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Executive Summary

Texas Rural Funders Collaborative

Who are we?

In July 2017, a group of funders convened to consider how working together we might bring additional attention and resources to areas of rural Texas. The Texas Rural Funders Collaborative (TRFC) is made up of private foundations, community foundations, and health-conversion foundations. We represent a variety of interests. But our shared belief is that the health of our state depends upon the success of all our communities, and that urban and rural areas are inextricably linked. It is our hope that by working jointly and partnering with individuals and organizations representing a diversity of expertise, we can support work that honors, preserves and strengthens rural life in Texas. We approach this work from an asset-based perspective focusing on what *is* working in rural communities, rather than what is not.

What do we plan to accomplish?

In the short-term, we believe philanthropy has a role to bring awareness and resources to the challenges facing rural people and places. But first, we must educate ourselves about rural needs and the existence of place-based assets so we can proceed in a way that adds value. To that end, the TRFC is supporting three activities:

1. Compiling the research report on rural Texas you now hold which includes:
 - An introduction to rural Texas prepared by Texas 2036, an organization developing a strategic plan for the state.
 - A landscape analysis developed by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG).
 - A report on the natural environment prepared by the Natural Resources Institute at A&M.
 - The results of a statewide survey conducted by Strategic Research Associates.
 - The results of a listening tour on broadband access by Connected Nation.
2. Partnering with the Texas Tribune to host a symposium: “The Future of Rural” to be held at Texas A&M University in College Station on November 12-13 in an effort to start the conversation about the hard realities as well as the success stories present in rural places around the state.
3. Convening a Rural Advisory Group consisting of rural experts from around the state to help inform this initiative.

What is next?

From the information gained from these studies and the Rural Advisory Group, we will be in a position to identify relevant long-term action strategies, not only for us individually and collectively to pursue, but actionable information for other public and private organizations to use. To that end, a critical strategy we will be exploring is the expansion of broadband networks to rural communities. Whether delivered via fiber, satellite, or fixed wireless technologies, we believe the existence of reliable high bandwidth networks may determine if a community thrives or simply survives.

With the rapid urbanization of our state, we are finding there is significantly less information and political attention presently focused on rural Texas than in past decades. There are fewer champions for rural interests. This provides philanthropy with our modest resources a unique opportunity, indeed a responsibility, to raise up and amplify rural voices. Our goal is to ensure that rural communities are strong, competitive and sustainable, so that future generations of Texans will have the option of choosing the benefits and lifestyle of rural living.

This report is available electronically at www.edtx.org/TexasRural.