



NEWS from the FOUNDATION



Statewide, Regional Partnerships and Coming Together

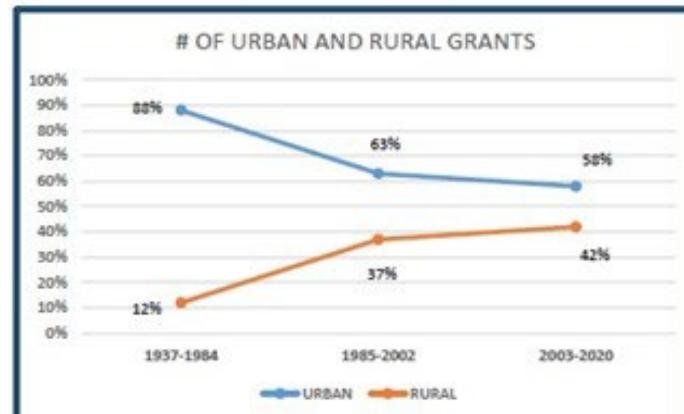
by Kyle Hybl

Earlier this month, El Pomar Foundation was pleased to host each of our 11 regional councils and several funding partners at our annual Statewide Meeting. It felt particularly special to host this convergence of staff and regional council members at Penrose House for the first time in more than a decade. As the place that Spencer and Julie Penrose considered their home together, and now a nonprofit conference facility, it was a particularly ideal location to come together.

It was a pleasure and privilege to spend two days at the Statewide Meeting acknowledging the contributions of our regional council members, learning together about issues around Colorado and reflecting on the impact of Regional Partnerships and El Pomar's work in support of all Coloradans. Council members learned from and participated in panels on community foundation impact and state policy priorities for the upcoming year. Participants also enjoyed a thoughtful keynote address on the state of housing from Colorado Department of Local Affairs Executive Director, Rick Garcia. Gathering and learning together was a powerful, uniting moment for council members and staff alike.

This community of council members from around Colorado is unique and important. Each member represents a different sector, community and life experience from across our state. Council efforts help keep the mission of Spencer and Julie Penrose alive through their commitment to the current and future well-being of the people of Colorado by bringing deep community-based ties and professional expertise to El Pomar's grant making process. Reuniting for the first time in two years, and particularly at Penrose House, gave us pause and warrants reflection on the power of Regional Partnerships.

Long before the pandemic, back in 2003, the Regional Partnerships program was created to leverage local expertise from all over Colorado to improve El Pomar's grant making, particularly in rural areas. These individuals would form regional councils that could more closely identify the funding needs of their respective regions. Historically, rural Colorado received fewer dollars on average than urban regions. However, by taking a strategic approach and later engaging with local partners through Regional Partnerships, El Pomar has substantially increased the number of grants made to rural Colorado since the decades prior to forming Regional Partnerships, as is illustrated by the chart below. We are proud and honored to have partnered with leaders across Colorado to provide such an effective funding strategy.



At the inception of Regional Partnerships, we knew working with local leaders in their communities would make us more effective in our grant making. With the onset of COVID-19, little did we know these Councils would also be a vital vehicle to get emergency funding into Colorado communities where it was needed most and with maximum speed. The Colorado Assistance Fund (CAF) was created to address emergent needs during the Great Recession in 2008 and was again activated four times over the past two years to address hardships brought on by COVID-19. The Trustees approved a total of \$3.1 million in three phases through its Colorado Assistance Fund in 2020, and another phase of more than \$550,000 in 2021. El Pomar's ability to distribute CAF funds into all areas of the state would not have been possible without the tireless work of regional council members, who researched local organizations and determined areas of highest need. Whether funding organizations supporting food security like St. George's Episcopal Church in Leadville, or specific arts and culture organizations, such as the White Water Festival in Cañon City, El Pomar was proud to support regional council members in directing funds where they could have deep and timely impact.

2021 has been an uncertain and challenging year, yet it has also been filled with hope and opportunity. Throughout the year, we have adapted to changing circumstances in ways that have allowed us to continue to be a steady and solid partner to nonprofits and communities around the state. We look forward to seeing where Regional Partnerships takes us as we approach 2022 with gratitude for our regional council members and continued optimism for what the "new normal" brings for communities across Colorado.