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Oregon Community Foundation Announces 2021 Priorities Aimed at Building Stronger, More Equitable Communities Throughout Oregon

OCF focuses investments on critical systems and infrastructure needed to support Oregon communities for years to come

Portland, Ore. – January 27, 2021 – Oregon Community Foundation (OCF) today announced 2021 priorities that build upon the foundation’s commitment to support Oregon communities through the COVID-19 pandemic and build a better Oregon where everyone can thrive. The announcement follows the latest wave of economic pain brought on by a pandemic that continues to intensify.

In response to unprecedented challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and wildfires, alongside increased visibility of historical and current systems of racial injustices, OCF builds upon significant shifts last year to ensure resources are deployed where they are needed most as the foundation transitions into 2021.

“Communities throughout Oregon continue to struggle with food insecurity, job losses, small business closures, children struggling to learn and the devastation of entire towns impacted by COVID-19 and wildfires,” said Max Williams, OCF president and CEO. “We have seen how these crises are compounding existing inequities, resulting in disproportionate impacts on Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), low-income Oregonians and struggling rural communities,” he added.

Throughout 2020, OCF responded quickly and urgently - distributing a record-setting \$220 million in charitable dollars to more than 3,000 nonprofits throughout Oregon working to address urgent needs, stabilize communities and prepare for long-term recovery in Oregon. OCF donors responded to the magnitude of need, as reflected in a 44% increase in donor advised fund grantmaking from the previous year.

Williams noted that every sector of society that OCF supports is grappling with the need for systems change: education, arts and culture, housing, business infrastructure, health care, and more. Recognizing that community organizations are the heroes on the front lines of addressing these changes, he recommitted OCF to deepening efforts, in partnership with community, to deliver relevant, timely support to help Oregonians in need.

He pointed to four impact areas in 2020 where OCF, alongside partner funders, business leaders and individual donors delivered overwhelmingly generous and critical response.

- **Meeting Urgent Basic Needs of Oregon Communities:** Established early in 2020, in collaboration with partners throughout the state, the Oregon Community Recovery Fund rapidly deployed \$87.7 million grants to 1,350 community-based

organizations at the front lines of the Coronavirus outbreak. Recognizing the disproportionate health, social and economic impacts for BIPOC and rural communities – OCF directed more than 40% of the COVID-recovery funds to BIPOC-led or focused organizations.

- **Stabilizing Small Businesses:** Small businesses in Oregon make up about 99.4% of all businesses and employ 55% of Oregon’s employees. Many small businesses such as childcare centers, restaurants, and other businesses reported they would not remain open and retain employees without immediate assistance to pay their operating costs. The Oregon Small Business Stabilization Fund, launched in March 2020, awarded \$2.6 million in grants to organizations that assist small businesses across the state. Forty-one percent of the grants were awarded to organizations that specifically serve women or people of color-owned businesses. Grant recipients used the funds to make small grants or loans to businesses in their communities.
- **Providing Relief for Artists Devastated by COVID-19 Impact:** The depth of financial loss in the arts and culture community has been staggering. The creativity of artists and cultural organizations is vital to building the collective hope and inspiration needed to process the trauma, grief and loss of the past year. Eight collaborating funders and many individual donors distributed \$5.25 million in funds to 400 arts organizations and 646 individual artists.

According to OCF, the challenges of the past year also presented opportunities for the foundation to strengthen how it is addressing deep and widening disparities among Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and rural Oregonians to create positive systemic change that strengthen our state.

“To effectively dismantle systems of oppression and create equitable opportunities and advancement, we must invest in local organizations leading the work in our communities,” said Sonia Worcel, the OCF chief community impact officer. “A stronger, more equitable future is achievable for Oregon if we work together to address root causes of these inequities, and philanthropy can play a strategic and leveraged role to make this happen.”

To that end, Worcel forecasted priority focus areas in the years ahead for OCF that will encompass grant making, research, a strengthened policy and advocacy agenda and concerted efforts in community engagement approaches that lead to more equitable and responsive systems supporting Oregon families.

- **Protect Our Houseless Neighbors:** Affordable housing availability in Oregon has only been exacerbated by the pandemic and wildfires. OCF is advocating to increase federal funding for affordable housing and investing in community-driven solutions like Project Turnkey, the \$65 million public/private/community-convened effort to convert hotels and motels into non-congregate shelter, and ultimately into transitional/permanent supportive housing units.
- **Ensure Kids Thrive:** OCF is advocating for significant investment in the nation’s childcare system to help families access quality, affordable care they’ll need to return to work and for the economy to thrive. OCF supports retaining recent investments in state equity plans for African American, Latinx, and Native American students; the Student Investment Account of the Student Success Act; additional investments in early learning programs and an expansion of a Black Student Success initiative launched in 2019.

- **Prepare for Long-Term Wildfire Recovery:** The Community Rebuilding Fund was established at OCF at the request of Governor Kate Brown and launched in partnership with OCF, Meyer Memorial Trust and The Ford Family Foundation in response to the wildfires that started on Labor Day. Working in shared purpose, resources will support the communities that were impacted by the fires and recognizing that recovery will be a multi-year process. The fund will support community-led, equitable investments for a stronger, more resilient Oregon.
- **Support Disproportionately Impacted Communities:** OCF research outlined in a new report, Cornerstones: Economic Mobility and Belonging in Oregon helps identify key areas of investment and policy change needed to create more high opportunity neighborhoods in Oregon: economically integrated neighborhoods, high-quality schools, living wage jobs, and increased social capital. Findings inform OCF grantmaking, programs and advocacy and will serve as a working framework to bring communities together in shared purpose to address economic and racial equity. In 2021, OCF’s responsive grantmaking program will continue to support Oregon communities with a sharpened focus on the most pressing challenges: the impact of COVID-19, promoting racial justice, wildfire recovery and the underinvestment and lack of infrastructure in under-resourced rural and marginalized communities across the state.

“In wave after wave of crises throughout 2020, OCF’s ecosystem of good emerged as a reflection of Oregon’s better angels - resilient in the face of great difficulty - responding with urgency and priority to the disproportionate impacts faced by communities, said Williams. “The magnitude of pressing needs in our state will continue for months and years to come, and we are relying on this sense of community and generosity to meet the moment.”

About Oregon Community Foundation

Oregon Community Foundation (OCF) puts donated money to work in Oregon – more than \$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. Impactful giving—time, talent and resources from many generous Oregonians—creates measurable change.

For more information about OCF, please visit: oregoncf.org.

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