15 Years of Regional Partnerships
It is important having people live and work in the regions as extensions of El Pomar! This is truly unique and critically important to the success of this program. These are the people that are ambassadors and love being connected to the Foundation and we should be the model for other funders to be better connected to rural communities outside Denver and Colorado Springs. This is an incredibly impressive model that we should be very proud of.

-Regional Council member

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Regional Partnerships began in 2003 after the Trustees of El Pomar Foundation recognized a need to better serve the rural* communities of Colorado. Fifteen years later, we have an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness and outcomes of the Regional Partnerships program. Based on interviews, focus groups, and surveys conducted with the program’s stakeholders, this report outlines how the objectives originally set by Foundation Trustees have been met and greatly exceeded.

Since 2003, through regional council recommended grants, regional merit grants and regional Trustee merit grants, the Regional Partnerships program has made 1,870 grants totaling $21.7 million in rural* regions. Relationships have been built and expanded with more than 140 past and current Council members, of which 72 are current Council members. Of those 72, 11 are elected officials, 4 are college presidents, and 4 are editors or publishers with local news outlets. El Pomar has also built a reputation of trust and is now seen in communities as a convener who fosters local solutions. While not an original goal of the Trustees, Regional Partnerships has also bolstered the internal capabilities of the Foundation through career development and strategic opportunities the program provides staff and Fellows.

Regional Partnerships has met the objectives set out by the Trustees when the program began, and has benefited from unintended outcomes. What began as an initiative has been internalized and is now ubiquitous to Foundation ideology; in thought and action, there is no question that El Pomar is a Foundation for Colorado. As Trustees look to the future, there are opportunities to leverage its strengths to improve the program and continue to better the lives of citizens in all of Colorado.

* For the purposes of this report, rural refers to all 64 counties except Adams, Arapahoe, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, El Paso, Elbert, Jefferson and Teller

PERCENTAGE OF EL POMAR DOLLARS GRANTED

15 YEARS AFTER REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS 2003 - 2017
- Rural Grants (28%)
- Urban Grants (72%)

15 YEARS BEFORE REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS 1988 - 2003
- Rural Grants (12%)
- Urban Grants (88%)

BEFORE REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS 1937 - 2003
- Rural Grants (9%)
- Urban Grants (91%)
Regional Partnerships encourages cooperation by convening leaders and organizations.
-Regional Council member

The regional councils were a brilliant idea and serving on the San Juan Council is one of my greatest joys. Reaching out to people where they live is surely a smart thing for a statewide foundation to do, and you did it. El Pomar Foundation has become known in my county because of the council and the grants of the foundation itself. Three cheers.
-Regional Council member
INTRODUCTION

Place-based funding first emerged in the 1960s, when the Ford Foundation and the federal government developed programs to focus on specific low-income neighborhoods. In the 1990s, comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs) emerged with a holistic approach to neighborhood change that included resident engagement and community building. From these early beginnings over 50 years ago, place-based funding has grown exponentially, including El Pomar’s Regional Partnerships program.

Regional Partnerships began in 2003 after El Pomar Trustees recognized a need to better serve the rural communities of Colorado. They felt that, as a Foundation for all of Colorado, a majority of El Pomar’s grant making was focused on the front range; however, Foundation staff and Trustees did not have the nuanced knowledge of the rural parts of the state to be effective grant makers in those areas. The Trustees hired Cathy Robbins who, with Trustees and staff, led the development of the Regional Partnerships model. The initial focus was on rural Colorado and encouraged local community leaders to respond to unique needs based on geographic priorities.

The Southeast Council held its first meeting in August 2003 and was followed quickly by the San Luis Valley. Initially, councils met to discuss and identify needs specific to their communities, acting as local advisors for El Pomar. By 2004, councils were able to recommend up to $25,000 in regional grants. The program has evolved, and over the past 15 years, El Pomar has developed 11 regional councils encompassing all 64 counties of Colorado. Today, councils recommend up to $200,000 each year; therefore, the regional councils have a combined annual financial impact over $2 million. Throughout the past 15 years, the general structure of the program has remained the same – local leaders including college presidents, elected officials, business and nonprofit executives and others, identify local concerns and recommend funding in their regions. However, the Councils have experienced a variety of changes including Trustee, staff and Council member turnover, different funding models, and a variety of focus areas.

I think we should continue with Regional Partnerships. It goes so far beyond wisely investing the Penroses’ money. It invests in the Colorado the Penroses believed in.

- Regional Council member
This report is an analysis of the data collected as part of the Regional Partnerships: 15 Years project, which included 615 unique survey data points, 42 stakeholder interviews, and an analysis of grant making and program cost. The intent of this summary can be distilled into three main objectives, listed below:

- Identify, quantify, and celebrate the accomplishments of the Regional Partnerships program over the last 15 years;
- Connect with stakeholders to discuss what works well and what could be improved as we look toward the future;
- Set priorities and objectives for the next phase of Regional Partnerships.

At the start of the analysis, four potential outcomes were identified. They are as follows:

- Maintain the program as is;
- Continue the Regional Councils and explore possible changes such as geographic coverage, staffing and selection of focus areas;
- Retain rural Colorado/statewide focus with a different grant making program;
- Exit the program with a multiyear plan.

The data collected through surveys, interviews, and an analysis of El Pomar’s financial commitment to the program demonstrate that, without a doubt, Regional Partnerships has impacted the Foundation’s rural grant making activities and all stakeholders believe that, while there may be opportunity for improvements, the program should continue.
As a foundation, it is El Pomar’s primary responsibility to make grants to nonprofits in order to improve the well-being of the people of Colorado. Regional Partnerships has enabled Trustees to more effectively reach nonprofits across the state. As one Trustee stated, *most basically, we got more money into rural Colorado*. A senior staff member expanded on this thought commenting, *it is almost guaranteed that six figures will go out into each region on an annual basis. That doesn’t happen often*. Since 2003, through regional council recommended grants, regional merit grants and regional Trustee merit grants, El Pomar Foundation has made 1,870 grants totaling $21.7 million. When comparing the grant making activities of the foundation since 1937 to the 15 years since Regional Partnerships began, there has been a 218% increase in the number of grants made to rural Colorado and a 109% increase in dollars to rural regions.
Though borrowing from the early comprehensive community initiative (CCI’s) models of the 1990’s, El Pomar was at the forefront of a focus on rural communities, especially in Colorado. Prior to 2004, place-based funding had occurred primarily in urban areas until national funders such as the Kellogg Foundation and the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation began funding rural programs. Even then, the foundations identified the need, such as health, education, poverty or policy. El Pomar’s Regional Partnership program, on the other hand, introduced a model that sought guidance from communities to identify the need a year earlier with the establishment of the Southeast Council in 2003.

The initial focus of Regional Partnerships was on rural Colorado and encouraged the regions to respond to distinctive needs based on geographic priorities. Regional Partnerships is unique in the state of Colorado and in place-based funding because it is a program and not an initiative limited by time and resources. It has become a part of El Pomar Foundation’s grant making and has been integrated into other forms of grant making and programs around the Foundation. In the words of one El Pomar Trustee, El Pomar is in the communities to stay. We’re not just there to visit and retreat back to the Front Range. We are deeply invested in the communities across Colorado. As a foundation whose mission is to serve the State of Colorado, Regional Partnerships has expanded our reach to every county in the state.

