

## **Community Analysis**

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### Physical Data

Eugene, Oregon, is a city of more than 170,000 people located in central Western Oregon, at the southern mouth of the Willamette Valley. As the second largest city in Oregon, Eugene emerges from forested hills that descend from the south with steep, windy roads, into the long, expanding farmland of the Willamette Valley. Two notable buttes stick above the city, serving as its most visible hiking hotspots. The wide Willamette River denotes the city's eastern border and carves through the city's northern half, and a large lake rests several miles to the west. Numerous parks are dotted around the city, culminating in over 50 miles of trails, 3,000 acres of public parks, and 30 miles of wetlands and other natural ecosystems (Eugene Cascades and Coast, *City*). To the north, the city floods into the farmlands and vineyards of the Willamette Valley, while thick forests of small, rural settlements surround the city on all other sides, with Eugene serving as a hub for all of the smaller, surrounding communities for miles around.

It is a young, lively, and hip hub of culture for western Oregon. With Portland being at the very north of Oregon, Eugene serves as the center of theater, music, food, arts, recreation, movies, sports, culture, and education for Western Oregon. With three colleges and universities, education is deeply intertwined with the city's population and its history, particularly the University of Oregon, which is almost as old as the city itself. Thanks in large part to this university, too, Eugene is the sports center of Oregon. It is even nationally renowned as the heart of the country's track and field sports and is named TrackTown USA, serving as host to not only state and national competitions, but even for the Olympic trials. The area of what is now Eugene and the adjoining, smaller city of Springfield were originally inhabited by the native Kalapuya tribe. In 1853, however, Eugene Skinner founded the city, with the University of Oregon being established in 1872 and quickly becoming a cornerstone of the city (Eugene Cascades and Coast,

*About*). Since then the city has grown, fueled in part by the lumber industry and in great deal by the rich farming of the Willamette Valley, although through the three centers of higher education and various medical facilities, education and health services now comprise the greatest source of the city's employment (United States Census Bureau).

### **Political Data**

There are numerous identifiable leaders in the community, ranging from political to educational to non-profit. Most obvious is the mayor, city council, and other locally elected leaders. Although their roles and contributions may be less interactive, visible, or eye-catching, they are nonetheless vital to the city and its community. Also attached to the local government is the Eugene Public Library (EPL). With a central location and two branches, it serves the whole of the city's community, with services and resources dedicated to minoritized groups of the city's community. From the educational side the city has several primary schools as well as three sources of higher education: Lane Community College, Bushnell University (formerly Northwest Christian University), and the University of Oregon (UO). Both of the former two schools are smaller institutions, whereas the latter is not only larger and historically linked to the city, but has significant authority in the city's culture and sports as well. UO owns the city's main sports stadium, Autzen Stadium, which is the biggest stadium in the state, and its campus includes Hayward Field, which is used for state, national, and Olympic track and field competitions. Both sporting arenas are used for community events as well, and the school is also responsible for a significant share of tourism from sporting events and the seasonal influx and outflow of college students and their relatives.

Many nonprofits are also in leadership roles in the city, covering everything from medical and disabilities, to animals, nature, and socializing. These are addressed more fully below under Cultural Data. All of the potential leaders identified in the community appear to be stable in their positions, with most of them having operated for decades at this point in time. It is unlikely that their targeted communities will substantially decrease in the foreseeable future, too. Likewise, the political climate of the city's community is stable as well. It is essentially an urban Democratic island in a rural Republican lake, but is quite solidified in its political bearings. In fact, it has voted consistently Democratic in every federal election since 1988 (Social Explorer).

## **Cultural Data**

### **Demographics**

As of 2020, Eugene has a population of 176,654, which is approximately 74.8% White, 10.6% Hispanic, 7.2% multi-racial, 4% Asia, 1.66% Black, 0.76% Native American, 0.65% other races, and 0.29% Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (Social Explorer; United States Census Bureau). Additionally, it is overall a young population. With a median age of only 35, 16.83% of the population is under 18, 33.12% are 18-34, 33.44% are 35-64, and the remaining 16.61% are 65 and over (Social Explorer).

