Inside East Central Illinois: A Summary Report from a Landscape Scan

Introduction:

Over ten weeks late last year, Laura conducted an informal survey of east central Illinois (ECI). I asked her to open a dialogue with community leaders about what they see as the opportunities and issues facing their communities. In the following sections, Laura will explain her methodology and share some conclusions arising from her conversations.

Apart from identifying assets in individual communities, as well as "areas of need" in and across communities, and trends across the region, her report draws no conclusions and makes no recommendations as to action by LFF.

We present this report (to the Board) to support and further stimulate a few conversations already underway among trustees, even if we haven't fully named them. In addition to preparing for major strategy discussions, undertaking this work had three additional purposes.

First, Laura's new position gave her responsibility for more local grantmaking and programming. In that position, I have asked her to help us – staff, trustees, and members – understand the meaning of *Sustainable Communities* from the perspective of those we serve. Opening a wider dialogue, we agreed, would be a good introduction for her, and provide a systematic way for Laura to begin building relationships and her understanding of The Foundation's traditional geography.

Another reason for opening a dialogue was to provide a starting point for reinvigorating capacity building. Historically, strengthening the organizational capacity of nonprofits in east central Illinois has been a Foundation priority. This is reflected, for example, in our devotion of .5fte to the creation of GoodWorksConnect.Org.[1] Over the past few years, capacity building has taken a back seat to our other work.

In part, the shift was natural as we positioned other more appropriate organizations to play that role. We endowed micro-grant programs at the four community foundations in east central Illinois, and we handed off GoodWorksConnect to Forefront, Illinois' nonprofit association. (Forefront also serves as Illinois' Regional Association of Grantmakers.)

As we come out of the COVID years, I would like to see us being more intentional in helping grantees working in communities who may still be suffering, or for whom the pandemic underscored already persistent problems. Or we may find opportunities to make a different sort of difference than we have attempted before.

I believe Laura has accomplished much of what I hoped she would. I thank her. Even if the report hasn't accomplished all our goals, her summary report should serve as a discussion stimulant.

Bruce Karmazin
Executive Director

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[1] For those not on the board at the time, LFF convened nonprofits across the region to create a Facebook-like platform for nonprofit leaders to network learn and grow from each other. Before that, we provided direct service, bringing in experts and provided trainings directly on topics like fundraising. We also created the Illinois Environmental Fundraising Collaborative, funding a fulltime fundraising professional for four of our grantees.

Background and Methodology:

This Summary Report reflects findings from 26 conversations with leaders representing 19 organizations across nine distinct geographic communities in seven different counties. Participants varied in their roles, from mayors and Chamber of Commerce directors to homeless shelter directors and community college staff. (See Appendix A for a full list of participants.)

Throughout these conversations I aimed to listen for insights into what their community's challenges and opportunities are, and how their communities are (or are not) prepared to address them.

I approached each conversation with an asset-based mindset, asking participants to first talk about their community's strengths; this was easier for some people than others, but I aimed to get a broad look at what is going well and what needs work in each community. I was careful not to push an agenda or steer the conversations toward a particular topic. I took diligent notes and began a theme-based spreadsheet to track patterns of needs and opportunities across the region. From there, I dug into a few of the most frequently discussed challenges and researched the organizations in each community that are working to address them. (See Appendix B for more information on the methodology of this study.)

For reference, a chart of participant community populations, racial demographics, and median household incomes is included in Appendix D.

Key Findings:

Strengths
A **spirit of community** in helping those in need, as well as the **human and social capital** in general, was referenced many times as a source of pride in east central Illinois communities. Community members talked about the **collaborations, leadership, and generous natures of their individual communities**, both with time through volunteering and with financial assets. Ed Dowd of the Mattoon Chamber of Commerce noted "the volunteerism here is second to none" and cited *Mattoon in Motion* and Elevate as examples of efforts undertaken by volunteers to improve opportunities and quality of life in Mattoon.

The word cloud shown below demonstrates the frequency with which various community strengths were identified in response to the question "*What is going well in your community?*". (The terms "healthcare" and "food" each refer to the *accessibility* of these services. "Education" refers to mentions of both higher-ed and overall "schools" as strengths.)

Eastern Illinois Foodbank was mentioned by several participants as a valuable asset in the region. In addition, food pantry donations and increases during COVID to programs like SNAP and free school lunches combined to make food access less of an issue. In fact, most participants that I spoke to in Champaign-Urbana and Decatur mentioned that low-income food access is not currently a top issue in their community, as it is being well-addressed by a variety of well-funded programs. As one community member noted about availability of food "if they can't get it, at least in C-U, they aren't trying"[2].

Effingham is proud of their low poverty rate (relative to the state and the overall region), the growth mindset that has allowed their city to attract new industry, and their collective community values.

Decatur lauds their award-winning park district and good access to healthcare, as well as Millikin University and Richland Community College. **Champaign-Urbana** has a wealth of higher education opportunities, as well, and a thriving nonprofit community. Their hospital systems provide not only access to high-level healthcare but also a stability for workforce unrivaled in the region. **Springfield** excels at the arts and addressing racial equity. As the state capital, their workforce benefits from state government opportunities as well as strong hospitals.

Mattoon is benefitting from a revived downtown with new businesses, murals, and streetscaping. Tree-planting (LFF funded!) and the Coles County inter-urban trail updates were also named as assets Mattoon is proud of.

