



# Community Needs Assessment



*Travelbakercounty.com*

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# Acknowledgements

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## About the Institute for Policy Research and Engagement



School of Planning, Public Policy and Management  
Institute for Policy Research and Engagement

The Institute for Policy Research & Engagement (IPRE) is a research center affiliated with the School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management at the University of Oregon. It is an interdisciplinary organization that assists Oregon communities by providing planning and technical assistance to help solve local issues and improve the quality of life for Oregon residents. The role of IPRE is to link the skills, expertise, and innovation of higher education with the transportation, economic development, and environmental needs of communities and regions in the State of Oregon, thereby providing service to Oregon and learning opportunities to the students involved.

## About the Resource Assistance for Rural Environments

Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) is a unique AmeriCorps Program serving rural Oregon to strengthen communities, economies, food systems, and the natural environment. Housed at the University of Oregon's Institute for Policy Research & Engagement in the School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management, we aim to link the energy, expertise, and innovation of the University of Oregon with rural Oregon communities' most pressing needs.



RARE AmeriCorps' mission is to assist Oregon's natural resource-tied rural communities while providing supported, applied experience to college graduates from across the US.

RARE members live in rural communities for 11 months and serve cities, counties, non-governmental organizations, or state agencies to improve economic and environmental conditions in rural Oregon. Now in its 27th year, the RARE AmeriCorps Program has placed over 550 volunteers and served every Oregon County.

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## Stakeholder Interviewees

NEOEDD would like to thank all of the community members and leaders who provided input and feedback. A list of the stakeholders that have contributed to this Assessment can be found in Appendix A.

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# Executive Summary

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NEOEDD set out to understand the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in our region via a Community Needs Assessment (Assessment). Through more than 70 interviews with various community leaders and organizations, NEOEDD sought to better understand the unique and shared impacts and opportunities across Northeast Oregon's geographies, populations, and industries. NEOEDD worked with partners to not only understand and share the regional impact of the pandemic, but to also reassess pre-existing community challenges, needs and opportunities. This Assessment will be appended to the NEOEDD Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and will inform collaborative planning and projects for regional preparedness and recovery.

## Economic Impacts of COVID

The region experienced large declines in employment in April 2020, that paralleled an increase in "New Initial Claims from Unemployment" and "Monthly Continued Claims for Unemployment". However, employment impacts varied from county to county, with some counties seeing job gains in sectors that experienced job losses in other counties. Covid case counts, positive test rates and vaccination rates have varied from county to county. State-identified risk levels also vary from county to county, ranging from low to extreme, and risk levels continue to change quickly as COVID-19 outbreaks develop and recede. And similar to many areas around the globe, the underserved and underrepresented individuals and families in our region have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

## Key Themes of Community Needs Assessment

Analysis of stakeholder input revealed five key themes:

- Social capital
- Health, food, & social services
- Education & childcare
- Built & natural environments
- Economic development

Each key theme further identifies associated needs, types of partnerships, challenges, strengths, and opportunities. This information represents the most common responses expressed by stakeholders, but does not capture all the specific details or information shared by individual interviewees. Some stakeholders represent larger groups (trade associations, BIPOC organizations, regional organizations, etc.) and their input was shaped by the needs of the people they serve.

## NEOEDD Opportunities and Recommendations

The following opportunities describe actions and efforts that can help address some of the key themes and needs identified in the Assessment. They depict possible opportunities that NEOEDD can either lead or support as our region looks to recovery and resiliency.

- Support the retention and expansion of existing businesses
- Support the development of new businesses
- Support equitable methods to make resources and decision-making processes more accessible and combat structural inequity/inequality
- Support actions to understand and address housing shortages
- Support actions to understand and address labor shortages
- Support actions to understand and address availability and cost of broadband
- Support actions to understand and address deficiencies and costs of inadequate infrastructure

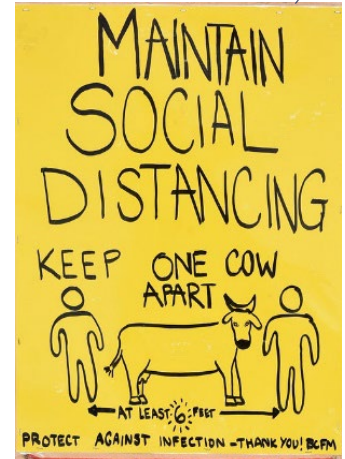


# Introduction

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From March 2020 through the present, the COVID-19 pandemic has catalytically changed communities across the world. The pandemic has simultaneously exacerbated known issues, given rise to new issues, highlighted strengths, and demanded innovative solutions, thus perhaps changing what economic development resources and assistance the region requires in the future.

Similar to many areas around the globe, the underserved and underrepresented, individuals and families in rural regions have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. This group may include, but is not limited to, individuals that identify as Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander, Black, Latinx, other people of color or ethnicities, persons with disabilities, persons with at-risk mental and physical health, LGBTQIA+, youth, and/or elderly. In reviewing pandemic impacts, it is important to learn about the needs, challenges, and strengths of the region and also the *unique* needs, challenges, and strengths of underserved and underrepresented groups. Northeast Oregon Economic Development District (NEOEDD) worked with partners to complete a Community Needs Assessment (Assessment) that aims to not only understand and share the regional impact of the pandemic, but to also reassess pre-existing community challenges, needs and opportunities. This Assessment will also benefit NEOEDD by providing a basis for a regional preparedness and recovery framework, that will be appended to the NEOEDD Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).



## Background and Methods

The Community Needs Assessment was done in collaboration with the University of Oregon (UO) Institute for Policy Research & Engagement (IPRE), Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) program, and five economic development districts (EDD) in Oregon: CCD Business Development Corporation (Coos, Curry, Douglas counties), Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corporation, Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council, Mid-Columbia Economic Development District, and South Central Oregon Economic Development District. For each of the five EDDs, a RARE member led a needs assessment and held interviews with stakeholders to listen to what they have experienced before and during the pandemic and what they see as needs. The EDDs agreed upon a purpose statement and core, modifiable interview questions (Appendix B) to ask stakeholders. In addition to the release of EDD-specific needs assessment reports, a collaborative report is being created to compare the EDDs findings across the state.

More than seventy stakeholder interviews were conducted for the NEOEDD region from January through early March 2021. Stakeholders included community members, leaders and partners that volunteered to anonymously share their expertise and experiences. Stakeholders had roles in areas such as, but not limited to:

Infrastructure	Tourism
Agriculture	Economic development
Health care	Small business
Education	Housing
Childcare	Local government
Community support organizations	Food systems
Arts & culture	Environmental & land management

A compilation of repeated responses revealed five key themes: Social Capital; Health, Food, & Social Services; Education & Childcare; Built & Natural Environment; and Economic Development. Though all responses were important, not all responses are represented in the key themes. Based on the five themes, secondary data was collected to supplement stakeholder responses. With the ongoing threat of the COVID-19 pandemic and emerging challenges, some organizations have conducted assessments of their own. Those assessments may provide more in-depth or sector specific information.

## NEOEDD's Role in Economic Development

NEOEDD is a public nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide resources and facilitate quality decision-making for the benefit of entrepreneurs, businesses, and communities in Northeast Oregon. As the US Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration designated lead planning and economic development organization for Baker, Union, and Wallowa counties, NEOEDD has developed four program areas to promote community development and well-being: business/entrepreneurial development assistance, community development assistance, nonprofit development assistance, and regional planning.

As documented in [NEOEDD's 2018-2023 CEDS](#), the region's goals provide guidance for decision-making, program and project opportunities. The region's goals focus primarily on creating a more productive, more sustainable, and more vibrant rural community:

- Diversify the economy and increase the percentage of family-wage jobs
- Increase and formalize regional economic development collaboration
- Assess, improve, and utilize infrastructure needed for economic growth
- Improve, develop, and expand community assets

While some pandemic recovery opportunities suggested by stakeholders could fit within the current goals, NEOEDD will use this Community Needs Assessment to help us consider how the region's goals or strategies may need to change. As a small regional organization, NEOEDD cannot take the lead in all projects and relies on many partners to complete valuable work that is in alignment with the CEDS. The District can also provide services such as technical assistance, facilitation, and financial and educational resources, as well as connections to other resources that may help with the planning and implementation of community-led projects.