The impact in rural Colorado has surpassed an increase in grant making. Another important objective of the program at its inception was to establish connections statewide and gain a greater understanding of the needs and assets of rural Colorado. The shift to multiyear, strategic grants is a testament to our increased knowledge and understanding of communities we serve. A Trustee affirmed this by saying, we understand the key issues across each region – we would have never had this type of understanding without Regional Partnerships. This knowledge benefits the Foundation outside of the regional grant making process; it enables Trustees to make better competitive grants.

We know the details of a community; we’re better positioned to make thoughtful funding decisions.
- Trustee
What makes it possible for El Pomar to operate such an unparalleled statewide program? What makes this program different from its peers across the nation? The data collected point to four significant assets that make Regional Partnerships the extraordinary program it is today: the network, the commitment of the program to encourage local solutions, the Foundation’s ability to convene, and Trustee and staff presence.
Regional Partnerships has become a remarkable asset to the Foundation and has built a reputation around the state that instills trust in El Pomar and makes people want to be a part of the Foundation’s team. As a result, the Foundation has built a strong network of supporters across Colorado. The network is what makes Regional Partnerships work. Not only does it enable El Pomar to effectively invest in all 64 counties in Colorado, but it provides non-monetary benefits to all stakeholders.

**COUNCIL MEMBERS**
Regional Partnerships Director Cathy Robbins often says the key to Regional Partnerships is the Council members, and she is not alone in that understanding. With 72 current Council members and more than 70 past Council members, it is almost universally agreed upon that Regional Partnerships capitalizes on Council members’ local perspective, voice and expertise. Not only does the Foundation look to the community leaders currently serving on the Councils, past Council members are kept engaged as additional sources of information and insight in communities. As one Council member observed, *Regional Partnerships is unique because it engages local networks by pulling together well connected people who understand the community.*

Through conversations with the various stakeholder groups, it became abundantly clear Council members are what make Regional Partnerships work, and perhaps more surprisingly, the Regional Partnerships program is beneficial to Council members as well. The Council members are the reason El Pomar is able to make more thoughtful grants in rural Colorado: Councils not only do an outstanding job with the development and recommendation of Regional Council grants, they are also instrumental in connecting nonprofits to the competitive process.

Council members commented that through Regional Partnerships, they have increased their connections with local nonprofits and community leaders, making them more effective in their other roles. A senior staff member noticed this and said, *the program makes Council members better community members – they have an ability to make a difference in a way they otherwise wouldn’t be able to.* In the survey given to regional Council members, the question with the highest average rating was “How effectively does Regional Partnerships build relationships with and among Council members?”
While councils and their members are critically important to the outcomes of Regional Partnerships, it is not just the existence of these councils that sets Regional Partnerships apart from other place-based funders. In fact, peer networks, what we call Regional Councils, have been used to involve people in problem-solving and decision making to improve communities since the 1990s.

Regional Partnerships effectively impacts all 11 regions in the state through its peer networks, but fostering local solutions allows regional councils to have a more powerful voice. The program encourages communities to address their own challenges, and in the words of one senior staff member, it’s the same concept as local government: better decisions are made at the local level and the complexity of specific issues is addressed more effectively. On a national level, it is unique that the regional councils recommend how to allocate funding based on the needs and opportunities of the geographic area. The councils have autonomy to identify a focus area, set a strategy and a process, identify partners and make recommendations. Almost every other place-based funding program focuses on a specific population such as the poor and marginalized, Native American reservations or issues of diversity, equity and inclusion.

While Regional Partnerships has a structure and a number of program wide best practices, the Trustees have been intentional about maintaining the autonomy of each council, which has been appreciated by Council members and communities alike. When asked what Regional Partnerships does really well, the program’s ability to allow councils freedom in their process, decisions, and overall strategy was commented on specifically. The autonomy acknowledges the diverse needs of each region and asks Council members to listen to their communities and act accordingly. One Council member commented: I love that El Pomar has flexibility and is willing to help with small immediate needs when they pop up. The Council is the eyes and ears of the community and if there is an urgent need, the Foundation responds to ensure communities are taken care of. Similarly, one senior staff member observed, even while we research and review strategic opportunities to make significant impact in the region we remain nimble enough to invest in sudden opportunities because the objective remains the same – make a significant impact in the community.

By starting at the community level, El Pomar has raised the profile, equally, for all communities across the state. One Council member commented, by increasing the amount of financial support from El Pomar Foundation to rural communities, the program has helped communities see themselves as part of the greater Colorado collective.

While Regional Partnerships uniquely positions El Pomar as a statewide grant making institution to address problems at a local level, the regional structure also encourages Council members to think beyond their local community and work across county lines to find regional solutions. The program pushes community leaders to work together to solve common challenges, as one Trustee stated, Council members take off their game faces and work together to solve a common challenge in their community.
El Pomar and the Regional Partnerships program build trust by bringing key people and organizations to the table to facilitate meaningful connections. These convening meetings have taken different forms with a wide array of participants, from educators in the Southwest Region, to thought leaders in the Northeast Region, to a full town hall in the Central Peaks Region.

Trust, ability to remain neutral to outcomes, inclusion across sectors, and grant making is a powerful recipe for productive discussion. People across the state trust El Pomar staff to remain neutral and to have the best interest of the communities in mind. Trust, combined with the influence of Council members and the strength of El Pomar’s brand, has helped the program develop a proven ability to convene groups of diverse community leaders. Not only do key leaders attend, they also discuss needs and assets in a uniquely uncharged atmosphere which fosters consensus building and a shared approach to problem-solving.

TRUSTEE AND STAFF PRESENCE

While professional development was not an outlined objective at the onset of the Regional Partnerships program, the staff structure and willingness of Foundation staff at all levels to work on the program has been a distinct benefit. The Fellowship provides consistent staffing, relationship building, and enthusiasm to Regional Partnerships at a level that is far different from funders who rely on program officers to attend site visits and manage grantee relationships. Regional Partnerships has also provided developmental and learning opportunities for the Trustees, senior staff and Fellows, which, for many, is a highlight of their involvement with the Foundation and a benefit to all their work.

Among Colorado funders, it is unique to El Pomar that Trustees regularly spend time working with Councils in their communities. The commitment to show up regularly in person is reliant on the staffing structure of the Foundation and the enthusiasm and commitment of Fellows, staff and Trustees.

