



East Portland Community Prosperity  
Initiative: 2021 Engagement

**FINAL REPORT**

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# INTRODUCTION

Unite Oregon has a long history of community organizing for people of color in Oregon. We are trusted community leaders and are led by people of color, immigrants, refugees, rural communities and people experiencing poverty. We work across Oregon to build a unified intercultural movement for justice. Unite Oregon represents over 13,000 supporters and members across Oregon. We are one of the very few statewide organizations that leads community organizing with Black, Indigenous and People of Color.

East Portland is a collection of historically working-class neighborhoods that also represent some of Portland's most diverse. As you head east, you can see this richly-diverse tapestry unfold before you: signs in Spanish, Russian, Chinese, and Vietnamese. The limited parks are packed with families of every race, ethnicity, language, and culture imaginable.

As the Portland region has grown over the past 20 years, many communities have been displaced out of the urban core, in particular to East Portland and county. The displacement has harmed communities' ability to generate and retain wealth. Unite Oregon believes that Portland needs a clear, bold and aggressive economic justice vision to uplift all communities, most importantly those which have been historically excluded from wealth opportunities—Black, Indigenous, immigrants, refugees, people of color, and working-class people of all backgrounds.





# PROJECT GOAL

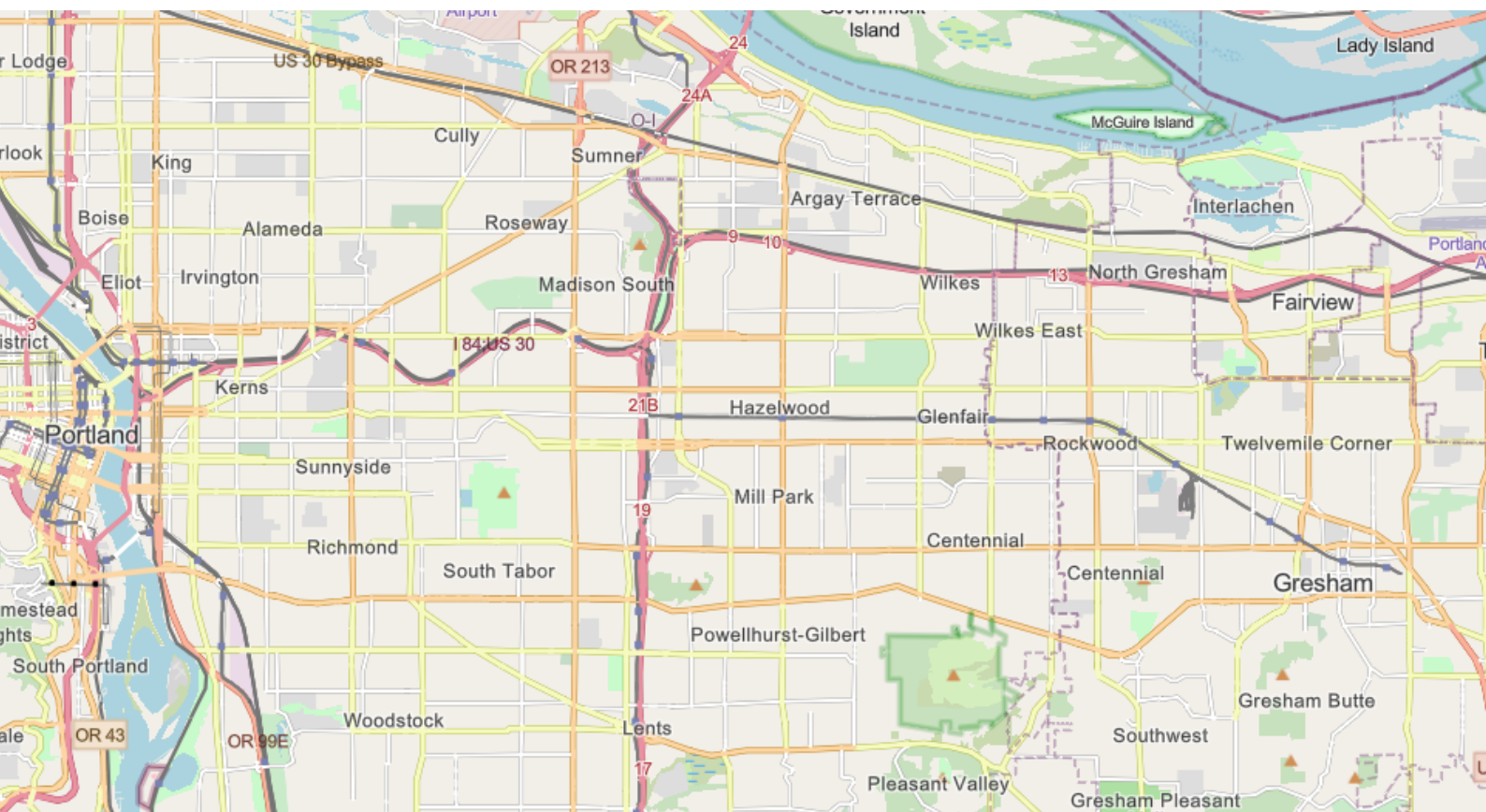


Unite Oregon's East Portland Community Prosperity Initiative aims to build economic prosperity that includes wealth creation and asset retention for our communities of color by empowering our community to advocate for ownership housing, anti-displacement, business entrepreneurship, workforce development, transportation safety, climate justice and educational opportunities. Our goal is to empower East Portland communities to construct a proactive economic prosperity and neighborhood revitalization strategy designed to avoid the displacement which typically occurs when neighborhoods prosper.

With partial support from a grant from the city of Portland, Unite Oregon led a series of community engagement activities that culminated in an East Portland Summit on June 30, 2021 that was attended by over 260 people and had nine languages spoken. This executive summary provides a snapshot of discussions and surveys with racially and culturally diverse community members in East Portland, Gresham, East Multnomah and Clackamas County. As we know, people live, work, worship, gather and play in communities where they can afford housing, be near extended family and travel to work.