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[2] We do recognize, however, the possibility that as COVID stimulus and other government programs recede food insecurity could resurge as a challenge.

Smaller towns in ECI (**Sullivan, Tuscola, Tolono, Marshall**) all benefit from the amenities afforded by their nearest larger towns, including access to healthcare at SBLHC, Carle and Christie clinics (Tuscola) and Decatur Memorial/DMH (Sullivan). These smaller towns enjoy relatively low crime rates and strong support for youth programs.

Challenges
Housing and mental health both quickly rose to the top in many of my conversations as the two most pressing challenges in ECI communities. Both issues are closely tied to the overall poverty rates in the area. Substance abuse is also closely related to the other three areas and was often mentioned in conjunction with housing and mental health.

The graph below represents the number of specific topic mentions by community members when asked *"What challenges does your community currently face?"*

Community Challenges

Number of Mentions
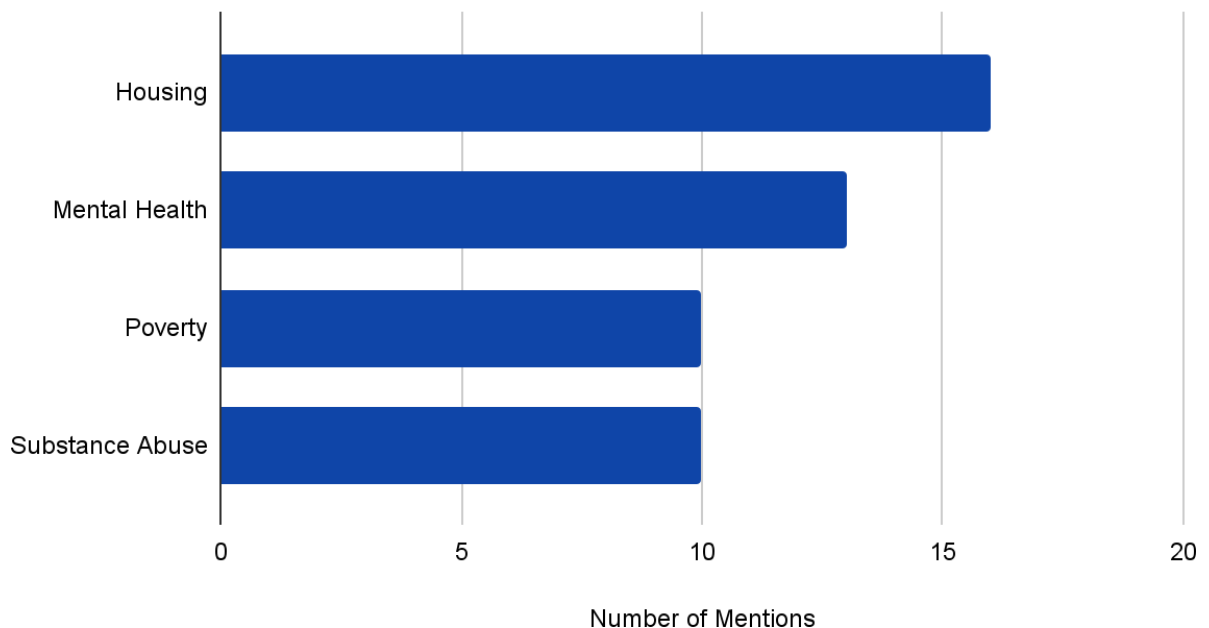
- **Shelter and Housing**
  This challenge was the most widely mentioned, noted by almost every community as a top issue. That said, the challenge of housing looks different across communities. Some are facing rising homeless populations that are growing faster than the communities' ability to shelter them (i.e. **Mattoon, Champaign, Springfield**):

The Haven (Mattoon) is now able to accommodate twice as many clients as the previous shelter, and they now have dedicated spaces for two families. They also provide 24/7 services and day programming. However, they are always full. Chris Davis, Director at The Haven, noted "many people are just one or two months away from homelessness". The Haven sees many people who have never been in this situation before.

Champaign's largest shelter, CU@Home, does not have space for families, only single adults. Their shelter is "sober" and requires individuals to complete an intake interview. The Champaign County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) now has a family shelter with space for eight families, but they also have a waiting list. CCRPC also provides other services for people experiencing homelessness through the Continuum of Service Providers to the Homeless (CSPH) including case management and connections to other agencies. **CSPH has identified low-barrier, emergency shelter (requiring no intake) as the biggest gap in the community services currently provided.**

Springfield has some public assistance housing complexes with below-passing HUD inspection scores. **They also have a lack of shelter space and have a "tent city" problem.** Various agencies, led by **Heartland Continuum of Care**, are working together to address these issues, and short-term, overflow shelter space has been created at the former Salvation Army for winter. Community forums are being held to address long-term solutions.

According to Mayor Julie Moore Wolfe, **Decatur** has neighborhood blight and "slumlord issues" which are being addressed by the City. **Decatur also lacks enough family shelter space**, with just a few spaces available for single women or men with children or families with children.