TRUSTEES

The engagement of the Trustees in the Regional Partnerships program has helped strengthen the Foundation’s connections with the communities of Colorado. Council and community members appreciate that it is not just El Pomar staff traveling to the region to meet with them. The investment of Trustee time is a visual display of the dedication of the Foundation to all parts of Colorado. One senior staff member summarized this by saying, *if we are a Foundation for Colorado, it is important that we are all out there, and that the Trustees are out there as well. People in the regions have a chance to meet and work with our Trustees.*
Regional Partnerships

FELLOWS

Fellows are an invaluable resource to the Regional Partnerships program, providing administrative support, research assistance and energy to the process. Grantees in particular are grateful for the work of the Fellows. Throughout grantee interviews, it was frequently mentioned that the responsiveness of regional Fellows was a particularly valuable piece of the grantee’s relationship with the regional council. As one Trustee noted, the reason this concept is so successful is because El Pomar provides considerable staff time in making things happen. In 2016, it was determined that Fellows, on average, spent 707 hours per year working on one region. The importance of Fellow time was echoed by a Council member who commented, El Pomar staff and Fellows were instrumental in facilitating the effort and keeping the Council on track. The survey data confirmed the importance of Fellow and staff support, as the comparative stakeholder’s data showed the highest average score was in response to the question “How effectively does Regional Partnerships utilize staff and Fellows to fulfill the mission?”

Likewise, the Regional Partnerships program is a key element of the Fellowship experience. Regional Partnerships provides Fellows an opportunity to engage with diverse community leaders and learn complex project and program management skills. One Fellow commented, Regional Partnerships was my favorite program. It was amazing to learn so much about one region of the state and make connections with leaders outside of Colorado Springs. A majority of Fellows find value in the program, as they gave the question “How much value do you find in Regional Partnerships” an average score of 4.24/5 on the survey.

Working with the Council and with El Pomar has been enormously rewarding and I am very impressed with Fellows and with senior staff and their commitment to the region.
-Regional Council member

SENIOR STAFF

Senior staff members provide guidance and oversight of the Fellows and the Councils to ensure each region is moving forward and continuing to meet the expectations of the Trustees. They are often called upon to help assess region needs, facilitate strategic planning meetings, and encourage community engagement. They are the consistent contact to the leadership in the region, which allows the Foundation to strengthen its network and build relationships.

The skills developed during senior staff’s work on Regional Partnerships can be used to benefit other Foundation programs as well. One staff member stated, my regional work makes me think in new and innovative ways. Oftentimes, the solution to a challenge with my region can also be used to help me better lead one of my other programs. Additionally, as a Foundation for Colorado, it is important that senior staff members have an understanding and appreciation of the state as a whole. Regional Partnerships facilitates this greater understanding, as one staff member commented, through Regional Partnerships, I have learned that Colorado communities are far more dynamic than I ever would have known just driving through to ski or camp.

While beneficial, senior staff also noted the program requires a considerable investment in time. Additionally, learning the nuances of the program and the skills needed to be effective can often require a significant investment of time by the staff member. In fact, pooled staff costs (excluding Fellows) average $278,000 per year.
As we look toward the future of Regional Partnerships, it is clear Council members, grantees, staff, and Trustees are excited about the program and recognize ongoing value in the regional councils. Many individuals see an opportunity to take the impact of Regional Partnerships to the next level and learn from the success of the past 15 years to ‘up our game.’

When asked how Foundation assets can be further leveraged to achieve the goals of the program, a number of ideas surfaced including: increase efficiency and effectiveness, bolster El Pomar collaboration with funders, further leverage Fellows and improve collaboration across councils.
ENHANCE EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

While the value of Regional Partnerships is undeniable and goes beyond the financial investment, the increase in grant dollars to the regions, and expansive network it is not without cost to the Foundation. Annually since 2003, the average cost of the program, including direct staff and Fellow costs is $567,700. The total cost of the program since its inception is $8.52 million. This includes all direct and indirect costs, including allocations for shared staff, IT, maintenance and Fellow time. The direct costs per year average $202,700. The total direct costs billed to the program since its inception are $3.04 million. In addition to the financial investment, several interviewees commented on the opportunity cost associated with taking senior staff from other programs.

Over the past 15 years, regional councils have become increasingly strategic in their grant making, investing time and resources to identify focus areas and champion organizations in which they can invest a considerable amount of money over multiple years to have a more significant impact. The time spent identifying a specific focus area can become overwhelming. One senior staff member asked, so much time is invested by staff, is there a better way?

With meetings held quarterly, it can be difficult for councils to retain momentum. One staff member observed a significant amount of time is spent recapping past discussions when Council members either miss meetings or forget what was decided in the meeting prior. A number of stakeholders expressed a desire to use what we have learned to be more strategic moving forward. One Trustee mentioned, perhaps we shift the responsibility of identifying a focus area to El Pomar now that we have an understanding of the communities and build our teams in the region based on what we are trying to accomplish. A Council member recognized the value of the Fellows in the research process and said, we need to continue to utilize Fellows to create an organized approach to exploring key issues in the region.

Finally, while a key strength of Regional Partnerships is the Foundation’s willingness to be in the region as face-to-face interactions are arguably the best method to develop relationships, stakeholders recognize there is still work to be done to build relationships within communities. In the survey responses, the lowest average score in the comparative data set came in response to the question “How effectively does Regional Partnerships build relationships within communities?” Therefore, as efficiencies of staffing the program are considered, stakeholder input suggests the Foundation keep El Pomar staff and Trustee time in communities.

STRUCTURE

Throughout the data collection process, the structure of Regional Partnerships was examined. By and large, the structure of the program is strong; however, with an eye toward improved efficiency and structural improvements, there is value in considering a variety of structural tweaks. Respondents challenged El Pomar to consider if it is important to be in every region, if all senior staff members and Fellows need to work in a region, or if every Council could be engaged in the same issue in order to improve efficiency.

Addressing a lack of engagement of certain Council members was raised by a number of respondents, many suggesting there should be a mechanism to roll disengaged Council members off the Council to make room for other community leaders. One Council member commented, Council members who don’t come to meetings and haven’t been there for a year should be moved off so we can have people that are there and engage with what we do. Several Trustees echoed the frustration of bringing Council members along and mentioned potential value in specific assignments or term limits.

Finally, one group that has difficulty with meeting attendance are council legislators. Of note, during the Legislators’ Focus Group, legislators made it clear they do want to meaningfully engage with council work and often feel guilty when they are unable to attend meetings. It was mentioned there may be an opportunity to restructure their involvement to better fit the needs of councils with the strengths and availability of legislators.
COLLABORATE WITH FUNDERS
An asset the Regional Partnerships program brings to communities is the Foundation’s connection to, and knowledge of, other funders. One grantee commented, *I cherish and embrace the effect our relationship with El Pomar has on my approach to other funders and community partners.* Throughout the data collection process, an opportunity to further leverage El Pomar’s relationship with funders and strength of convening came to light. When asked about wishes for the future of the program, one respondent said, to continue to work on collaboration with other funders and consider becoming a convener of all agencies: nonprofits, government programs and faith-based communities.

Several interviewees commented on El Pomar’s potential to better understand the full breadth of funder capacity in the state and look to increase partnership opportunities. Further, others thought Regional Partnerships could continue to focus on supporting grantee organizations as they leverage El Pomar funding.

