

2018

TOP

TRACKING OREGON'S PROGRESS



Oregonians Mobilizing for Change

Oregon

Community

Foundation

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Community is our middle name.

Oregon Community Foundation (OCF) was established on the enduring principle that “the most creative solutions arise from groups of private citizens who come together to work in partnership and address their common needs and aspirations” (*OCF Grant Guidelines*, 1998). We believe fully engaged residents are a building block for healthy communities and a healthy democracy.

This report explores examples of effective community engagement in Oregon today. OCF strives to practice the key components identified in this report:

- We connect with people from around Oregon to explore what we can accomplish together by drawing on our strengths rather than focusing on shortfalls.
- We support building relationships across diverse communities as a necessary underpinning for efforts to address opportunity gaps and other mutually identified issues.
- We listen and provide support so engaged community members can succeed.

OCF is committed to the work of community engagement, and it shows both in how we operate and in how we support others. It shows in our Community Grant program, where the defining goal is to strengthen the social fabric of our communities. It shows in our Latino Partnership Program, which trains emerging leaders and supports fuller opportunities for Latino children and families. It shows in our Community 101 program, which gives students the power of grantmaking as they learn about and participate in their own communities. Most of all, it shows in the vision and dedication of the more than 1,600 volunteers who help us realize our mission to improve lives for all Oregonians through the power of philanthropy.

This commitment goes hand in hand with OCF’s core values of equity, diversity and inclusion. Equitable, diverse and inclusive community engagement is essential to ensuring a future in which Oregon is led by thoughtful, connected leaders who know how to get things done, and to achieving the thriving, sustainable Oregon we all want for ourselves and our children.

What about you? What resonates with you from this report? How are you involved in your community? We hope you will consider how you can play a part in making Oregon the most engaged, diversely participatory, can-do state in our nation.

Kathleen Cornett

VICE PRESIDENT FOR GRANTS & PROGRAMS



Executive Summary

Oregonians Mobilizing for Change

In 2017, OCF addressed a widening opportunity gap facing Oregon's children in the Tracking Oregon's Progress (TOP) report *Toward a Thriving Future: Closing the Opportunity Gap for Oregon's Kids*. This report identified a need for community-led efforts to identify and mobilize local solutions.

OCF is pleased to present the 2018 TOP report, *Oregonians Mobilizing for Change*, which builds on the concept of community-led efforts. This report provides an in-depth review of how Oregonians are working collaboratively with diverse groups and ideas to strengthen necessary building blocks for vibrant communities.

Community- and local-led change is the backbone of transforming our state. Communities across Oregon, whether connected by geography or common experience, can tell stories about who they are and what they value. When these stories focus on strengths, assets and shared values, they harness the power of positive change to address complex challenges. When told through the experiences of the most impacted community members, they tap into people's beliefs and feelings, creating a collective determination to further motivate and amplify action for good.

In a state known for deep civic and community engagement, with an increasingly diverse population, all Oregonians need tools and opportunities to engage meaningfully with one another. When community members themselves are considered experts and valued change agents, community-directed solutions create lasting impact.

The six stories presented in this report provide snapshots of Oregonians working together to build vibrant communities. In analyzing these models for community engagement around the state, we found a number of common ingredients for successful community-driven solutions.



BUILD KEY RELATIONSHIPS

Strong relationships indicate success, as they enhance participants' personal satisfaction and growth.

- Strong relationships can increase individuals' commitment to the work, extend the network of potential participants, and create efficiencies as individuals and organizations share the work.
- The quality of relationships is as important as the quantity, if not more so.
- Nurturing relationships takes intention and time; building trust does not happen overnight.
- Trust begins with clear communication, listening and learning from one another.



BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH DIVERSE GROUPS

Successful engagement efforts involve the community members and groups most impacted by an issue.

- Including diverse groups who have multiple experiences and perspectives in project planning, design and implementation ensures needs and solutions are defined by those most impacted.
- Project leaders must make an intentional effort to ensure that engaging diverse groups is part of a project's goal and design.
- Efforts that engage diverse groups do not just share information or gather opinions; they empower community members to own and lead the work.



FOSTER EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Successful community engagement efforts rely on dedicated project coordinators and broaden the definition of “leader.”

- Coordinators manage projects, mobilize volunteers and access decision-makers across organizations and sectors.
- Community members not traditionally viewed as leaders may be well suited to assume a leadership role.
- Essential nontraditional leadership qualities include relevant personal stories and lived experiences, effective listening skills and the ability to support and empower others.



FOCUS ON THE END GOAL

It is necessary for project leaders not only to identify short-term or easy projects but also to link those projects explicitly to the larger issues the community effort seeks to address.

- Identify low-hanging fruit: efforts that are easy to define, time-limited or that can result in early and easy wins.
- Connect efforts to long-term systemic impacts and issues to change.



INVEST THE NECESSARY TIME

Successful community engagement takes time and effort and is an investment with a dual purpose:

- Leverage and grow a diverse network of local expertise to address persistent challenges.
- Build community capacity to reap long-term rewards in a journey toward stronger, more resilient communities.

MOBILIZING CHANGE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

We hope community members will use the stories profiled here and the questions below to think more deeply about the work they are or could be doing in their own communities.

- 1 What do you love about your community? How can you use what you love to strengthen it?
- 2 What is community? Who is part of your community?
- 3 Who are the leaders in your community? What do they have in common? How can you stretch your definition of “leader” to those who may not look or act like leaders you already know?
- 4 What can you apply from the case studies in your own community?
- 5 What motivates you to be involved in your community? What might motivate other community members?

“Real civic engagement to me is coalition-building, problem-solving and more listening than talking, with a particular ear for people who don’t have power.”





Introduction

OCF's 2017 TOP Indicators report, *Toward a Thriving Future: Closing the Opportunity Gap for Oregon's Kids*, acknowledged that social change efforts are more successful when led by community members who are equipped to define pressing problems, rally community assets and define potential solutions (Barnes and Schmitz, 2016). While state and federal support and attention are also important, the best solutions will come from inside—not outside—local communities, championed by those who know them intimately. This is especially important in rural communities, low-income communities and communities of color, which all play a pivotal role in designing feasible and sustainable solutions.

The 2018 TOP Indicators report, *Oregonians Mobilizing for Change*, provides a comprehensive resource for communities that seek to create meaningful change from within. Building on the 2017 report, we examine where and how community engagement is alive across Oregon.

Creating a healthy, thriving, sustainable Oregon requires diverse community engagement strategies across a range of issues, from creating healthier environments, to building affordable housing, to expanding economic and educational opportunities for more Oregonians. In

THE STORY A COMMUNITY TELLS ABOUT ITSELF “SHAPES PEOPLE’S MINDSETS, ATTITUDES, BEHAVIORS AND ACTIONS; IT AFFECTS THEIR SENSE OF POSSIBILITY.”

Oregon, we know well that the heroes of our communities reside within them. The story a community tells about itself “shapes people’s mindsets, attitudes, behaviors and actions; it affects their sense of possibility” (Harwood, 2015). When communities focus on strengths-based conversations and recognize their own capacity to mobilize resources and solve problems, they reveal powerful potential for positive change. And when community members see themselves as experts and valued change agents, community-directed solutions can deliver lasting impact.

The next section of this report paints a picture of how Oregonians are involved in their communities and situates Oregon within its national context. Following that overview, the heart of the report spotlights six illuminating examples of Oregonians working together to make a difference in their communities. These efforts are varied geographically and topically. While these efforts were not undertaken with the explicit purpose of closing the opportunity gap, all are addressing crucial family and community needs. They will in turn nurture healthy, vibrant communities and families, which are the necessary building blocks for supporting Oregon’s children. Following the individual case studies, we identify key themes across the six case studies and then conclude with a series of reflection questions for individuals, organizations and communities to inform the creation of community-driven solutions.



Civic and Community Engagement Are at Oregon's Core

Civic engagement refers to how individuals decide to participate in their communities.

Community engagement refers to the ways in which organizations and government connect with community members to develop or implement policies, programs or services.

Both civic and community engagement exist along a spectrum. For the individual, civic engagement can be apolitical or political, formal or informal. It may range from talking about issues in society with friends or coworkers, to donating time and/or money to nonprofit organizations, to voting in elec-

tions and participating in strikes, marches, boycotts and protests.

Individuals engage in their communities for a variety of reasons, which include protecting and growing community assets and working toward changes that can address community challenges.

Similarly, community engagement takes various forms. The International Association for Public Participation has created an engagement spectrum (below) that describes ways for organizations and government to engage communities, ranging from informing to empowering community members.



Oregon has historically enjoyed high levels of civic and community engagement. As the state's population becomes increasingly diverse, it is important to ensure that all Oregonians have the tools and opportunities they need to engage in their communities in meaningful ways. Between 2010 and 2017, Oregon's population grew by roughly 8 percent — more than 300,000 people. Nearly three-quarters of that increase is due to people moving into the state. All but two of Oregon's 36 counties (Grant and Harney) saw population increases during the last seven years. At the same time, Oregonians are increasingly diverse, with the most recent estimates showing that communities of color represent 23 percent of the state population.

In a 2017 survey, a majority of Oregonians believed that they and people like them can make an impact in their community (DHM Research, 2017). Those who believed they could make a difference were generally more optimistic about their communities and the direction in which Oregon is headed as a state. These optimistic respondents were also more likely to be engaged in their communities.