## Organization of this Plan

The remainder of this report is organized as follows:

- **District Profile** briefly presents the demographic and economic status of the region, for a more in-depth overview, see NEOEDD's 2018-2023 CEDS
- **Key Themes** reflect community areas where interviewees and secondary data identify a growing concern for needs, each theme will provide contextual information, challenges, needs, strengths to be leveraged, and potential opportunities
- **NEOEDD's Role in Economic Recovery** outlines possible next steps for NEOEDD that are to be guided by the findings from this Assessment and the regional values identified in the 2018-2023 CEDS
- **Appendices**

# District Profile

This section provides a snapshot of NEOEDD’s region and provides some context for the key themes that will be discussed later in this report.

## Location

NEOEDD acknowledges the indigenous people whose homelands include the Northeast Oregon region - the Cayuse, Umatilla, Walla Walla, and Nez Perce people. We also acknowledge their continuing connection to this land through their presence, traditions, languages, cultures, economies, and treaty rights. The region is defined by the borders of Baker, Union, and Wallowa counties, with Washington State to the north and Idaho to the east. Nearly half of the land base is in public ownership, primarily under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Forest Service, including the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, Umatilla National Forest, Hells Canyon National Recreation Area, Hells Canyon Wilderness Area and Eagle Cap Wilderness Area. The variable and diverse topography plays an important role in the region’s climate, history, cultures, natural resources, economy, and daily activities. Interstate-84 passes through Baker and Union counties connecting to major cities - Boise, ID to the south and Portland, OR to the west. Wallowa County connects to I-84 via OR-82 in Union County, making the City of La Grande a transportation hub. The region is served by one state airport (Joseph), two municipal airports (Enterprise, Baker City), and one county airport (Union). All the airports are general aviation airports, with no scheduled commercial air service available in the region.

## Demographics

The Northeast Oregon region is rural in nature with a low population density and major towns such as the county seats, La Grande (population 13,460), Baker City (population 10,010), and Enterprise (population 1,995) ([PSU Population Research Center, PRC, 2020](#)). Quality of life and access to nature have been identified by residents as some of the major assets of the region. The region is predominately white with a mostly aged population (Appendix C), however the region is attracting many people who are looking to relocate. Positive population growth rate (Table 1) in all three counties also includes an increase in specific racial/ethnic populations. From 2013-2018 there has been a slow and steady growth in the number of Pacific Islander, American Indian & Alaska Native, and Black and/or African American residents in Union County. Eastern Oregon University’s long-standing program to support enrollment of Pacific Islander and Asian American students has contributed to the growing diversity. There is a slow and steady growth in the Asian American, Black or African American residents in Baker County. In all three counties, there is a steady growth in Latinx residents ([US Census Bureau 2014 -2018](#)). The [April 2021 Oregon Employment Department article](#) also shows that with further analysis into census data, there is even more diversity within each county when you consider multiracial residents (largely White and American Indian or Alaskan Native) or residents who do not identify with any of the standard categories provided. In terms of education, the [Kids Count Data Center](#) (KCDC) reported that the Northeast Oregon has similar or better than high school graduation rate than the state, however, the region has low rate of residents with college degrees (Table 1).

<b>Table 1</b>	<b>Baker County</b> County Seat: Baker City	<b>Union County</b> County Seat: La Grande	<b>Wallowa County</b> County Seat: Enterprise	<b>Oregon</b>
<b>Total Population</b> , July 1 2019 Est. (PSU PRC, 2020)	16,910	26,840	7,160	4,236,400
<b>Population % Change</b> , April 2010 to July 2019 (PSU PRC, 2020)	4.8	4.2	2.2	10.6
<b>Median Age</b> (US Census, 2020 Est.)	48.0	40.0	53.0	40.0
<b>% High School Graduation</b> , (KCDC, 2018-2019)	78.8	83.1	96.4	80.0
<b>% Bachelor’s degree or Higher</b> , age 25+ (US Census, 2015-2019)	23.7	24.5	26.4	33.7



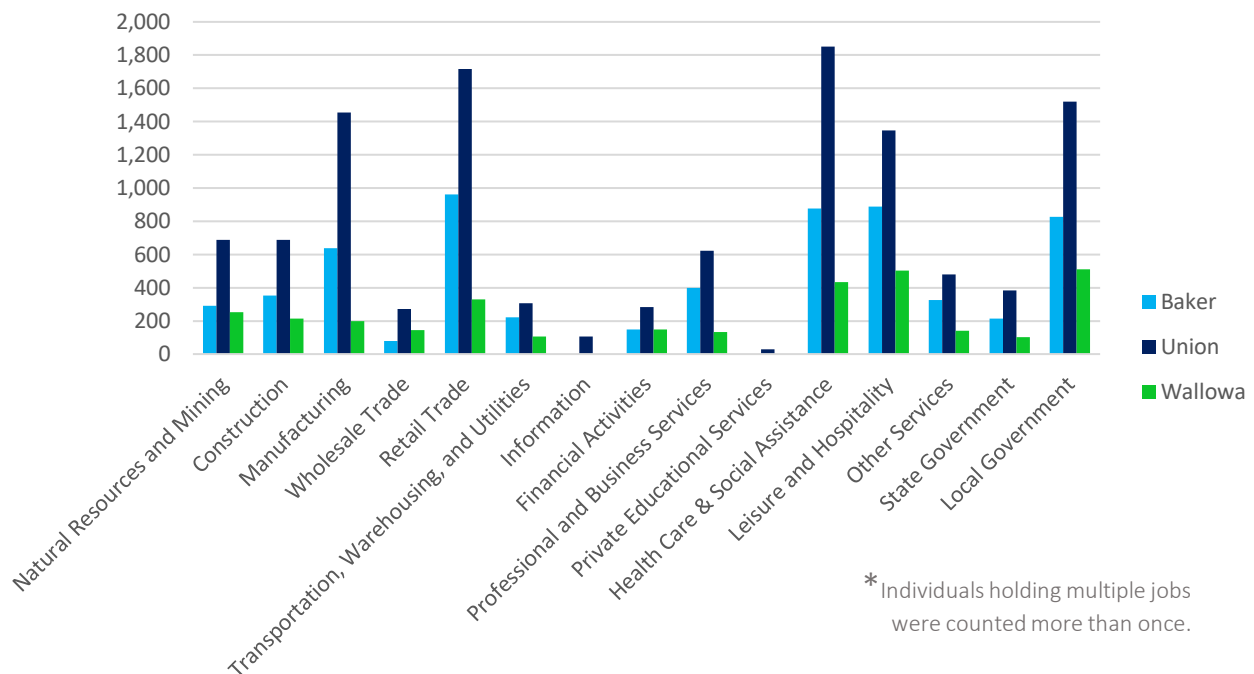
# Economic Development

## Before COVID-19 Pandemic

The region’s economy continues to have strong base in agriculture and timber, with an increasingly significant tourism sector. The region has high self-employment, and locally owned businesses provide a key link in the circulation of capital in the region. All three counties have seasonal economies with reduced employment during the winter months. To learn more about industry sectors and clusters in the region, see [NEOEDD’s 2018-2023 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy \(CEDS\) Regional Plan](#).

The “Number of Jobs by Broad Industry” graph below provides employment numbers for the region’s largest industries. Top sectors representing major employers in Baker County include retail trade, leisure and hospitality, health care & social assistance, and local government; in Union County health care & social assistance, retail trade, local government, manufacturing, and leisure and hospitality; and in Wallowa County local government, leisure and hospitality, and health care & social assistance. Note that jobs in public education are included in the local and state government sectors.

**Figure 1: Number of Jobs by Broad Industry - 3rd Quarter 2019**



The 2018-2023 CEDS described the region’s labor force participation as relatively static, with declines due to aging populations and challenges for working-age adults to remain in the area. The labor force participation rate measures the number of people over the age of 16 who are actively job hunting as well as those who are currently employed. The region’s labor force participation rate in 2019 was significantly lower than the US rate (US, 63%; Baker County, 49.7%; Union County, 58.9%; and Wallowa County, 55.1%) and varied by age and county. Labor participation rates also varied with racial/ethnic backgrounds, where high participation rates were found for Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian American, Black and/or African American, Some Other Race alone, and Latinx/Hispanic ([Current Population Survey 2019](#)). This may be due to the communities having younger, lower median age, than the county population ([OED Aug. 2020 Article](#) and [OED Jan. 2020 Article](#)). Note that the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic created additional challenges for labor force participation and increases in unemployment.