*The goal of this project is to identify needs and issues of community members and opportunities that service providers and the city can contribute.*





## EAST PORTLAND

East Portland is Portland's most diverse district and is continuing to grow and change. Portland's Comprehensive Plan Update Growth Forecast (2015) estimates that East Portland will gain more housing units (nearly 24,000) by 2035- more than any other district outside the Central City. While these additional housing units are important for meeting the housing needs of Portland and the region, a key challenge Portland is addressing is how to ensure that all East Portlanders benefit from this growth and are not displaced as development occurs, while also addressing the area's infrastructure gaps.

*Two out of every five households in East Portland do not have ready access to a city park. That is in contrast to the rest of Portland where four out of every five households live within a half mile of a park or natural area.*

According to Oregon Walks, the pedestrian death rate per 100,000 was three times higher east of 82nd Avenue than it was west of 82nd from 2017-2019. East Portland also has a higher poverty level, lower educational level, higher levels of income inequality and along with that, southeast Portland has the highest population of communities of color.

## SUMMARY AND OUTCOMES

With the assistance of community organizations such as Beyond Black CDC, Somali Oregon Service Center, Vietnamese Community of Oregon, Ethiopian and Eritrean Resource Center, as well as community organizers, translators and volunteers, Unite Oregon facilitated the community engagement process in three phases from April to June 2021.

### Feedback consisted of:

**300**

Responses to the online survey in **7 languages**

**265**

Participants in the East PDX Community Summit in **9 languages**

**36**

Participants in focus group discussions in **5 languages**

*To administer the engagement process, Unite Oregon employed the support of 13 volunteers, 10 translators and 6 community organizers.*

Community members were compensated for their participation and received via gift card:

- \$25 for completing the online survey
- \$50 for participating in a focus group
- \$100 for attending the community summit



# Community Engagement Process

## PHASE ONE: ONLINE SURVEY

Two online surveys were administered in April to June 2021. The first survey was distributed to community-based organizations (CBOs) in April 2021 to gain an understanding of services provided, demographics served and priorities and goals for East Portland. The results of the stakeholder survey were intended to inform Unite Oregon of gaps in available services and future priorities for the East Portland Community Prosperity Initiative. The 24-question online survey was created using SurveyMonkey, and received responses from 11 CBOs serving East Portland.