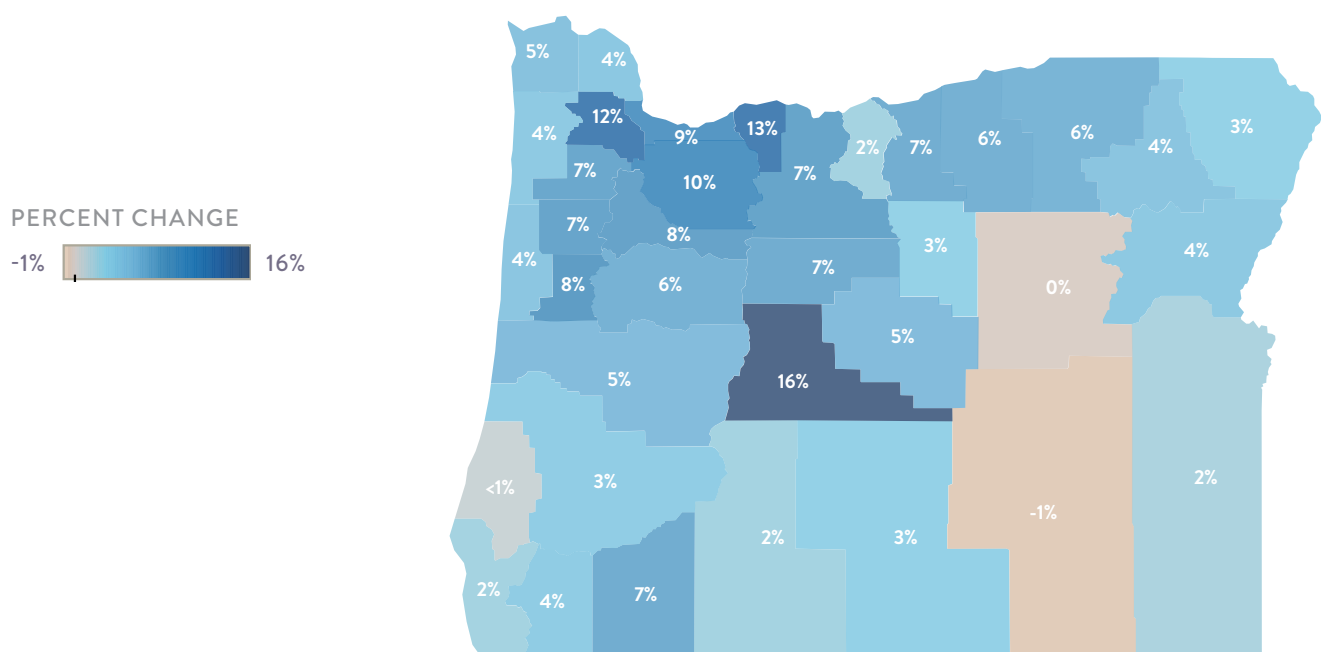
For instance, 42 percent of people who felt impactful volunteered at least once a month, compared to 26 percent of people who did not feel impactful.

Oregonians connect with their communities in a variety of informal ways. According to a 2013 survey, 92 percent of Oregonians frequently talk to neighbors, 43 percent participate in groups or organizations, and nearly 70 percent engage in “informal volunteering” like helping out a neighbor (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2015). A more recent survey found that 83 percent of Oregonians trust their neighbors (DHM Research, 2017).

Oregonians also engage with their communities in more formal ways, including volunteering (donating time to a nonprofit organization), donating money to charity, and voting. Over 1 million Oregonians gave more than 128 million hours of their time in 2015 by volunteering with nonprofit organizations (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2015). Oregon's volunteer rate is the 13th highest among the 50 states and the District of Columbia (Lambarth and Cochran, 2016); at 32

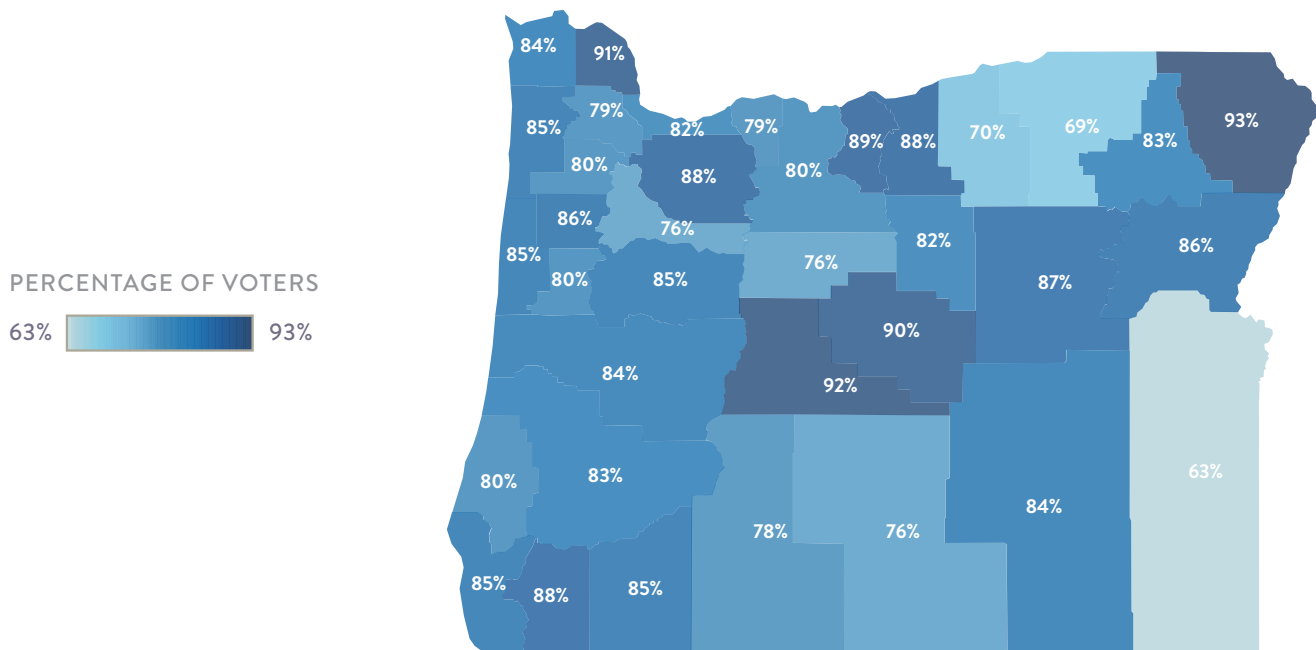
NEARLY ALL OREGON COUNTIES HAVE GROWN SINCE 2010

POPULATION CHANGE 2010–2017, POPULATION RESEARCH CENTER, PSU, APRIL 2017



VOTER REGISTRATION VARIES BY COUNTY

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION OVER 18 REGISTERED TO VOTE,
OREGON SECRETARY OF STATE & AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY, 2016



percent, it is consistently higher than the national average of 25 percent.

Being asked to volunteer is one of the strongest predictors that a person will volunteer, but some people are asked more often than others. Wealthier individuals are more likely to be asked to volunteer than low-income individuals (Benenson and Stagg, 2016), and white community members are more likely to be asked to volunteer than community members of color (Toppe et al., 2001).

Oregonians have a strong history of charitable giving. More than 56 percent of Oregonians gave \$25 or more to nonprofit organizations in 2015. Oregonians also report giving 2.22 percent of their income to charity in 2016 (Oregon Community Foundation, 2018). For the first time in more than a decade, this giving rate is lower than the U.S. rate of 2.31 percent.

Oregonians are also politically engaged. In the 2016 general election, Oregon had one of the highest voter turnout rates in the nation at 68 percent of eligible voters. Only five states experienced higher voter turnout rates, with Minnesota ranking first

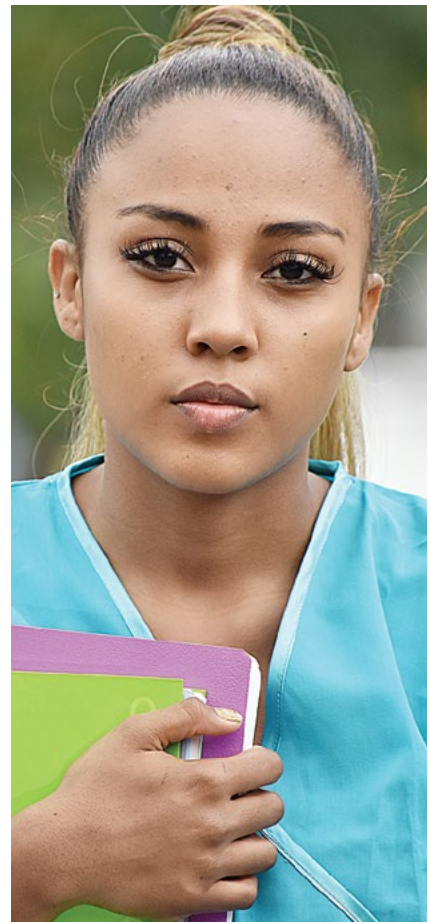
at 75 percent. The 2016 turnout rate was also a few percentage points higher than the 2012 general election rate of 64 percent.

In 2016, there were 2.6 million registered voters in Oregon (Oregon Secretary of State), representing 84 percent of the total voting age population in the state (McDonald). Across Oregon counties, voter registration varies from 63 percent of the population 18 and over in Malheur County to 93 percent of the population 18 and over in Wallowa County.

