



COMMUNITY OUTREACH REPORT

MARCH 2022



INTRODUCTION

In January 2021, Our Valley Our Future / Nuestro Valle Nuestro Futuro (OVOF) launched the “Our Valley, Stronger” community visioning and planning project, leading to a new five-year Action Plan for the years 2022-26. Over the course of the next 12 months, OVOF engaged with more than 2,000 community members about the region’s challenges, strengths, and weaknesses, along with ways to improve everyone’s quality of life. The project’s name – Our Valley, Stronger – was chosen to reflect OVOF’s belief that if residents work together, the region can come out of the COVID-19 pandemic in a stronger, more resilient position as it looks to the future.

This process was a dynamic one as OVOF moved from public input to concrete outcomes. The pathway started with community leader (stakeholder) interviews, was broadened through various forms of community engagement, including online public surveys, focus groups and panel discussions, and augmented further by research on emerging trends beginning to affect the community.

Answering these four thematic questions, community members provided information that served as building blocks of the new Action Plan:

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“Where are we now?”
Core values, challenges, opportunities

“Where are we going?”
Key trends and issues

“Where do we want to be?”
Vision, directional themes

“How do we get there?”
Action planning, plan development

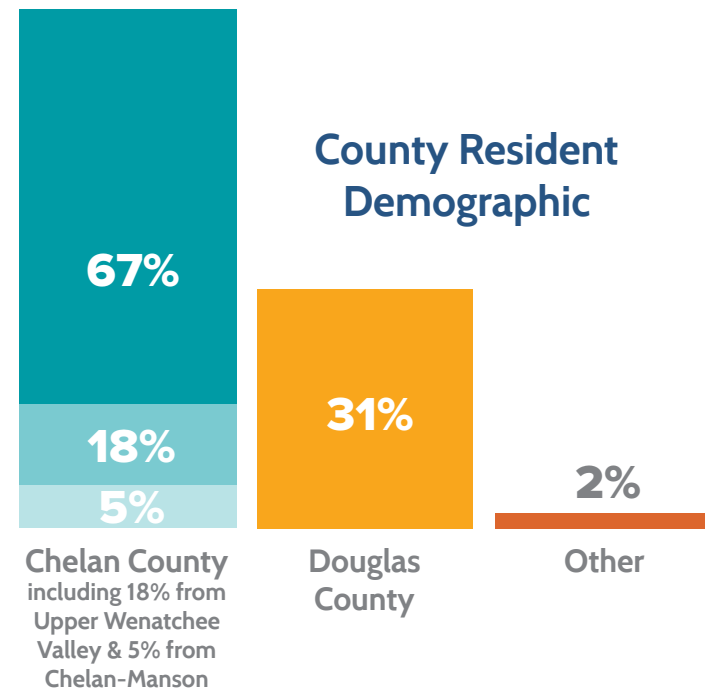
OVOF also asked questions during its outreach work about the COVID-19 pandemic, social inequities, and the level of optimism residents hold about the future.

Vision ideas generated from community members were further distilled and refined by six Action Teams and turned into actionable projects and programs that constitute the new five-year Action Plan for the years 2022-26.

PARTICIPATION FROM COMMUNITY MEMBERS

All told, 2,041 community members directly participated in OVOF’s outreach phase in 2021. They participated through:

- **49 stakeholder interviews**
- **2 public surveys**
- **19 focus groups**
- **2 panel discussions.**

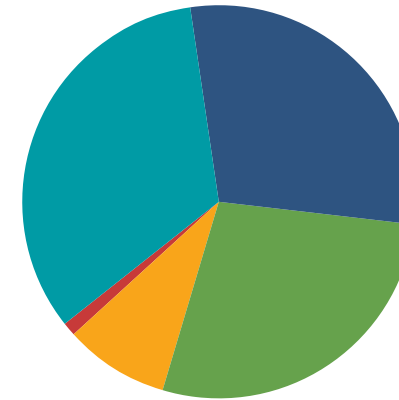


Demographically, participants cut a wide swath across the community. For example, approximately 67 percent of participants were Chelan County residents (including 18 percent from the Upper Wenatchee Valley and 5 percent from Chelan-Manson), 31 percent were Douglas County residents, and 2 percent were from other locations. 26 percent self-identified as Latino.

