, DHS District Manager
3. Hillary Saraceno, Department of Human Services
4. Fran Willis, Bank of the Cascades
5. Tom Moore, COIC
6. Tanya Tonge, Hunger Prevention Coalition
7. Allan Flood, Bethlehem Inn
8. Alisha Hopper, HealthMatters of Central Oregon
9. Christine Lewis, Housing Works
10. Lisa Burbidge, Boys & Girls Club



Appendix Two: Research and Pre-Convening Survey Results

This Appendix focuses on research conducted prior to the Recession Group Convening. It includes an overview of problems facing Central Oregon today as gathered through interviews and surveys. These are arranged under the following topics: immediate effects of the economic downturn, identification of service gaps, suggestions for ways the public and private sectors can better cooperate and a brief look at community initiatives already available.

This general breakdown is followed by a more comprehensive and personal look at the problems facing the private sector and the nonprofit sector. A few specific stories are presented via testimonials gathered in advance of the convening.

It is no secret that across the country, communities are experiencing hardship. Looking just at Central Oregon, we see that unemployment and home foreclosures contributed to a homeless population of at least 2,237 people in Crook, Deschutes and Jefferson counties in January, showing an increase of roughly 29 percent in the overall homeless population from 2008 (www.bendbulletin.com, "Annual Count Reveals More Homeless"). Also, there are more homeless children this year than in prior years.

In February, Deschutes had the highest number of housing units with foreclosure filings in the state, according to the Southern Oregon Mail Tribune.

Deschutes County's December unemployment rate climbed to 11.3 percent, according to Oregon Employment Department data released in January. In December 2007, the jobless rate was 6.1 percent. The December 2008 unemployment rate exceeds the last recession in 2000 and 2001, when county unemployment rates for the month were 5.4 percent and 8.1 percent, respectively. In Crook and Jefferson counties, the December 2008 unemployment picture was bleaker — 14 percent and 13.3 percent, respectively (www.bendbulletin.com, "Area Unemployment Rates Jump").

The surveys conducted with Recession Convening Session attendants provided great insight into the very real problems that are reverberating throughout Central Oregon and affecting all within these communities. Survey participants expressed a general positive attitude about coming together to cooperate and find solutions — being proactive was high on everyone's list. Regarding the current



economic crisis and the effect it is having in Central Oregon, one survey respondent summed it up well when they wrote,

"It has been a crazy six months. The uncertainty of the economy combined with fewer resources anticipated to meet the projected demand puts an enormous strain on the organization and on our staff and volunteers when they see an increasing demand for our services, not only from the sheer number of people seeking care, but from the seriousness of their condition when they arrive at our door."

From the surveys conducted before the Recession Convening Session, the following effects have been observed as a result of the economic downturn:

- Cuts in funding and staff
- Increase in the intensity of family stress (higher suicide and divorce rates); greater need for mental health services
- Increased need for emergency shelter; increased need for rental assistance
- Reduction in public grants (that fund programs like parent training classes) and community donations
- Increase in helpline calls asking about emergency services, prescriptions and rent
- Increase in numbers of volunteers (but there is not always enough staff to coordinate and train those who wish to volunteer)
- Increase in need for emergency meals and food boxes
- Increase in layoffs and unemployment
- Families, many of which were considered middle class last year, are not able to meet basic needs such as heating, medical care, food, housing, etc.
- Sharp increase in medically uninsured
- Increase in domestic violence
- Lack of available medical/dental care (access to OHP more difficult to obtain)
- Loss of after-school enrichment activities for children
- Reduction in public grants (that fund programs like parent training classes)
- Community college unable to expand fast enough to meet demand
- If cuts in court funding continue, there will be less accountability for offenders
- Sharp decrease in the number of low-income and service worker households in the Bend area
- Increase in crime

The following service gaps were identified:

- Lack of safety net for abused and neglected children
- Lack of resources to assist working parents with child care costs