It was reported in the 2018 -2023 CEDS that average annual wages in the region were steadily increasing, but they were about a third less than state or federal wage rates. Unemployment Insurance Wage Records show that the highest number of jobs in the region are in the ‘under \$15/hour’ class, the second highest number of jobs pay \$20.00-\$29.99/hour, and the third highest number jobs pay \$15.00-\$19.99/hour (Oregon Employment Department, County-level Wage Report, Third Quarter 2019).

There is a significant amount of poverty in the region. The region’s poverty rates are higher than the state in all categories, and higher than the nation in all categories except for those age 65 and older. The poverty rate of those ages 65 and older is lower than the nation in all three counties, and lower than the state in Wallowa County. The lower poverty rate among those 65 and older in Wallowa County is most likely related to in-migration of individuals who are receiving non-wage income, including retirement income from work performed elsewhere, along with dividends, interest, and/or rent income.

The region has been experiencing notable growth of non-labor income for many decades. From 1970 to 2016, non-labor income grew by 277 percent, while over the same period, labor income grew by just 31 percent (CEDS). Self-employment rates are very high. Most of the region’s businesses are in the ‘1-4 employees’ size-of-firm class, and most of the region’s jobs are provided by businesses in the ‘5-9 employees’ class (Oregon Employment Department, Size of Firm Report by Area, First Quarter 2020). The number of business establishments with employees continues to grow.

Recognizing the importance of small businesses, NEOEDD is one of several organizations working to meet the needs for business-development services. Examples of other business support entities include, U. S. Small Business Development Centers (hosted by Blue Mountain Community College and Eastern Oregon University), Chambers of Commerce, county level economic development departments, incubators or accelerators (LaunchPad Baker and Ignite), City of La Grande Urban Renewal District, Main Street, and Wallowa Resources. The region has worked to develop additional ways to support local business financing using community capital tools such as community public offerings and no-interest loans.

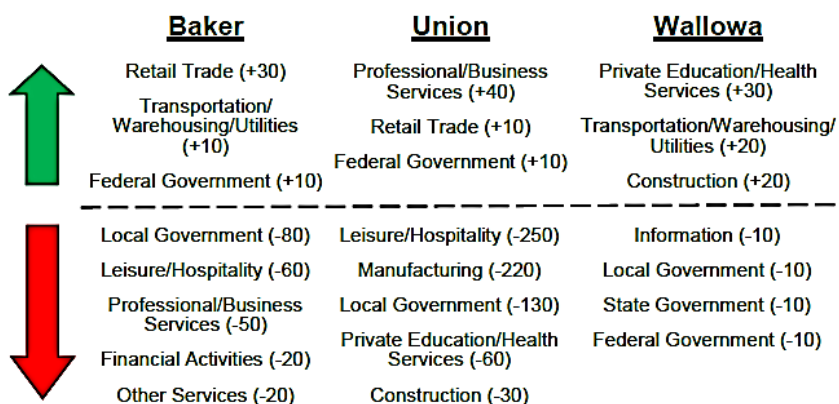
### During the COVID-19 Pandemic

As of April 2021, NEOEDD had provided \$845,500 in COVID financial supports (federal, state, and private donation funding) to small businesses and nonprofit employers. Providing access to financial supports was complicated by the many rounds and types of relief funding, each with their own eligibility criteria, application requirements and timeframes. Initially, many programs also did not fit the needs of small rural businesses and NEOEDD had to work with partners to convince funders to make changes that would allow many more businesses in our region to qualify. NEOEDD pivoted to providing business development classes and other technical assistance online, including classes and resource information specific to COVID-19 recovery and resiliency. NEOEDD also developed new collaborative partnerships to advocate for resources needed by small rural businesses. As the pandemic continues, we anticipate that additional investments will need to be made to support businesses financially and to help them transition to a post-COVID economy that includes increased tourism impacts in rural areas; competition from online sales; and in-migration of retirees, remote workers (zoom towns) and second-home residents.

### Notable Industry Gains and Losses Over-the-Year Employment Change from February 2020

**Figure 2**

As mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic and related statewide restrictions on gatherings greatly affects employers and employees. The Northeast Economic Indicator Dashboard from Oregon Employment Department showed that the region experienced large declines in employment in April 2020, that paralleled an increase in “New Initial Claims from Unemployment” and “Monthly Continued Claims for Unemployment” (Appendix D). From February 2020 to February 2021, Baker County’s unemployment rate (UR) increased from 5.0 (seasonally adjusted UR, 4.1) to 7.1 (seasonally adjusted UR, 5.6); Union County’s UR increased from 5.2 (seasonally adjusted UR, 4.2) to 8.7 (seasonally adjusted UR, 7.1); and Wallowa County’s UR increased from 7.0 to 7.4, but the seasonally adjusted UR decreased from 4.9 to 4.6. Oregon UR from February 2020 to February 2021 was from 3.6 (seasonally adjusted UR, 3.6) to 6.7 (seasonally adjusted UR, 6.1). (Oregon Employment Department 2021). As of February 2021, sectors that with notable over-the-year job gains and losses varied by county (Figure 2; Oregon Employment Department). Job losses and gains for industries in Baker and Union counties share similar outcomes, whereas Wallowa County has a notable difference in trends from the other two counties.



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# Key Themes

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A number of key themes emerged during the Assessment process. The needs, partnerships, challenges, strengths, and opportunities, listed under each key theme represent the most common responses expressed by stakeholders, but they do not capture all the specific details or information shared by individual interviewees. Some stakeholders represent larger groups (trade associations, BIPOC organizations, regional organizations, etc.) and their input was shaped by the needs of the people they serve. The potential opportunities expressed by stakeholders have not been tested for feasibility, therefore they should not be considered concrete strategies towards community improvement. Rather, the needs and opportunities should serve as a starting point for further exploration. This report acknowledges that many efforts have been initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic and those efforts may have already explored some of the listed opportunities or other strategies.

Interviews revealed the following **Key Themes**:

- Social Capital
- Health, Food, & Social Services
- Education & Childcare
- Built & Natural Environments
- Economic Development

For each theme, the following are presented:

- Key Needs – List of general needs and associated examples of specific needs
- Potential Partners – Examples of current or potential partners brought up during interviews; Potential room to expand partnerships and connect to other themes
- Challenges – Pre-existing and COVID-19-influenced challenges for the region
- Strengths – Pre-existing and emerging COVID-19-influenced strengths
- Potential Opportunities – Leveraged strengths and opportunities to address challenges and needs

Some needs were consistently identified across all the Key Themes and should be considered when planning and implementing all recovery strategies:

- Continue actions to improve equity and include underserved and underrepresented groups
- Improve methods and means of communication
- Find innovative and efficient ways to address capacity issues
- Map out partners and services provided by organizations in the communities

# Social Capital



The presence of multiple grassroots projects, nonprofit organizations, high volunteerism, and communication challenges are all linked to the social capital theme. Stakeholders expressed social capital ([OECD 2013](#)) in terms of:

- Personal relationships - structure of people’s networks (i.e., the people they know) and the social behaviors that contribute to establishing and maintaining those networks
- Social network support - direct outcome of the nature of people’s personal relationships, and resources available to each individual through their personal social network
- Civic engagement - activities and networks through which people contribute to civic and community life, such as volunteering, political participation, group membership and different forms of community action
- Trust and cooperative norms - shared values and trust – general trust in others and/or trust in institutions, as well as norms of reciprocity and discrimination that exists in societies