Macon County Continuum of Care works with Dove, Inc., and their Homeless Advisory Council oversee a Homeward Bound program which compiles annual data in the Point in Time and Housing Inventory Count to inform local decisions. They believe the 2021 numbers were likely affected by COVID as they show a decrease in the overall homeless population below any level in the past eight years. This may be due to the eviction moratorium, stimulus checks, and other government aid offered during the pandemic. **However, 37% of the 83 homeless persons counted were unsheltered, which is a higher rate than past years (an all-time high, actually). In related statistics, emergency shelter capacity in 2021 showed a decrease over recent years with an occupancy rate at just 47.8%. This was possibly due to COVID restrictions at shelters which deterred people from seeking shelter – leading to the higher rate of unsheltered individuals.**

In addition to sheltering the homeless, some communities would like to **expand housing developments as a way to attract new business and industry** (**Mattoon, Marshall, Sullivan, Tolono**). Specifically, Sullivan has a dearth of affordable and safe rental property. Mattoon is looking to expand housing in the $200k to $350k range (an average home in Mattoon is valued at $89k). Marshall seeks to increase their availability of "starter home" properties in the $80k to $99k range. Tolono would like to expand their housing developments. However, they face a costly sewer plant expansion before they can address their housing shortage.

> *"Mental health issues in the schools include the alcoholism and drug dependency seen in parents. It is less a taboo topic than it used to be, but judgment and stigma still persist and it affects livelihood, as well."*
>
> **Kris Maleske, Mattoon Schools**

- **Mental Health (and Substance Abuse)**
Mental health was the second most frequently mentioned community challenge. **Mattoon Mayor Rick Hall noted child and adolescent mental health** as a top concern. Kris Maleske, Community Services and Parental Involvement Director for Mattoon CUSD, talked about the increase in **"outburst behavior" they are seeing in the schools at all levels**. Kris also noted "Mental health issues in the schools include the alcoholism and drug dependency seen in parents. It is a less taboo topic than it used to be, but judgment and stigma still persist and it affects livelihood, as well." Decatur Mayor Wolfe commented that although Decatur has good access to healthcare overall, they sometimes have to transfer adolescent mental health inpatient cases to Chicago due to lack of beds.

[The 2020 Illinois Youth Survey](#), taken by students in 8th, 10th, and 12th grades in Coles and surrounding counties, shows a 7% increase in self-reported teen depression since 2018. Forty percent of students reported having felt "so sad and hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities". Other findings show that one in five teens have used alcohol or drugs while alone in the past year, and 20% of 12th graders reported having engaged in binge drinking during the previous two weeks. The full report addresses more statistics around drug and alcohol use, mental health concerns, family involvement, and teen experiences at school such as bullying and safety concerns.

Springfield is tackling childhood mental health needs through a collaborative effort called [Children's MOSAIC Project](#). **The project involves [embedding on-site mental health resources in schools](#).** Funding is/was provided by the Illinois Children's Healthcare Foundation, the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln, Memorial Health System, and the United Way of Central Illinois (Springfield).

The [2021 U.S. Surgeon General report](#) on youth mental health outlines the issues and potential solutions in light of COVID. See page 31 for funder/foundation recommendations.

Mental health concerns were also cited by homeless shelter directors as a top issue that is linked to drug abuse in all, and especially seen in the homeless population. One director estimates that 75 to 80% of their clients have mental health or substance abuse issues. They described how these issues form a "triangle" with homelessness as interconnected issues that all exacerbate one another. The [Macon County Continuum of Care Point in](#) [Time Count](#) (referenced in the previous section) indicates mental health is the top self-reported concern for clients, followed by physical disability and substance abuse.

Larger towns have more developed mental health services but never enough; residents of smaller towns often must travel to larger towns for services. Laurrie Minor of the **Sullivan** Chamber noted their behavioral health clinic has been busier since COVID started, and she wondered if it is an increase in mental health issues or increased awareness and willingness to seek help now. Participants in **Effingham** talked specifically about needing to travel for treatment of more serious mental health concerns. In addition to hospital-based clinics and services, various nonprofit and private clinics are available such as [LifeLinks](#) in Mattoon, [Heritage Behavioral Health Center](#) and [Crossing Healthcare](#) in Decatur, and [Rosecrance](#) in Champaign.

- **Overall Poverty Rate**
  At the intersection of housing, mental health, substance abuse and economic development lies the overall poverty rate of the region which is higher in many communities than the Illinois average.

  The United Way measures households living just above the poverty line through their **[ALICE Project](#)** (**A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed), a population that was previously referred to as "working poor." Beverley Baker of the United Way of Champaign County commented **"communities rely on many types of low wage workers to educate and care for society";** the ALICE project takes into consideration the sizable number of families just above the poverty line and living paycheck to paycheck as costs of living rise and wages stagnate.

  In 2018, 23% of Illinois households were within ALICE levels and 12% were considered below the poverty line; in Coles County those below the poverty level came to 18% and the ALICE rate was 22%. Other counties in the region face poverty rates around 10-15% and ALICE rates from 18-25%. **Champaign and Coles counties have the highest combined poverty and ALICE rates in our ECI footprint at 44% and 40% respectively.** (Appendix D shows median household incomes for many communities in the region.)

COVID-19

It was impossible to avoid the topic of COVID-19 during these conversations, and many participants were clearly viewing their communities' needs through the pandemic lens. Job loss and economic issues caused by the pandemic were mentioned frequently, often as the first response to "What challenges does your community face right now?". (*However, according to both Ed Dowd at the Mattoon Chamber of Commerce and Bonnie Moore at the Lake Land Center for Business and Innovation, unemployment in the region is actually quite low -* at 3.7% as of October 2021 *– in fact, small businesses state they are having trouble finding workers.*)

Lack of sufficient childcare was a runner-up issue to jobs/economy, noted by most participants who are more recently aware that the economic struggles in many communities are due to women not being able to work without adequate childcare resources. Some communities are looking at ways to address the childcare gap. (Lake Land College, specifically, is looking at how to best support early childhood education students and workers.)

