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Our Valley Our Future launches community visioning and planning project

Feedback from residents will help craft projects to assist in pandemic recovery

WENATCHEE — Our Valley Our Future / Nuestro Valle Nuestro Futuro announced today the launch of its “Our Valley, Stronger” community outreach, visioning and planning project that will help drive pandemic response, recovery and rebuilding work in the region for the years 2022-26.

At the end of the year, OVOF will release a five-year Action Plan of projects and programs led by partnering organizations.

The first OVOF Action Plan (for the years 2017-21) expires at the end of this year. As of December 2020, objectives have been met in four of the seven game-changer projects and in 94 of the 161 other projects and programs in that initial Action Plan.

More than 40 organizations from Chelan and Douglas counties have signed on as official project partners for the “Our Valley, Stronger” project, which will be part community needs assessment and part community planning. This year’s work will provide decision-makers in the public, private and nonprofit sectors with an assessment of the region’s challenges, strengths, and weaknesses as the region emerges from the pandemic, along with specific steps the region can take to boost its pandemic response, recovery, and rebuilding efforts.

“The project’s name was chosen to reflect OVOF’s belief that if we all work together, we can come out of the pandemic better and stronger as a region and community,” said OVOF Board President David Olson, who is CEO of Columbia Valley Community Health. “The pandemic has impacted virtually every resident, but in vastly different ways. The OVOF process will provide residents with an opportunity to come together, to be heard, to heal, to hope, to frame their needs, and to plan for a better future.”

The project’s main tasks include collecting and analyzing input from residents and community leaders, developing projects and programs based on that feedback from residents and community leaders, and gaining the commitment of lead partners to execute each of the projects and programs in the new plan. OVOF also will be researching into how other communities are rebounding from the pandemic.

To help gather feedback from residents, OVOF is conducting a community survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/OVOF2021> (in English) and <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NuestroValleEncuesta> (in Spanish). Some of the questions in the survey are the same ones OVOF asked in 2015-16, which will allow OVOF and its partners to see how the views of residents have changed in that time period. Other survey questions deal with COVID response, recovery and rebuilding, and with issues of equity and inclusion.

OVOF also will hold several online and hybrid community events this spring — in partnership with such organizations as NCW Libraries and the Wenatchee Valley Museum & Cultural Center — to engage residents and seek feedback. OVOF is teaming up with The Wenatchee World to hold the first community event, an online listening session, from 6 to 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 13. Moderators will include Wenatchee Mayor Frank Kuntz, East Wenatchee Mayor Jerrilea Crawford, Wenatchee Valley Chamber of Commerce executive director Shiloh Burgess, North Central Educational Service District superintendent Michelle Price, Confluence Health Dr. Bindu Nayak, and Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council executive director Alan Walker. To register for the online listening session: <https://live.remo.co/e/wenatchee-world-community-listen/register>.

Once all the input and data have been gathered this spring and early summer, OVOF will appoint two citizen committees to help analyze the information and to recommend projects and programs for the new Action Plan. The plan itself will have six sections, reflecting the wholistic nature of the planning work. Those sections will focus on the economy and jobs; housing, transportation and growth; the environment and conservation; social services; education and culture; and governance and decision-making.

Planning for COVID recovery and rebuilding will be a central focus of this year's work. Since February 2020, thousands of people in Chelan and Douglas counties have lost jobs and income; been unable to pay their rents or mortgages; endured months of isolation, stress and anxiety; and struggled to access services.

Stacy Luckensmeyer, Wenatchee Valley College business and industry liaison, said the OVOF data will be foundational for the economic and community development plans of cities, counties, ports and other organizations across the entire region.

"The OVOF project will identify the most effective actions to be taken to support, stabilize, and grow businesses in our region," said Luckensmeyer, who is OVOF past president. "Multiple infrastructure projects are expected to be identified through planning, as are education and health needs, and economic opportunities for the private sector. To best support our recovering business community, we need to have a clear picture of our area's economic and community priorities, where there are opportunities for sector growth, and how the public and private entities are collaborating together to open doors for business growth and future development.

"In many ways, this region is blessed to have a vehicle like OVOF in place at this moment in time," Luckensmeyer added. "Not a lot of communities do."

For more on the "Our Valley, Stronger" community planning project, visit the OVOF website at <http://www.ourvalleyourfuture.org>.

Our Valley Our Future, founded in 2015, is a nonprofit organization that brings together residents and organizations to improve the region's quality of life. Its guiding document is its Action Plan, which includes projects and programs led by partnering organizations. OVOF serves as convener, facilitator, data-collector, planner and communicator in furthering the community's vision.

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