Key Needs	
General Themes	Specific Themes
Continue to increase communications and collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structured, impactful community conversations that discuss community development strategies or polarizing community topics</li> <li>• Improved communications/coordination between organizations/nonprofits and economic development partners</li> </ul>
Continue to explore equitable methods to make resources more accessible and combat structural inequity/inequality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies to address structural inequities through the willingness for community members and supporting organizations/entities to improve intercultural communication, cultural competency, and embrace more inclusive environments for individuals that identifies with underrepresented and underserved groups</li> <li>• Easy-to-navigate, centralized location for resources (e.g. simplified website or an established county level resource coordinator)</li> </ul>
Potential Partners	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Local</b> - Local government, community/civic organizations, schools, community members</li> <li>• <b>County</b> - county government, community/civic organizations</li> <li>• <b>Regional &amp; State</b> - State officials and regional representatives, physical and mental health facilities, education service districts, community/civic/arts/cultural organizations, NEOEDD, underserved/underrepresented community leaders or organizations</li> </ul>	
Challenges	
<p><b>Pre-Existing Challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Struggles with trust and cooperative norms such as a lack of local &amp; state government transparency and unfavorable decision-making due to implicit bias</li> <li>• Challenges for community members to access resources due to physical distance, capacity of organizations, or difficulty navigating systems to gather information about current resources</li> <li>• Challenges for underserved and underrepresented groups accessing resources, especially if the system is unfamiliar to them or if entities do not reach out to them</li> <li>• Concerns about the challenges the rural-urban divide poses to our region’s ability to be resilient and maintain the current culture</li> <li>• Perception that little, though increasing, diversity in the region does not warrant efforts or programs to be more inclusive, understand different community’s needs, do effective outreach, and support individuals or families that identify with non-dominant backgrounds. For example, non-dominant race/ethnicity (e.g., Indigenous, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Black, Middle Eastern, multiracial/multiethnic, and/or Latinx),</li> </ul>	

LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, two-spirit, and/or other), person with disabilities, remote community member, and other underrepresented and underserved groups.

- Perception that there is not enough capacity to meet the needs of the growing non-dominant racial and ethnic communities
- Attempts by organizations/entities to include members of underserved/non-dominant communities are often tokenizing (“ticking a box”)
- Non-dominant communities are not considered in community planning/strategies, decision-making, projects, or policies
- Perception that addressing certain problems will make that problem bigger than it really is or create other problems.
- Perception that having a dual-diagnosis treatment center in a community may bring more people with dual-diagnosis to the area/or give that area a bad reputation.
- Perception that as more people move to the area, changes will threaten the current dominant rural culture

### COVID19 Challenges

- Fewer social events have negatively impacted elderly individuals and culturally specific communities. For example, the Nez Perce Tribe (and other indigenous peoples) continue to have an intimate connection to the land in Northeast Oregon (region provides access to food, water, culture, history, a future, and traditional events). Tribal members, specifically elders, were not able to meet safely to make important decisions.
- Video conference fatigue
- Reduced access to services due to closed offices, less capacity, and racial/ethnic disparities
- Isolation negatively affecting mental health and personal relationships
- Attempts to keep the public informed of pandemic status and political information have also caused ‘information overload’ and further exacerbated other state and local political/social polarization issues

## Strengths

### Pre-Existing Strengths

- Resourcefulness, “tight-knit” communities, and high volunteerism
- Increase in racial, ethnic and gender diversity has provided the region with other innovative ideas and social interactions and played a key role in the region’s overall well-being, resiliency, economic progress

### Emerging Strengths

- Organizations “taking this time” to conduct assessments, plans, and consider equitable strategies
- Strengthen bonds with partners
- Embrace roles that make an organization the centralized source for information
- Attempts to be more inclusive and equitable by communities and organizations and seeing them struggling to listen and learn from underserved and underrepresented groups
- People forced to become more comfortable with technology and embrace alternative ways to communicate
- Students being more socially and politically engaged




## Potential Opportunities

- Organizations and communities could work with underrepresented and underserved groups to determine what seamless inclusion and equity looks like
- Offer more appropriate resources (for example, translated documents) to members of the community
- Continue to support and participate in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), LGBTQIA+ specific, and healthy relationships trainings
- Hold ‘community conversations’ roundtables to get to know other community members, build trust, and to discuss polarizing topics, strategic plans, and assessments
- Establish a mechanism to support more collaboration and foster healthy partnerships between entities to address capacity issues, increase transparency, and improve efficiency

# Health, Food, & Social Services



The health care industry accounts for a large part of the region’s economy. The region has many nonprofit organizations and community volunteers that support families’ access to health and food resources. However, several interviewees expressed increasing concerns about equity (mainly in terms of accessibility by various community groups) and low capacity. With the stresses from the pandemic, there are also concerns about the increasing mental health issues and domestic violence/ sexual assault cases. Interviewees expressed residents’ on-going difficulty accessing healthy foods – another issue exacerbated by the pandemic.

 <b>Key Needs</b>	
General Themes	Specific Themes
Continue to explore innovative solutions to provide affordable, inclusive mental and physical health care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More health-specific support groups to facilitate sharing of knowledge and social support</li> <li>• More local dual diagnosis treatment centers and transitional/permanent supportive housing</li> <li>• Providers to ask underrepresented and underserved groups how to best serve them and to be up to date on necessary DEI/ identity-specific trainings</li> <li>• Community leaders to hold regular well-being/supportive check-ins with each other</li> <li>• Solutions to employ and retain physical and mental health specialists and skilled nursing facilities in the region.</li> <li>• Affordable health insurance for working/moderate income residents</li> <li>• More non-emergency transportation for some areas</li> </ul>
Continue to explore innovative solutions to increase access to healthy food options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase access to healthy, affordable, and culture specific food options</li> <li>• Food pantries that carry menstrual, hygiene, baby care, and household products</li> </ul>
 <b>Potential Partners</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Local</b> - Physical and mental health facilities, city councils, housing committees, planning and zoning department, and community members, food banks, grocery stores, agricultural businesses</li> <li>• <b>County</b> - Physical and mental health facilities, social services organizations (Department of Human Services - DHS, domestic violence-sexual assault, community connections)</li> <li>• <b>Regional &amp; State</b> - Physical and mental health facilities, education service districts, arts, science, &amp; culture organizations, underserved/underrepresented community leaders or organizations, transitional housing nonprofits (for example, specific to people with severe mental illness or previously incarcerated)</li> </ul>	
 <b>Challenges</b>	
<p><b>Pre-Existing Challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of providers, specialists, and health-specific centers (e.g., dual-diagnosis treatment center) for physical and mental health care</li> <li>• Long distances to services, difficulty navigating resources, and qualifications for affordable health care</li> <li>• Distance, affordability, and availability of healthy food options, especially for community members of smaller towns, different ethnic, cultural, and/or religious dietary backgrounds</li> <li>• Negative perceptions of allowing SNAP participants free choice of food purchase</li> <li>• Underrepresented and underserved groups feeling unwelcomed or not listened to when seeking physical and mental health services</li> </ul> <p><b>COVID19 Challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased isolation due to shutdowns/social distancing affecting the well-being of individuals and families</li> <li>• Negative affects to mental health, increase in domestic abuse/sexual assault cases, fewer residents seeking preventive care</li> </ul>	



- Food bank closures reducing access to healthy food options
- Stresses on health and food access systems have exacerbated equity issues for underrepresented and underserved residents
- Increase in homeless/unhoused individuals, youth, and families, which includes families “doubling-up” in homes
- Safety and health of staff and volunteers (especially since many are elderly)
- Mental health/well-being of emergency response teams, providers, and community leaders who engage more frequently in unpredictable situations and have a harder time recharging after each activity/event



## Strengths

### Pre-Existing Strengths

- Many gap services available in the region
- High number of nonprofits per capita and high volunteerism
- Underrepresented and underserved groups of different cultural background have helped diversify the variety of foods and restaurants
- Food banks and friendly neighbors helped provide access to healthy food options to some people
- Warming center/station that provides shelter during the winter months
- Social services and other organizations are working to expand “No Wrong Door” policy to increase collaboration with partners/organizations/agencies and streamline access to services and support, so that there is no wrong door or no wrong organization for residents to contact when seeking resources

### Emerging Strengths

- Growing interest in mental/behavioral health and food access support
- Health care institutions and organizations overcoming closures and social distancing requirements with telehealth and telework
- Residents, organizations in Baker, Union, and Wallowa Counties pulling together and creating the Eastern Oregon Community Resource Network (EOCRN) to share information and resources
- COVID-19 relief funds that domestic violence–sexual assault organizations and other social services could use to provide resources and shelters for survivors and homeless/unhoused individuals/families
- Community members stepped up to deliver food and other essential items to residents who were homebound/quarantined






## Potential Opportunities

- Communities or organizations to define and publish community roles and services of organizations/entities in accessible locations for various community groups to further understand how to navigate systems
- Provide culture-/language-specific materials to underserved and underrepresented communities in the region
- Coordinate with health care organizations to destigmatize mental health
- Organize mental or physical health support groups for community members
- Explore the need and feasibility for community green houses
- Explore partnerships to see that grocery stores/markets/food banks carry more food options for ethnic and religious populations that are growing in certain areas in the region

# Education & Childcare



In the [2020 Oregon by the Numbers](#) publication, the Northeast Oregon region was reported to have better than the state average in Kinder Readiness for early childhood education and a high rate of high school graduation. However, the region has low rates of residents with college degrees. Many interviewees expressed that there are not enough work-learning opportunities for students. Interviewees also expressed that childcare services are often seen as a public service even if it is a private business. This perception has caused misunderstandings between providers, families, and state funding sources. The well-being of educators was also a concern.