Because the surveys, in particular, were not a scientific random sample, they cannot claim to be statistically representative of the region’s population. That said, the fact that survey participants of different backgrounds and locations closely reflected actual regional demographic numbers lends significant credibility to survey results.

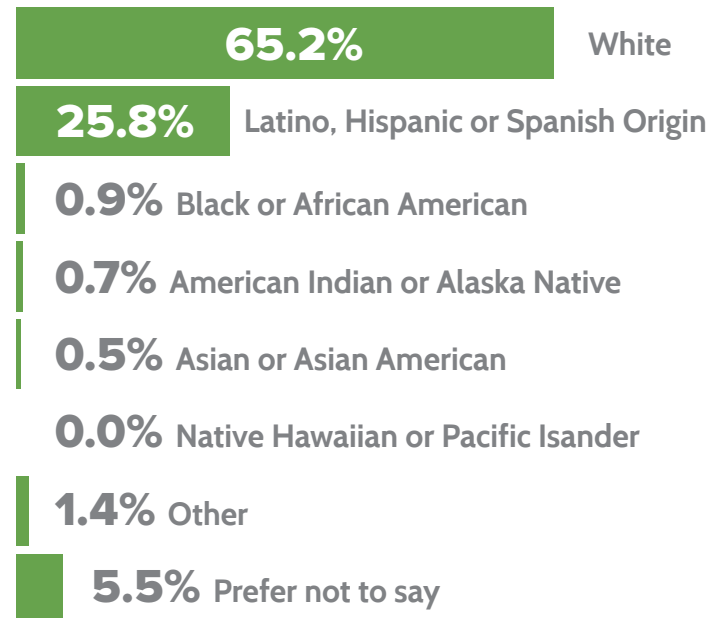
The information collected provides us with a close look at the current state of the region and what its residents foresee is needed to make it a more thriving place to live, work and play going forward.

AGE BREAKDOWN of participants in Our Valley Our Future’s outreach work in 2021



- 60 years and older: **33.5%**
- 45 to 59 years of age: **29.1%**
- 30 to 44 years of age: **27.7%**
- 19 to 29 years of age: **8.7%**
- 18 years and younger: **1.0%**

ETHNICITY BREAKDOWN of participants in Our Valley Our Future’s outreach work in 2021



Where the 2,041 participants in Our Valley Our Future’s outreach work lived in 2021

Wenatchee	41.5%
East Wenatchee	22.8%
Leavenworth	11.5%
Cashmere	4.4%
Chelan	3.7%
Rock Island	2.8%
Waterville	2.0%
Orondo	1.9%
Entiat	1.5%
Malaga	1.5%
Manson	1.2%
Peshastin	1.2%
Plain	0.7%
Bridgeport	0.6%
Mansfield	0.6%
Monitor	0.3%
Other	1.8%



What is the biggest challenge for the future of our valley?

Below are the top responses, categorized and ranked based on the number of times mentioned.

OVERALL RESPONDENTS

1. Adapting to growth
2. Housing
3. Building resiliency
4. Bridging the cultural divide
5. Better jobs, economy
6. Providing social services
7. Community divisiveness
8. Improving education
8. Sustainable tourism
10. Adapting to change

LATINO RESPONDENTS

1. Bridging the cultural divide
2. Housing
3. Adapting to growth
4. Improving education
5. Better jobs, economy
6. Providing social services
7. Cost of living
8. Assisting youth
9. Building resiliency
10. Public safety

MAIN FINDINGS FROM OUTREACH WORK

The following summary of findings from OVOF's outreach work in 2021 provides a glimpse into the community's attitudes about the future:

Values Remain Constant

Community members continue to value the region's natural environment (open spaces, scenic beauty, clean air and water), outdoor recreation opportunities, sense of community and small-town feel, services and amenities in the Greater Wenatchee Area, low crime rates, cultural diversity, and the agriculture industry. Such endearing values not only speak to what residents don't want to see go away, but also provides a kind of yardstick against which to measure proposed future plans.