Racial inequity — in the form of systemic policies, practices and stereotypes — has resulted in unequal opportunities for civic participation. While no reliable data is available specifically for Oregon, people of color are less likely to be registered and vote in the United States overall. Several factors contribute to this disparity. First, people of higher socioeconomic status are more likely to vote. Indeed, when education, income and occupation are held constant, African-Americans participate politically at a rate equal to or greater than that of white Americans (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2006). However, decades of systemic discrimination have resulted in lower income and educational

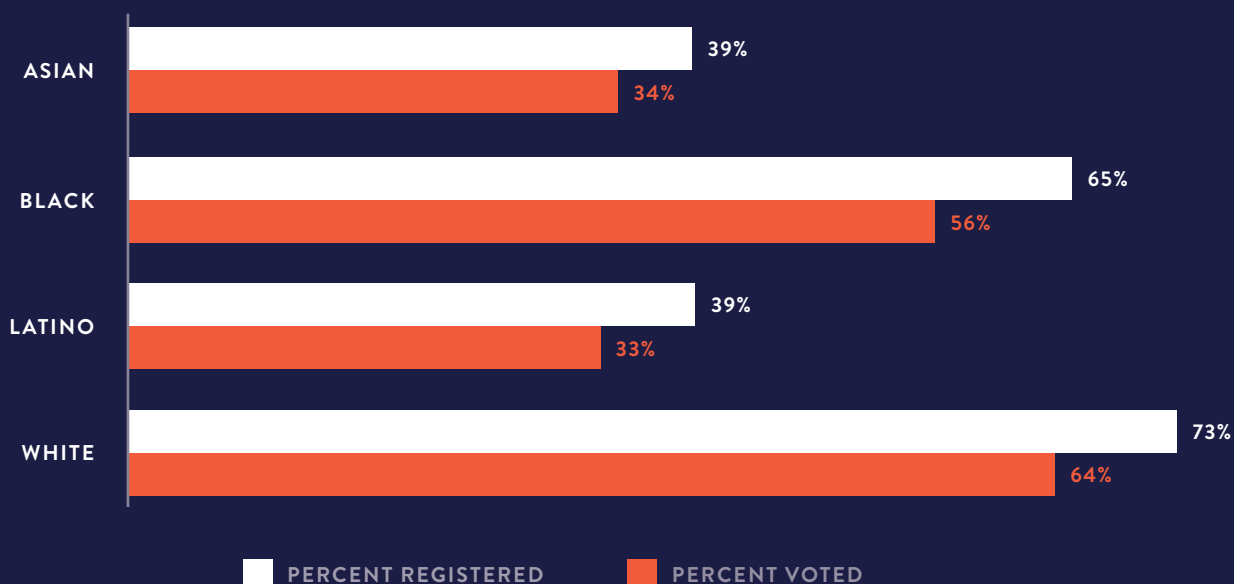
attainment for many people of color. Voters of color are also more likely to experience barriers — like less accessible polling places, intimidation and misinformation — that prevent them from casting ballots. Formal voter eligibility policies also prevent many people of color from registering and voting. For example, Asians and Latinos are more likely not to meet naturalization and residency requirements, and laws that prevent ex-felons from voting disproportionately impact people of color.

Oregon enacted the nation's first automatic voter registration law, known as Oregon Motor Voter (OMV), making voter registration easier for all Oregonians. The system ensures that any eligible citizen who interacts with the Oregon Department of Motor Vehicles is registered to vote and that the registration is up to date. There is evidence that the new law had a positive impact on both voter registration and voting in the 2016 election. During the first year, OMV registered 272,000 Oregonians to vote, and 98,000 of those new voters cast their ballots in the 2016 election (Griffin, Gronke, Wang & Kennedy, 2017). While that voter turnout rate of 44 percent is lower than the statewide rate of 68 percent, Oregonians who registered and voted through OMV are more diverse than the traditional registrant and voter population. OMV registrants and voters are younger and more likely to live in lower-income areas. They are also more likely to live in more racially diverse places and in places where people are likely to have a lower level of education.



PEOPLE OF COLOR ARE LESS LIKELY TO BE REGISTERED AND TO VOTE IN THE UNITED STATES

REPORTED VOTING & REGISTRATION BY RACE & ETHNICITY, CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY, NOV 2016



Community-Driven Change in Oregon

Oregonians contribute to their communities in a variety of ways. While statistics provide a general picture of community and civic engagement, taking an in-depth look at projects and communities allows for a fuller and more nuanced understanding of how individuals, organizations and local government are collaborating to create positive change across our state.

These case studies were selected because they demonstrate various approaches to community engagement, from involving community members in needs assessment and planning processes, to implementing projects, to centering community members as emerging leaders. They are also stories of Oregonians working collaboratively to strengthen food security, sustainability, affordable housing, racial justice, environmental health and economic vitality. Although the causes addressed are disparate, at their core all six projects are about strengthening some of the necessary building blocks to foster vibrant communities that in turn support and provide opportunities for Oregon's children and families.

Although all six projects have had success, they have also encountered challenges on the road to community engagement. Our hope is to inspire dialogue and action while we share lessons learned with others who are embarking on community engagement efforts.

“My goal is to get those people who have the passion to shake things up and make a change. A community that is empowered is a community that can grow stronger.”

ROBERTO GAMBOA
EUVALCREE

MOBILIZING ACROSS OREGON

CASE STUDIES FEATURED
IN THIS REPORT



Community Building Block

Healthy Environment

HOOD RIVER & COLUMBIA RIVERKEEPER

The Columbia River Gorge is one of Oregon's most important natural resources. The river is home to salmon and steelhead trout that feed Oregonians, recreational activities like wind surfing and swimming that support local economies, and tribal nations that shape the Columbia River basin's past, present and future. Clean water is essential to the long-term health and viability of our state and region.

Since 2000, Columbia Riverkeeper has worked to preserve this vital resource by bringing volunteers together to monitor water quality, clean and restore waterfront areas, and advocate to protect the river. Columbia Riverkeeper also regularly works with tribal nations in the area and builds coalitions of like-minded organizations and individuals. According to Paul Blackburn, mayor of Hood River, Columbia Riverkeeper is "a valuable ally in leading this community."

In 2015, Columbia Riverkeeper was awarded a conservation easement for Nichols Natural Area, a three-acre piece of land along the Columbia in Hood River. For nearly 60 years, the land was home to Nichols Boat Works, a boat yard that became neglected and overgrown with invasive plants. Instead of turning the land over to a private company to restore, the organization engaged the Hood River community in conservation plans in three main areas:

- **Education.** Make the land a living laboratory to engage students in environmental education.
- **Restoration.** Invite volunteers and community input to restore the riparian (waterfront) habitat.
- **Inclusion.** Engage diverse community members through outreach, education and bilingual programs.

In 2017, Columbia Riverkeeper hired community organizer Ubaldo Hernández to engage the Latino community — about a quarter of the Hood River population — in the Nichols Natural Area restoration. Ubaldo knows the community well through his long history of volunteering and community involvement and as host of his mostly Spanish radio show, "Conoce tu Columbia" ("Know Your Columbia"), which airs on local Radio Tierra. One of his first tasks



INTERVIEWEES

SUSAN ARECHAGA
WY'EAST MIDDLE SCHOOL

PAUL BLACKBURN
CITY OF HOOD RIVER

LORRI EPSTEIN
UBALDO HERNÁNDEZ
BRETT VANDENHEUVEL
COLUMBIA RIVERKEEPER

ADAM SMITH
HOOD RIVER MIDDLE SCHOOL

was to help develop a leadership team to guide the plans for Nichols Natural Area. Ubaldo credits one-on-one conversations as the most important engagement tool, noting that relationship-building is a two-way street.

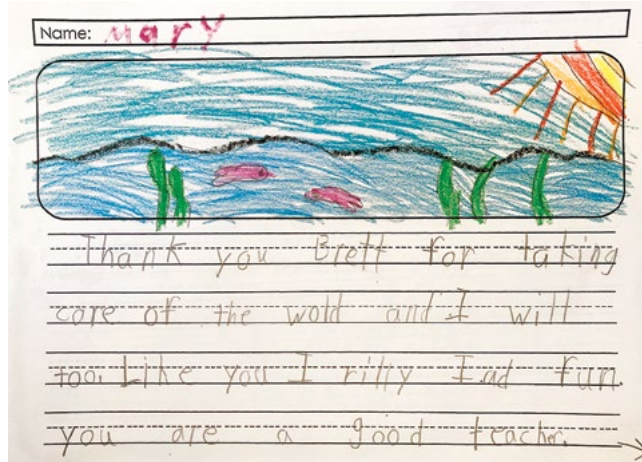
Ubaldo works to understand residents' concerns and to "care about people as people." It's a time-consuming investment, but it pays off in strong relationships that frequently result in people asking, "How can I get involved?"

Students also play a critical role. Since January 2018, 800 students of all ages have helped restore Nichols Natural Area by removing invasive plants, planting new trees, spreading mulch, testing water temperature and quality, and participating in educational activities. The waterfront location has become a living laboratory where students learn about water quality and riparian habitats. Role-playing turns students into black-crowned night herons looking for a place to build a nest. Hood River Middle School science teacher Adam Smith says that this game is "a great way to talk to the kids about how as we develop and change the landscape we live in, we have to be thoughtful about the animals and people who are there."

Susan Arechaga, a science teacher at Wy'East Middle School, found that the experience helped her students activate their classroom learning. Wy'East is a high-poverty school that has a large migrant student population. Susan tells a story of showing her students a video featuring Multnomah Falls, a popular landmark in Columbia Gorge. To her surprise, most of the students could not identify it because they had never had an opportunity to visit. In an effort to make the abstract concrete, they visited Nichols Natural Area to connect classroom learning to actual experience: "When we're back in the classroom, they can connect what we're learning to something they saw, touched and were physically a part of."