 <b>Key Needs</b>	
General Themes	Specific Themes
Continue to work with partners to make childcare options more equitable for families and profitable for providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More programs for infant to toddlers</li> <li>• More providers and physical spaces for childcare</li> <li>• Expanded eligibility for childcare subsidy and more money for each child</li> <li>• Affordable and quality childcare services</li> <li>• More approachable/accessible/incentivized system for childcare providers to successfully start up and maintain a childcare business, including the state to provide cost-based reimbursement rates, lower family co-payments and equitable state share-payments across regions, support for provider networks, and a regulatory framework appropriate for small sites (like micro-centers and learning hubs)</li> </ul>
Continue to find innovative ways to improve and expand career pathway and skill development options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business training for providers/business owners/organizations (e.g., to cover business strategies, risk-taking, identifying potential partnerships)</li> <li>• More coordination between partners to create more work-learning opportunities for high schoolers and young adults</li> </ul>
 <b>Potential Partners</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Local</b> - Schools/pre-K/HeadStart, parent/guardians, educators, community organizations, city councils, businesses, and community members, libraries</li> <li>• <b>County</b> - Community organizations, commissioners, Child Care Resource &amp; Referral</li> <li>• <b>Regional &amp; State</b> - Education service districts, arts, science, &amp; culture organizations, underserved/underrepresented community leaders or organizations</li> </ul>	
 <b>Challenges</b>	
<p><b>Pre-Existing Challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing struggles for parents/guardians to attain affordable and quality childcare</li> <li>• Childcare providers and early childhood education (ECE) centers struggle to cover business costs. Jobs tend to be low paying, resulting in high turnover.</li> <li>• Rural environments have the added difficulty in accessing and providing quality and affordable childcare or education, including difficulties such as increasing the needs for cost-based reimbursement rates, equalization payments, and slot funding contracts (<a href="#">The Family Ford Foundation Childcare in Rural Oregon 2020</a>).</li> <li>• Lack of provider networks and an appropriate revised regulatory framework for small and micro centers</li> <li>• Childcare providers and ECE centers have trouble overcoming the perception that they are only “babysitters” and not also educators and small business owners</li> <li>• High school students have limited access to work-learning opportunities</li> </ul> <p><b>COVID19 Challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pandemic shutdowns and social distance restrictions have decreased student attendance and enrollment for all levels of education (pre-k to higher education)</li> </ul>	

- Fewer opportunities for in-person trainings, clinicals, work-study placements, internships, and mentorships for vocational/higher education students
- Educators feel overworked, even though some institutions have reported to being flexible and allowing educators to meet their needs as necessary
- Worried for student’s mental health due to less socializing, cancelled extracurricular activities, and issues at home
- Rapidly growing need for quality broadband in education due to more students doing distance-learning and employees teleworking

## Strengths

### Pre-Existing Strengths

- High graduation rate for high school
- Many nonprofits in the region connecting students to the community through projects and programs
- Arts and cultural organizations helping to educate residents about the region’s long history and many cultures

### Emerging Strengths

- Increasing access to education via virtual trainings
- Rise in GED enrollment
- Educators being heard more by the community, and more communication between educators and parents




## Potential Opportunities

- ECE centers to connect with local businesses and organizations to continue to afford and buy local supplies
- Providers to educate the community about the childcare ecosystem network and childcare expectations (such as, how the system works, what it costs to run a center/business, and ability to making a living wage as a provider)
- More personal development and evening classes for educators and caregivers (in-person or virtual)
- Increase coordination between educators, community organizations, and local businesses to create more work-learning opportunities for high schoolers

# Built & Natural Environments



The people in Northeast Oregon have an intimate connection to land. Many cultural activities are landscape-based and a number of organizations are working in environmental preservation on public and private lands. Many interviewees expressed concerns about the influx of visitors and a possible increase in permanent migration to the area that could cause unwanted types of development. These concerns have been exacerbated by the pandemic and added visitor stresses on both natural and built systems. Concerns for the built environment include housing, infrastructure, and land use planning. Workforce housing was found to be the biggest concern for interviewees, as housing shortages are affecting job opportunities and overall economic development for the area. Broadband accessibility was the second biggest concern. In general, the pandemic exacerbated most of the pre-existing challenges surrounding access to quality broadband/highspeed internet, housing, and, in some areas, urban sprawl/development concerns.

 <b>Key Needs</b>	
General Themes	Specific Themes
Continue to explore innovative ways to increase attainable housing options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More funding, developers, and/or contractors to meet housing needs</li> <li>• More quality, affordable housing options for workforce, senior citizens, persons who experience a disability, veterans, and low- and moderate-income families/individuals</li> <li>• Establish next steps for tenants and landlords before/after the eviction moratorium is lifted</li> <li>• Transitional and permanent supportive housing in the region</li> </ul>
Continue to develop for a more resilient future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of current quality and availability of broadband in each community</li> <li>• Expanded access to quality, affordable broadband</li> <li>• Expanded recycling programs in some areas</li> <li>• Increased awareness about energy efficiency and renewable solutions for new and existing development</li> <li>• More community support and staffing for organizations like land trusts</li> </ul>
 <b>Potential Partners</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Local</b> - City councils, planning and zoning department, community members, agricultural businesses, utilities</li> <li>• <b>County</b> - Commissioners, Environmental and land preservation organizations, and realtors</li> <li>• <b>Regional &amp; State</b> - Forest Service, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development, Northeast Oregon Housing Authority, developers, transitional housing nonprofits (e.g., formerly incarcerated or residential treatment), civil engineering firms, utilities, NEOEDD, contractors, developers, and underserved/underrepresented community leaders or organizations</li> </ul>	
 <b>Challenges</b>	
<b>Pre-Existing Challenges</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to affordable and quality high-speed internet/ broadband</li> <li>• Increased interest of people to move to the area is driving a need for affordable high-speed internet</li> <li>• Influx of tourists at large events causes broadband and cellular connection issues for residents and agriculture technology (such as irrigation pivots)</li> <li>• Growing interest in the area could exacerbate urban sprawl, overburden outdated/insufficient infrastructure, and drive cultural changes</li> <li>• Land trusts face barriers of funding and capacity for large community projects</li> <li>• Agriculture businesses expressed concerns about improper wolf management and lack of land available for new and beginning ranchers</li> <li>• Lack of housing options in the region (e.g., affordable workforce housing, rental housing, permanent supportive housing, and temporary professional housing)</li> </ul>	

- Conversion of residential housing to tourism lodging, absentee property owners and second homeowners
- Limited number of developers/contractors and the high cost of development in the region
- Limited rental options for tenants due to rental/financial history, implicit bias, being priced out of units due to high construction costs and increasing property values
- New homes being built are not meeting affordable or workforce housing needs

#### COVID19 Challenges

- Added pressure for areas to have quality, reliable high-speed internet/broadband that can meet the demands of more virtual activities (e.g., distance-learning, resource/food access, telework, entertainment/socializing, and telehealth)
- Many pandemic-induced housing challenges, including homeowners following social restrictions taking the opportunity to do repairs and greatly increasing the demand for the already limited number of contractors and supplies
- Demand for utility bill assistance has increased
- Eviction moratorium has left rental owners feeling unheard and concerned about paying their bills and prompting them to sell property
- Concerns about non-payment and escalating mental health has resulted in more time-consuming and stricter screenings of tenants
- The moratorium has reduced the number of evictions and subsequent openings for low-income housing units
- People with low wage jobs, including families (often younger families), individuals, and underrepresented groups have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic

### Strengths

#### Pre-Existing Strengths

- Steady increase of individuals and families wanting to relocate to the region and believe it has much to offer
- Communities becoming more aware of infrastructure and housing issues and focusing their energy in these areas, such as updating older buildings
- Many stakeholders expressing concerns for the natural environment in response to community's development strategies
- Strong support from tribal members and environmental organizations is leading to increasing efforts to educate community members (especially, the youth) and visitors about the environment, outdoor safety, and land management/stewardship

#### Emerging Strengths

- Some organizations and communities are conducting housing assessments and are more aware of housing issues

### Potential Opportunities

- Conduct or update infrastructure and housing assessments for communities
- Hold a renewable energy educational campaign
- Developers and contractors to actively offer renewable energy and energy efficient options
- Update land development/zoning ordinances for sustainable development
- Hold public conversations about the results of housing assessments and include contractors and developers
- New and alternative funding streams for development of affordable/workforce housing

# Economic Development

The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has tested the economic stability of industries in the region. Many interviewees reported that business support systems are engaging to support businesses in need, but also to prepare them to become more resilient to future shocks. Unemployment benefits have been expanded to include self-employed individuals who would not have normally qualified for assistance. However, some stakeholders are concerned that extended unemployment benefits, and other factors, have deterred job seekers from applying for jobs or returning to work, thus leaving many positions unfilled. The additional table, *Businesses & Community Facilities Desired by Interviewees*, lists potential business/entrepreneurial opportunities suggested by stakeholders.

Key Needs	
General Themes	Specific Themes
Continue to explore business retention solutions and provide more workforce development options for current and future workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More attainable financial literacy and business classes for youth and adults</li> <li>• Tailored financial literacy and business classes for sexual assault/domestic violence survivors, racial and ethnic minorities, women, and other underrepresented and underserved groups</li> <li>• Staff management trainings for growing nonprofits</li> <li>• Increase awareness for traditional and non-traditional financing opportunities</li> </ul>
Continue to support resilient local businesses and strong diversified economies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversified funding streams for nonprofits</li> <li>• More USDA certified meat processing plants in the region</li> <li>• Off-priced retail apparel and home accessories stores</li> <li>• Recovery, succession, and real estate lease-to-ownership plans for small businesses</li> <li>• Local governments reserve some small business funds for emergencies</li> <li>• Finding more philanthropic investment opportunities for long term benefits</li> <li>• Find ways to capture more visitor dollars by linking tourists to locally produced goods and services.</li> <li>• Improve messaging or information released during the pandemic and future crises</li> <li>• Strengthen partnerships between tourism entities, other community organizations and business owners</li> <li>• Tourism entities to increase marketing to visitors about maintaining healthy communities and natural environments</li> </ul>
Potential Partners	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Local</b> - Economic development departments, Main Street programs, schools, and local business/ agricultural businesses</li> <li>• <b>County</b> - Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Development Centers, and incubation/accelerator/co-working organization (LaunchPad Baker/ Ignite-La Grande)</li> <li>• <b>Regional &amp; State</b> - Schools, Eastern Oregon Visitors Association (EOVA), NEOEDD, Business Oregon, Eastern Oregon Workforce Board (EOWB), Oregon Restaurant &amp; Lodging Association (ORLA), US Dept. of Agriculture (USDA), economists, Regional Solutions, and underserved/underrepresented community leaders or organizations</li> </ul>	





## Challenges

### Pre-Existing Challenges

- Aging population, high cost of living, lack of affordable housing, and underemployment has negative effect on retaining workforce
- Some employers have difficulty retaining workers, but also finding and keeping workers who have the necessary soft skills for certain job positions
- Some youth and young adults lack work-learning or mentorship programs and are not interested in available agricultural work
- Perceived instability of the timber industry creates challenges to retaining employees
- Large geographic territory that has to be served by business support entities with very small number of staff
- Small business support entities lack the diversity to meet the needs of minority business owners for appropriate mentors/business development providers
- Small business owners struggle to navigate support systems and find resources, such as seed money, to start and sustain a business
- Women and racially/ethnically underrepresented and underserved business owners face additional barriers to start-up and grow a business
- Minority-owned businesses developing building lease plans instead of being guided to develop a building ownership plan, which could work better for them
- Minority-owned businesses not developing equity in the business and when they retire there is less to sell
- Minority-owned businesses with distrust of governments and small business support systems due to on-going issues such as, implicit bias in the community, lack of funding that will not lead to debt they can't afford (especially if coming from a low-income background), inappropriate/unsuccessful outreach from various support systems, and lack of role models, mentors, and partners who believe in their vision and offer appropriate guidance
- Lack of affordable and available agricultural land/pasture to support new ranching businesses

### COVID19 Challenges

- Unpredictable shutdowns, temporary closures, and social distancing restrictions causing many businesses to suffer losses
- Added costs for businesses, such as providing personal protective equipment (PPE) to employees, meeting increased demands for online sales/e-commerce, and needing more packaging and/or shipping supplies
- Retail and hospitality industries (i.e., restaurants and lodging) in some areas have been hit the hardest from having additional issues such as, difficulty predicting how much inventory to order and decline in foot traffic
- Retail and hospitality challenges affected how tourism organizations are marketing/promoting to potential visitors
- Some ranchers saw declines in sales when restaurants closed
- Some businesses have closed permanently
- Business owners that decided to enter retirement early and closed their business instead of selling it
- Business closures creating gaps in goods and services in the local economy
- Difficulty tracking business closures as some do not report closures to state regulatory bodies or are not registered with the state
- Small business owners who did not receive Covid-19 relief assistance because they found it difficult to find/or had no knowledge of funding opportunities, did not have the necessary documentation to apply, did not have the time to apply or could not meet deadlines, afraid of loan debt, or/and did not trust the government with their information
- Business instability is raising concerns about current and future job security
- Employee shortages and fewer job seekers at hiring events in the region and nationally
- Some unemployed workers/job seekers with concerns for health and safety, layoffs, reduced work hours, increasing financial struggles, forced distance learning for children, and reduced childcare options seek unemployment benefits and remain unemployed as given the uncertain times this may be the most reliable option
- Younger families with lower wage jobs and underserved/underrepresented groups tend to work in industries that are being hit the hardest (retail and hospitality) and are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic



## Strengths

### Pre-Existing Strengths

- Large number of small business owners and the region’s “can do attitude,” resourcefulness, and adaptability contribute to the economic resiliency of the region
- Benefit of wide range of different types of businesses and types of backgrounds of business owners
- Awareness by economic development organizations of the need for business incubator/accelerators that could allow business owners to have an affordable space to operate and network

### Emerging Strengths

- Social networks are being greatly leveraged
- Restaurant owners have learned to be more adaptable with the frequent changes in policies
- National supply chain disruption created more awareness of the food system and food access issues
- Increased awareness about food access issues
- Restaurant owners who found ways to help the community by donating food to their employees and to community organizations to help with food access
- Business owners reaching out to consumers by exploring new ways of running their business, such as moving to online sales/e-commerce, adding a take-out window, or planning to use incubator/accelerator centers to work remotely
- Business owners connected to support services and communicating more to discuss relief options and guidance, strengthening those relationships
- Business service providers services trying to find more equitable ways to support business owners and non-profits by moving trainings online and making them more accessible
- Residents showing support for small businesses by “buying local”, especially in the absence of visitors
- Some areas doing well at capturing visitor dollars during the pandemic
- More diverse visitor base visiting rural areas for outdoor recreation in summer of 2020
- Some communities and organizations are preparing for new influx of visitors and residents