A Changing Region

Community members perceive the region is changing quickly and in vastly more ways than they did when queried by OVOF in 2015-16.

Growth: Community members have witnessed an influx of new residents, visitors and money over the past five years, most of it spurred or influenced by the pandemic. The new arrivals include remote workers, second-home owners, retirees, young adults, and others. Large numbers of people have visited the Leavenworth and Lake Chelan areas and the region's trail systems and outdoor attractions during the pandemic.

COVID-19: The pandemic has had a negative impact on many aspects of community life and magnified inequities, leading to a marked increase in social services to assist those in need. Asked by OVOF what areas have been most negatively impacted by the pandemic, residents cited people's physical, mental and spiritual health, the health care system itself, the education system, arts and culture, housing, and community connectiveness.

Housing: In 2015-16, when OVOF last sought input from community members about regional challenges, people cited the general lack of available and affordable housing as a growing issue in Chelan and Douglas counties. In 2021, the consensus among community members is that many essential workers, first-time home buyers and young people and families have been completely priced out of the local housing market. Said one resident, "Often times when I look at the housing market and see the skyrocketing prices and compare that with the economy here, I think, 'How sustainable are the two?' My biggest concern is that the people who work here won't be able to live here."



Agriculture: Community members have taken note of orchards being converted into home sites and are keenly aware some small farmers find making a living on farming alone difficult. Another change cited by community members: Fruit companies are increasingly turning to automation to handle work previously done by people.

Divisiveness: Community members also have taken note of community divisiveness over COVID vaccinations and masking, national politics, new residents, urban vs. rural lifestyles, culture, and tourism.



Cultural integration: Community members say a silver lining of the pandemic has been seeing Latinos and Anglos work together to provide information and resources to the overall community, including those most vulnerable.



In what areas do you think racial and social equity barriers exist in our valley?

OVERALL RESPONDENTS

- Language: 64.1%
- Housing: 58.0%
- Culture: 50.2%
- Education: 45.5%
- Workplace: 37.1%
- Criminal justice: 34.7%
- Access to technology: 34.2%
- Health care: 33.9%
- Business opportunities: 31.7%
- Child care: 30.1%
- Job training: 25.4%
- Access to loans: 24.3%
- Transportation: 21.1%
- There are no barriers: 8.6%

LATINO RESPONDENTS

- Language: 73.2%
- Culture: 63.0%
- Housing: 50.4%
- Education: 50.4%
- Workplace: 50.4%
- Health care: 43.3%
- Criminal justice: 37.8%
- Business opportunities: 33.9%
- Job training: 33.9%
- Access to loans: 29.9%
- Access to technology: 29.1%
- Child care: 27.6%
- Transportation: 24.4%
- There are no barriers: 5.5%



What is the most important thing our community can do to address issues of racial and social equity?

Below are the top responses, categorized and ranked based on the number of times mentioned.

1. Develop a better understanding of cultures and issues
2. Provide affordable housing and social services
3. Engage, communicate and listen
4. Increase representation of minorities in leadership roles
5. Improve language fluency
6. Build and nurture relationships
7. Celebrate cultures, people and successes
8. Acknowledge there is an issue
9. Call out racism
10. Train and educate the overall community

Big Challenges

Adapting to growth: Community members believe the region's biggest challenge is adapting to growth so the region doesn't lose what community members value most: the natural environment, sense of community, a more rural lifestyle, agriculture, and the ability to own a home and live and work in the same community. In particular, residents are calling for more attainable and affordable housing, infrastructure improvements to get ahead of the growth, better planning and coordination among jurisdictions, and a sustainable tourism industry. Overuse of public lands for outdoor recreation is a big concern. Many foresee the growth continuing for quite some time. Said

one community leader interviewed, "The key is finding a way to preserve our beautiful way of life and also grow."