### **Community Services**

As mentioned earlier, there are a number of institutions and nonprofit organizations that serve the community, with the following being located on the Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce's website. Medical and disability nonprofits are popular, and include: Direction Service; Oregon Supported Living Program; HIV Alliance; Northwest Association for Blind Athletes; Oregon Social Learning Center; and Power on with Limb Loss. All of these

organizations provide medical assistance and direction for a wide range of individuals, with Direction Service and the Oregon Social Learning Center focusing on assisting individuals and families with special needs and disabilities. The Boys and Girls Clubs of Emerald Valley, and Holt International Children's Services are more socially oriented nonprofits, focusing on work with children specifically, whereas the Eugene Downtown Lions Club provides food to local individuals and communities. There are also the Friends of Buford Park & Mt. Pisgah, and the School Garden Project, with the former being a volunteer organization tending to some of the parks of the city, and the latter seeking to educate children on gardening and growing their own food. Additionally there is one notable animal nonprofit organization, Greenhill Humane Society, SPCA, which is possibly the most locally renowned.

Eugene has a number of nonprofits, organizations, and institutions dedicated to cultural and ethnic purposes as well, far outnumbering the aforementioned examples. It is home to the Eugene Symphony, the Eugene Ballet, the Eugene Opera, and the Oregon Bach Festival, as well as The Hult Center for the Performing Arts, the Cuthbert Amphitheater, the Shedd Institute, and the Very Little Theater, one of the longest-running community theaters nationally (Oregon Encyclopedia, 2022). The Lane Arts Council, as another example, is a branch of the local government and works to promote the arts in the area, doing so quite consistently and well. One of its more notable and recurring programs is the Fiesta Cultural, a multi-month long celebration of "Latino/a/x/e arts, culture, and heritage" from September through December with both in-person and virtual events (Lane Arts).

Both Huerto de la Familia and the Centro Latino Americano organization are also local organizations that help the local Latinx population. As is Downtown Languages, which works to help immigrants learn English. Eugene's Asian population is supported by the

Eugene/Springfield Asian Council, the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO), the Chinese-American Benevolent Association, the Japanese American Association (JAA) of Lane County, and the Oregon Asian Celebration. African Americans in Eugene are benefited by the African American Community Coalition and the Eugene Springfield NAACP chapter, which is very active in the area, particularly with the University of Oregon. Unfortunately, only one local organization could be identified that is dedicated to Native Americans, and that is the Many Nations Longhouse which is on the UO campus. Interestingly, despite only 4% of the city identifying as Asian, the Asian organizations and nonprofits nearly equal those of all other identified ethnicity-based organizations combined, even though it is more than doubled by the Latinx population.

Another (albeit less dedicated) institution serving the community is Nike. Even though it is as antithetical to a nonprofit as a corporation can get, the company was originally established in Eugene and still donates hundreds of millions of dollars to the University of Oregon and other local institutions, helping to fuel local development and institution expansion.

As previously stated, the University of Oregon serves the community not only as a center of higher education, but as a crux of local sports as well. Additionally, it is also responsible for a large, changing population that immigrates and emigrates with the school year calendar. Many individuals who attend, however, remain in the area year-round, particularly those later in their academic careers or seeking post-bachelor degrees. Similarly, there is a population that remains in the area post-graduation as well.

Perhaps the most notable, successful, and farthest reaching institution serving the population, however, is the Eugene Public Library (EPL). Providing a number of services, including homeschooling and homework assistance for kids, assistance in learning languages,

job hunting, building a business, as well as maker spaces, EPL is able to provide services to the majority of its community (Eugene Public Library). There are numerous resources for Spanish speaking individuals as well, with an easily locatable option for Spanish on the EPL website to not only navigate the website easier, but to find Spanish specific services as well.

### **Media and Scholarly Depictions**

Eugene is known as TrackTown USA due to it being the birthplace of American jogging and of Nike, for its famous track and field stars such as Steve Prefontaine, Bill Bowerman, and Phil Knight, and for its continued role as the national leader of track and field and running (Marquardt, 2022; Oregon Encyclopedia, 2022). Sports media also highlight Eugene as the home of the Ducks college football team. Wine connoisseurs note the area for its vineyards, while farmers and gardeners note the area for its rich soil. Hikers love the city for its parks, wetlands, hiking trails, and proximity to both the Pacific Ocean and the Cascade Mountains (Marquardt, 2022). The city is also known for its sustainability and green practices (Bennett, 2007; BioCycle, 2016; Chen, 2008). Unfortunately, however, Eugene Public Library's downtown location is situated adjacent to the main bus station, the area that is most rampant for drug use and aggressive homeless individuals, resulting in an above-average rate of library incidents despite the city's low crime rate (Anonymous, 2015).