> ***When I asked participants to talk about the big-picture issues that existed prior to the pandemic and are persisting now, housing and mental health rose to the top.***

Some communities I talked to were quick to mention the divisive political issues and COVID-specific struggles of mask-wearing and low vaccination rates of our region. These are valid concerns, and challenges that won't go away immediately. They are also indicative of larger, underlying disparities in education and income, as well as the strong evangelical faith community in the region that has aligned with anti-masking and anti-vaxxing factions. Schools, businesses, and organizations such as YMCAs have felt the divides very strongly as they attempt to navigate the pandemic and keep the public safe.

The intersection of Strengths and Challenges: Additional Opportunities

I asked each community member to talk about what they see as the biggest opportunities for their towns in **the next 5 to 10 years.** Some were ready with a plan (Springfield's The Next 10 Community Vision plan; Mattoon Community School District's LIFT Center) but most were able to simply talk about possibilities and broader ideas for the region and their towns.

- **Continuing Education and Workforce Development**
  Many ECI cities have strong community colleges that are addressing continuing education and workforce development needs. **Lake Land College is working with Mattoon CUSD2** to align their curricula and dual credit options with the new LIFT Center, set to open for high school students in fall 2022. It is hoped that the workforce development needs of the region will be aided by these efforts as well as offering potential new industries an impetus to locate here.

- **Increased Recreational Opportunities**
  Tolono, situated just south of Champaign, is considering new bike and walking trails for both transportation and recreation purposes. Mattoon is looking to further expand the bike trail from its current trailhead into town where it can be met at the depot and perhaps on further west. Springfield's plan has a good outline of their vision for future recreational improvements including connecting bike trails and adding new bike lanes.

    - **Mattoon's new sports complex venture, slated to open in 2023**
      - **[Lincoln Land of Sports](#)**

- **Gardening and Food Projects**
  While my conversations were more broad and these were not topics on my question list, **some participants inevitably wanted to talk about projects they are considering that might overlap with our LHC/NBCA grantmaking.** The Haven and CU@Home are both interested in gardening programs for guests and potential greenhouses. Charleston High School is also interested in a greenhouse project in 2022. Douglas-Hart Nature Center is considering ways they may be able to take some of their farm ground out of conventional crops and into prairie or forest.

  Many people I talked to noted that they **hope Illinois is no longer losing residents 5 to 10 years from now.** This was a pervasive concern in light of our most recent Census results that showed most ECI towns have lost residents since 2010. Springfield's The Next Ten report cites data that IL has lost the second highest number of millennial residents of any state in recent years. **Quality of life projects feature prominently in their plan in an effort to attract and maintain young IL residents and families.**

> *"…one of the biggest local problems going forward will be the lack of consistent and professional local journalism."*
>
> **John Stremsterfer**

Finally, worth noting was an insightful comment from John Stremsterfer of the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln. He feels "one of the biggest local problems going forward will be the lack of consistent and professional local journalism." The State Journal-Register (Springfield), for instance, is selling their building and has only three or four full time reporters now. "Web-based "gossip" news sites have begun to take over for local information. This allows for misinformation to proliferate. **John feels that local journalism may need to move to a nonprofit model.**

In fact, the media/journalism topic is a good reminder that **there are other topics that didn't rise to the top of these conversations but that we know are of importance in the region, namely the climate crisis and democracy**. In my attempt to not lead participants into topics they weren't ready to discuss, and to really allow them to present their own views of their communities' strengths and weaknesses, climate and democracy largely took a back seat.

> *Given what we know about the current media, climate, and democracy crises, funding opportunities around these topics should all be considered as relevant to the continued functioning and thriving of ECI communities.*

Racial Equity/Unheard Voices

I spoke with nearly every community member on racial equity and learned much about the differences in how the topic is (or is not) addressed in our region. Not surprisingly, the smaller, more rural communities seem to have less awareness of the topic of equity and how it could apply to their communities. Some mayors of small communities had clearly not thought much about the topic and how it is addressed in their communities. Others were very open to discussing equity as a value and their hopes for the futures of their communities in this area.

Representatives from larger communities (Springfield, Decatur, Champaign) were well aware of the need for diversity and equity within their own organizations and as a focus of their work. In particular, **the community foundations and United Ways in these larger communities are well-educated and prepared to lead their communities around such topics as diverse nonprofit boards, equity in grantmaking, building trust, and amplifying diverse citizen voices.** (Racial demographics for cities and towns represented by participants are listed in Appendix D.)

Natalie Beck, President of the [The Community Foundation of Macon County](#) in Decatur, noted that "equity permeates everything they do". This extends to their grantmaking, and they only consider grants for organizations whose staff and board reflect the demographics of the community they are serving. The United Ways in Champaign, Decatur, and Springfield are also doing a good deal of equity work. In Champaign, the UW used [Healing IL $](#) to **fund organizations in 5 counties around them to take on some equity work. They also invested $100k locally as small regrants and hosted eight educational opportunities including book studies, speakers, and conversations. The Champaign Community Coalition sub-committee is now working on an equity strategy from this collaboration.**

[**The Champaign County African American Heritage Trail**](#) is an example of a new project in development in Champaign County that will bring attention to the history of the Black population in the region.

