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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Our Valley plan in line to be community's 'golden ticket,' officials say

WENATCHEE — When Our Valley Our Future / Nuestro Valle Nuestro Futuro announced it had landed a \$130,000 grant at its action plan unveiling luncheon in late November, the applause from those gathered at the Wenatchee Convention Center was long and sustained.

The cheers are likely to get louder in the months and years ahead.

Officials say that Our Valley, the community visioning and development initiative launched in 2015, is in prime position to help secure and leverage additional grant funding for the 156 projects and programs that make up its first action plan.

The reason? The Our Valley Action Plan was built on what thousands of community members say they value about the region and what they believe is needed to improve residents' quality of life. As a result, the plan reflects the community's voice, which is what grant funders want to see documented in applications. The thousands of hours that went into developing the community's action plan also can be used as a match for grants.

"This is a very unique plan," said Alan Walker, a member of the Our Valley steering committee and executive director of the United Way of Chelan and Douglas Counties. "It truly mirrors the community and its wishes."

"Often, well-meaning groups work in silos, not looking past their core volunteers, constituents and clients to the broader community," said Beth Stipe, executive director of the Community Foundation of NCW. "A process like Our Valley Our Future — having a broad community voice and collaborative efforts across boundaries — is something valued by funders and quite rare."

Local officials said their counterparts on the state and federal levels have reviewed the new action plan and are already referring it as the Wenatchee Valley's guiding document and main screening tool. That is due to the fact the plan was built on collaboration and inclusiveness, including the surveying and interviewing of thousands of residents, and addresses everyone in the valley.

The avenues to leverage the plan and its projects are many, they said. The Our Valley plan not only contains the community's voice but it has identified lead partners, addresses a full range of community focus areas and has individual projects that overlap into different focus areas. The action plan also builds on the community's existing assets.

"It's been my experience that when a community develops a grassroots plan, and connects the dots, funding will follow," added Allison Williams, another Our Valley steering committee member and City of Wenatchee executive services director.

Steve Maher, Our Valley project coordinator, said applications for lead partners to seek 'Our Valley Action-Ready Grants' will be available later this month. The grants are coming from the \$130,000 awarded to Our Valley by the Community Foundation of NCW. The Community Foundation and the United Way of Chelan and Douglas Counties jointly applied on behalf of Our Valley for support from Philanthropy Northwest with funding through The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Our Valley has decided to award the 'Action-Ready' grants four times a year, with the first deadline for applications being Feb. 1. More information will be published in upcoming weeks on the Our Valley website and Facebook page, Maher said.

In January, Our Valley's third phase — the implementation phase — will begin as lead partners incorporate the projects into their work plans. Our Valley is set up structurally to help lead partners facilitate, organize, plan, communicate, market, lobby, trouble-shoot, and track progress.

The action plan — approximately 15 months in the making — includes 149 projects and programs and seven major "game-changer" projects spread out over six focus areas (economy and jobs; land use, growth and transportation; the environment and outdoor recreation; health care, social services and public safety; education and arts and culture; community engagement, governance and decision-making).

The plan's projects and programs are being led by 81 public agencies, businesses, nonprofit organizations and community groups. The lead partners have committed to championing and implementing the actions within a five-year period. By working on these projects, the partner organizations share responsibility in bringing Our Valley's long-term, grassroots vision to fruition.

Our Valley was started by a small group of community leaders inspired by a TEDx Conference in Wenatchee and driven by a desire to tackle big challenges facing the region — a restructuring economy, lagging wages, threats from catastrophic wildfires, rising poverty levels and a growing housing crisis.

For a downloadable version of the Our Valley Action Plan — and a look at all seven major game-changer projects and 149 action items — visit <http://www.ourvalleyourfuture.org>.

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