### **Target Community**

More than 3,000 people in Eugene (approximately 1.69% of the total population) are homeless, with limited resources available to them (City of Eugene). The Eugene Public Library offers a variety of job and educational services—such as training, workshops, and resume building—but does not list any other resources for this population. This may be because the

library is closely entwined with the city, and, indeed, searching the library website for “homeless” takes the user to the City of Eugene’s information and resources for homeless individuals. Nevertheless, the library as a public institution has the opportunity to assist homeless residents. The recorded interactions with homeless individuals and the library’s location already place the library in a position to work with this community.

Achieving a reduction in incidents would by itself be beneficial to the library and users, but the library can do more than that, too. Action could begin with as little effort as smiles, friendly chatter, and offering free coffee—an approach which the Dallas Public Library found led to a “decrease in incidents and a new feeling of camaraderie” (Giudice, 2017, p. 14). Outreach for homeless populations can be a fine line to walk. Not only can there be lack of cooperation on behalf of the homeless community, inspired at least in part by mutual distrust and ill-opinions between the homeless population and the library staff and other users, but services directly and nominally focusing on homeless individuals can act to accentuate differences, rather than create inclusion (Muggleton, 2013; Willett & Broadley, 2011).

Beyond providing job training and application assistance, there is another subtle, non-identifying or schismatic service that libraries can provide to the homeless population. Not only is it an essential one, but it’s one which EPL already provides—to a limited degree. Of the 3,000 homeless individuals in Eugene, approximately 2,000 of them lack shelter at night (City of Eugene). This issue becomes most drastic from mid-Autumn to mid-Spring, when nightly temperatures can be below freezing, resulting in frostbite and death from exposure. To prevent this, there are warming centers that accept homeless individuals, but these are insufficient to accommodate the entire homeless community. All three locations of the EPL do offer space for homeless individuals to stay warm during the cold and snow, yet they’re critically limited by



their hours of operation, extending at their longest from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., precluding any utilization during the coldest hours (KEZI, 2021). Consequently, the homeless community lacks appropriate resources when they are most in need.

### **Temporal Events**

There are two main cyclical events which occur in Eugene. First and most noticeable is the mass arrival and exodus of college students and their families in track with the school year, which boosts the local economy through tourism and a larger potential workforce. Of greater importance to the sub-community addressed above, though, is winter. Cold months in Eugene can be mild, with nights hovering in the mid-40s, or they can be below freezing in the 10's and 20's. During this time the homeless community is most vulnerable and in need of assistance.

### **Conclusion**

#### **Sources and Challenges**

In ideal circumstances, interviews or even focus groups could be done with individuals of the homeless community to gather their opinions and input on the library and both its current and potential services. However, this is difficult for a variety of reasons. First, homeless individuals may not have the stereotypical appearance of being homeless and vice versa, and approaching someone with participating in an interview may be construed as an insult (especially if they are not, in fact, homeless), or they may be upset at being singled out, identified in front of others, or other aspects of the interaction. Only cooperating with known homeless individuals who already use the library can result in its own issues of limited input, and homeless individuals may altogether be unwilling to participate (Willett & Broadley, 2011). Another barrier is trust. Library

staff may be hesitant to approach and interact with homeless individuals due to previous volatile incidents (Anonymous, 2015; Venturella, 1991), while homeless individuals likewise may inherently distrust library staff or the library as a whole (Willett & Broadley, 2011). Finally, the other difficulty with dealing with the homeless community is the wider public opinion. Other patrons may not want to be around homeless individuals entirely, while others may disagree with the library providing additional support (Venturella, 1991).

### **Proposed Program**

The program I would like to propose addresses the limitations of EPL's current efforts to support the homeless population in winter by expanding EPL's warming centers to be 24/7 services to protect the homeless population from the risks of exposure. This expansion of coverage can be moderate by extending the service's hours using staff and volunteer supervision, with books available to be read. Or it can be more expansive through access to showers, computers, and other services. In either scenario, individuals would be cordoned off from the rest of the library outside of normal operating hours for security, but have a selection of books accessible to utilize, which may include books offering educational and training resources.

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