Some of the conversations I had gave me the opportunity to share some of our own learning around racial equity as well as some of the resources we have found helpful. Surprising me in the equity conversation were a few participants from different organizations in Mattoon who are genuinely interested in learning more and talking about what their organizations can do to more adequately address equity issues. Douglas-Hart Nature Center, in fact, has already done some equity training with staff and is working to address equity issues on the ground in practical ways such as by recognizing pronouns with their LGBTQ teen volunteers.

Rural Equity Considerations

Small and rural communities are underserved by philanthropy and, at times, "invisible" to the organizations offering grants. This is the assertion of a [recent piece in the Chronicle of Philanthropy](#) by Bob Atkins of Rutgers University. Atkins outlines how smaller, poorer communities are left behind when grant dollars are on the table and what grant makers can do to alleviate the problem:

"But the first step must be acknowledging that traditional grant making too often misses the greatest needs because the burden falls on communities to make themselves visible to foundations. Grant makers need to take on some of this burden, build relationships with overlooked communities, and change operations to better serve communities in greatest need. Now, more than ever, we can't afford to miss anyone."

In [Transforming Rural Health Through Economic Development](#) Maryam Khojasteh of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and Janet Topolsky of the Aspen Institute's [Thrive Rural Framework](#) explore the need for **local ownership and design of solutions in rural communities**. According to Topolsky:

"This is human-centered design. If I'm trying to make something better, I can choose to imagine in my mind what the problem is and then deliver the solution that I think will work. But it likely will not work because I didn't ask the people the solution is supposed to help about what their real barriers are, and what design elements are essential to catalyze a solution that works."

*"You've heard the phrase 'Nothing about us, without us.' Another rephrasing of this that I've heard from a community activist is: 'If it's for us, without us, it's **not** about us.' We need to take that to heart. Can we consult? Can we share the power for co-designing? Can we respect the wisdom of the people we're trying to help? And can we meet people where they are?"*

Thrive Rural expounds on these ideas in a [recent issue brief about economic development and health in rural communities.](#)

Finally, our democracy may well depend on the investments we make now in rural America. Loren McArthur of Arabella Advisors stressed this point in the recent Chronicle of Philanthropy article ["One Year After the Capitol Insurrection, Philanthropy Must Step Up Efforts to Restore National Solidarity and Trust"](#):

> *"…traditional grant making too often misses the greatest needs because the burden falls on communities to make themselves visible to foundations."*
>
> *Bob Atkins*
>
> *"'If it's for us, without us, it's not about us.' We need to take that to heart."*
>
> *Janet Topolsky*

*"**Invest in rural and small-town America.** Reinvigorating American democracy will require developing a shared vision for a multiracial democratic future that includes small-town and rural Americans of all races. Consider that by 2040, just [30 percent of Americans](#) living in 34 rural states will control 68 U.S. Senate seats."*

"Just as philanthropy has made a commitment in recent years to greater racial diversity in its staffing and governance, it should seek to integrate rural and small-town working-class voices of every race in its decision making."

See examples of specific place-based foundation programming in Appendix C.

Six Months Later

Six months have passed since I began my conversations with community leaders. In that time, several developments have no doubt added to or exacerbated the challenges faced by the small rural communities represented in the report. Another COVID outbreak suggests the pandemic has not yet run its full course; Inflation, especially rising gas prices, have had an impact on all Americans; and the outbreak of war in Europe and the 2022 mid-term campaigns now heating up could make the challenges of sustainability that much more formidable to the communities we care about.

Here in east central Illinois, the flowering trees are blooming and there is, for the moment, a feeling of greater normalcy. Under the surface, however, the challenges I have outlined persist. Many are systemic issues that are not quickly addressed by a one-time (or even a multi-year) financial commitment. Yet, the goals of philanthropy in rural areas do not have to be limited to immediate results, important as those are. An additional objective should be to elevate the voices of historically under-served rural populations, and engage these communities in a more deliberate manner that supports local ownership of solutions. Building internal capacity and opportunities for collaboration and shared strategy within rural communities is more critical than ever.

As Bruce noted in the introduction, I have offered no conclusions with respect to strategy or program. I simply aimed to gather and present information to enhance staff and trustee understanding of the region. I look forward to hearing your feedback and receiving input that guides staff in further exploring how The Lumpkin Family Foundation's work can continue to impact east central Illinois.

Laura Huddleston
Program Officer
April 2022

Appendices:

A. **Participant List**
B. **Methodology**
C. **Place-based Foundation Programming**
D. **Population, Racial and Median Household Demographics**
E. **An Example of Rural-Urban Disparity**
F. **References**

Appendix A - 2021 Landscape Scan and Listening Tour Participants

Recognizing that it would be difficult to get a perfect cross-section of the communities in our region, we attempted to cast a wide net and reached out to approximately 50 community leaders with invitations to participate in our landscape scan. The following individuals responded to our invitations and agreed to participate in conversations.