The second survey was intended for East Portland community members and was also created using SurveyMonkey. Survey questions were focused on assessing the needs and assets of East Portland entrepreneurs and community members to identify priorities for change. Survey questions covered a broad range of topics including housing, food security, transportation, businesses and priorities for East Portland. With the help of paid translators and community organizers, the survey questions were translated and distributed in seven languages, including: Spanish, Somali, Nepali, Burmese, English, Vietnamese and Chinese. 301 responses were collected from May to June 2021.

## PHASE TWO: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Focus group discussions were conducted from May to June 2021 via Zoom in order to collect more qualitative data and were intentionally kept small (5-10 participants each) to ensure in-depth narratives were gathered. Focus group questions were aimed at understanding participants' living, working and transportation conditions in East Portland, as well as priorities for government projects and job training/small businesses. Focus groups were held in five languages, including: Spanish, Burmese, Nepali, Somali and English, for a total of 36 participants. The one hour discussions were arranged with the help of community organizers and consecutive interpretation was provided.



## PHASE THREE: EAST PORTLAND COMMUNITY SUMMIT



The goal of the East Portland Community Summit was to bring together community members, local entrepreneurs and stakeholders from across the city to listen to ideas, needs and solutions as well as set goals for justice-centered wealth building in East Portland. The event was held via Zoom on June 30th, 2021 and included over 260 community members and stakeholders including government staff, elected officials, CBOs and service providers. Nine languages were represented at the community summit, including: Somali, Nepali, Burmese, Spanish, Vietnamese, English, Amharic, Tigrigna, and Arabic. Simultaneous interpretation was provided in the full Zoom session and consecutive interpretation was provided in breakout sessions. The agenda for the event consisted of:

- Introductions and highlights from the surveys and focus groups
- Culturally specific breakout sessions for community members to share priorities and give input on government projects
- Facilitators shared highlights from breakout sessions, closing remarks



# **SURVEY RESULTS**

## **Demographics**

Survey participants identified as 50% immigrants, 25% refugees, 2% asylum seekers, and 23% were American born or preferred not to answer. 68% of survey participants are aged 18-44.

## **Housing**

51% of participants rent housing, 38% own, and 6% identified as houseless. Only 23% said that their rent has not increased in the past 12 months.

## **Economic Prosperity**

For survey participants, 31% disclosed an average household income below \$30,000 and 48% cohabited with 3-4 persons in a household and 16% had over five persons in their household. 27% are unable to save some of each paycheck, and 38% are able to save less than 10%.

## **Transportation**

61% drive their own car and 27% use public transportation.

## **Entrepreneurship**

Survey participants identified as 50% immigrants, 25% refugees, 2% asylum seekers, and 23% were American born or preferred not to answer. 68% of survey participants are aged 18-44.

## **Education**

35% have completed an undergraduate program, 21% have undergone university preparation, and 23% attended only secondary school.

## **What do they believe are the highest priority issues for East Portland?**

1. Affordable housing (57%)
2. Public Safety (52%)
3. Living wage jobs (41%)
4. Education/job training (37%)

## **What kind of businesses do they believe would most benefit East Portland?**

1. Accommodations and food services (48%)
2. Healthcare and social assistance (33%)
3. Educational services (30%)

# FOCUS GROUP HIGHLIGHTS

## *Burmese Community*

The first focus group discussion was held on May 19th with five members of the Burmese community living in the East Portland/Gresham area. The focus group was arranged with the help of community organizer Sandy Minsein.

### **What did they like most about where they live?**

Participants most frequently mentioned that they liked how the East Portland/Gresham area was quiet or not crowded, followed by the community in the area.

### **What would they change about where they live?**

The most common response among the participants in this focus group was expensive rent and mortgage. Participants also frequently mentioned that they would like improved bus lines, additional Asian grocery stores and a community center.

*“The only thing I agree with is the mortgage and rent is too high. If the mortgage was less we would be really happy.”*

### **What job training or small business opportunities are they interested in?**

For job training needs, the most common response in this focus group was ESL courses. The most frequently mentioned small business opportunity of interest was a food business or grocery store.

