



2008

**Philanthropy Exploration  
in Washington County**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Study conducted by

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## INTRODUCTION

Oregon's Washington County is a community in transition. The county has experienced unprecedented growth in its population, diversity and economy over the past 20 years. This growth has presented many challenges, including the challenge for government and non-profits in keeping pace with serving the growing needs of the community and its residents. This study was conducted to explore philanthropy in Washington County and to assess whether giving trends in Washington County are keeping with this growing need.

Vision Action Network (VAN), a private non-profit organization committed to the promotion and support of collaborative community-based problem solving, was created to help address these challenges. By bringing together a broad array of community partners, VAN tackles ongoing and emergent issues to make fundamental changes in the civic infrastructure and health of the community. In 2007, in recognition of the changing landscape of the community, VAN's Board of Directors met with representatives from several regional foundations to discuss philanthropy issues in Washington County. These conversations coalesced into three key questions:

- ◆ Are we leaving contributions from local donors untapped, either through our individual donor efforts or through our employee giving campaigns?
- ◆ Are giving patterns in Washington County different in comparison to other counties and if so, why? What assumptions exist about charitable giving that should be explored?
- ◆ Are there ways nonprofits can collaborate to make their philanthropic efforts stronger?

In early 2008, the VAN Board of Directors, in partnership with key stakeholders, directed a study to answer these questions and develop recommendations for action. The study included the collection of current data from *The Oregon Foundation DataBook, 9th Ed.* and from the Oregon Attorney General's Charitable Activities Section database, as well as an online survey of 81 foundations, non-profit organizations and businesses, and 24 interviews with individual and business donors.

## SUMMARY OF COMMON THEMES

### *Untapped Giving Potential*

Evidence indicates that there may be untapped giving potential in Washington County, with two contributing factors: (1) rapidly changing demographics and a lack of strategy to reach emerging groups and (2) limited nonprofit fundraising capacity.

Many donors reported that they believed communities of color can and should be engaged more in giving. Half of businesses and nonprofits and 61% of foundations report that they do not actively engage diverse populations in philanthropy.

Nationwide, individual donors contribute approximately 84% of all charitable dollars (including bequests); foundations contribute approximately 12% and corporations contribute approximately 3-4% of total charitable contributions (The Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, 2005). When Washington County nonprofits ranked activities they considered "very important" to achieving their fundraising goals, activities targeting foundations and corporations ranked highest. This suggests many organizations are not focusing on individual donor activities that will significantly increase fundraising revenue and build sustainability over time.

Lastly close to 80% of foundations surveyed disagreed with the statement “Our foundation receives many requests from Washington County nonprofits”, while almost 70% of nonprofits surveyed stated that grantwriting was “very important” in reaching their fundraising goals. This discrepancy warrants further study.

### ***Giving Patterns in Washington County***

Results of the study are inconclusive in answering the question whether or not giving patterns in Washington County differ from giving patterns in comparable counties. Data from the Oregon Attorney General’s Charitable Activities Section database of Oregon nonprofit organizations showed a mixed picture. In addition, one-quarter of nonprofit organizations believe the Washington County community gives less generously than similar communities, while 84.6% of foundations believe that the Washington County community gives the same as or more generously than similar communities. This discrepancy suggests the issue may be one of perception, but further study is warranted to explore this in more depth.

### ***Washington County as a Community***

The study suggests that Washington County has not yet established a ‘sense of place.’ Many donors interviewed experience their community as a particular city, neighborhood or region, but few described Washington County as their community. Many donors and foundations provide support beyond Washington County and to organizations in Multnomah County, which serve all or part of Washington County. The contrasting sense of community among donors may lead to a vague awareness of needs. Foundations and businesses report that ‘community needs’ are very important in their funding decisions; but, a shared definition of community was not found.

## **ADVISORY TEAM RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Build Nonprofit Capacity to Meet the Needs of a Growing Population***

To assist in building Washington County non-profit capacity, it is recommended that partnerships with existing organizations and foundations are created to provide regular trainings, networking opportunities and “Funders Fairs” for non-profit organization staff and board members.

### ***Help Businesses to Give and Encourage Giving***

To encourage and support business giving, it is recommended that the Washington County community celebrate corporate philanthropy and volunteerism through an annual Washington County Corporate Philanthropy Awards. It is also recommended that Washington County businesses are provided with information on workplace giving programs.

### ***Dialogue for Diversity***

To support understanding of our changing demographics, it is recommended that the Washington County community engage in conversation about diversity and provide more opportunities for people of color to be more involved in philanthropy and leadership roles.

### ***Building the Washington County Community***

To help develop a stronger sense of Washington County as a community, it is recommended that geographically-focused trainings and gatherings for non-profits are held regularly and consistently over time, as described above. It is also recommended that the release of this report is utilized to convene a cross-sector of stakeholders to develop a shared vision of philanthropy in Washington County.



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### **Funding Partners**

Meyer Memorial Trust  
The Oregon Community Foundation  
Tuality Healthcare  
Oregon Food Bank  
Community Action Organization of Washington County  
Community Housing Fund  
Hillsboro Community Foundation  
Providence Health and Services  
SOLV  
United Way of the Columbia-Willamette

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For a copy of the full report, visit our website [www.visionactionnetwork.org](http://www.visionactionnetwork.org) or call us at 503-846-5792.

The Vision Action Network is a private non-profit organization committed to the promotion and support of collaborative community-based problem solving in Washington County.