Beverley Baker - Chief Impact Officer, United Way of Champaign County

Natalie Beck - President, The Community Foundation of Macon County

Kristin Bertrand - Program Officer, Southeastern Illinois Community Foundation

Debbie Bogle - President, United Way of Decatur and Mid-Illinois

Carolyn Cloyd - President, United Way of Coles County

Rob Dalhaus - Executive Director, CU @ Home

Chris Davis - Executive Director, The Haven

Ed Dowd - Director, Mattoon Chamber of Commerce

Blake Fairchild - CEO and Director of Mattoon Area Family YMCA

Rick Hall - Mayor of Mattoon

John Hasten - Mayor of Marshall and Retired School Administrator, Teacher, and Football Coach

Tony Holly - Director of Strategic Grantmaking, Community Foundation of Macon County

James Keith - Director of Community Impact, United Way of Decatur and Mid-Illinois

John Kelker - President and CPO, United Way of Central Illinois (Springfield)

Kayla Kerner - former Youth Director, Mattoon Area Family YMCA

Dan Kleiss - Mayor of Tuscola and Retired HR Director from Cabot Corp.

Amanda Lessley - former President and CEO, Southeastern Illinois Community

Foundation

Kris Maleske - Community Services and Parental Involvement Director, Mattoon CUSD 2

Angie Hatfield Marker - President and CEO, Community Foundation of East Central Illinois

Laurrie Minor - Director, Sullivan Chamber of Commerce

Bonnie Moore - Director, Center for Business and Innovation, Lake Land College

Rob Murphy - Mayor of Tolono and University of Illinois Police Officer

Alex Pleasant - President and CEO, Southeastern Illinois Community Foundation

John Stremsterfer - President and CEO, Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln

Jennifer Tariq - Executive Director, Douglas-Hart Nature Center

Julie Moore Wolf - Mayor of Decatur

Appendix B - Methodology

The purpose of these interviews was to gather information while also getting to know more community leaders and potential partners. I set out to have conversations about what these communities are doing well and are proud of in addition to finding out what their struggles are.

In order to learn more about qualitative interviewing, I first consulted "Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods" by Michael Quinn Patton (2002) which helped me outline open-ended and neutral questions to use with a combined conversation and interview approach. I learned how to begin the interviews with present-day topics and move on to questions about the past or future later in the conversation as well as how to use follow-up questions to probe for more information when necessary. Finally, I was reminded of the need to take excellent notes and to get quotes from as many folks as possible, as these are the "raw data of qualitative interviews" (p. 380).

To ground my discussions and help frame the information I might receive from participants, I also gathered research about various facets of our region as they related to the 2020 election results, local climate attitudes, and racial and ethnic demographics and low-income statistics of school-age students for various regional school districts.

I used the following resources to gather this information:

ECI Votes by County and District in 2020

Racial and Ethnic Demographics in IL Schools

Yale Climate Opinion Maps by County

One of the biggest takeaways from this research was that nearly all counties in our region voted between 51% and 79% for Trump in 2020 (with the only exclusion in the region being Champaign County which recorded a 60% vote for Biden).

Racial and ethnic demographics for local schools show a growing number of minority students including a growth in those listed as "two or more races". Coles County elementary schools, for instance, reported between 15%-19% "non-white" students in 2020. **This is significantly higher than the overall non-white population of much of the county.** Finally, climate statistics show that only 47% of constituents in our 15th Congressional district feel that climate change is directly caused by human behavior.

Interview/Conversation Question Guide

Because I used a combined interview/conversation approach, I opened each call with more of a "get to know each other" dialogue. The specifics of this varied based on the person I was speaking with and succeeded in giving us each a sense of familiarity. I discovered personal

connections with many folks, some as far away as Springfield and Marshall. From there, I was able to ask each participant to discuss those things in their communities that they see as strengths. Framing questions with "Can you talk about…" helped me maintain a conversational tone and invited the participants to take a larger role in the conversations. Beyond these opening questions, I used the following interview guide to be sure I was keeping our conversations on track and to gather information that can be compared across the region.

1. **What are the strengths in (town/community)?/What are you proud of?**
2. **What initiatives or impactful programs have been successful in (town) in the past? Why? What resources exist in (town) to help endeavors like this be successful?**
3. **What challenges does (town) face currently?**
4. **Where do you see (town) in five years? Ten? What will it take to get there?/What will it take to make sure that doesn't happen?**
5. **In what ways are racial equity and other types of social equity evident in (town/community)?**

With the data from my notes, I used a spreadsheet to track instances of similar and repeated strengths and challenges across the region.

Appendix C - Program Examples from Other Place-Based Foundations

Nonprofit Quarterly recently published an article on uncoupling place-based funding from outputs in favor of larger, systemic outcomes in, "[How to Fund Place-Based Partnerships if We Want Them to Work](#)":

> "The appeal of community organizations explicitly sharing goals, data, and resources in service of collective impact is tantalizing for those of us working to accelerate positive social change. Yet while we've seen a lot of excitement about encouraging nonprofits, governmental, and other entities to work together in new ways, we have not seen enough funders willing to provide the significant, long-term, flexible support required to realize the potential of place-based partnerships."

> "Funders need to make room for projects that don't fit neatly into their health portfolio, or housing portfolio, or education portfolio, mirroring the collaborative approaches they ask of nonprofits. If they let go of their focus on pre-identified outputs and break down grantmaking silos, they can fund effective place-based partnerships that achieve community-level impact at scale."

