

OREGON WATER FUTURES PROJECT REPORT

2020 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Oregon passes historic water package

- \$530 million water package
- \$1.5 million for equitable water access & indigenous energy resiliency
- SCR17 puts responsibility on all agencies to prioritize environmental justice



Oregon Water Futures Project

Illuminating what ***water justice*** means to Oregonians on the frontlines of our water challenges through community conversations and partnerships.

Project goals:

- Lift up voices from across the state about water and environmental justice issues
- Identify community priorities for water and culturally-specific resiliency
- Build capacity around water advocacy
- Foster a statewide water justice movement



Partnering with Community Based Organizations



“Es muy importante crear espacios de conversaciones en nuestras comunidades sobre nuestro medio ambiente y el agua, enriquece nuestro conocimiento sobre prácticas de conservación que podemos implementar todos los días, a la misma vez que amplía nuestra conciencia para seguir abogando para garantizar acceso al agua limpia y accesible para todos.”

- Tomás Bartolo, PCUN



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“It is very important to create spaces for conversations in our communities about our environment and water, it enriches our knowledge about conservation practices that we can implement every day, at the same time that it broadens our awareness to continue advocating to guarantee access to clean water and accessible to all.”

-Tomas Bartolo, PCUN

Approach: Community Engagement Best Practices



“I think that that experience with that elder from the Ponca tribe has really taught me what it means to pray with water and to cleanse myself with water.”

- Ashia (Klamath, Eugene)



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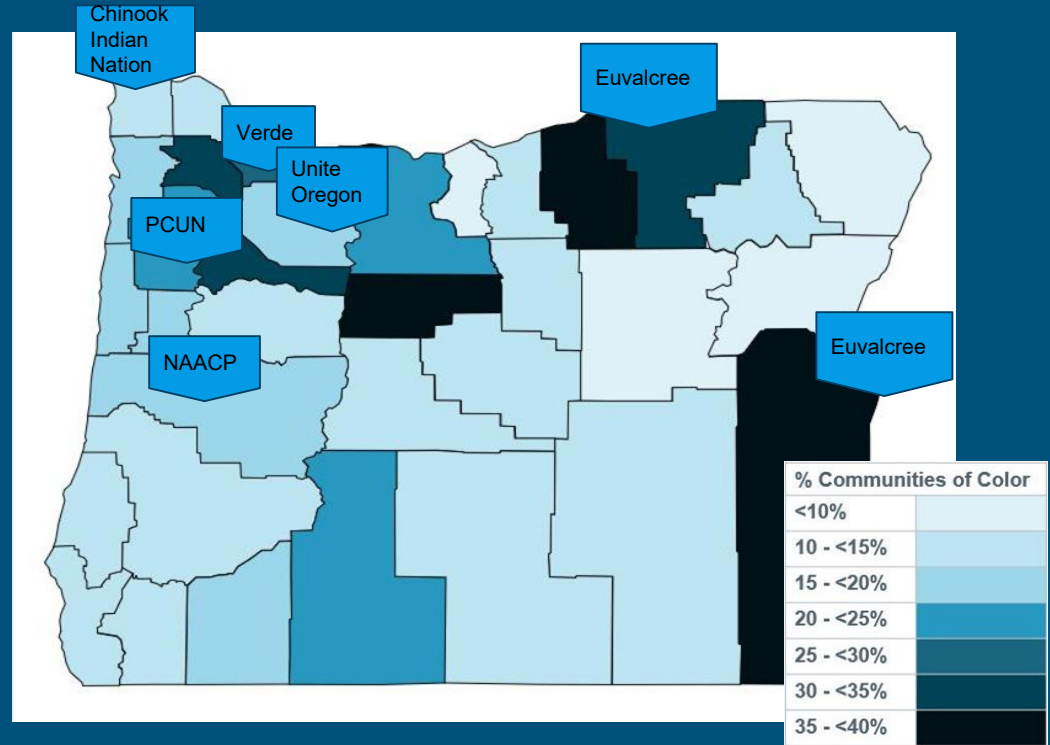
- Relationship Building
- Co-create outreach and engagement approaches that center community voices
- Be flexible and adaptable
- Create as much access as possible
- Tap into people’s existing values and language
- Ensure adequate funding
- Not one size or model fits all

2020 Community Engagement

2 online gatherings
75 phone interviews
Multilingual

104 total participants:

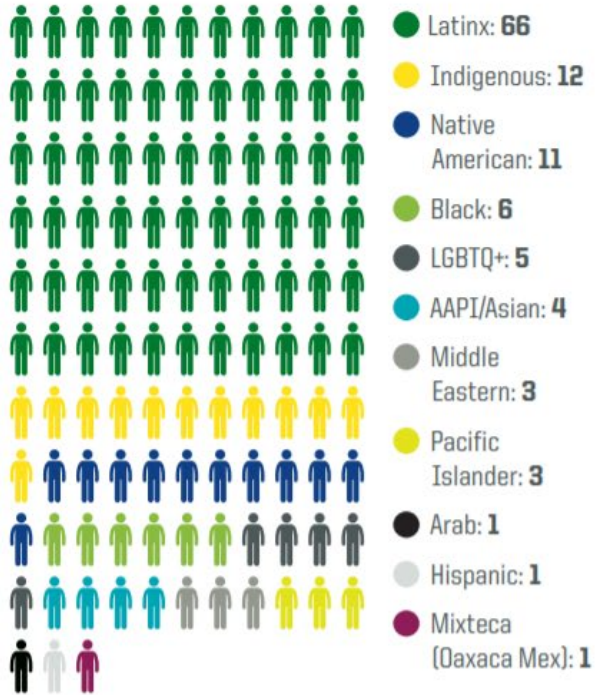
- Native
- Latinx
- Black
- Migrant communities (Indigenous Latinx, SE Asian, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, Arab, Somali)
- Mostly lower-income/ working class
- Many renters, some homeowners



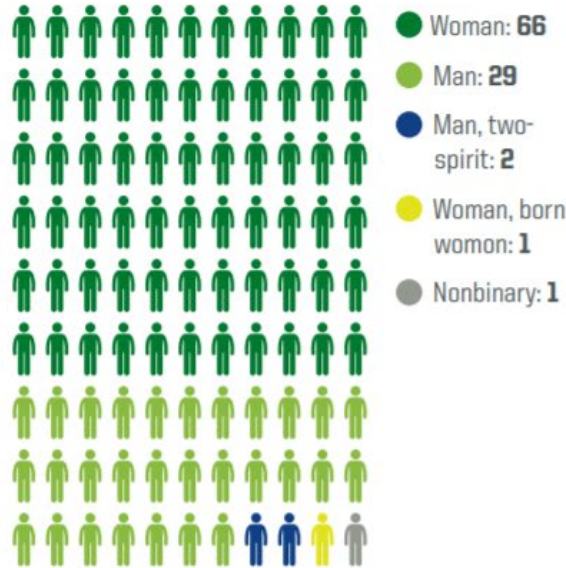
Percentage of People of Color by County (Hispanic + non-white)

Source: John Horvick, DHM Research, Political Director on Twitter

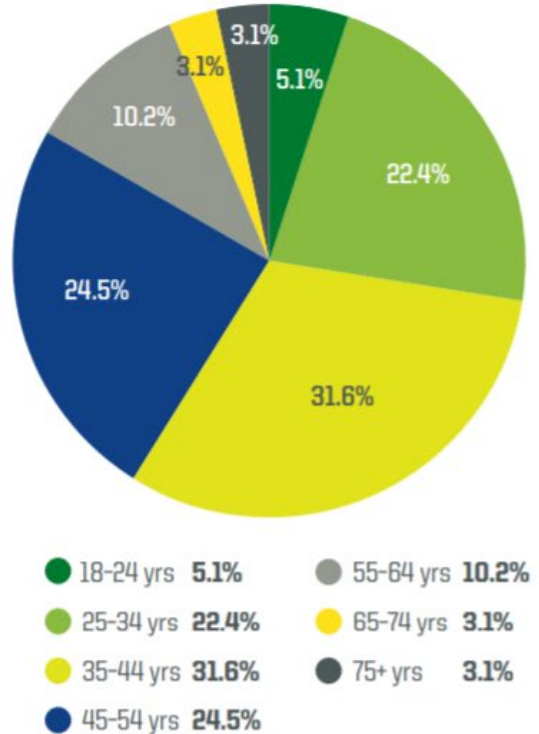
Participants' Social Identifiers



Participants' Gender Identification



Participants' Age





“Water is incorporated in my spiritual practices. Water has a name. There are deities and rituals associated with water.”


- Donella Elizabeth-Alston

Statewide Themes

- **Water Values**
 - Need support for local leadership + knowledge
- **Capacity**
 - Take action + invest in community capacity
- **Distrust**
 - Address water infrastructure + improve emergency communications
- **Access to Information**
 - Improve renter + farmworker protections, renter education

Statewide Themes

- **Serious Water Challenges**
 - Need community engagement funding tied to infrastructure dollars; access to testing + filters
- **Affordability**
 - Infrastructure improvements, bill assistance + trust building are key
- **Well Water**
 - Improved well water regulation needed
- **Emergency Preparedness**
 - Need culturally-inclusive emergency response plans; CBO partnerships are key



“They say the water is good, but I’m not so sure because when I use it to cook, it looks as if it were dirty.”