## Potential Opportunities

- Explore value added opportunities
- Explore agritourism opportunities
- Create more work-learning opportunities (mentorships, apprenticeships, and internships) for youth and young adults
- Explore youths’ needs for and perspective on entering the workforce
- Continue to have more collaboration/ coordination on projects
- Explore joint marketing opportunities and improve marketing strategies for businesses and organizations
- Map and define economic support entities (e.g., EOVA, Chambers, NEOEDD, SBDC, Business Oregon, Economic Development Departments, etc.)
- Regularly invite key industry leaders and underserved/underrepresented group leaders when planning projects/programs
- Explore businesses that have a remote work option
- Diversify professions represented in our region
- Create more cohesive county-level strategies for wayfinding and/or buy-local campaigns



## Businesses & Community Facilities Desired by Interviewees

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concessions/Small Businesses at State Parks</li> <li>• Bowling alley</li> <li>• Movie theatre</li> <li>• Dry cleaner</li> <li>• Commercial green houses</li> <li>• Roller skate rink</li> <li>• Youth/recreation center</li> <li>• Bookkeeper</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketing services</li> <li>• Web designer/ Graphic designer</li> <li>• Retail (affordable clothing stores and shoes)</li> <li>• Sports goods shop</li> <li>• Housekeeping/ Janitorial services</li> <li>• Pilots, mechanics, or avionic shop</li> <li>• Trade Contractors</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

# NEOEDD Opportunities and Recommendations

The following recommendations describe actions and efforts that can help address some of the key themes and needs identified in the Assessment. They depict possible opportunities that NEOEDD can either lead or support as our region looks to recovery and resiliency. Note, just because a recommendation is listed does not mean it can or will be implemented.

<b>Opportunities</b> <i>What will guide regional economic development?</i>	<b>Implementation</b> <i>How can the strategies be implemented?</i>
<p>Support the retention and expansion of existing businesses</p> <p>Support the development of new businesses</p>	<p>Provide online access to business development resources including topics such as: shifting to online sales, planning for new markets, creating attractive and competitive workplaces, enhanced social media marketing, financing, and emergency preparedness planning.</p> <p>Collaborate with partners to provide networking, referrals and co-working facilities.</p> <p>Provide loans, Individual Development Accounts, and promote use of community capital (individual investments in businesses whether public or private)</p> <p>Collaborate in Sectoral Business Support/Development – Agritourism, sustainable tourism product development and planning, childcare, community food system development, arts and cultural organizations and businesses</p> <p>Continue to collaborate with partners statewide to ensure business development and financial resources are designed to meet the needs of small rural businesses</p>
<p>Support equitable methods to make resources and decision-making processes more accessible and combat structural inequity/ inequality.</p>	<p>Work with underrepresented and underserved groups to determine what seamless inclusion and equity looks like and initiate changes</p> <p>Continue to support and participate in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), LGBTQIA+, and healthy relationships trainings.</p> <p>Hold ‘community conversations’ roundtables to get to know other community members, build trust, and to safely discuss polarizing topics, strategic plans, and assessments.</p> <p>Provide business development programs specifically targeted to demographic groups that are underrepresented.</p> <p>Explore new methods to map and share information on economic and community support entities</p> <p>Provide culture/language-specific materials to underserved and underrepresented communities</p>

<p><b>Support actions to understand and address housing shortages</b></p>	<p>Convene housing partners to learn about current and proposed initiatives/projects and how to expand or replicate them.</p> <p>Conduct or update infrastructure and housing assessments for communities.</p> <p>Identify and modify codes that are barriers to development/retention of affordable/workforce housing.</p> <p>Share information on findings and offer public engagement opportunities to help determine actions to implement.</p>
<p><b>Support actions to understand and address labor shortages</b></p>	<p>Convene workforce development partners, workers and employers to identify the most significant barriers to workforce participation.</p> <p>Learn about current and proposed initiatives/projects and how to expand or replicate them.</p> <p>Share information on findings and offer public engagement opportunities to help determine actions to implement.</p>
<p><b>Support actions to understand and address availability and cost of broadband.</b></p>	<p>Convene broadband providers and community partners to verify underserved areas and ways to improve service at an affordable cost.</p>
<p><b>Support actions to understand and address deficiencies and costs of inadequate infrastructure</b></p>	<p>Conduct outreach to communities to update information on infrastructure needs and priorities.</p>

# Conclusion

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Many of the issues identified in the Community Needs Assessment are complex and will require collaboration and innovative thinking to address. NEOEDD has the capability to convene partners and support efforts to address some of the issues raised by this Assessment. NEOEDD's mission is to access resources and facilitate quality decision-making for businesses, communities and entrepreneurs in NE Oregon. Economic Development Districts traditionally take a holistic view of regional economic and community development and realize that many factors influence the region's economy and quality of life for its residents. NEOEDD has focused its efforts on supporting the establishment and growth of small businesses through:

- Business Finance – loans, Individual Development Accounts, promotion of community capital (individual investments in businesses whether public or private)
- Entrepreneurial Development – business planning, marketing and finance workshops, networking and referrals, entrepreneurial ecosystem enhancements and collaboration with partners, co-working facilities
- Sectoral Business Support/Development – agritourism, tourism product development and planning, community food system development, arts and cultural organization and business support

NEOEDD also provides education and support for nonprofit and for-profit entities who want to understand and incorporate diversity, equity and inclusion concepts into their operations.

The opportunities and recommendations from this assessment will inform NEOEDD's efforts to develop collaborative strategies for economic recovery.

## NEOEDD's Role in Economic Recovery

NEOEDD plans to complete the following next steps:

1. Present the Assessment's findings and NEOEDD's Opportunities and Recommendations to the Regional Solutions Team and the Rural Engagement and Vitality Center.
2. Develop a Regional Recovery Plan with the participation and support of regional partners, community members and the NEOEDD board, including: review of other recovery plans that pertain to the region and ways our work could amplify initiatives lead by others, feasibility analysis of opportunities in the Assessment, potential sector-specific meetings for workforce development, housing, childcare and broadband.
3. Determine how NEOEDD operations could be changed to address issues that have been identified in the Assessment and implement those changes.

# Appendix A: Stakeholders

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We thank all the named (below) and anonymous stakeholders that shared their time, perspectives, and experiences during the interviewing process of this Community Needs Assessment:

**Lea Hoover** | Director of Administration and Strategic Services, Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative

**Jessie Huff** | State Energy Coordinator, USDA Oregon Rural Development

**John Holman** | General Field Representative, Rural Utilities Service – Telecommunications Programs, USDA Rural Development

**Joseph Basile** | Renewable Energy Project Manager, Wallowa Resources Community Solutions Inc.

**Kate Harbour** | Outdoor Recreation and Trail Development Coordinator/RARE Participant, Eastern Oregon Visitors Association (EOVA)

**Alana Carollo** | Executive Director, EOVA

**Suzannah Moore-Hemann** | Executive Director, Union County Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Information Center

**Courtney Crowell** | Eastern Oregon Regional Solutions Coordinator - Regional Solutions, Office of the Governor, State of Oregon

**Lauren Kolojchick-Kotch** | Program Manager, Rural Development Initiatives (RDI)

**Nate Davis** | Program Manager, RDI

**Brian S. McDowell** | Regional Development Officer for Region 11, Business Oregon (Oregon Business Development Department)

**Christine Jarski** | Economic Development Director, City of La Grande

**Erin Carpenter** | Project Director, Eastern Oregon Workforce Board

**Jeff Nelson** | Advisor, Blue Mountain Community College Small Business Development Center

**Kaitlyn Gekeler** | Office Specialist, Office of Regional Outreach and Innovation at Eastern Oregon University (EOU) | Business Owner, Sugar Pine Farms and More LLC

**Tara Morrell** | Interim Deputy Director, Workforce Operations at Oregon Employment Department (WorkSource)

**Terry Hopkins** | Membership Representative, Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association (ORLA)

**Chantay Jett** | Executive Director, Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness

**Wallowa Memorial Hospital Employee**

**Nicolas Powers** | Chief Executive Officer, Winding Waters Community Health Center

**Trish Brinton** | Selling Division Manager, Encompass Health - Home Health & Hospice

**Donna Beverage** | Commissioner, Union County

**Robert Strope** | City Manager, City of La Grande

**Susan Roberts** | Commissioner, Wallowa County

**Marsha Moore** | Project Manager, Chrisman Development Inc.

**Ann Bloom** | Nutrition Education Program Assistant, OSU Extensions

**Matt Rippee** | District Manager, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department/ Regional Solutions Team