The following are snapshots of work by three different foundations doing place-based funding:

1. **[The Tracy Family Foundation](#) (TFF) is a place-based family foundation located in west central Illinois.** They work in [ten counties](#) and five focus areas: education, youth, families, mental health, and Brown County. TFF added [mental health](#) as a new focus area in 2020 through which they "invest in organizations that provide direct mental health services to those in need, expand the reach of mental health services to children and adults, and promote preventative measures that foster life-long well being." According to Terry Jenkins, Program Officer at TFF, the new focus area was driven by their 3rd generation members (ages similar to LFF's 6th generation), and is working towards providing both proactive and reactive grants.

   TFF's [Brown County](#) program is a great example of a foundation giving unique focus to one county/community. TFF helped fund long-range strategic planning for the Brown County/Mt. Sterling community and has continued to fund and oversee periodic community surveys for the county. They also have a Brown County Public School Grant Fund unique to schools in Mt. Sterling. The Brown County program gives about $650k/year and constitutes approximately 10% of TFF's annual giving. In addition to the school grants, this includes grants to fund local infrastructure and economic development projects.

   Finally, **TFF has a robust [Capacity Building](#) program that gives $750k annually to organizations in the TFF funding footprint**. Terry Jenkins explained that about 60%

of all TFF grantees get an automatic $5k in capacity building money, and there is a short application for additional requests which have a quick 2 to 4 week turnaround. TFF also provides access to the iCAT capacity assessment tool for applying organizations. This assessment is a "planning and evaluation tool that assesses six key organizational capacities: Leading, Learning, Resource Generating, Planning, Managing, and Overseeing."

2. **Grand Victoria Foundation (GVF)** works statewide in IL and also **has a place-based program specific to Elgin, IL**. As part of their Elgin Program GVF funds in two specific categories:
   - **Mission Grants:** to organizations that effectively and inclusively meet the needs and wants of the community. We give priority to organizations located in Elgin, serve Elgin residents, and deliver high-quality programs.
   - **Partnership and Collaboration Grants:** to organizations that partner with other local institutions to coordinate the building of high-functioning systems that bring about positive community change.

   GVF also has a Rapid Response Fund, designed in response to community feedback, that addresses immediate needs and has a rolling application. Funds are released within 30 days of application, and a verbal report from the grantee is due after 6 months. These are not intended for general operating funds but to meet an immediate need unrelated to budget shortfalls.

   In terms of their growing equity focus, GVF is partnering to work on a new "Abundance Movement":
   > "Abundance is a movement. It is a movement to free mindsets, dollars, policies and practices to address anti-Blackness and White supremacy culture in philanthropy. Abundance requires distributing wealth differently and transforming philanthropy's traditional power relationships. The goal is to ensure long-term and equitable distribution to Black-led (and centered) organizations."

3. Funding specifically in Maine, the **Elmina B. Sewall Foundation uses an equity lens in their Rapid Response Fund to prioritize** "Organizations led by and serving people in under-resourced populations and geographies, including: African Americans, Indigenous, and people of color; immigrants and refugees; LGBTQ; people with low incomes; differently-abled populations; incarcerated populations; people in recovery; and populations who are homeless or at risk of homelessness"

   Sewall also has a Healthy People Healthy Places program with five strategy areas:
   1. **Support the Well-being of People** – supporting all people to lead healthy and whole lives
   2. **Support Healthy Land and Water** – protects or enhances land and water quality and

productivity

3. **Develop Thriving Local Economies** – promotes long-term development while building local opportunity

4. **Invest in Community Engagement and Social Equity** – builds community, strengthens relationships, and enhances civic participation

5. **Build Resilient Communities** – builds the capacity of all communities to adapt and thrive

These grants are given in **Community Focus Areas** (the Katahdin Region, Lewiston, Tribal Communities, and Washington County) and also statewide in ME within **Topical Focus Areas** (Food Systems and Nature-Based Education). In 2020 they added a Twin Pandemics grant fund to respond to organizations working through COVID-19 and racial injustice responses and gave $2.4m in additional funds for these causes.

Appendix D - ECI Regional Population and Demographics

Community	Overall Population (2020 Census data for cities over 5k; 2019 data for cities under 5k*)	Racial Breakdown** (2019 American Community Survey Data - *does not include designations less than 1%*)	Median Household Income (2019)
Springfield	114,394	71% White, 20% Black, 3% Asian, 2.8% Latino/Hispanic, 3.5% two or more races	$54,648
Champaign	88,302	59% White, 18.6% Black, 13.3% Asian, 6.3% Latino/Hispanic, 2.7% two or more races	$48,415
Decatur	70,522	69% White, 21% Black, 6.3% two or more races, 2.9% two or more races	$42,701
Urbana	38,336	54% White, 19% Asian, 16.4% Black, 7% Latino/Hispanic, 3.4% two or more races	$37,102
Charleston	17,286	84% White, 8% Black, 3.8% Latino/Hispanic, 2% two or more races, 2.6% Asian	$40,863
Mattoon	16,870	95% White, 1.6% Black, 1.9% Latino/Hispanic, 1.2% two or more races	$39,852
Effingham	12,252	92% White, 1.5% Black, 4.8% Latino/Hispanic, 1.4% two or more races	$47,582

Tuscola	4,564	93% White, 4% Latino/Hispanic, 2% Asian	$56,545
Sullivan	4,475	95.8% White, 1.6% Latino/Hispanic, 1.2% Black	$56,375
Marshall	3,543	98.1% White	$45,703
Tolono	3,237	88.4% White, 4.7% Black, 3% Latino/Hispanic, 3% two or more races	$66,445

U.S. Census/American Community Survey doesn't display info for cities with fewer than 5,000 people. Data for these towns from: https://datausa.io/.