Columbia Riverkeeper engages students as volunteer scientists. They help to capture how Nichols Natural Area is changing by taking photos that can be uploaded to Digital Earth Watch, a website supported by NASA, where they can be monitored for environmental changes. Susan notes that this real-world experience showed students how they can be part of making a difference: "An experience like that changes how kids perceive what learning science is about. It's us, it's here, it's now. You see kids' faces lighting up."





**“Thank you ...
for taking care
of the world
and I will too.”**

SECOND-GRADER
HOOD RIVER COUNTY

Columbia Riverkeeper identifies several factors in a successful school partnership:

- **Curriculum alignment.** Ahead of each visit to Nichols Natural Area, Ubaldo meets with teachers to determine the best way to use field trips to support classroom learning. Then, he visits classrooms and delivers lessons to prepare students for the experience.
- **Eliminating financial and logistical barriers.** Columbia Riverkeeper makes an effort to lower logistical and financial barriers. In many cases, Columbia Riverkeeper’s ability to pay for buses to transport students is key to facilitating school participation. In Adam Smith’s words, “As a teacher, I do a lot of cost-benefit analysis. There are only so many hours in the day. If I put time into planning for something, I want to make sure that it will have enough payoff. I definitely think there is for this opportunity.”
- **Mentorship and role modeling.** Ubaldo is a role model for the many Latino students who visit Nichols Natural Area. In the Hood River County School District, more than 40 percent of

students are Latino compared to only 3 percent of teachers and staff (Oregon Department of Education, 2017–18). Ubaldo notes that Latino students often speak to him in Spanish even when they understand the lessons he delivers in English. Latino students also ask about his career path and how he ended up at Columbia Riverkeeper. Relationships with adult role models who reflect students’ racial or ethnic background and experience can help students form positive racial identities that contribute to more positive attitudes toward school and, eventually, to increased educational attainment (Kipp, Ruffenach & Janssen).

Adam and Susan understand that Columbia Riverkeeper is building connections between students and the environment through their educational programs. When students feel a connection to a place, they want to show their parents, siblings and friends. They take pride in the tree they planted, the mulch they spread or where they thought the night heron should build its nest. It changes how children think about their community and then, says Susan, “in the future it changes how the community treats and looks at areas of the environment.”

Community Building Block

Sustainable Communities

CORVALLIS & CORVALLIS SUSTAINABILITY COALITION

The city of Corvallis has a long history of commitment to sustainability. The city's 2020 vision statement envisions Corvallis as a "highly livable city which employs local benchmarks to measure its progress in areas such as housing, economic vitality, educational quality, environmental quality and overall quality of life" (Corvallis City Council, 1997). City goals and policies have followed suit: In 2003, the city set a sustainability goal for city management; in 2004, it adopted an organizational sustainability policy; and in 2006, the city approved funding for a sustainability coordinator.

Community members recognized the need for more coordinated, community-based action to help the city fulfill its 2020 vision. Corvallis Sustainability Coalition (formed in 2007) helped the city adopt a community sustainability goal and entered into a formal agreement with the city to create a sustainability action plan.

The process of developing this plan involved hundreds of community members and organizations, in keeping with the interconnected environmental, economic and social goals that best address systemic change for sustainability. Over 600 people attended the initial town hall meeting in 2008, with then-Mayor Charlie Tomlinson noting, "This is the most difficult thing, the most important thing that our community will embark upon over the next number of years — to create a plan that envisions a sustainable Corvallis, a community that understands its impact in the world, a community that understands that it can be a role model for communities across America and across the world" (Corvallis Sustainability Coalition, 2008).

Volunteer discussion leaders led brainstorming sessions for long-range goals and for strategies to achieve those goals. Based on these commu-

nity-sourced ideas, the Coalition formed 12 work groups (Community Inclusion, Economic Vitality, Education, Energy, Food, Health and Human Services, Housing, Land Use, Natural Areas and Wildlife, Transportation, Waste and Recycling, and Water). More than 200 people signed up to volunteer with the work groups. These volunteers conducted extensive research and selected long-term, visionary goals for each of the areas. A second town hall meeting later in 2008 confirmed that the work groups were on the right track.

The third and final town hall that year was attended by about 400 people. Each of the work groups shared the goals, strategies and actions they had created. Attendees were invited to provide input by electronic polling and discussed actions they wanted to commit to as individuals. The resulting



action plan was revised five years later based on another series of community conversations.

Progress on Corvallis' Sustainability Action Plan continues, with 12 volunteer action teams identifying, planning and implementing projects that fulfill plan goals. Membership and structure varies by team: Some teams are more action-oriented and rarely have formal meetings, while others have regular monthly meetings.

Annette Mills, the Coalition's facilitator, notes that most of the action team leaders are under 50. She attributes this younger participation to the group's approach: "A solutions-oriented approach helps people feel empowered."

The Food Action Team is one example of the Coalition's ongoing work. The team's goal is to increase the consumption of locally and sustainably produced food. They are organized into two subgroups: an Edible Garden Group that encourages gardening and a Local 6 Connection group that promotes local food sources. The group has around 10 consistently committed members and about 50 people who stay up to date via the team's

listserv. According to Mark McGuire, one of the Food Action Team leaders, it's about quality, not quantity: "We get caught up in always wanting numbers, but increasing numbers can decrease quality." Indeed, those who are consistently involved are committed to the work. Rebecca Falli-
hee, the other Food Action Team leader, describes the team in this way: "We're all volunteers, and most of us are doing it because we love it."

Karen Bloom, a Corvallis resident and Food Action Team member, feels strongly about promoting food security in her community. She assists with the creation of the annual garden resource guide and hosts the edible garden tours (summer tours of local yards with edible landscaping designed to educate community members and inspire them to grow their own food at home).

Rebecca works with the Local 6 Connection group to increase the consumption of food that is grown or processed in one of the six counties surrounding Corvallis. As a team leader, she says that her role is to build excitement among team members, help determine roles and responsibilities, and promote the voices of those on the team. She notes that





while it is challenging to keep an all-volunteer group engaged, a personal touch is effective. Acknowledging that “everyone likes to be needed,” Rebecca will reach out to individual team members to share something about the project they are working on. She feels that there is more buy-in from her fellow volunteers when her communications are more personalized.

Relying on all-volunteer teams can have other downsides. The team often does not have the capacity to take on all of the projects identified. Limited time and conflicting schedules can also get in the way of accomplishing projects. Managing the group process can be difficult at times: Team members decide which projects to pursue, and sometimes disagreements within the group can make it hard to get projects off the ground.

Nevertheless, the Food Action Team manages to accomplish a great deal. In addition to the annual garden tours and the resource guide, the team distributes “Simply Seasonal” recipes at the farmers market, hosts a

Local Eats Week featuring local ingredients at area restaurants, and maintains neighborhood planting kiosks on residential sidewalks and in community gardens and parks. The kiosks display rotating informational posters that support gardening and community connections.

Corvallis Sustainability Coalition is in regular contact with local government and helps guide the community’s discussion on sustainability. For example, Sean McGuire, Benton County sustainability coordinator, is a member of the Coalition’s steering committee, and Hal Brauner, one of nine city councilors, serves as the City Council liaison to the steering committee. The Coalition also submits regular reports to the city.

Coalition facilitator Annette Mills and the Coalition as a whole have a good reputation with local government officials. Annette was recently asked to be the project manager for the city’s new Climate Action Advisory Board. Biff Traber, the mayor of Corvallis and a long-time volunteer with the Coali-

INTERVIEWEES

KAREN BLOOM
REBECCA FALLIHEE
MARK MCGUIRE
COMMUNITY MEMBERS

SEAN MCGUIRE
BENTON COUNTY

ANNETTE MILLS
CORVALLIS SUSTAINABILITY
COALITION

BIFF TRABER
CITY OF CORVALLIS

tion, says that it is “a critical element of how this community as a whole is moving forward on sustainability.”

Another strength of the Coalition is its ability to partner with other local organizations—at last count, about 350 of them. At quarterly meetings, representatives from partner organizations can hear from the Coalition, as well as from the individual action teams, and share what is happening within their own organizations. The Coalition’s broad view of sustainability leaves room for a wide variety of interests and missions. Sean notes that one of the Coalition’s strengths is that it has “galvanized so many different players across a common purpose.”

However, the broad nature of the Coalition’s work can also pose challenges. According to Mark McGuire, “The larger the vision is, the more general it becomes, and people start to disengage with the work.” The Coalition’s action teams focus their efforts on specific, attainable projects to help keep volunteers consistently engaged and excited.

Community Building Block

Equitable & Inclusive Communities

ONTARIO & EUVALCREE

Equal representation is essential to ensure that decisions, policies and laws reflect the needs and perspectives of all community members. In order to have equal representation, people need to know how to influence public policy, need the access to do so and need leadership opportunities.

Ontario sits near the border of Oregon and Idaho, and its population of roughly 11,000 is more diverse than Oregon overall. Over 40 percent of the population is Latino and nearly 2 percent is Asian, but both populations are underrepresented in leadership roles in the community. At the same time, it is a cohesive community where community members care about each other regardless of race and ethnicity. In contrast to a national climate sowing distrust and fear among immigrant and refugee communities, Ontario recently opened an immigrant and refugee welcome center to serve its roughly 50 refugee families.

Euvalcree, an Ontario nonprofit, is working to build trust and make space for all voices in the community. The Latino-led and Latino-focused organization seeks to empower all community members. Its name is derived from three Latin roots: *eu*, meaning “good”; *val*, meaning “valiant” or “strong”; and *cree*, meaning “faith” or “belief.” Euvalcree evolved from the Treasure Valley Community Resource Center, which launched in 2012 to address Latino community concerns. According to its executive director, Gustavo Morales, Euvalcree is successful because it identifies common ground for communities and cultures to engage together. Euvalcree finds that public events encourage engagement, demonstrate community involvement and bring the community together in a fun, relaxing environment where people are more receptive to calls for participation (as reflected in the attendance of 1,500 community members at the organization’s first Children’s Day in 2016).