COLLABORATE ACROSS COUNCILS
Regional Partnerships enables councils to solve problems from the local level and to think critically and creatively about how to solve problems using the assets of a specific community. Limited opportunities to collaborate and learn across regional lines act as a barrier to capitalizing on this strength. As one Council member noted, *in real life, the boundaries between the regions aren’t so neatly drawn and bordering councils usually support communities facing similar challenges.*

Cross-council collaboration has been a focus of the Regional Partnerships team over the last several years and several steps have been taken to encourage collaboration including a monthly regional newsletter, the launch of Council Connect, and several successful joint council meetings. The data suggests El Pomar staff should continue to improve the Councils’ ability to learn from, and work in concert with one another.

FURTHER LEVERAGE FELLOWS
The Fellowship and Regional Partnerships are flagship programs of the Foundation, and in many ways, they strengthen one another. Regional Partnerships gives Fellows an opportunity to engage with dynamic community leaders and provides a venue for Fellows to utilize myriad project management skills and make a significant impact. One former Fellow reflected, *what I enjoyed most was interacting with rural leaders across the state to identify issues and actively pursue ways to improve communities.* Similarly, another alumnus cited the compelling work and the need for strategic thinking as a favorite aspect of Regional Partnerships.

Because of the value Fellows bring to the Regional Partnerships process and the importance of the program in Fellows’ experience, several stakeholders suggested the Foundation consider how to further leverage this mutually beneficial relationship to afford Fellows more learning opportunities and better serve the communities of Colorado. One Trustee commented, *Regional Partnerships is the greatest application of what [Fellows] learn in professional development.* Another Trustee acknowledged creating a stronger connection between the two programs would require a shift in the type of work Fellows are asked to do, saying, *Fellows would need to have a more substantive role in the program, we couldn’t ask them to just do more of the same work.*
The data collected revealed an overwhelmingly positive perspective of Regional Partnerships and its impact on the state of Colorado since 2003. The original intent to increase grant dollars to rural Colorado and build a network across the state was undoubtedly met. There were also several unintended positive outcomes including the impact the program has on Foundation staff, professional benefits for Council members, and an increase in El Pomar’s understanding of communities across the state.

While the strengths of the program are numerous, the network, El Pomar’s ability to convene, and the focus on place-based local solutions emerged as critical elements of this program. Looking forward, stakeholders see potential for Regional Partnerships to have even greater impact in the future by leveraging its strengths to increase collaboration with funders and other Councils, improve efficiency and further utilize Fellows.
ABOUT THE DATA

QUANTITATIVE
All El Pomar Foundation grants data was taken from FoundationConnect, El Pomar’s grants database, on April 18, 2018. All grant making data from January 1, 1937 to December 31, 2017 was collected. Dollar amounts associated with the cost of the program were collected from the Foundation’s assistant controller based on the Foundation’s internal costs tracking. Fellow costs were calculated using the following equation: HW*R*HY.

» HW = Hourly wage (starting salary divided by 2080)
» R = Number of regions (partial regions calculated based on when during the year the region started)
» HY = Hours per region per year (based on 2016 Fellow time tracking, which showed 707 Fellow hours were worked per region per year)

KEY TERMS:
» After Regional Partnerships: Grants or costs occurring after September 1, 2003
» 15 Year Before Regional Partnerships: Grants made from January 1, 1988 to August 31, 2003
» Rural: All 64 counties except Adams, Arapahoe, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, El Paso, Elbert, Jefferson and Teller

ONLINE SURVEYS:
El Pomar staff collected surveys from 70 stakeholders associated with the Regional Partnerships Program. Four unique surveys were distributed to Regional Trustees, Regional Council members, Regional grantees and Regional staff and Fellows (current and former). Each survey addressed the following categories: relationship building, community enhancement, resource utilization, mission and vision fulfillment, foundation communication and result achievement. Stakeholders responded to a series of statements on a five point Likert Scale and also had the opportunity to respond to several open ended questions. Survey questions and results may be found in the appendix.

LEGISLATIVE FOCUS GROUP:
The legislators who serve on the Regional Councils were invited to a focus group held in Denver. During the session, they discussed open-ended questions about the Regional Partnerships program and the role of legislators on their Councils.

TELEPHONIC INTERVIEWS:
El Pomar Regional staff conducted telephonic interviews with a total of 20 current Council members and eight current and former Council grantee partners. All Interviewees responded to several open ended questions which can be found in the appendix.

QUALITATIVE
The analysis of the Regional Partnerships program is based on the data collected by El Pomar Foundation staff via online surveys, a Legislative focus group, telephonic interviews and in-person interviews between December 2017 and May 2018.

IN-PERSON INTERVIEWS:
The current El Pomar Trustees and all Regional Senior staff members were interviewed in person by members of the Regional Partnerships team. All responded to a series of statements on a five point Likert Scale and also had the opportunity to respond to several open ended questions which can be found in the appendix.
APPENDIX

I. Trustees  
   a. Interview summary  
   b. Survey summary  

II. Council members  
    a. Interview summary  
    b. Survey summary  

III. Grantees  
     a. Interview summary  
     b. Survey summary  

IV. Staff and Fellows  
    a. Interview summary  
    b. Survey summary
Looking back on the work of the Regional Councils, what are the successes? What are you proud of?

- **We have a strong relationship with rural Colorado**
  - We make more competitive grants - Council members serve as partial advisors on competitive grants and we are more in tune with needs and assets in communities across the state
  - We know the details in a community – we’re better positioned to make thoughtful funding decisions
  - We have a broadened reputation statewide
  - El Pomar is invested in communities for the long term – not just to visit and retreat back to the Front Range
  - Most basically, got more money into rural Colorado
  - Council members are invested in the process because we show up. We drive the five hours to get to the Western Slope so they show up to meetings.

**Today**

*What does Regional Partnerships do really well?*

- **Builds a powerful network (Develops multi-faceted symbiotic relationships)**
  - Regional Partnerships makes Council members better at their day jobs
  - Fellows are able to engage with diverse community leaders and learn complex program and project management skills
  - Expands El Pomar’s presence and makes a better grant maker
  - Council members are El Pomar’s cheerleaders and are able to speak intelligently about El Pomar and its mission
  - People of gravity spend their time with us
  - Communities are empowered and are the recipients of new dollars ($200,000/year through RP and increased funding through the competitive process)

- **Takes a region-wide approach**
  - Council members take off their game faces and work together to solve a common challenge
  - Council members build relationships across the region
  - We understand key issues across the region – never would have had this type of understanding before

- **Enables local solutions and gets things done**
  - Empowers communities to solve their own challenges
  - Each Council is given great autonomy to work in a way that works best for them
  - There is more free reign than in govt. conversations
  - Senior Staff and Fellows put the time and effort into making things happen

- **Encourages communication and collaboration**
Brings community leaders together and fosters trust between the community and EPF

We are a trusted broker of conversation

In the context of other funders what makes Regional Partnerships unique

- **Consistency and strategy**
  - We build meaningful relationships within the communities and are there on a consistent basis
  - Regional Partnerships is the most effective funding source focused on funding statewide in a strategic way
  - El Pomar Trustees show up – they also make the five hour drive to a rural Colorado community
  - We stay – the length of time is longer, we stay, and we have boots on the ground consistently
  - Repetition
    - Consistent meetings in the regions, emails, newsletters, council connect – we never lose touch