**See Appendix B - Methodology for more information about school district racial demographics that point to increasing non-white population in younger age groups.*

Appendix E - **An Example of Rural/Urban Disparity**

Each of the community challenges outlined in this report could be researched to determine their specific rural/urban differences and disparities. The topic of mental health is one example of how societal challenges differ in rural and urban communities, highlighting some disparities that can be considered as factors in rural equity.

Unique challenges for mental health care in rural areas:
According to the [National Rural Health Association](#), the following factors are particular challenges to the provision of mental health services in rural communities:

- **Accessibility** – Rural residents often travel long distances to receive services, are less likely to be insured for mental health services, and providers are less likely to recognize a mental illness.
- **Availability** – Chronic shortages of mental health professionals exist and mental health providers are more likely to practice in urban centers.
- **Affordability** – Some rural residents may not be able to afford the cost of health insurance or the cost of out-of-pocket care if they lack health insurance.
- **Acceptability** – Rural residents may be more susceptible to the stigma of needing or receiving mental healthcare in small communities where everyone knows each other and fewer choices of trained professionals can lead to a lack of faith in confidentiality, as well as a reliance on the informal care of family members, close friends, and religious leaders.

Recent [University of Kentucky research findings](#) indicate that non-metropolitan/rural citizens experienced higher incidence of serious mental illness (SMI) over the past year and received fewer treatment modalities (ie. receiving only medication) than metropolitan/urban citizens:

"Supplemental findings indicate that a higher proportion of non-metropolitan than metropolitan adults with SMI receive medication alone. Our prior report on treatment among adults with major depression yielded a similar finding. In contrast, a higher proportion of metropolitan than non-metropolitan adults received inpatient, outpatient, and medication. **The greater reliance on medication among nonmetropolitan adults with SMI may be attributable to a lower availability of mental health counselors in non-metropolitan counties and barriers to traveling elsewhere for treatment.** Supporting this explanation, non-metropolitan adults more frequently reported that not having transportation or convenient treatment was a deterrent to seeking mental health services. Regardless of county residence, the most commonly reported barriers to receiving mental health treatment among persons with SMI were not knowing where to go, a fear of being committed/medicated, and not having time for treatment."

Points to consider specific to IL and ECI:
1. **Almost all of IL is a designated mental health provider shortage area.** As per the [2019 IL Behavioral Health Workforce Task Force Report](#), "Mental Health America ranks Illinois 29thth in the country in mental health workforce availability based on its 480-to-1 ratio of population to mental health professionals, and the Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that only 23.3% of Illinoisans' mental health needs can be met with its current workforce."

"Shortages are especially acute in rural areas and among low-income and under-insured individuals and families. 30.3% of Illinois' rural hospitals are in designated primary care shortage areas and 93.7% are in designated mental health shortage areas."

Graphics and Data:

- **[Slides 34 and 35](#) of a USC chartbook, The Cost of Mental Illness: Illinois Facts and Figures, illustrate the mental health provider shortage.**
- **[2021 County Mental Health Provider Rankings](#) lay out the disparities of the most rural counties in ECI.**

Ratio of mental health providers* to population in IL by county:

IL overall = 480:1
Cook Co. = 340:1
DuPage Co. = 320:1
Shelby Co. = 2,700:1
Effingham Co. = 530:1
Edgar Co. = 950:1
Coles Co. = 280:1
Champaign Co. = 380:1
Macon Co. = 650:1
Moultrie Co. = 760:1
Christian Co. = 1,620:1
Cumberland Co. = 2,690:1
Douglas Co. = 6,490:1
Sangamon Co. = 420:1
Clark Co. = 3,860:1

IN overall = 590:1 (Vigo Co./Terre Haute = 620:1)
MO overall = 490:1 (St. Louis Co. = 330:1)
(It is my experience that ECI residents sometimes travel to both Terre Haute and St. Louis to access mental health care.)

The 2021 County Health Rankings used data from 2020 for this measure.

*In 2015, marriage and family therapists and mental health providers that treat alcohol and other drug abuse were added to this measure.

2.　　**Overall low state spending and insurance reimbursement issues plague the system in IL.** Capitol News Illinois/St. Louis Public Radio wrote about the state disinvestment causes, which go back to the state budget impasse of 2015 to 2017, and the solutions resulting from the 2019 Behavioral Workforce Task Force Report findings: "The 2019 task force report found the state should consider the creation of a [Behavioral Health Workforce Education Center](#) to 'lead a cross-agency, cross-sectoral strategy to improve access to a qualified diverse workforce providing evidence-based behavioral health prevention, treatment, and recovery services'" (Barbic, 2021). This center was created as part of House Bill 158, the Health Care

and Human Services Reform Act, and will be a collaboration between higher education in the state and the [Department of Human Services.](#)

Graphics:
- **[Slide 19](#) of the USC Chartbook** further illustrates the low reimbursement rate for Medicaid in IL:

  > *"Illinois has one of the lowest Medicaid-to-Medicare fee ratios, which may further limit physician's willingness to accept Medicaid patients. This can be a barrier for these patients to obtain access to mental health care."*

Appendix F

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