As Dolores Martinez, Euvalcree’s community engagement director, explains, the organization’s “main goal is to build the leadership among members of our community.” As a result, Euvalcree is able to create more cohesion while developing both capacity and meaningful opportunities for community members to engage. The organization hosts “Know Your Rights” workshops to help community members understand their basic rights when dealing with law enforcement, and it recently organized a community rapid response team to observe and ensure the proper handling of immigration rights during encounters with federal immigration authorities. Earlier this year, a group of community members completed a four-week leadership development program to learn how to organize and implement projects and advocacy efforts to create change in the community, such as advocating for driver’s licenses for undocumented immigrants. Euvalcree hopes the trainings encourage ongoing involvement while motivating others to participate. A community member who completed the leadership development training shared skills she gained during a subsequent youth leadership camp session hosted by Euvalcree.

Education leads to empowerment. As Dolores Martinez says, “Euvalcree wants to show people in our community that they can do more by giving them new knowledge and skills.... People who have been through the training and go out into the community serve as an example. They share what they learn, and this motivates other people to get involved.” Laurel Talavera, a community member who participated in Euvalcree trainings, explains that “being involved in Euvalcree, I feel like I’m more worthy and I have something to fall back on. It keeps me alive.”

The organization’s mission to empower extends to its own employees. Dolores worked as a house-

keeper at a local hotel when she started volunteering with Euvalcree. She says that she gained confidence in herself by attending Euvalcree's trainings and that Gustavo gave her the opportunity to learn and grow. Working with Euvalcree, she learned that her limited English is not an insurmountable barrier, gained computer skills and continues to develop professionally. "Euvalcree gave me that confidence in myself to do more," Dolores explains.

In its efforts to give voice to all community members, Euvalcree has built a strong relationship with the city of Ontario, including City Manager Adam Brown, who meets regularly with Gustavo. From the city's perspective, Euvalcree helps them engage and connect with community members who might not otherwise connect with government. For example, in 2016 Euvalcree conducted a door-to-door community assessment survey that gathered input from around 500 individuals. At the same time, the city conducted a community assessment by hosting more than 30 focus groups with existing groups like school boards and clubs. Adam notes that the assessments complement each other and that the results of both will be used in the city's strategic planning process.

Because of this close relationship, Euvalcree was able to work with the city to create positive change after an immigration episode rocked the community. In March 2017, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials came into town and asked the Ontario Police Department to send an officer to speak with the family of a detainee. The officer complied, and the Police Department's involvement came under heavy scrutiny from the community. Following this event, Gustavo visited Adam and suggested that it was time for them to take action on forming the advisory committee they had been talking about. Together with Peter Lawson, a former food bank manager and community resource developer, they took steps to make the committee a reality. Initially, the committee was modeled after Hermiston's Hispanic Advisory Committee. Ultimately, they decided to make it a broader Diversity Advisory Committee because of the Japanese, Basque, Somali and other diverse communities living in Ontario.

The city ordinance that established the committee (Ordinance 2728-2017) was approved in December 2017. It specifies that members should be reflective of city demographics and that "no one ethnicity, culture or socio-economic status shall be represented by more than 50 percent of the committee membership." It also specifies that the committee serves to connect diverse communities to elected officials, reviews policy, advocates for opportunities, and reports regularly to the City Council. Adam Brown states that his "hope is that the committee connects the whole community with city government, and our City Council is more informed when they share decisions by having recommendations and feedback." Community members interested in serving on the committee apply and are appointed by the City Council for three-year terms. Adam says that personal outreach has been vital for attracting committee members. Euvalcree and Peter Lawson have done a lot of the footwork to recruit potential participants.

The committee, which consists of seven members, has only met a few times and is still getting its footing, but it is working to spread the word to the community. At a meeting in August 2018, members discussed community events where they could set up tables and expressed interest in creating business cards and developing a one-pager to describe the committee and its purpose. At the same meeting, committee members had an initial discussion to establish core values. They talked about the importance of engaging community members and building collaborative relationships, advocating for the community, and promoting social justice, fairness and equality. Throughout the meeting, it was clear that most members were unfamiliar with the formal government policies and procedures that guide this type of committee. For example, there was confusion around what they needed to vote on and how to do so. According to Roberto Gamboa, operations and community development director at Euvalcree, the confusion is a sign that the right people (i.e., community members who are not professional politicians or administrators) are involved: "That's how you know that you're getting authentic feedback from people who are authentically part of the community."

“The ability to inspire and empower provides a way of life and a new way of doing things. If you can inspire enough people, you can really start moving the dial on bigger issues. People will be their own solutions.”

GUSTAVO MORALES
EUVALCREE

INTERVIEWEES

ADAM BROWN
CITY OF ONTARIO

ROBERTO GAMBOA
DOLORES MARTINEZ
GUSTAVO MORALES
EUVALCREE

LAUREL TALAVERA
COMMUNITY MEMBER



Community Building Block

Economic Development

BANDON & GREATER BANDON ASSOCIATION

Bandon is a town of 3,000 located on the southern coast of Oregon. The town's median age (50) is higher than the state average (39). While Bandon has a large retiree population, working families with children under 18 make up half of the town's residents. Bandon's median annual household income, \$24,000, is \$10,000 less than the state average. Although tourism is a large driver of the town's economy, the community was suffering from the decline in the natural resource economy when it was hard hit by the economic recession. The town faces the dual challenges of fostering living-wage employment for working families and ensuring the viability of small businesses in a community subject to seasonal variations in tourism.

Greater Bandon Association (GBA), incorporated as a nonprofit in 2010, focuses on strategies to strengthen and grow businesses in Bandon, including revitalizing the downtown business community, and on economic development more broadly. GBA follows the national Main Street Approach, which is a framework for community-driven revitalization that includes work in four areas:

- Building strong organizational capacity (organization).
- Building a diverse economic base (economic vitality).
- Creating an inviting atmosphere (design).
- Marketing the community's assets (promotion).

Prior to October 1, 2018, GBA was run by a volunteer executive director. The organization also had support from an AmeriCorps Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) member in 2016–2017. While the executive director is now a

paid position, GBA involves community members both through the governance and staffing of the organization and through its outreach and community activities. For example, GBA, with assistance from national and state Main Street coordinators, administered a community survey in spring 2018 and reviewed survey results at a community gathering. Over 200 community members completed the survey, which asked about the community's strengths and input on investments.

Working in close partnership with the city manager, the City Council and the Port of Bandon, GBA has engaged in a variety of efforts to improve Bandon's local economy. As an example, GBA facilitated the brainstorming and convening with the port and city that brought a trolley to Bandon to assist with summer traffic and parking congestion. GBA was also instrumental in securing placement of the historic Masonic building on the National Register of Historic Places, with the help of a University of Oregon architecture school intern supported by a grant from Oregon Main Street and the Masons.

In addition, GBA — in partnership with the city, port and South Coast Bicycles — created the Cycle Stop Rest and Repair stop to draw in cycling tourists. The stop is located next to a public restroom and includes benches, a repair rack, tools, an air pump, lockers, bike racks and a water dispenser.

The Cycle Stop Rest and Repair stop is an unqualified success, having received the state of Oregon's 2014 Excellence in Downtown Revitalization Award for Partnerships as well as additional grants in 2016 from Travel Oregon and Wild Rivers Coast Alliance for improvements.

GBA has created several unique events to raise awareness of Bandon in ways that bring in more



“It’s not about paternalism and coming into a place and making it what you think it should be, but working with the community to make it what they think it should be.”

DANA NICHOLS
CITY OF BANDON

visitors and residents. Alive After Five happens monthly on Fridays from June through December and encourages downtown businesses to stay open after 5 p.m. to bring people out in the streets. People purchase glasses and are given a map of participating businesses providing wine tastings and snacks. GBA sells between 100 and 250 wine glasses at each event — depending on the time of year — and participants are a mix of local residents, tourists, first-time attendees and return participants. The annual Gorse Blossom Festival draws people downtown in the winter and brings more attention to the community’s fight against an invasive plant species. Held over Presidents Day weekend in the Port of Bandon’s Old Town Marketplace, the festival features local food and beverages, entertainment and a Sunday morning “Bloody Mary Stroll” through downtown. It won Best Downtown Special Event at the Oregon Downtown Revitalization Awards in 2017.

These events and many others have strengthened the sense of community and cohesion in Bandon, engaged people who may not be involved in the communities in other ways, and drawn more customers to Bandon businesses.

To succeed, GBA has worked closely with other organizations, especially the city and port. GBA serves as added capacity for both the city and port

to help facilitate and manage projects. As Bandon city councilor and GBA board member Peter Braun explains, “Whenever GBA has an economic development meeting, the city manager attends. Oftentimes, I don’t delineate work between [city] councilor and GBA. It’s all the same work trying to develop a stronger economy.” One example of this close partnership is the facade improvement program that GBA proposed to the City Council. Businesses can apply for loans to improve their facades, with the city matching 50 percent of costs. GBA assists on the committee that reviews and approves loan applications.