- **Invests time**
  - Only foundation that invests large amounts of Trustee and staff time
  - Personal outreach by staff into the community

- **Intentional focus on rural Colorado**
  - We are the most significant funder putting focused attention on rural Colorado
  - The Regional Partnerships program insures dollars are getting into the most rural parts of Colorado

- **Flexibility**
  - Trustees have a lot of latitude
  - Councils are each one-of-a-kind

- **They wish they had thought of it first**
  - Most effective statewide grant making approach and other funders wish they had thought of it first
  - We talk to communities and don’t ask for anything – no one else knows how to, or cares to, do it

Describe the impact Regional Partnerships has had on Colorado

- **Increased dollars into rural communities**
  - Pushed our grant making to a local level – it decentralized our grant making and as a result our grants are much better
  - Approach is very locally focused but is in all 11 regions – when you zoom out to a statewide level it demonstrates the power of local solutions
  - Getting money to the places that need it most or the communities and institutions with the champions to do the work

- **Convener**
  - Enable people from across the state to learn from one another
  - Statewide is one of the most diverse statewide convening meetings (most are industry specific)
Create a unique network of local leaders across the entire state
Statewide allows people to address their own agenda with one another too – speaking to our unique ability to convene

Future

If you could change one thing to improve Regional Partnerships what would that be? Where could the program most improve?

- Understand value
  - Opportunity cost associated with taking Senior Staff from other programs
  - If the investment were to increase is there enough ROI?
  - Is it of value? How frequently are grants transformational?
  - Don’t think there is an RP lite and it is worth the investment, but we should never stop asking the question

- Share successes and information/connect to funders/increase external communication
  - Adjacent regions partner on grant making on topics of common interest
  - Create a Council of Council members to share information and work on common issues
  - Find a way to more effectively share information and lessons learned with other Funders
  - As we move on from our first multi-year projects we thought the sustainability piece would come and it’s harder than I thought, would love to figure out how to connect Councils to funders
  - Share work with general public
  - Request input from nonprofits
  - Supplement/enrich Councils with communication in between Council meetings

- Improve inefficiencies
  - Difficult when Council members miss a meeting or forget what we were discussing, spend a lot of time recapping past discussions
  - Find a way to accelerate the process – we spend too much time and there is too much wandering
  - It’s like Council members experience ‘summer slide’ between every meeting

- Focus on the causes, not the symptoms

- Maintain the vision
  - Enhance the quality of life
  - Create opportunity in the regions

Describe three concrete wishes you have for the future of Regional Partnerships

- Maximize use of the Fellowship
  - Regional Partnerships and the Fellowship are our premiere programs, and we should continue to think about how they capitalize on one another
It is the greatest opportunity for application of what they learn in professional development

Would need to have a more substantive role in the program – can’t just do more of the same work

All Fellows may not need to be involved

- Increased engagement by Council members
  - Term limits
  - Assignments

- New rules/new expectations at Statewide

What would you like to see Regional Partnerships accomplish in the next 10 years? What will it take to get there

- See the structure evolve
  - Do we need to be in every region? Could we approach each Region differently?
  - Is there a way to scale so we are still in every county but only have eight regions?
  - Be intentional with who we put on the Council and create systems that help move them along when they are no longer helpful
  - All Councils engage with the same issue

- Strategic shift - leverage what we have learned
  - For the past 15 years have been focused on finding areas of need/opportunity – we should utilize our expertise of leadership and convening more effectively
  - Shift responsibility to identifying focus to El Pomar (we now know stuff) and build our team based on what we’re trying to accomplish
  - Use a SECOS model and leverage our power as a convener and put more emphasis and money on convening and supporting collaborative processes that are OWNED by others
    - Bring leaders to the table, identify an issue, then bring the players together and keep the collaboration moving forward
  - El Pomar should be at the table during statewide discussions about the regions
The highest average score given by the Regional Trustees was in response to the question: “How effectively does Regional Partnerships build relationships with and among Council members?” The average score recorded was 4.78/5 with the most relevant comment being; “The reason this concept is so successful is because El Pomar provides considerable staff time in making things happen.” The lowest average score was in response to the question: “How effectively does Regional Partnerships build relationships within communities?” The average score was 4.11/5 with the most constructive comment being; “Relationships are effectively built with those individuals/organizations with which we work. Not otherwise.”

**Five Point Likert Scale**

1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree

***Results represent the weighted average score of each statement***

- **Highest response:**
  - **4.78 How effectively does Regional Partnerships utilize staff and Fellows to fulfill the mission?**
    - “The reason this concept is so successful is because El Pomar provides considerable staff time in making things happen.”

- **Lowest responses:**
  - **4.11 How effectively does Regional Partnerships build relationships within communities?**
    - “Relationships are effectively built with those individuals/organizations with which we work. Not otherwise.”

**Open-Ended Questions**

- Again, Regional Partnerships is the model that every other state-wide funder wishes they had! Way to go El Pomar!
- Good time to try some deeper thinking about the future
Looking back on the work of the Regional Councils, what are the successes? What are you proud of?

- **We as Council members work together through effective collaboration and teamwork**
  - We make decisions based on our region – not our counties
  - El Pomar chooses quality and effective Council members
  - Councils have a spirit of collaboration within their communities and regions

- **We have enhanced and expanded our impact through greater intentionality and thoughtfulness in our grant making**
  - We give fewer one-time grants and now work with our communities to make greater systemic and strategic changes through multi-year grants
  - We have impacted our local nonprofits who would otherwise not have had such concentrated support
  - We have expanded El Pomar’s focus and have brought rural communities together to learn how to be collaborative and more successful

**Today**

*What does Regional Partnerships do really well?*

- **Regional Partnerships impacts and touches every region of Colorado by:**
  - Addressing the real needs of the region
  - Capitalizing on the Council members for their local perspective, voice, and expertise
  - Allowing Councils freedom on their process, decisions, and overall strategy
  - Encouraging collaboration by convening leaders and organizations
  - Conducting and using research to make decisions

- Through this process, rural communities have increasingly feel like they matter to the rest of the state

**Describe the impact Regional Partnerships has had on your community?**

- **Regional Partnerships has increased the amount of financial support, from El Pomar Foundation and other funders, allocated to rural communities**
  - Help communities see themselves as part of the greater Colorado collective

**What does it mean to you to be a regional council member?**

- **As Council members, we serve and strengthen our communities at a deeper and more effective level**
  - Our connection to our communities have strengthened and grown
  - We are given the agency to be servants to our community through responsive grant making
  - We have increased our connections with local networks, communities, and nonprofits

- **We as Council members see it as a true honor to serve El Pomar Foundation**
  - We are dedicated to El Pomar’s legacy and historical significance
We see our role as an El Pomar liaison as an honor and important responsibility.