### **What government projects would they prioritize?**

Participants most frequently said they would prioritize government projects related to improved and additional parks and gardens. Respondents also commonly mentioned childcare, affordable housing and a community center.

*“I am also thinking about the children because they don’t have anywhere to go. Something like a park or garden they can enjoy.”*



# FOCUS GROUP HIGHLIGHTS

## *Somali Community*

The second focus group discussion was held on May 20th with eight members of the Somali community living in the East Portland/Gresham area. The focus group was arranged with the help of community organizers and Somali Oregon Service (SOS) Center representatives Ali Ibrahim and Abdirizak Musa.

### What did they like most about where they live?

Participants in this focus group most commonly said they liked the public transportation where they live, followed by schools in the area.

### What would they change about where they live?

Many concerns were voiced, but the most common answers were affordable childcare and increased public safety.

### What job training or small business opportunities are they interested in?

The two most common workforce training opportunities voiced were computer/technological literacy and skilled job training, such as for the pre-employment tests administered by corporations such as Amazon.

*"I am too old to learn new skills but if for example people like me are given grants for a small business they can help with economic prosperity."*

Another important theme that was discussed in this focus group was the need for interest-free loans for members of the Islamic community.

*"In Islam we are not allowed to pay interest. There is an Islamic foundation but you have to have good income first."*

# FOCUS GROUP HIGHLIGHTS

## *Latinx Community*

The next focus group discussion was held on May 27th with eleven members of the Latinx community living in East County. The focus group was arranged with the help of community organizers Jadelis Muñoz Nieves, Maria Luna, and translator Paul Riek.

### **What did they like most about where they live?**

The most common response was schools in the area, followed by stores and parks/gardens.

### **What would they change about where they live?**

Participants most frequently mentioned public safety issues, including theft and interpersonal violence, followed by an increase in homelessness throughout the pandemic.

*“It’s been four years living here, and there is a real problem with insecurity and crime ever since the pandemic.”*

### **What workforce training or small business opportunities are they interested in?**

The most common opportunity expressed was for classes related to starting and operating a small business, followed by technological literacy then gardens and ESL.

*“I’d like to learn to use a computer really well. I don’t know it very well.”*



# FOCUS GROUP HIGHLIGHTS

## *Nepali Community*

Another focus group discussion was held on June 17th with six members of the Nepali community living in East County. The focus group was arranged with the help of community organizer and translator Ang Karma Sherpa.

### **What did they like most about where they live?**

Participants most frequently brought up the quality of schools in the area, followed by their satisfaction with the location of their home and proximity to services such as transportation.

### **What would they change about where they live?**

The highest priorities voiced by focus group participants were more affordable childcare options, traffic accidents/unsafe streets and homelessness in their community. It should also be noted that 50% of attendees in this focus group were unemployed due to the effects of COVID-19 or a lack of childcare.

*“I used to work as a medic but currently I work from home because I don’t have a babysitter and can’t find one.”*

### **What workforce training or small business opportunities are they interested in?**

The most frequent responses included Nepali language classes for children to preserve culture, scholarships and GED assistance, followed by resources for small business and rent assistance.

*“My concern is about language. In other states they have an institute... I wish something similar could be started here so our children could learn our parents language.”*

### **What government projects would they prioritize?**

Members of this focus group most frequently said they would prioritize government projects focused on schools, followed by road/infrastructure improvements and scholarships as well as rent assistance.

# FOCUS GROUP HIGHLIGHTS

## *English Focus Group*

The final focus group discussion was held on June 24th with six members of the East Portland community who identify as black, indigenous or people of color. The focus group was arranged with the help of community organizer Lorri O'Neill.

### What did they like most about where they live?

The most common response was parks/trails in the area, followed by the location of their home and the bus system.

### What would they change about where they live?

Participants in this focus group most frequently mentioned the need for additional grocery stores in East Portland, followed by more/additional parks and speed bumps to mitigate traffic and pedestrian accidents.