- Increase in alcohol and drug abuse
- Lack of comprehensive services and crisis management
- Lack of group meetings for all agencies working with families to come together for a unified plan for the family
- Need for a more cohesive net of employment services
- No comprehensive coordination of agencies/organizations/churches
- Transportation needed for homeless or those looking for work
- No region-wide volunteer network
- No safety net for undocumented residents
- Insufficient residential programs for youth with emotional and behavior problems
- No network established between the nonprofit sector and the business sector for job creation development
- Needs of immigrant population are not being met
- No coordination of stimulus spending
- Need a system to distribute unused food from private sector to meet public needs
- Better interfaith cooperation needed to meet public needs

The following suggestions were made for how the public and private sectors can work together:

- Invest in programs that blend private and public resources
- School districts could provide transportation to clubs for youth to help relieve stress on parents
- Integrate job creation with affordable housing options and initiatives
- Partnerships that make it more attractive to invest in Central Oregon
- Action group meetings with similar missions to address what needs to be funded and how to collaborate and work together; identify joint priorities; forums for community problem solving
- Participate in HealthMatters of Central Oregon, expanded health access and coverage for residents of Crook, Deschutes and Jefferson counties, care coordination pathways for health, mental and human services, population health management, chronic disease management
- Centralized resource location
- Create a “hire local” initiative
- Coordinate and centralize access to health and mental health services; facilitation and funds coordination of Electronic Medical Records system between clinics, doctors and CHC

Identified community initiatives currently in place:

- 211 call center
- HealthMatters of Central Oregon



- Shepherd's House Shelter
- STEPS Short Term Emergency Plan to Shelter
- Work/Life Academy: Partnership between PEP, COCC and COIC
- BAT-transportation
- VIM Clinic and Mosaic Medical (FQHC Health Clinic) have initiated a monthly care coordination meeting so that each clinic can provide services not being provided by the others and so services are not duplicated
- Latino micro-enterprise initiative
- Early Head Start
- Project Homeless Connect; Homeless Leadership Coalition/Council
- Occupational Skills Training Certificate
- Hunger Prevention Coalition
- Interfaith Winter Shelter Program
- Colink Financial Services
- Family Access Network (helps families thrive by connecting them to basic needs)
- Neighbor Impact
- Sisters Nugget
- The Source
- Bend Bulletin
- United Way



Testimonials

The following testimonials were presented first from the private sector and then from the nonprofit sector to gain a better understanding of their different challenges and how they believe they can continue to positively affect their communities in the days, weeks and years to come.

Private Sector

PATRICIA L. MOSS

President & CEO, Cascade Bancorp; CEO, Bank of the Cascades

In the midst of this severe economic environment, banks are facing extraordinary challenges as we strive to serve the financial needs of our customers and communities. Our response is two-fold: First, we are facing adversity directly and responding with prudent actions and transparency. We are actively working with our customers to effectively manage their loans. We believe we have a responsibility to step up in challenging times to stay active in our communities and proactively work together with our customers to respond to both challenges and opportunities.

Nonprofit Sector

KERI PODELL

Services Planning Specialist, Neighbor Impact

The economic downturn has impacted our agency by dramatically increasing the number of eligible customers seeking services in nearly every service area, particularly rent and mortgage assistance, energy assistance and foreclosure prevention. Our attempts to meet those needs has resulted in a tremendous strain on our financial and human resources.

We are seeing a shift in the demographics of people we serve. For instance, the number of single men seeking assistance has increased, as well as first-time users of safety net systems. There is a higher need for more intensive case management, comprehensive services and crisis management. There is uncertainty around future funding and there has been a state financial hit to Head Start, with the possibility of losing over 141 child slots in our agency next year.

In terms of staff, particularly those in direct service, they report having increased stress, loss of passion for work, frustration around the unknowns of future funding, and difficulty delivering services at the agency's standard. Some of our staff are also experiencing financial crisis due to a spouse or partner being unemployed. Our Employee Assistance Program is being used now more than average.