GBA’s community engagement work is not without its challenges. Keeping business owners actively involved in GBA’s committees and work has been more difficult, and GBA has wrestled with defining its own role in relation to that of the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber focuses on the needs of its member businesses through business lobbying and regional recreational tourism, while GBA aims to take a broader view of economic development for the town. Despite this distinction, GBA and the Chamber collaborate on many projects. GBA oversees the parade that kicks off the Chamber’s annual Cranberry Festival, while the Chamber contributed \$4,000 to last year’s Gorse Blossom Festival. GBA also recently secured funding for a community events coordinator who will work out of the GBA

offices and will coordinate events for both GBA and the Chamber.

Another challenge GBA faces is how to engage a broader cross section of Bandon. GBA volunteers are eager to involve a more diverse group in the work of the organization and also want the projects undertaken by the organization to benefit all community members, but engaging a wider base of the community has been difficult.

Dana Nichols, a Bandon city planner and GBA's former AmeriCorps member, explains: "It tends to be the same 20 people serving on committees ... I'm 29, and I'm the youngest person on the [GBA] board. For the most part, I feel like the young people aren't engaged. I want to pull them in and haven't really found a way yet."

GBA's action plan for the future includes continuing the Main Street Approach. GBA volunteers

are organized into three subcommittees: Design, Economic Vitality, and Promotion. The Design subcommittee will explore strategies for improving the visual appeal of the area, including the next round of facade grants and other maintenance improvement projects. The Promotion subcommittee will focus on events (such as the Gorse Blossom Festival) and marketing strategies to increase local shopping. The Economic Vitality subcommittee is exploring catalytic property redevelopment projects along with business advocacy.

Larger issues of economic vitality remain a heavy lift for GBA. Becoming involved in economic development projects may mean that GBA takes positions — either pro or con — on projects where there is disagreement in the community. This is not something that GBA has done to date. Thus, the organization may need to become more comfortable expanding its role and shifting its emphasis moving forward.



**“This is a huge challenge:
How do you build living
wage jobs and a well-
skilled workforce? GBA
hasn’t figured this out
yet. It’s a heavy lift.
It’s going to take some
different partnerships
and strategies ... It’s
more complicated than
putting on festivals and
beautifying a downtown.”**

JEFF GRIFFIN
PORT OF BANDON

INTERVIEWEES

PENNY ALLEN
COMMUNITY MEMBER &
OCF BOARD MEMBER

PETER BRAUN
ROBERT MAWSON
DANA NICHOLS
CITY OF BANDON

GINA DEARTH
MATT WINKEL
COMMUNITY MEMBERS

JEFF GRIFFIN
PORT OF BANDON





Community Building Block

Food Security

GRAND RONDE & MARION-POLK FOOD SHARE

Grand Ronde is a community in the western Willamette Valley between Salem and Lincoln City. Nearly one-quarter of the population is American Indian or Alaska Native, and the community encompasses the Grand Ronde Reservation of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon. It's a tight-knit community; as Kelly Rowe, executive director of health services, explains, "Our community is small enough for people to call and check on one another if someone doesn't come out of their house for a few days. It goes beyond the individual to being involved with one another."

Despite Grand Ronde's location in one of the richest agricultural areas in Oregon, many residents do not have access to the nutritious food needed to maintain a healthy lifestyle. As in the rest of the state, about 13 percent of Grand Ronde households are food insecure. They lack long-term access to the food needed to survive and thrive. In addition, 10 percent of households are both low income and lack easy access to a grocery store (double the statewide rate of 5 percent).

Oregon is a rich state for agriculture, producing over 200 agricultural commodities, but more than 14 percent of Oregon households are food insecure; they may regularly worry that food will run out, may be unable to afford a balanced meal and may skip meals. Ensuring access to nutritious food is an important component of achieving equitable health outcomes for all Oregonians.

In a 2016 community survey, 80 percent of respondents reported traveling over 10 miles to get food, and nearly half reported traveling over 20 miles. Many lower-income community members rely on public transportation, but the local bus only makes two stops in the community every two hours. This makes it particularly challenging for elder and low-income community members to access nutritious food.

The Tribe relies heavily on the nontribal community for food resources, and much of the Tribe's relationship with food is linked to culture and historical context. For example, some community



members want better access to first foods and to ensure that younger generations know how to plant, harvest and prepare these foods.

Recognizing these combined challenges, the Tribal Council began a partnership with Marion-Polk Food Share (MPFS) to increase food security and strengthen the community food system.

MPFS is leading the fight to end hunger in Marion and Polk counties and is a member of the Oregon Food Bank Network. They facilitate community-based teams to strengthen food systems and empower communities. This work is rooted in a belief that community members know best the challenges they face and can identify unique solutions based on community assets. Taylor West, community food systems coordinator and RARE AmeriCorps member, says, “We are there to meet the needs of community members on what is important to them. And the only way to get to that is by intentionally collaborating with them. We advocate with the community instead of for the community.”

In 2014, the Tribal Council invested in a local food pantry called Iskam MəkʰMək-Haws, or “place where you get food” in Chinook (often referred to as just “Iskam”). They leveraged federal and Tribal Housing Authority funds to centralize the food pantry and create more space and services (Rhodes, 2014). The new location is more acces-

sible for community members; it’s near Tribal Housing, income-based federal housing and the Grand Ronde Health and Wellness Center. The pantry provides an opportunity for closer partnership between the Tribe and MPFS. The Food Share has entered into a contract directly with the Tribe to manage the new food pantry. Francene Ambrose, Grand Ronde program manager, is both an MPFS employee and a member of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. MPFS also hired Lexi Stickel through the RARE AmeriCorps Program to conduct a two-county community food assessment with a specific focus on Grand Ronde. Lexi is now the director of community programs at MPFS.

MPFS began planning a Food, Education, Agriculture Solutions Together (FEAST) event with a tribal employee leadership team. The FEAST model was developed by Oregon Food Bank and brings community members together to talk about assets, challenges and opportunities within the community food system. With the right people in attendance (i.e., those most directly impacted and engaged with the initiative), the work will continue to improve food access.

Several priorities surfaced from this meeting:

- Empower individuals through food sovereignty.
- Support Grand Ronde Community Garden.

“The leaders within this community are fearless and relentless. They are incredible leaders that have risen out of these challenges and are determined to see change happen.”

TAYLOR WEST
MARION-POLK FOOD SHARE



- Connect the community with local farmers and producers.
- Interest in cooking and gardening classes.
- Improved access to healthy, affordable food.
- Creation of the Food Access and Community Team (FACT).

FACT began meeting monthly to continue the work of the initial event. Tribal and nontribal members work together to convene teams, develop relationships and coordinate their efforts to reduce community-identified barriers to food security.

A Meals on Wheels relationship with Iskam facilitates a convenient frozen-meal pickup service at the food pantry. Food sharing between Iskam and a nearby pantry, Grand Sheramina, ensures that each site has a better mix of food for their respective communities. FACT also coordinated a food access and nutrition survey in 2016 to better understand community barriers and opportunities. Respondents identified regional transportation barriers, reflected a low SNAP (i.e., food stamps) participation rate, and expressed their desire for better local shopping choices.

Following the survey, FACT hosted a FEAST follow-up conversation where they learned that community members are interested in hunting and in creating more opportunities for community learning and sharing. In response, FACT launched an annual event called MəḵMəḵ Mania, which is a celebration of local food that educates community members and connects them to resources. In response to community feedback, FACT also publishes a local food and resource guide annually to help community members learn about available resources.

MPFS brings healthy local food to community members through a program called Farm Share Rx. The community does not have a farmers market, and residents have limited fresh fruits and vegetables. The Grand Ronde Health and Wellness Center screened 40 interested patients to enroll them in the program. Participants received a free box of fresh produce from Osprey Farm in Willamina for 14 weeks over the summer. Each week, the MPFS program coordinator set up a tent in the Iskam parking lot for distribution. Osprey Farm dropped off 40 containers of fresh produce, and community members trickled in over a two-hour period to pick up boxes. Most participants are older, and many stayed a few minutes to chat with other partici-



pants or food pantry employees. In addition to the produce, MPFS distributed recipes as inspiration for using the produce, and Oregon State University Extension Service's Food Hero program provided tastings using the food box produce. All program participants also had the opportunity to join "Plan, Shop, Save, Cook," a four-week class hosted by OSU that teaches meal planning, how to save money on groceries and how to cook healthy meals.

These days, Iskam Mək^hMək-Haws is a bustling community hub — a place where people can come together to connect while also accessing resources. Francene serves as a community connector. Chris Mercier states that community members "trust [Francene] to support them in getting connected and initiating projects that they find valuable." She is currently building a partnership with The Northwest Hub, a nonprofit bike shop based in Salem, to host monthly bike repair classes and launch a bike share that would allow people to rent bikes.

Francene values the knowledge that community members can share with each other. Many community members volunteer at Iskam by sorting food, taking individuals through the pantry to shop, and even hosting classes on topics like skin allergies and extreme couponing.

INTERVIEWEES

FRANCENE AMBROSE
TAYLOR WEST
MARION-POLK FOOD SHARE

ANGELA BLACKWELL
GRAND RONDE EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

CHRISTA HOSLEY
KELLY ROWE
GRAND RONDE HEALTH
& WELLNESS CENTER

CHRIS MERCIER
THE CONFEDERATED TRIBES
OF GRAND RONDE

Elders also volunteer their time to work with youth and show them how to care for plants, explaining why a surplus is planted and how to harvest the crops. Many of these volunteers also receive food from the pantry. Francene explains that "volunteers are taking things home and sharing; they are building community networks and having conversations."

There is little doubt that the partnership between MPFS and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde has resulted in improved access to healthy food for both tribal and nontribal community members. At the same time, challenges like transportation barriers and the lack of a grocery store or farmers market in the community still loom large. But community leaders are committed to change, and only time will tell what they are able to accomplish with their dedication to strengthening community food systems in Grand Ronde.