*"I would say the bus service really bothers me. I need to drive to work."*

### What workforce training or small business opportunities are they interested in?

The most common themes that arose in this discussion were opportunities related to creating and selling art, followed by scholarships for continuing education and earning licenses.

*"I make crafts and earrings, I've done it before but I used to sell my work but now there is nothing going on and I'm trying to collect more work. I can't do it all myself."*

### What government projects would they prioritize?

The highest priority voiced by participants in this focus group was affordable housing and utility assistance, followed by addiction recovery and community gardens.

*"I always thought of multi housing or shared housing like we could share a community garden..."*

# AMHARIC GROUP

## Needs and Priorities:

- Help accessing resources, bridge building between city/service providers and community
- Affordable housing, rent assistance
- Support for job seekers/small businesses
- Strengthen community organizations
- Childcare, youth engagement
- Community center
- New parks, community gardens

# *Summit Highlights*

## SOMALI GROUP

### Needs and priorities:

- Job coaching, tech literacy training
- Resource navigation
- Improved public transportation
- Affordable housing
- Public safety concerns

## BURMESE GROUP

### Needs and Priorities:

- Street improvements
- Programs to address violence
- Temple, community center
- Affordable housing/rent assistance
- Job seeking help

## NEPALI GROUP

### Needs and priorities:

- Housing assistance, pathways to ownership
- Improved public transportation, street crossings
- Programs to reduce violence
- Workforce training/education
- Utility assistance
- Improved/additional parks and community gardens
- Affordable childcare



## **LATINX GROUP**

Needs and priorities:

- Affordable housing/rent assistance
- Public safety/programs to reduce violence
- Public health, addressing COVID-19
- Cleanliness, litter in East Portland

## *Summit Highlights*

## **ARABIC GROUP**

Needs and priorities:

- Legal services for refugees
- Rent assistance/affordable housing
- Support for job seekers/small businesses

## **VIETNAMESE GROUP**

Needs and priorities:

- Affordable housing/rent assistance
- Programs to reduce violence
- Support for landlords, small businesses

## **ENGLISH GROUP**

Needs and priorities:

- Rent assistance and affordable housing
- Pathways to home ownership
- Medical care for refugees
- Public safety/programs to reduce violence

# HIGH-LEVEL GAPS ANALYSIS

Based on surveys, focus groups and summit participation, Unite Oregon's analysis determined the list below are gaps in services that need to be filled by public and private service providers, businesses, government and educational institutions.

## Access to rent/mortgage assistance, affordable housing

Community members in East Portland asked for support in helping pay rent, reducing rent and mortgage payments. They also asked for support in learning how to qualify and apply for loans for buying a house. Many stated that if they rented, their rent payments are constantly increased beyond their ability to pay and have been displaced from their homes.

*"We need affordable housing to rent or own their own home and so it would be easier for people to live somewhere."*

## Small business support and start up

There is a need and desire for community members to have support for existing small businesses, such as forgivable loans for upgrading equipment and scaling up businesses out of homes for brick and mortar business. Assistance with meeting building codes, cost of building permits and construction costs are key for success. Entrepreneurs also expressed the need for assistance with soft costs, such as accounting, banking, preparing taxes, and business planning. Finally, there is a need for assistance with business start up with training, forgivable microloans and basics of starting a business, marketing, finance, and business planning and development.

*"I want to build my own business but I don't know how to start."*

## Affordable childcare options

There is a large need throughout East Portland for affordable, reliable and conveniently located childcare, especially for young children who are not yet school aged.

## Workforce training and education/scholarships

The need for training and placement for family wage jobs, apprenticeship, internships that include ESL and computer literacy was frequently expressed by community members. Training employers how to engage and reach out to culturally diverse communities through trusted organizations for job placement, job fairs and direct opportunities for learning how to fill out applications, interview for jobs and coordinating with other employers on a consistent approach is needed. Providing scholarships for training at community colleges is an additional concern. Also, the need for affordable, conveniently located and reliable child care is a requirement for success. Assistance with certifications for in-home childcare providers for building improvements, training on health and safety, certification and insurance and liability.