- **We have expanded our knowledge on a variety of topics including:**
  - Philanthropy
  - Our communities
  - Leadership
  - Local and statewide networks

**How do you describe El Pomar's impact in Colorado?**

- **Regional councils allow communities to respond to unique needs based on geographic priorities**
  - Reaching out to rural Colorado demonstrates El Pomar’s efforts to enhance visibility
  - El Pomar serves as the spark that allows regional projects to happen
  - Regional Partnerships has a strong reputation—there is a focus on not just the financial component but also an investment in people and personnel
  - Because of programs like Regional Partnerships, we as council members recognize the value of regionality

- **El Pomar’s impact is significant and serves as perhaps the most important organization in Colorado**
  - Every part of the state is touched by El Pomar funding and it is impressive that rural communities are encouraged to apply for grant opportunities
  - The regional council model is a respected model across the state with communities in rural areas feeling just as empowered as communities in urban environments
  - Grants are more broad than other funders, which allows El Pomar to serve a wide variety of missions

**Future**

*If you could change one thing to improve Regional Partnerships, what would that be? If you were a Trustee, what would you do with the same human and financial resources?*

- **Utilize Regional Partnerships to leverage other El Pomar programs**
  - Council members could work to identify emerging community leaders or coach Fellows after they’ve completed the program.

- **Follow-up on the excitement of Statewide**
  - As council members, we leave very excited but then we go back to our day jobs. Perhaps a follow-up conference call or check-in could help us implement some of the big ideas we took away from the conference.

- **Implement a structure to better receive real feedback from communities about what they want or need**
  - Council members see mental health and early childhood education as regional issues, but hearing from the community members themselves could help councils narrow their focus and get to the root of some larger issues.

- **Encourage and promote collaboration opportunities between councils**
In real life, the boundaries between the regions aren’t so neatly drawn and bordering councils usually support communities facing similar challenges

- Align Trustees so they better understand regional issues instead of being experts in just one region

**Describe three concrete aspirations you have for the future of Regional Partnerships**

- **Increase interaction with other regions and learn about their funding approaches**
  - Learn from the successes and mistakes of other Councils
  - Observe another regional council meeting, particularly a region that has similar focus area or is serving a similar population
  - Meet with other councils more than once per year

- **Evaluate El Pomar’s role in a multi-funder context**
  - Understand the full breadth of funder capacity in the state and look to increase partnership opportunities
  - Support regional council grantee organizations as they work to leverage funding from El Pomar

- **Frequently re-evaluate the regional focus area**
  - Continue to utilize Fellows to help create an organized approach to exploring key issues throughout the region
  - How can we as council members identify the core issues and how can we meaningfully engage, which is not always in a financial capacity

*What would you like to see Regional Partnerships accomplish in the next 10 years? What will it take to get there?*

- **Support nonprofits in additional ways:**
  - Help them identify other sources of funding
  - Reserve a small amount of annual Council dollars for emergency projects or needs—the responsiveness and agility makes this program unique
  - Share El Pomar’s financial expertise with nonprofit boards and nonprofit leadership
  - Potentially invest in multi-region pilot projects—regional councils can be more flexible in funding and it is something we should take advantage of

- **Start a conversation about how to better share ideas across the state**
  - Sometimes meetings and resource sharing between council members seems serendipitous; the program doesn’t intentionally cross pollinate, which seems like a missed opportunity
  - Utilize joint council meetings and bring in professional experts from the designated focus area
  - Implement some type of technology platform which could help us communicate between councils, grantee organizations and local nonprofits, and provide ongoing access to Fellows. It could be a vault of shared information and best practices to help build regional connectivity.

- **Enhance regional connectivity**
  - Encourage regional cooperation and use Regional Partnerships as a way to engage councils in discussion about community issues
- Up the connection between Council funding and other sources of El Pomar funding
- Encourage or organize regional site visits for council members across the state

**Continue the Fellowship program with a part of the Fellowship rooted in Regional Partnerships support**

- The Fellowship program is terrific and develops strong young leaders. There is a symbiotic relationship between the Fellowship and Regional Partnerships.
- The research Fellows have done over the years has been helpful and they transition from year to year so effectively
- Fellows are integral to success – the relationship between Fellows, Council members, and Trustees is part of the magic sauce and works really well
- One area of improvement would be to assign Fellows to regions with which they have a connection

**Comments/Quotes**

- It is important having people live and work in the regions as extensions of El Pomar! This is truly unique and critically important to the success of this program. These are the people that are ambassadors and love being connected to the Foundation and we should be the model for other funders to be better connected to rural communities outside Denver and Colorado Springs. This is an incredibly impressive model that we should be very proud of.

- One additional thing is that we should never lose focus of what we really are- we are the vehicle to support many groups (large and small) that make communities better places to live. Relationships I have formed are a true blessing and I love doing a small part of El Pomar’s work.

- Working with council and with El Pomar has been enormously rewarding and I am very impressed with fellows and with Sr. Staff and their commitment to the region. I love that El Pomar has flexibility and is willing to help with small immediate needs when they pop up. Council is eyes and ears of community and if there is an urgent need, the Foundation responds to ensure communities are taken care of.

- Regional Partnerships is unique because it engages local networks by pulling together well connected people who understand the community.

- El Pomar is significant and perhaps the most important organization in Colorado.

- I think we should continue with Regional Partnerships. It goes so far beyond wisely investing in the Penroses’ money. It invests in the Colorado the Penroses believed in.
The highest average score given by Regional Council Members was in response to the question: “How effectively does Regional Partnerships build relationships with and among Council members?” The average score recorded was 4.23/5 with the most relevant comment being: “In the last years of my service on the council, I observed significant leverage of resources coming from the community with the El Pomar funding being used as the catalyst to move the initiative forward.” The lowest average score was in response to the question: “How effectively does Regional Partnerships build relationships within communities?” The average score was 3.77/5 with the most constructive comment being: “I think we could still improve on our collaboration with other funders and even existing government programs, to meet the needs of our target populations.”

**Five Point Likert Scale**

1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree

***Results represent the weighted average score of each statement***

- **Highest response:**
  - 4.23 How effectively does Regional Partnerships build relationships with and among Council members?
    - “In the last years of my service on the council, I observed significant leverage of resources coming from the community with the El Pomar funding being used as the catalyst to move the initiative forward.”

- **Lowest responses:**
  - 3.77 How effectively does Regional Partnerships build relationships within communities?
    - “I think we could still improve on our collaboration with other funders and even existing government programs, to meet the needs of our target populations.”

**Open-Ended Questions**

- Connect Councils that are focusing on the same issues.

- Continue to work on collaboration with other funders, and consider becoming a ‘convener’ of all agencies—nonprofits, government programs, and faith-based communities- on the persistent issue of affordable housing and homelessness.
As you consider your relationship with the Council, how is it different than others?