Greater resiliency: Community members see building greater resiliency – commonly defined as the ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from adverse situations, both natural and man-made – as key to the future viability of the place. Climate change is a factor but not the only one. Community members want to see greater resiliency applied to natural resources (water and land), natural disasters (wildfires), health and wellness of individuals, the economy, internet connectivity, education (from early learning through adult learning), and agriculture. Said a community leader, "What is going to happen next? How will it affect us? How do we build systems that can respond appropriately? How do communities come together?"

Basic needs: The needs of many residents have increased exponentially during the pandemic. To recover, community members favor economic measures first and foremost, followed by a focus on education, housing, public health, behavioral health, food assistance, and other social services.



We need to find common ground on things. There needs to be an understanding of the otherness.

Social divisions: Many community members are concerned about divisiveness among people and the fear it will continue to fester into the foreseeable future and get in the way of problem solving and actionable steps. Such disagreements have driven a wedge between people, including friends and neighbors, even members of the same family. Said one community leader, "It is similar to what you are seeing in the rest of the country. How we can achieve something together when we sometimes have opposite points of view about the same problem? We need to find common ground in things." Said a resident, "There needs to be an understanding of the otherness."

Inclusion: Community members say fully bridging the Anglo-Latino cultural divide will take the overall community's involvement and commitment, and that relationship building is a vital first step. While they believe diversity is increasing in many sectors, they also say the region needs more people from underrepresented groups in leadership positions in order to create a more authentic, productive and harmonious community.

Optimism Declines

In 2021, in the midst of the pandemic, community members expressed less optimism about the future than they did when the same question was asked of them in 2015. Asked whether they think the region will be a better or worse place to live in the future, 51 percent of the OVOF survey respondents in 2021 answered either "definitely better" or "somewhat better," compared to 58 percent of survey respondents who answered that way in 2015. Conversely, 30 percent of survey respondents in 2021 answered either "somewhat worse" or "definitely worse" to the same question, compared with 19 percent who answered that way in 2015.

The region's Latino community expressed far more optimism about the region's future in 2021, with 76 percent of Latino survey respondents answering either "definitely better" or "somewhat better" to that same question.

AN ANALYSIS OF GLOBAL AND U.S. TRENDS

OVOF hired Steven Ames of NXT Consulting Group in 2021 to conduct an analysis of global and U.S. trends as such trends ultimately affect people and organizations on a local level, and local communities are often times on the front line of change. Understanding trends ahead of time can make communities more proactive and assist in community visioning and planning work. OVOF utilized this information in crafting game changer initiatives and action items. As part of this analysis, Ames reviewed nearly 100 articles, papers and reports from mainstream media, policy journals, nongovernmental organizations, and scholarly institutions. Here is what he found:

Major Trends

Population Growth and Change: Worldwide, there will be continued growth, the "aging" and diversifying of populations, and major population migrations. U.S. population growth in stagnating, aging, and diversifying. America is becoming more ethnically, racially and culturally diverse. Hispanic, Asian and multi-racial people have driven U.S. growth since 2010. People who identify as multi-racial grew by 276 percent to 33.8 million in 2020. The white (non-Hispanic) population accounted for 58 percent of the population in 2020, its lowest share on record. Closer to home, a "California Exodus" – driven by taxes, housing, cost of living, climate change, and wildfires – is increasing migration to the Northwest and other parts of the country. Wealthy Americans, high-tech workers, and Millennials are moving. Destinations include remote 'lifestyle' locations, smaller towns and more affordable suburbs. Washington state was in the top five states for numeric population increase between 2010 and 2020.



Our Valley Our Future interviewed 49 community stakeholders between February and April 2021. One of the questions asked of the stakeholders.

Based on what you know or have learned, what are the one or two most important things your organization could focus on to foster our valley's long-term rebuilding from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Below are the top responses, categorized and ranked based on the number of times mentioned.