## HIGH-LEVEL GAPS ANALYSIS

### Community Centers

There was a great deal of interest in community centers that can provide space for communities to provide culturally specific language classes, legal services, climate resilience resources, tax and finance assistance, job applications, meals and food and worship. Many community members want to provide opportunities to maintain and teach their language and culture to their younger generation and are seeking opportunities to convene as well as provide services to their elders, such as hot meals, food boxes, places to gather, activities and social services, medical services and clinics.

*"I wish for... the community center for everyone. Right now... if we have a celebration or party we don't have anywhere to go."*



# HIGH-LEVEL GAPS ANALYSIS

## Road and infrastructure improvements

Many East Portlanders do not feel safe on the streets walking, going to work, school, public transit and other places. Concerns were voiced about not having sidewalks or crossings on some streets, dangerous crossings at busy intersections, lack of street lighting and concerns about personal safety around houseless individuals and camps. Many stated concerns about the high speed of traffic, street racing and racism and harassment from drivers as a major reason they would rather drive than walk or take public transit.

*"I will add one more point which is the roads, especially 82nd Ave... And it is too scary to go outside you have to look over your shoulder or wonder what is going to happen."*

## Resource Navigation

Many participants in the community engagement process expressed the need for culturally specific resource navigation and bridge building between the city, service providers and community members.

*"Bridge building between community members and city officials is needed because of language barriers or educational barriers. We need small community organizations to be strengthened because they are doing this bridge building already."*

# **AFFORDABLE HOUSING/RENT ASSISTANCE**

Banks, credit unions and mortgage companies invest in culturally and language specific homeownership education programs, low or no interest loans and sponsorships for pathways to homeownership. Explore different ownership models that do not require high down payments and monthly payments.

- Create a collaborative business model where several small businesses can share infrastructure such as assembly, warehousing, accounting, marketing, office, retail space.
- Create a mentorship program where more established entrepreneurs can share their expertise and provide compensation for these services, which could be in-kind, such as reduction in rent.

## *Recommendations*

Government, philanthropic and business invest in affordable housing and provide options outside of traditional rental housing and management that focuses on culturally specific needs and pathways for economic stability.

# **SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT AND START UP**

- Create a small business incubator space in East Portland that focuses on small business start up for communities of color.
- Provide forgivable loans for small businesses to scale up.

## WORKFORCE TRAINING AND EDUCATION/ SCHOLARSHIPS

- Establish a workforce training center in East Portland that focuses on racially diverse communities.
- Focus on training for living wage jobs that includes culturally and racially focused approaches to adult education, including languages other than English.

## *Recommendations*

- Provide scholarships to PCC/MHCC for community members to take classes for certification in trades. Assist with placement after certification in businesses.
- Clean energy businesses, electrical utilities and Energy Trust to invest in culturally specific training and job placement.

- Establish a community center in East Portland that allows community members to decide on programming and use of the building. Create a funding model that supports operations and programming.
- Invest in equipping the new community center with resources to become a climate resilience center that helps residents respond to increasingly frequent extreme weather events.

## COMMUNITY CENTERS

Include indoor and outdoor space uses and encourage collaboration with communities and grassroots community-based organizations.



## AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE OPTIONS

## *Recommendations*

- Focus on assisting families, in particular mothers to assist with licensing, insurance, and setting up a business for child care in the community.
- Faith institutions, schools and community centers provide space for child care providers.
- Opportunity to create a collaborative business model so small businesses can share costs.

- Prioritize constructing and connecting sidewalks.
- Establish additional parks, green spaces and community gardens in East Portland, and prioritize upkeep and improvements of existing green spaces, include community in designing parks that are culturally responsive to community needs and address the urban heat island effect.

## ROAD AND INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

Focus on traffic and public safety investments, including street improvements, clean up and community safety programs.

# *Recommendations*

## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

- City to invest in culturally specific programs for pedestrian safety.
- Provide training for neighborhood support programs.
- City to create Safe Routes to Schools in East Portland that focuses on and is led by communities of color in multiple languages.

City to invest in culturally Community organizations that focus on climate resilient workforce and wealth-building opportunities including community gardens, trash/bottle collecting, and tree planting to receive city investment.

