

"How can we model the behavior we seek to inspire?" An On-going Series

The Urban / Rural Divide

"How can we model the behavior we seek to inspire? Do our boards, staff and volunteers reflect the diversity of the communities we serve? How can we be more inclusive?" –theme of the November 2013 Federation of State Humanities Council conference in Birmingham, Alabama.¹

One of the issues that councils have to take into consideration in planning and implementing their programming and activities is the divide separating city from countryside. Fifty-five of the state and jurisdictional humanities councils deal with urban/rural divides. For some councils bridging these divides is not only culturally difficult but can also involve transportation and financial challenges. The Humanities Council of Washington, DC, is the only exception because it is wholly urban, serving the city of Washington. Here are six examples of the varying kinds of urban/rural contexts with which councils work.²

- In "habitation," **Illinois** is metropolitan. In "land," it is agricultural. According to the last census, 80% reside on 20% of the land. Only 13% do not live in a city. Almost 76% live in or around one city—Chicago. Chicago has the fifth highest foreign-born population in the U.S. counting 21.7% of its residents as foreign born.
- **Montana** is the fourth largest state with 145,552 square miles, and a population of 1,005,141. While Native Americans often live in rural places on seven reservations, Montana has one of the lowest US percentages of foreign-born citizens and African Americans. Montanans tend to love their land but disagree about the appropriate means for inhabiting the place.
- In 41 of **Kentucky's** counties the poverty and unemployment rates can be as high as 45% and 58%, respectively. In contrast, the urban areas of Lexington, Louisville, the Northern Kentucky area (Golden Triangle), Owensboro, Bowling Green, and the "Interstate-plus-university communities" have younger, growing populations, higher incomes/rates of employment, and higher educational attainment levels.
- **Utah's** population is concentrated in a few small cities, surprisingly making it the 6th most urbanized state. Nearly 80% live in a 20-mile wide and 80-mile long corridor that runs north and south of Salt Lake City. The topography of Utah's 85,000 square miles makes travel between regions difficult—a hundred miles as the crow flies can require a day's drive. It is an oasis civilization.
- **Vermont's** population is the most rural of any state in the country. Sixty-two per cent of its population lives in towns of fewer than 2,500 people, which is the federal government's long-standing definition of "rural." Only eight communities have a population over 10,000, and only one—Burlington—has a population greater than 20,000. Vermont's population is also one of the oldest, whitest, and smallest in the union.
- Over 60% of **Georgia's** population lives in the cities of Atlanta, Augusta, Macon, Columbus, Albany, Savannah, and Valdosta. The rural population is not well served by schools and other basic human services. In contrast, Atlanta is home to 20 colleges and universities, museums, the world's largest aquarium, and a zoo. Sixty-five languages are spoken in its public schools.

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¹ In 2013, each issue of Federal/State Partnership's *Working Together* newsletter is surveying the challenges councils face within their states and jurisdictions as they confront such issues as geography, educational and cultural resources, audiences and demography, technology, and the economy. The primary source for these surveys is the contextual section of councils' self-assessment reports, augmented as needed by census and other data. We will use examples from all 56 state and jurisdictional humanities councils in this series. Each article is available online in both Federal/State Partnership's e-newsletter archive and in its Resource Library.

² The executives of these councils reviewed and, in some cases, edited these thumbnails.