- **Regional Councils serve as advocates for the nonprofit organization in ways many other funders do not**
  - Council member involvement and support of grantee organizations is valuable to communities
  - Council members have personal contact with grantee organizations and work to stay personally invested in their communities
  - Because of the partnership with regional councils, nonprofits have learned more about other issues facing their communities
  - Councils are interested in the organization as a whole rather than just one specific program or project

- **Regional Councils allow grantee organizations a significant level of trust and autonomy while still providing support and guidance**
  - Council dollars can be flexible to meet an immediate need
  - Grantee organizations can leverage council member expertise and skillset while also gaining access to vast regional network

- **Regional Councils work to build partnerships with grantee organizations**
  - In some cases, councils establish the funding relationship by approaching community organizations with the opportunity to collaborate which is empowering and appreciated
  - Through these partnerships, councils show that they believe in both the organization and the broader community

*Does your relationship with the Council provide any additional value for your organization?*

- **Regional Council relationship helps grantee organizations build other community partnerships**
  - Grantees can leverage council dollars to gain additional funding

- **Regional Council relationships help organizations think both strategically and long term**
  - Council members can help nonprofits formulate plans and identify measurable milestones
  - Encourage organizational leadership to attend sessions like regional NELP, which adds new tools to the management toolbox

- **The personal relationships with individual council members is value added**
  - Council members have large networks and they work to build connections between grantee organizations and other funders or potential community partners

*Would your organization be different without the help of the Council?*

- **Council members advocate for grantee organizations**
- **Councils support leadership and organizational development**
  - Regional NELP

- **Multi-year grants have pushed organizations outside their comfort zone, but have been an appreciated form of funding**

What did you learn about El Pomar that you did not know before this funding relationship?

- **The Fellowship Program**

- **El Pomar’s widespread reach**
  - The regional concept sets El Pomar apart from other funders and allows dollars to be spread across the state rather than just concentrated along the Front Range
  - Councils can respond to changing needs and priorities that may be unique to individual communities

What part of the relationship with the Council had value for you?

- **Ongoing partnerships and personal relationships with council members**
  - Even after multi-year grants conclude, council members work to maintain relationship and support the organization
  - Council members for the most part understand their regions and work diligently to build connections

- **The responsiveness of regional Fellows, Senior Staff, and council members**
  - The regional council funding model makes it feel like grantee organizations can be nimble and react to changing community needs

Future

If you could change one thing to improve the Council’s work with grantee organizations what would that be?

- **Recognizing the amount of time it takes grantee organizations to complete projects requested by the council**
  - There have been times grantee organizations have worked through the weekend to compile the information requested when there may not have been ample time provided to fulfill the request

- **Increase council member interaction**
  - Have more council members attend community events or events hosted by the nonprofit
- **Offer additional opportunities for professional development**

  *What would you like to see Regional Partnerships accomplish in the next 10 years?*

- **Regional collaboration**
  - Work with other nonprofits in other regions serving similar needs

- **Continue the successful model that is currently in place with additional funding (if available)**
  - Councils have the ability to be so responsive to community needs and that should be continued
  - Find organizations that are doing good work who are on the cusp of doing more

*On a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being the least effective and 5 being the most), how effectively did your work with the Regional Council*

- **Help build relationships with Council members (average: 4.4 range: 4-5)**
  - Council members are responsive, take an interest in community challenges, and think strategically
  - Would be nice to see them more often

- **Build relationships with El Pomar staff (average: 4.7 range: 3-5)**
  - Monthly phone calls and routine check-in emails are helpful remaining connected to El Pomar
  - El Pomar staff is friendly and responsive to questions
  - Fellow turnover can be challenging in maintaining relationships

- **Build relationships with El Pomar Trustees (average: 4.1 range: 3-5)**
  - There might not be the expectation to know them as well as council members or Fellows/senior staff
  - Relationship could be strengthened with more intentional interaction
  - Bill Ward, Dave Palenchar, Bob Manning, and General Jacoby specifically mentioned as strong relationship builders and advocates of their regional projects

- **How knowledgeable was the Council and staff in the funding area generally (average: 4.5 range: 3-5)**
  - The council did not have a ton of initial knowledge, but they took the time to learn
  - Council is as up to speed as they need to be and the expectation is not that general purpose foun-
tions are experts in all focus areas
  o  It depends on the council member, but everyone works hard to understand

• **Challenge your skills and encourage your professional growth (average: 4.8 range: 4-5)**
  o  “A 10.”
  o  I’ve done nothing but grow since we tapped into Regional Council support
  o  Councils have supported grantee organization leadership to attend regional NELP which has been instrumental in growth

**Comments**

• Council members do not get in the way of the nonprofit’s work.

• Without regional council funding, the organization would not have been able to grow the way it did to meet the needs of the project.

• The Council is out there in the universe just really rooting for us. Especially in the beginning, knowing that we had a funder out there and a group of leaders in our region who believed in us was really powerful.” – Katie Baldassar, LCBAG
The highest average score given by the Grantees was in response to the question asking about the Foundation’s positive impact on their organization. The average score recorded was 4.78/5 with the most relevant comment being: “I cherish and embrace the affect our relationship with El Pomar has had on my approach to other funders and community partners.” The lowest average score was in response to the question that asked about the Council’s ability to collaborate with their organization to define the outcomes and outputs of the grant. The average score was 3.92/5 with the most constructive comment being; “I am still not 100% certain of what I need to provide El Pomar in order to display the use of grant monies.”

**Five Point Likert Scale**

1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree

***Results represent the weighted average score of each statement***

- **Highest response: The Foundation has had a positive impact on your organization**
  - 4.78
    - “I cherish and embrace the affect our relationship with El Pomar has had on my approach to other funders and community partners.”

- **Lowest responses: The Council effectively collaborates with our organization to determine the outcomes and outputs of the grant**
  - 3.92
    - “I am still not 100% certain of what I need to provide El Pomar in order to display the use of grant monies.”

**Open-Ended Questions**

*What specific effects has the Council’s investment had on your organization? The Council grant allowed us to...*

**Notable comments:**

- Allowed us to remain true to our mission and focus resources on our middle school aged children which is a segment that many funders overlook. Additionally, your support has helped us attract other donors. Finally, council members are great thought partners.

- Collaborate over a wide geographic region for the good of early childhood education.

- The grant allowed us to strategically build upon the work of our organization taking us to the next level in funding, awareness and community partnerships!

**General Comments?**

- The support we receive is much appreciated.

- Living in a rural area is often times hard when it comes to receiving funding for a high quality program. El Pomar recognized this issue and immediately started providing opportunities for rural communities to apply for funding.

- We will always be grateful for the continued impact that El Pomar makes in our organization and in our communities.
Looking back on the work of the Regional Councils, what are the successes? What are you proud of?