## **RESOURCE NAVIGATION**

- City to invest in resource navigation services, designate employees throughout bureaus to work particularly on connecting culturally specific community members to economic, political, social and structural resources.
- City to prioritize strengthening community based organizations (CBOs) who are leading bridge building and resource navigation work.

## **CLIMATE RESILIENT WEALTH-BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES**

City and CBOs invest in equipping new and existing community centers with resources to become climate resilience centers that help residents respond to increasingly frequent extreme weather events.

This list of potential partners in East Portland includes both local, state and national partners that can assist with collaboration and investment to achieve the vision for an equitable, safe and healthy community.

## SERVICE PROVIDERS/CBOS

- Somali Oregon Service (SOS) Center
- Ethiopian and Eritrean Resource Center (EERC)
- Vietnamese Community of Oregon (VNCO)
- Beyond Black

- Imagine Black
- Rosewood Initiative
- Historic Parkrose
- REACH CDC
- Holst Architecture
- Resolve Architecture
- Salazar Architecture
- Coalition of Communities of Color
- AntiDisplacement PDX
- Growing Gardens
- Mary Kiona Foundation
- Black Food Sovereignty Coalition
- Four Forces Inc
- Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA)
- People-Places-Things
- Portland General Electric (PGE)
- OnPoint Bank
- Community Investment Trust (CIT)
- MercyCorps Northwest

- Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability
- East Portland Action Plan
- Portland Bureau of Parks and Recreation
- Oregon Metro
- Portland Water Bureau
- Portland Bureau of Environmental Services
- Portland Housing Bureau
- Portland Bureau of Transportation
- Prosper Portland
- Portland Office of Equity and Human Rights

## GOVERNMENT PARTNERS

- Planning and Sustainability Commission
- Division of Community Safety
- State Representative Andrea Valderrama
- Multnomah County Commissioner Vega Pederson
- City of Gresham



## **STATE GOVERNMENT PARTNERS**

- Business Oregon
- Oregon Department of Transportation
- Oregon Employment Department
- Oregon Health Authority
- Oregon Department of Education
- Oregon Department of Energy
- Oregon Housing and Community Services
- Governor's Office

## **FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PARTNERS**

- HUD
- Federal Reserve
- Department of Commerce
- US DOT
- Small Business Administration
- Environmental Protection Agency

## **PRIVATE SECTOR**

- Banks, mortgage and credit and investment financial institutions
- Insurance
- Business and chambers of commerce
- Real estate development and brokers, architecture
- Manufacturing, assembly businesses
- Trades
- Clean energy and green economy businesses
- Corporate/global businesses
- Utility and infrastructure

## **NON-PROFITS /EDUCATION**

- Affordable Housing
- Workforce development
- Social service providers
- Advocacy
- Community colleges and universities
- Public and private K-12 education

# Conclusion

While East Portland has recently been the focus of long delayed investment by the city, a new vision is emerging. Past organizing and advocacy efforts have been disjointed and fraught with obstacles from politics to lack of leadership. Today, the challenges are more urgent than ever with the economic and climate crisis, the impacts of COVID-19, housing instability, rising violence and hate crimes focused on our Black and brown community.

Unite Oregon believes that Portland needs a clear, bold and aggressive economic justice vision to uplift all communities, most importantly those which have been historically excluded from wealth opportunities – Black, Indigenous, immigrants, refugees, people of color, and working-class people of all backgrounds.

Unite Oregon's East Portland Community Prosperity Initiative aims to build economic prosperity that includes wealth creation and asset retention for our communities of color by empowering our community to advocate for ownership housing, anti-displacement, business entrepreneurship, workforce development, transportation safety, climate justice and educational opportunities. Our goal is to empower East Portland communities to construct a proactive economic prosperity and neighborhood revitalization strategy designed to avoid the displacement which typically occurs when neighborhoods prosper.

Unite Oregon is the only organization in the region that can lead, organize and implement this vision because of our years of empowering multicultural and multiracial communities and building the bridge between those with the resources and those with the need. We are committed to realizing this vision by engaging with the strength and power of our community and leveraging resources from all sectors to accomplish this. We are inviting our partners to work with us to meet this challenge.

For more information,  
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