



NEWS *from the* FOUNDATION

Look Back, Look Forward: A Reflection of 15 Years at the Statewide Meeting

by Cathy Robbins

After 15 years of the Statewide meeting, let us take both a look back at what we have accomplished and learned, and a look forward to utilize the energy, networks and resources for an even bigger future impact through collaboration and additional funding partners.

Look Back

Because El Pomar's regions vary greatly from the Eastern Plains to the Western Slope, and the Front Range to the San Luis Valley, we have a great deal to learn from one another. It is these contrasts that challenge, inform, influence and encourage us to think and work with different perspectives. The purpose of the Statewide meeting is to provide a venue to engage and connect Council members from every corner of Colorado.

The first Statewide meeting was held at Penrose House in 2004 with all four councils (Northwest, Southeast, San Luis Valley and Southwest) in attendance. Since that first gathering, Statewide has grown and improved to include eleven different councils representing all 64 Colorado counties. In the words of a Council member, "At Statewide you truly see the extent to which Regional Partnerships spans the entire state, and the positive impact the program and each individual Council is having."

Over time, we have realized the four stakeholder groups key to a successful Statewide meeting — Council members, El Pomar Foundation, presenters and philanthropic leaders. Each group offers a unique perspective which results in productive and action-driven meetings.

Council members

It inspires me to observe Council members network, share ideas and learn from each other about priorities, strategies and aspirations. The relationships continue beyond Statewide to form new connections to people and places throughout Colorado.

One Council member stated, "It is inspiring to experience the broad reach El Pomar Foundation has created and supported, and to see so many dedicated folks trying to make their communities a better place."

El Pomar Foundation

The Statewide meeting is also an opportunity to increase awareness and broaden knowledge about the Foundation. El Pomar is much more than Regional Partnerships, with 12 programs, numerous donor-directed funds and our primary operation—the competitive grants process.

El Pomar is grateful for the opportunity to annually convene such a diverse group of leaders and connect them to additional Foundation programs and projects.

Presenters

Statewide has attracted U.S. Senator Ken Salazar (2006), Governor John Hickenlooper (2011) and U.S. Senator Cory Gardner (2015) who encouraged us to be involved and engaged in our local communities. Two national speakers, Vikki Spruill and Dan Cardinali, expanded our thinking and challenged us to do more. In 2013, Vikki Spruill, President and CEO of the Council on Foundations, shared examples of how philanthropy plays an important role in building communities to expand on Council members thinking of themselves as community investors. In 2018, Dan Cardinali, President and CEO of Independent Sector, spoke about genuine community engagement and praised the approach of Regional Partnerships. These presenters have brought an incredible depth of knowledge and insight to this annual meeting.

Philanthropic Leaders

In 2009, additional philanthropic leaders began joining us at Statewide. The relationships with other funders are reciprocal as councils offer place-based information, introductions to leaders in their respective region and knowledge of organizations and people. Council members learn about what, where and how others are funding. It is helpful and beneficial to both.

As a philanthropic leader noted in 2014, "In 10 years of work, El Pomar Foundation has made headway in a new kind of partnership and thinking in the state."

Look Forward

These four components —Council members, El Pomar, other philanthropists and presenters— account for a dynamic, energetic, informative and celebratory experience. These groups are also the framework to improve and expand for the future.

Think about where Regional Partnerships is on a continuum to reach full potential (it is a good question that is left to others to answer). As I think about the future of how we move on that continuum, I believe the next step requires collaboration and multiple funders. We must take this opportunity to commit and leverage our strengths.