- **Relationships**

- **Council member engagement/role as ambassadors**
  - Council members see themselves as ambassadors and are proud to serve in that role
  - They take their roles very seriously
  - Communities feel engaged

- **Inspire/Facilitate Collaboration**
  - Brought in an objective facilitator to help a group of nonprofits establish an effective collaboration
  - By design Regional Partnerships fosters collaboration and requires buy-in by the participants. Lack of collaboration would be more expedient.
  - Brought in other funders
  - Encourages collaboration rather than competitiveness between communities

- **Intentionality and responsiveness**
  - Even while we research and review strategic opportunities to make significant impact in the region we remain nimble enough to invest in sudden opportunities because the objective remains the same – make a significant impact in the community
  - Just because something wasn’t on our radar doesn’t mean we can’t pivot and provide support where the community sees fit
  - Councils have the flexibility to focus on a wide range of topics
  - Councils make informed and educated investments

*What does Regional Partnerships do really well?*

- **Utilize local knowledge**
  - Same concept as local government really – better decisions are made on a local level and the complexities of specific issues are addressed more effectively.
  - We make better competitive and regional grants because we have local expertise

- **Expand network/EPF name recognition**
  - If we are a foundation for Colorado, it is important that we are all out there, that the Trustees are out there as well. People in the region have a chance to meet and work with our Trustees.
  - We are physically there on a regular basis
  - The program does a great job getting El Pomar’s name out there

- **Increase rural funding**
  - It is almost guaranteed that six figures will go to each region on an annual basis
• Encourages community engagement
  o Actually makes Council members better community members – they have an ability to make a difference in a way that they wouldn’t otherwise be able to
  o Networking gives the Council a sense of what’s happening in the community and a goal to learn more

If you could change one thing to improve Regional Partnerships what would that be?

• Clarify Council member roles
  o Better educate the Council on how the process works. Can they have a job description?
  o Rotate Council members more frequently (5-7 years should be considered a long tenure)

• Efficiency
  o So much time is invested by staff, is there a better way?
  o Training for Senior staff is ineffective – it’s hard to learn how to handle the nuances of the program and the expectations can be very hard to meet
  o Too many internal meetings

• Clarification of Non-rural Regions
  o A concern is that people in the community see the Council as just a branch of the broader El Pomar which is uncomfortable. They don’t understand the difference - I think they see it as a task force of EPF.

What is one thing you’ve learned as a result of being part of the Regional Partnerships program?

• Patience
  o It takes time to get a Council headed in the right direction
  o Building a Council with the right group dynamics is difficult, important, and time intensive
  o It is difficult to be effective when you do not understand the nuances or have less passion for the program or program-specific skills

• Richness of communities
  o Communities are more dynamic than I would have ever known just driving through to ski or camp

• Intentionality
  o I am more aware of the balance between supporting councils and flinging money into the mountains
  o Finding a way to bring a program not only to multiple towns but across multiple counties requires collaboration, buy-in, and hard work from a number of stakeholders

How much time (on average) do you spend on Regional Partnerships?

• 2-3 hours per week (depends on the season)
• 8 hours – reviewing grant requests takes a long time

From your perspective, what impact has Regional Partnerships had on the region in which you work?

• Financial
• Significant impact on specific organizations
  o On the region our impact is limited but on the organizations it has been significant
  o The grants we’ve made have changed the trajectory of the organizations and we can impact a great number of people through these organizations – we were very thoughtful with our grant making and it paid off
  o Councils are more able to take calculated risks and provide seed money, which can have large impacts on organizations
  o In regions with fewer assets, programs have been created to fill gaps seen by the Councils

• Other resources
  o Fellow research
  o Ability to convene
  o Utilize networks to expand access to resources across the state

• Trust
  o Organizations feel comfortable because they have reciprocal relationships with Funders. Related, they have specific contacts at the Foundation (Trustees, staff, Fellows).

Describe the impact Regional Partnerships has had on Colorado

• Funding spread across the state
  o The program has diverted philanthropy into lesser served areas across the state
  o El Pomar’s grant making has become more measured, strategic, and equitable

• Encourages community leaders to look beyond their town
  o Rural communities can function in silos, and Regional Partnerships encourages community

• Proven system
  o Demonstrates to other funders that there is a way to solicit input from those living in areas other than the front range about their communities

What would you like Regional Partnerships to look like in 10 years? What will it take to get there?

• More funding for the Councils

• Longer funding commitments

• Council member education system – we more intentionally help them learn about their region and the funding already in place to address them

Describe three concrete wishes you have for the future of Regional Partnerships

• Find equilibrium between freedom and structure
  o Seems like we had too much of a pendulum swing with measurement and evaluation – we went from not enough to overkill
• There is no individuality in the way Senior staff are asked to lead their regions

• **Increase Council to Council interaction**

• **Meaningful and impactful grants**
  - Focus on getting funding into rural Colorado
  - Greater focus on grant process and less focus on outcomes

• **Engaged Council members**
  - Elected official availability is often a problem

• **Collaboration with other funders**
  - Competitive and regional grants work together rather than compete
  - Collaboration with other funders and organizations
  - Make Council members more readily available to other funders as a resource and help facilitate that cooperative relationship
The highest average score given by Staff and Fellows was in response to the question: “How much value do you find in Regional Partnerships?” The average score recorded was 4.24/5 with the most relevant comment being; “…I am a big believer in community driven philanthropy. This will always be a huge gem of El Pomar’s legacy in my mind.” The lowest average score was in response to the question: “How effectively does Regional Partnerships expand your network?” The average score was 3.76/5 with the most constructive comment being; “Beyond the Fellowship, I have not had the opportunity/need to take advantage of the network that I developed through the Fellowship.”

**Five Point Likert Scale**

1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree

***Results represent the weighted average score of each statement***

- **Highest response:**
  - 4.24 How much value do you find in Regional Partnerships?
    - “…I am a big believer in community driven philanthropy. This will always be a huge gem of El Pomar’s legacy in my mind.”

- **Lowest responses:**
  - 3.76 How effectively does Regional Partnerships expand your network?
    - “Beyond the Fellowship, I have not had the opportunity/need to take advantage of the network that I developed through the Fellowship.”

*Of note: This data set includes current and former Fellows*

**Open-Ended Questions**

- I work for an organization that engages the community in grant making recommendations now, and I think it’s our greatest value to the community. I wish we were a little more like El Pomar in how we do this. Engaging the community in funding decisions is smart, ethical, and creates long lasting investment in that community.

- Congrats on 15 years of RP. El Pomar is a foundation for Colorado, and the ethos of the RP program illustrates that. The Regional Partnerships model is super-brilliant; easily one of the most innovative and unique programs I’ve seen from a foundation or a nonprofit. It also aligns nicely with nuanced community-engagement philosophies, by learning about the most pressing needs from community leaders. The emphasis on research and evaluation is important since there needs to be measurable outcomes and accountability across the board. It will be important for the Councils to maintain their “spirit” as this emphasis is rolled out. As with most things, balance is important and Council’s should also consider integrating the evaluation metrics that organizations are already doing with their important needs. My most constructive feedback would be for the makeup of the Councils to be more representative of the regions they serve. And although RP was initially created to serve the rural regions, it’s important to also consider the unique value that the non-rural regions (Pikes Peak and Metro) bring to the program and that they do reach the largest populations. I think that sometimes it can be easy for those regions to feel left out since some of the RP communications (like the holiday card) only talk about the impact RP is making in rural Colorado communities.

- RP is a TRULY innovative program that so many other foundations, nonprofits, and businesses look to as a top program making a real impact in communities around Colorado, especially in rural areas.
Enhance, encourage, and promote the current and future well being of the people of Colorado