1. Community building
2. Business assistance
3. Community resiliency
4. More housing
5. Economic development
6. Maintaining core industries
7. Adapting to change
8. Social services
8. Public health measures
10. Funding for nonprofits

Climate Change and Environment: Extreme weather, resource depletion, declining biodiversity, and water/food insecurity are occurring globally and will remain a major challenge for years. Partially in response, the world is turning to renewable, low-carbon energy sources. About 60 percent of the Western U.S. is in "exceptional" or "extreme" drought; less than 1 percent of the West is unaffected by drought. Reductions in snowpack means lowered flows in tributaries and rivers. Soil moisture levels in the Northwest are drier than in 99 percent of previous years. Man-made lakes supplying much of the West now exceed historic lows. The first-ever water shortage declaration affecting seven states has been declared. From 2011 to 2020, an average of 7.5 million acres burned every year, more than double the average from 1991-2000.



Urbanization: The growth in urbanization will continue around the world and have a significant impact on land use, housing, transportation, and infrastructure. U.S. metropolitan areas – which includes the Greater Wenatchee Area – grew by 9 percent between 2010 and 2020, accounting for 86 percent of the country’s population in 2020. The “built landscape” in the U.S. grew by 14,000 square miles between 2001-2019 – or 5 times the size of Delaware. Much of the new development is in the West and Sun Belt states. U.S. housing units grew by 6.7 percent between 2010 and 2020, but at half the growth rate of the previous decade.

Economic Restructuring: Globalization, automation and remote work, and changing workplaces and jobs are all increasing. The pandemic, along with automation, has created a “double-disruption” scenario. Post-pandemic, many U.S. employees are saying they want to work partially from home. The pandemic’s impact on women in the workforce has been severe due in part to lack of childcare. Recouping the female labor force participation may take a decade or more. Global outsourcing, artificial intelligence and Big Tech have deconstructed traditional American jobs and the dream of unlimited opportunity. The Gig Economy and remote work have exploded, fueled by technology, digital platforms and the pandemic. Artificial intelligence, robotics and automation will replace entire categories of work – between 30 to 40 percent of all jobs. Middle-skilled, middle-income jobs are the most threatened.

Science, Technology and Telecommunication: Technology and communications experts describe the new normal as a time of massive disruption and unprecedented challenges. Humans’ relationship with technology will deepen post-pandemic, relying even more on digital connections for work, education, health care, daily commerce, and essential social interactions. Challenges of deeper tech-dependence include greater economic inequality, more powerful Big Tech, and the spread of mis-

information. Opportunities include social equity reforms, more flexible workplaces, and “smart systems” in health care, education, and community living.

Public Health: Pandemics, unequal access to health care, medical advances, and new health care models are at the forefront. The cost of healthcare is becoming unsustainable in advanced economies. Health inequity and disparities in health care opportunities remain pervasive, especially among low-income groups and people of color. The health care industry alone can’t deliver health care, particularly when it comes to population-based prevention and “precision medicine.” The smartphone is becoming a powerful tool for access to health, linking cloud-based medical records, diagnostics and treatment information. Health care dominates top emerging technologies, including robotics, genetic engineering, AI, digital genomics, RNA-based therapeutics, and more.



Social Equity: Awareness of wealth gaps, income inequalities, systemic racism, and xenophobia have become a major cultural force, prompting public, private and community sector responses. The post-pandemic economic recovery threatens to leave marginalized and lower income groups behind economically for longer periods of time. Hate crimes are at their highest levels. Immigration on the U.S.’s southern border continues to polarize public opinion.

Values and Norms: Changing lifestyles, changing civic norms, and democracies under duress are major trends today. Millennials and Gen Z are driving an American values shift: patriotism, religion, having children all rate lower in importance than 20 years ago. The U.S. is becoming more secular. Less than 50 percent of Americans belong to a religious group. A large majority of Americans believe in “hard work,” other top-rated values include tolerance for others, financial security, and self-fulfillment. About 40 percent think increasing diversity and tolerance for different cultures and races is a “step forward” for society, while 14 percent say it is a “step back.” U.S. is now rated as a ‘flawed democracy,’ due to increased polarization, declining social cohesion, and disruptions in the democratic process.