- Christina

Infrastructure Needs

- **Flooding:** In Independence and Umatilla, seasonal flooding has prevented people from getting to work, damaged infrastructure and created public health concerns
- **Natural infrastructure:** The lower Columbia River is greatly damaged and threatens species Chinook Indian Nation members rely on; CIN is eager to engage in restoration
- **Domestic wells + septic:** High water tables on the North Coast affect these systems ability to perform; concern about impact of development on groundwater supplies
- **River water quality:** People enjoy visiting rivers and lakes, but they don't get in the water due to water quality concerns - opportunity to improve people's connection/trust in water
- **Small water systems:** Employer-provided housing and mobile home parks have inconsistent water quality and access

Water Quantity

- Warrenton and the Clatsop Plains: Participants discussed whether there will be enough water in the future from the Lewis and Clark River to sustain existing communities and planned population growth
- Malheur and Umatilla counties: participants who experience localized water shortages raised concerns about having enough water to shower, and some people bring their own hand sanitizer to work because of limited handwashing stations or unclean bathroom facilities
- In Ontario: “wells don’t get enough (water).” One family living there “almost never has enough water;” they often do not have water to finish showering

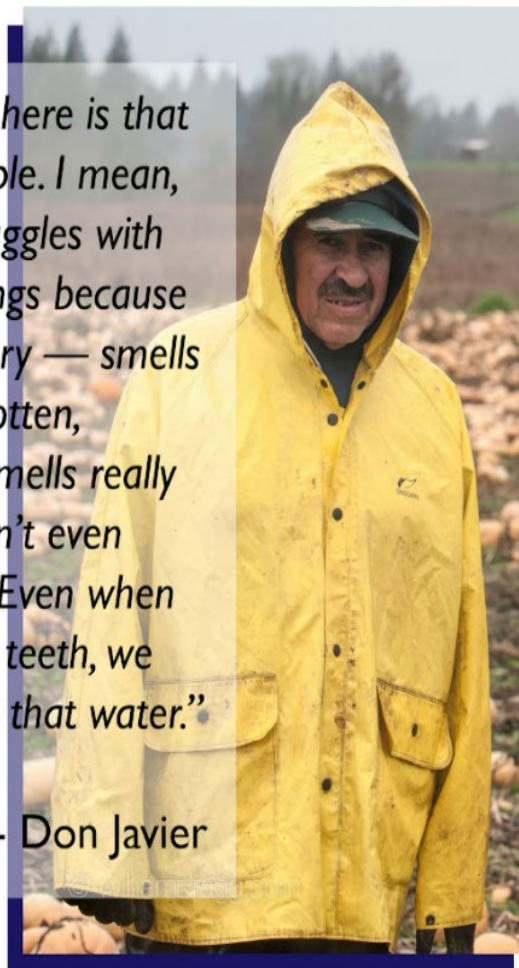


Water Wells

- Housing type impacts water resources and access to information
- In several regions, participants raised concerns about domestic wells, noting that there is not enough routine testing or regulation.
- On the North Coast, high water tables and high tides affect the ability of septic systems to perform as designed, and participants are concerned about the impact of increased local development on groundwater supplies

“The problem we have here is that the water is not drinkable. I mean, sometimes my wife struggles with water even to wash things because the water comes out very — smells very bad, it stinks like rotten, something like that. It smells really bad, and the people don’t even think about drinking it. Even when you want to brush your teeth, we don’t want to do it with that water.”

- Don Javier



Water Affordability

- Community members experience serious water quality and availability challenges
- Water affordability and water quality are linked
- There are well water concerns tied to past experience, poor regulation, and lack of protections for renters



What's Next

- Oregon Water Justice Framework (community priorities + policy agenda)
- Community leadership capacity building (help drive infrastructure + policy priorities)
- Movement building / network development in Oregon



Early Priorities for Action

1. Investing in culturally-specific organizations to do community engagement.
2. Broadening access to funding for all tribes, including those not federally recognized.
3. Allocating money for testing (by trusted sources), remediation, and replacement of domestic wells.
4. Investing in water policy education and water stewardship education that is designed or co-designed with tribes or BIPOC-led CBOs that serve BIPOC communities.

Recommendations for the Commission

1. Investing in community and state capacity for equitable water access
2. Community engagement, mobilization, and good practices
3. Including CBOs in the 2022 update to the Integrated Water Resources Strategy (IWRs)

“There is confusion around water quality and water sources, and how to interpret water bills ... affordability is a concern and water rates are too expensive for the quality of water our communities feel they are receiving. The solutions to the issue of mistrust and affordability can be addressed by continuing to center our frontline communities - who are being impacted first and worst - into decision-making spaces. Invest in capacity for community-based organizations to continue to engage with historically and present-day marginalized communities.”

- Jairaj Singh, Unite Oregon



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