When people have consistent access to enough food for an active healthy lifestyle, they are food secure. Resilient community food systems bolster food security by integrating food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste to ensure that the community has access to the food it needs.

Community Building Block

Affordable Housing

PORTLAND & LEAVEN COMMUNITY

Safe and affordable housing is a basic necessity. Affordable housing creates more economic security, ensuring that individuals and families have enough resources to cover other basic needs like food, medical care and education. Studies show that stable, affordable housing can have a positive impact on children's education and health outcomes. Communities with an adequate affordable housing supply reap economic benefits: Employers can more easily attract and retain workers, developing new housing creates jobs, and residents moving in put money back into the local economy (Wardrip, Williams & Hague, 2011).

And yet as Oregon grows, affordable housing is increasingly scarce. According to the Portland Housing Bureau, only two of Portland's 24 neighborhoods have affordable rental housing for a three-person household at 60 percent of the area median income. No neighborhoods are affordable to rent for the average black, Latino, Native American or single mother-headed household. Only six

of the 24 neighborhoods are affordable enough for the average Portlander to buy a home.

Leaven Community was founded in 2013 to "build relationships and ignite the power of our shared stories and spiritual wisdoms by acting collectively with our neighbors to cultivate diverse, equitable and thriving neighborhoods."

Much of the organization's work is in the Cully neighborhood, a diverse, majority low-income neighborhood in Northeast Portland. Leaven Community is taking steps to disrupt the impact of gentrification and power imbalance as their neighborhood grows and changes. Eric Conklin, board president, explains that "one of the goals of Leaven is to expand [its currently mostly white membership base] and see who is not at the table and be intentional about forming those relationships." As Leaven grows, the board is deliberately structuring itself to create power balance and to be an organization more fully representative of



current and future members and neighbors who are marginalized.

The group has established Common House as a space that brings people and organizations together to work on interconnected issues and shared mission. Home to 10 grassroots organizations (half of which are led by people of color), Common House convenes organizations whose missions are to create change and develop leadership grounded in the stories and experiences of the marginalized and oppressed. Common House also identifies leadership development opportunities for organizations and community members of color.

A cornerstone of Leaven's mission is a relational, story-based approach to community organizing. Leaven uses one-on-one intentional conversations, house meetings and community gatherings to surface personal stories. Problems identified from these stories are summarized, and the community together prioritizes areas for action. Community members then conduct research to identify specific issues with readily achievable goals and take action. At the end of the story cycle, the community celebrates and evaluates what steps to take next.

Their work with stories has resulted in a small improvement in Portland's affordable housing

crisis. At a community listening session in early 2017, Leaven heard concerns about housing first-hand and decided to form a Land and Housing Research Action Team.

One particularly compelling story came from Luz Gomez, a Honduran immigrant looking for stable housing for herself and her son. Another community member, Chris Sanderson, had just built a tiny home and was looking for both a financial and a social return. A third member, Jocelyn Furbush, was willing to have the tiny house parked on her property. As Eric Conklin explains, "Luz's story was compelling, and that was the driving force behind it all. I see it as the team gathered around her and her story, versus us being the leaders out in front."

As all of the pieces came together, the Research Action Team learned that having tiny houses on private property violated city ordinance. They researched the regulations and realized they needed to start with the city of Portland's Bureau of Development Services (BDS). Leaven reached out to City Commissioner Chloe Eudaly, who oversaw BDS, and her chief of staff, Marshall Runkel.

Research Action Team members met with Commissioner Eudaly and Marshall Runkel, and Luz shared her story. Leaven Community members asked that a



"I have this web of relationships through Leaven that I really value and that I've gotten so much out of in so many ways."

JOCELYN FURBUSH
LEAVEN COMMUNITY



INTERVIEWEES

ERIC CONKLIN
LEAVEN COMMUNITY

JOCELYN FURBUSH
COMMUNITY MEMBER

LAVETA GILMORE JONES
LEAVEN COMMUNITY

LUZ GOMEZ
LEAVEN COMMUNITY

MARSHALL RUNKEL
CITY OF PORTLAND

stay on tiny home evictions be enacted while a way was identified to make these homes legal in Portland. Commissioner Eudaly was supportive, and her staff began investigating whether a local stay was possible. Marshall worked with the city attorney and BDS on the stay while legislative changes were in the works at the state level. Marshall met again with Leaven members and confirmed that the stay did not require any formal legislative changes and could be accomplished relatively easily through a declaration from Commissioner Eudaly. To build support, the Research Action Team hosted meetings, inviting neighbors to tell their housing stories and encourage support for the stay. Leaven then hosted a community assembly where they formally asked Commissioner Eudaly for the stay on evictions. The room was packed, and Commissioner Eudaly shared her personal story about living in substandard housing. Marshall Runkel notes that places like this assembly, where people gather to make a difference, “are powerful places. That’s where real good and change occurs.”

As for Luz, she and her son moved into their tiny home and lived there until Luz accepted a job offer in Washington state. She says that sharing her story was about more than finding a place for her family to live: “I got a place to call home, but we got it for other people. We listened to their stories and got them involved.” Those inside and outside of Leaven, including Luz, cite the group’s ability to listen and to reflect the needs of the community as one key to its success.

At the heart of Leaven’s ability to listen to and reflect the community is its commitment to building deep personal relationships. Eric Conklin describes the foundation as one-to-one conversations that are more about sharing what is important to each person and finding common ground than about what Leaven thinks is best.

Much of that practice comes from Leaven’s origins as a faith community with members who were (and still are) deeply dedicated to each other. For many, these relationships provide additional motivation to act together to better the community. Jocelyn Furbush explains that “so much is based in personal relationship and story. Getting to know each other on a human level makes it easier to move through challenges and still have a strong fabric.”

The Land and Housing Research Action Team’s work has not ended. The group meets every other week to find a way to use land owned by faith-based organizations for affordable housing. The meetings still reflect Leaven’s commitment to honor individual stories. A recent meeting started with attendees pairing up to talk about what makes a space a home, before diving into a discussion about zoning and permitting. Their next project will be much larger and take much longer than the stay on tiny home evictions, but Leaven hopes that they will build on that early win—and some of the relationships developed in the process—to make a bigger, more long-term impact on the city’s affordable housing crisis.

What It Takes to Mobilize Communities

These case studies highlight six distinct communities that have mobilized community members to address locally identified priorities. While the topics addressed and the strategies used differ across these communities, several common ingredients for success emerge from these examples: building relationships, engaging diverse communities, identifying and fostering leadership, balancing long-term goals with short-term wins, and putting in the time to invest in the future.



BUILD KEY RELATIONSHIPS

A key theme across the case studies is the importance of relationships and trust. Relationships are critical to an effort's success, and they bring satisfaction and personal growth to those involved. Strong relationships can assist in project success because personal connections can increase individuals' commitment to the work and extend the network of individuals who can be invited to participate. They can also result in efficiencies as individuals and organizations collaborate to share the necessary work.

The quality of relationships is as important as the quantity, if not more so. Fostering and nurturing successful relationships takes intention and time; building trust does not happen overnight. Communication, listening and learning from one another are important building blocks for creating trust and strong relationships. Transparency, in the form of communicating progress and activities as well as the rationale behind decisions, can foster trust in an effort.

Robert Mawson from Greater Bandon Association explains that they “really strive to make sure people understand the efforts. They may not agree, but at least they understand why we are doing what we are doing.”

Although some communication can be done on a macro level through community meetings, social media and newsletters, building deeper relationships relies on a personalized one-on-one approach. There is no replacing face-to-face meetings in order to build relationships and trust. For example, Greater Bandon Association members would do a weekly “walkaround” to meet one on one with business owners and hear about their needs and ideas. Similarly, Leaven has relied heavily on one-on-one conversations that are, as Eric Conklin describes it, “about what’s important to you, what’s important to me, what’s in common between us and what steps we can take together.”

In addition to communicating about project activities and goals, trust is built when individuals truly listen to and learn from one another. Community engagement efforts are not just an opportunity to learn; the success of these efforts depends in part on individuals sharing experiences and learning from one another.

It is through this sharing that individuals come to understand alternative experiences and viewpoints and then collectively determine the best solutions to community challenges. As Taylor West of MPFS describes it, “I really see my role as being a good listener and a good facilitator of the conversations that bring about the change. When I think about success in terms of community involvement, I think about people learning from each other.”



“Successful community involvement looks like coming together as a community and neighborhood ... to discover together what are the pressures and opportunities before us.”

ERIC CONKLIN
LEAVEN COMMUNITY

Case study participants describe the trust present in healthy relationships as two-directional: Community members trust that the engagement effort will be shaped by their experiences and goals, and those leading the effort trust that the community members will honor their volunteer and other commitments.

Not only are these relationships crucial to the success of community engagement efforts, but they also benefit the individuals involved. Community members across the case studies describe how the relationships they formed through community engagement efforts changed them as individuals. Community members gained awareness of important issues, broadened their networks and gained confidence to get involved. As Dolores Martinez from Euvalcree explains, “Euvalcree gave me that confidence in myself to do more, and I’m very grateful [for] ... opportunities to learn and grow.”



BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH DIVERSE GROUPS

Successful community engagement efforts involve those groups and community members most impacted by the issue at hand. Engaging diverse groups ensures that multiple experiences and perspectives are included in a project’s planning,

design and implementation. This ensures that the needs to be addressed, along with the solutions to be pursued, are defined by those most impacted. As Taylor West explains, “We are there to meet the need of community members on what’s important to them. And the only way to get that is by intentionally collaborating with them. We advocate with the community instead of for the community.” Eric Conklin from Leaven explains that “successful community involvement looks like coming together as a community and neighborhood ... to discover together what are the pressures and opportunities before us.”