**Patrick Wingard** | Regional Representative, Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development/ Regional Solutions Team

**Randy Jones** | Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and Regional Solutions liaison, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality/ Regional Solutions Team

**Cassandra Sanchez** | EOU Health and Wellness Intern, EOU

**Julie Keniry** | Program Manager, Rural Engagement and Vitality Center (REV)

**Justin Chin** | Director of Career Services, EOU - Division of Student Affairs and Career Services



**Mendy Clark** | Director, Bus, Finance, & Purchasing, Union School District 5  
**Meredith Lair** | Executive Director, Northeast Oregon Area Health Education Center  
**Tabitha Espina** | Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Composition, EOU  
**Amy Stubblefield** | Executive Director, Safe Harbors  
**Marika Straw** | LGBTQIA+ Advocate & Shelter Manager, Safe Harbors  
**Denine Rautenstrauch** | Head Librarian, Enterprise Public Library  
**Hannah Voetberg** | President, Abundant Life | Organization Founder, Neighbors Together  
**Liberty Avila** | Executive Director, Northeast Oregon Network (NEON)  
**Building Healthy Families**  
**Tyana Musrasrik-Nanpei** | Community Connection Northeast Oregon | President, Eastern Oregon COFA Alliance National Network (CANN)  
**Robert Kleng** | Executive Director, Eastern Oregon University Head Start  
**Tobie Renee Sass** | Childcare Development Director, Umatilla Morrow Head Start (UMCHS), Inc – Early Learning Division  
**Angela Bombaci** | Executive Director, Nez Perce Wallowa Homeland  
**Cheryl North Coughlan** | Executive Director, Josephy Center for Arts and Culture  
**Gwendolyn Trice** | Executive Director and Founder, Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center  
**Chalene Harshman** | Quality Improvement Specialist and Focused Child Care Coordinator, Malheur Education Service District - Child Care Resource & Referral  
**Theresa Martinez** | Eastern Oregon Child Care Resources Coordinator, Malheur Education Service District  
**Kathleen Ackley** | Executive Director, Wallowa Land Trust  
**Larz Stewart** | Development Director, Wallowa Resources  
**Christopher Rich** | Eastern Oregon Regional Economist, Oregon Employment Department  
**Temporary/Transient Lodging Business Owners**  
**Amanda Martino** | Conservation Director, Blue Mountain Land Trust  
**Robin Maille** | Assistant Professor of Practice, Family & Community Health/SNAP-Ed and OSU Extension Service  
**Christopher Evans** | Community Development Coordinator, Oregon Department of Human Services  
**Oregon Cattlemen's Association Member**  
**Oregon Hay Growers Association Member**  
**Mark Coomer** | Relationship Manager and VP, Northwest Farm Credit Services  
**Diane M. Daggett** | Broker, Ruby Peak Realty  
**Katy Nesbitt** | Director, Wallowa County Natural Resource Director | Director, Wallowa County Economic Development  
**Robert Seymour** | Senior Director Finance/Chief Financial Officer, Grande Ronde Hospital  
**Shae Talley** | Area Manager, J-U-B Engineers, Inc  
**Caryn Appler** | Eastern Oregon Outreach Manager, Energy Trust of Oregon  
**Bryan Tweit** | Executive Director, Hatch/Launch Pad Baker | Economic Director, Baker County Economic Development  
**Brandy McIntosh** | Executive Director, MayDay, Inc.  
**Millwork Company Employee**

# Appendix B: Interview Questions

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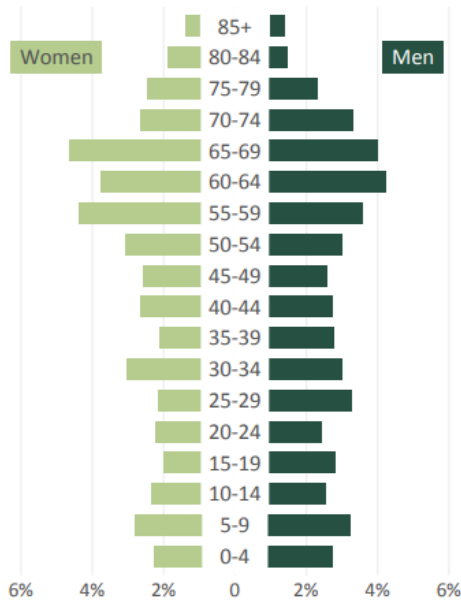
1. What are your primary job duties? With what perspective(s) are you bringing to this interview to help us identify the needs of the community you support?
2. What positive and negative impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic and related shutdown orders are you seeing in the community and/or your organization? Follow-up: How do you think we could leverage these impacts into opportunities for the next six months to a year?
3. What challenges are you seeing for people who have been disproportionately impacted during COVID-19 pandemic?
4. What needs/challenges does your [organization/business/community] have that you feel are unique to rural regions?
5. Do you see a trend in the use of your services? Have you noticed any other trends in the community?
6. What is your vision for your business/ organization/ community in 6mo, 1yr, and 2 years? How do you hope to reach these goals? How can NEOEDD help with this goal (immediate, short-term, and long-term needs)?
7. Are there any specific concrete barriers that you are encountering that are preventing you from reaching your goals?
8. Have you/or your organization implemented any new strategies/policies/structures/plans during the pandemic?
9. Have there been any local/state strategies that have been implemented during the pandemic months that have positively or negatively impacted your organization or the work that you do for the community?
10. What resources have been most beneficial during the pandemic and where have you found them (centralized location/organization)?
11. What resources do you think would have been useful prior to the economic disruption?
12. What are some community/organization/company assets that were revealed to you during this pandemic and how could they be leveraged in the future?
13. Are there organizations/businesses/resources/legislation that you believe could positively contribute to the character of the community?
14. In your opinion, for the communities you are involved with, what are the immediate, short-term, and long-term needs?
15. Are you aware of NEOEDD's services? What services would be beneficial in the future?
16. What questions are we not asking you that you feel are important for us to understand or address?

# Appendix C: Population Age Distribution

2020 Oregon by Numbers - Population Age Distribution

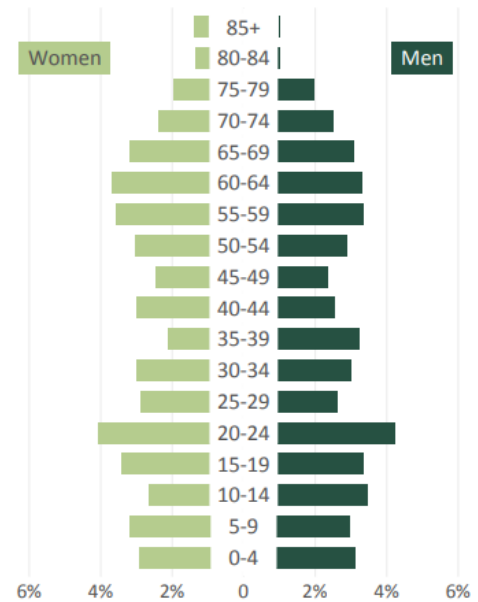
## Baker County

### POPULATION BY AGE



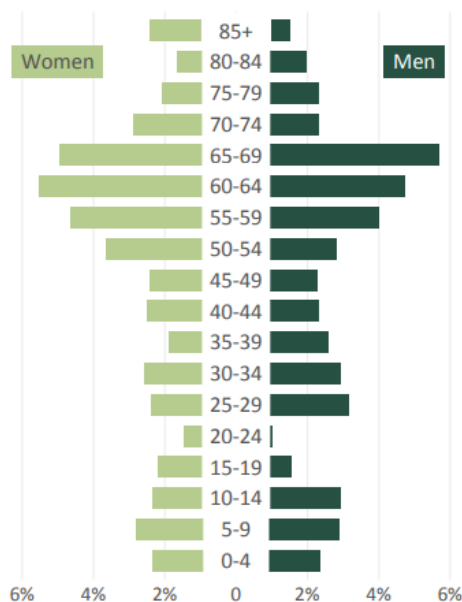
## Union County

### POPULATION BY AGE



## Wallowa County

### POPULATION BY AGE



# Appendix D: Employment Data

Eastern Oregon Regional Economist, Oregon Employment Department (2020), prepared by Christopher Rich