It can be challenging to engage groups who have been historically marginalized and to build bridges across communities that do not have a history of working together or trusting one another. The importance of relationship- and trust-building is heightened when focusing specifically on engaging diverse groups. Historically marginalized groups may have good reason to distrust invitations to join mainstream groups, and a divisive political climate increases that lack of trust. As Ubaldo Hernández of Columbia Riverkeeper explains, “Engaging first-generation Latino populations in America — inviting people to participate can be difficult, especially the immigrant community.” Francene Ambrose from MPFS explains that it may take extra effort to bridge divides: “If we hold [the food pantry] in a tribal building, we had to overcome the [nontribal] community thinking they are not

allowed because there is a tribal name for the food pantry. But they are welcome.”

It takes an intentional effort from project leaders to ensure that engaging diverse groups is part of a project’s design and goal. Lorri Epstein from Columbia Riverkeeper explains that they “are using the leadership team to discuss how to move forward from a diverse lens. They’re influencing how to make activities as inclusive as possible.”

Soliciting feedback and ideas from diverse groups can be done by building one-on-one relationships as well as through more formalized systems. For example, Euvalcree was instrumental in encouraging the city of Ontario to create a diversity advisory committee modeled after Hermiston’s Hispanic Advisory Committee. The city passed an ordinance stating that the City Council must get opinions from the committee, and the committee can also bring concerns and ideas to the City Council.

Community efforts that can successfully engage diverse groups do more than just share information or ask for opinions; these projects are designed to empower community members to own and lead the work. Empowering groups to take ownership of these efforts benefits the entire community. As Roberto Gamboa from Euvalcree explains, “I want to empower my people, but I also want to empower the whole community. If I only empower my people, then someone else becomes the minority.”



FOSTER EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Interviewees across all six case studies discussed the presence and importance of dedicated project coordinators. These individuals have dedicated their time and energy to organizing and managing the projects, mobilizing other volunteers and building relationships, among other things. These individuals have stuck with these efforts over the long term and have built trust and respect with others in their communities. These community leaders have access to decision-makers across

organizations and sectors, and often have decision-making authority themselves.

The case studies illustrate how the very definition of leadership, and who is considered a leader, can and should be expanded. Community members who may not traditionally be seen as leaders may in fact be the ones best suited to take on this role. Individuals who are most impacted by the community issues to be addressed often have the most knowledge of community strengths and challenges and possess connections, relationships and the trust of others.

Several important characteristics of effective leadership surface across the case studies, and these characteristics are not necessarily the ones traditionally associated with those in leadership roles. First, several case studies illustrate the importance of lived experiences and personal stories. For example, Luz’s personal struggle with housing served as a catalyst for Leaven’s work, and Luz and others impacted by Portland’s housing crisis assumed leadership by sharing their stories with public officials to advocate for change.

Another leadership ability manifesting across the case studies is listening skills. Those who assumed leadership roles described their efforts to listen to community members, either through one-on-one conversations or through more formalized listening tours. As Taylor West from MPFS explains, “I really see my role as being a good listener and a good facilitator of conversations.”

In addition, individuals who have taken on leadership roles in some of these case study efforts describe their work as supporting and empowering others. For example, Euvalcree supports leadership development and opportunities for community members formally through leadership trainings and informally through mentoring and one-on-one relationships. As Roberto Gamboa explains, “A lot of people count on us not just as an organization but as individuals.” Adam Brown agrees, stating that Euvalcree’s leaders have been “great personal advisors because they do a lot of their work with individual development.”



FOCUS ON THE END GOAL

Determining the focus and scope of an effort can be a challenge for community engagement projects. One approach is to identify the low-hanging fruit — those efforts that are easy to define, time-limited or that can result in some early or easy wins. These efforts can serve as an entry point for community members to engage on an issue; community members may be more attracted to a concrete effort as opposed to a larger, loftier goal that feels more intangible, difficult to reach and seemingly too big for them to impact.

As Taylor West from Marion-Polk Food Share explains, it can be important to present “a tangible project to the community that invites people to contribute and pursue without overwhelming or alienating people.” Further, early and tangible results provide a sense of satisfaction that can bolster motivation for future engagement.

However, when projects focus too much on smaller and easier wins, they may not make progress toward larger systems-change goals. While some community members are motivated to focus on low-hanging fruit, others may not want to engage unless they see how their efforts will impact the larger systemic issue they seek to change.

Eric Conklin from Leaven explains: “When there’s so much wrong in the world, as an organizing community, it’s easy to get distracted ... not to say we shouldn’t be doing [all] those things, but when there are so many things, it’s hard to be successful.” Therefore, it is necessary to identify not just the short-term or easy projects, but also to link those projects explicitly to the larger issue the effort seeks to address.



INVEST THE NECESSARY TIME

Successful community engagement takes time and effort. Building relationships, identifying community issues and solutions, and designing and implementing a plan — all with meaningful participation and leadership from community members — is a long-term process. And time is in short supply; community member volunteers have competing obligations, as do organization staff members.

The individuals involved in the case study efforts view the time needed not just as an investment in the success of the current effort, but also as an investment in community capacity-building that will reap other rewards down the line.

For example, Columbia Riverkeeper’s work to engage students doesn’t just change how these children view their community and the river right now. As Susan Arechaga explains, “In the future, it changes how the community treats and looks at the environment.” Similarly, Corvallis Sustainability Coalition thinks about current projects in terms of how they will help the community as a whole to move forward on sustainability.

Investing time in lifting up community members’ abilities to address local needs lays a strong foundation for ongoing community improvement, as Roberto Gamboa from Euvalcree notes: “My goal is to get those people who have the passion to shake things up and make a change. A community that is empowered is a community that can grow stronger.” Similarly, Angela Blackwell from the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde affirms that “community engagement ... lays the foundation for communities to be empowered and resilient. This allows the community to harness and tap into their own assets.”



Reflecting on Community-Driven Solutions

The examples in this report illustrate that cultivating strong communities is everyone's business. Individual community members, local government, nonprofit organizations, businesses, philanthropy, faith communities, clubs and associations all have a role to play and many are already doing so. The efforts highlighted here are just six of many examples of Oregonians building thriving communities where everyone has a chance to succeed.

Though these stories are specific, their lessons are wide-reaching. Communities across the state—large and small, urban and rural—may recognize themselves in these examples. The following questions will help community members to think more deeply about the work they are or could be doing.

- 1 What do you love about your community? How can you use what you love to strengthen your community?
- 2 What is community? Who is part of your community?
- 3 Who are the leaders in your community? What do they have in common? How can you stretch your definition of “leader” to those who may not look or act like the leaders you already know?
- 4 What can you apply from the case studies in your own community?
- 5 What motivates you to be involved in your community? What might motivate other community members?

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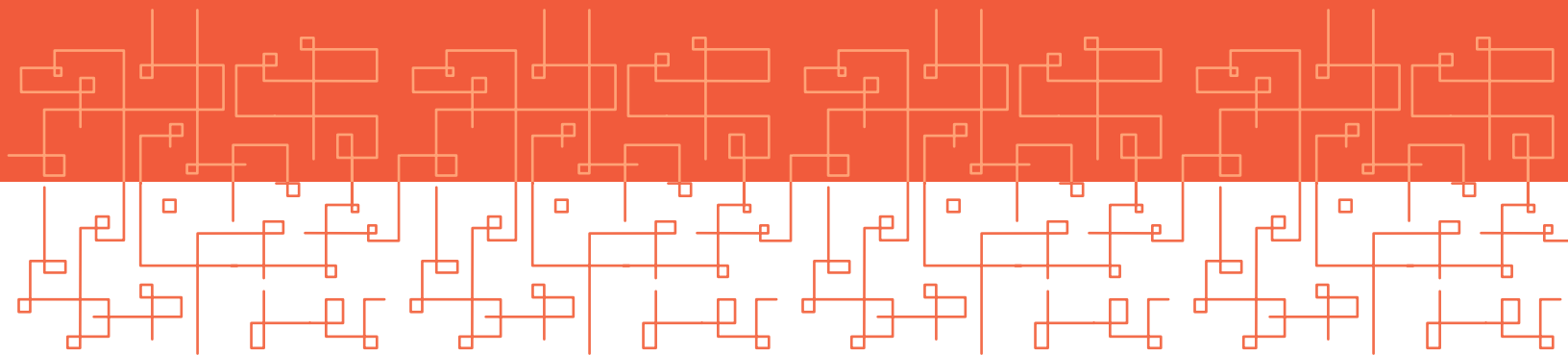
In 2013, Oregon Community Foundation (OCF) worked with Oregon State University (OSU) to create a set of indicators to track the economic, social and environmental progress of Oregon. These indicators were added to the existing Communities Reporter Tool website as a set of TOP (Tracking Oregon's Progress) indicators.

OCF and OSU have published four reports using the TOP indicators, including *Toward a Thriving Future*, the 2017 report about the opportunity gap. TOP data was also used to produce this report.

All five reports and the TOP indicators are available at **oregoncf.org/top-indicators**.

The mission of Oregon Community Foundation is to improve lives for all Oregonians through the power of philanthropy.

OCF puts donated money to work for Oregonians — \$100 million in grants and scholarships annually. Since 1973, OCF grantmaking, research, advocacy and community-advised solutions have helped individuals, families, businesses and organizations create charitable funds to improve lives for all Oregonians.



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