

United Way of the Columbia-Willamette
**WILDFIRE RESPONSE
AND RECOVERY FUND**
2020-2021 REPORT



United Way of the
Columbia-Willamette

A MESSAGE TO OUR COMMUNITY

At United Way of the Columbia-Willamette (UWCW), we lead with racial equity. We know that structural racism and other forms of oppression contribute to persistent disparities in our region. Alongside our partners, grantees, and community leaders, we work to develop solutions that advance health, well-being, and equity for all.

Across the state, culturally specific and culturally responsive organizations stepped up to serve their communities during the 2020 wildfires. We prioritized grants to these organizations, as they became de-facto disaster rapid response teams, often having to put their regular missions to the side during the crisis.

This report captures what we learned from our grantees, as we work to build trust and redirect resources to organizations with deep connections in their communities. We know disasters exacerbate existing inequalities and disproportionately hurt the most vulnerable. We also know disasters provide opportunities to re-imagine the systems that shape our lives—and our grantees are asking for transformational change.

We are grateful to leaders on the frontlines, working diligently to uplift their communities. We are also grateful to our partners and funders, who share our commitment to centering racial equity in disaster relief and recovery.

We look forward to our continued collaboration.



Amanda Whalen
Chief Impact Officer
Disaster Response Initiative



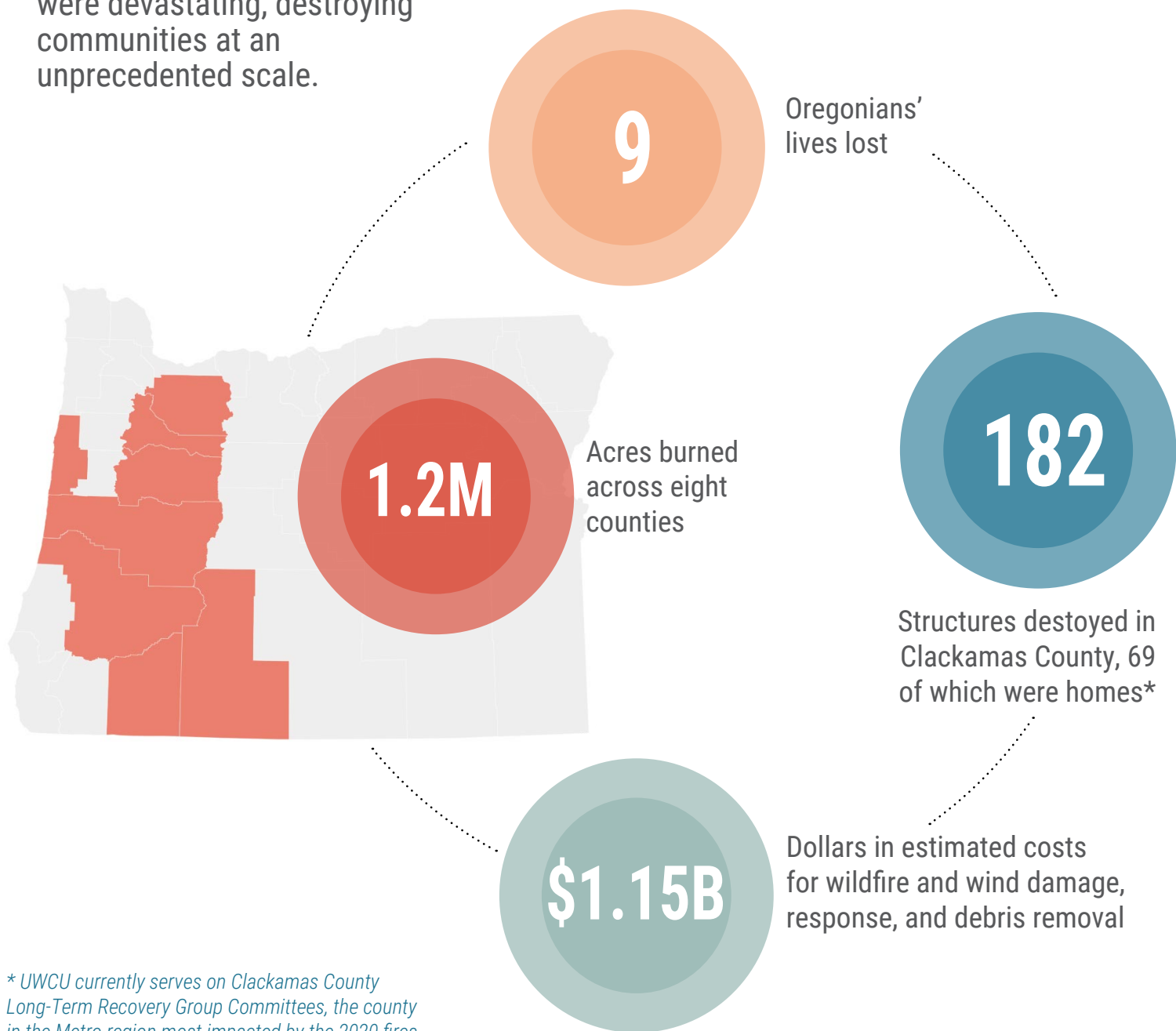
Cristy Muñoz
Program Manager
Disaster Response Initiative

Snapshot

2020 OREGON WILDFIRES

The 2020 Oregon wildfires

were devastating, destroying communities at an unprecedented scale.



* UWCU currently serves on Clackamas County Long-Term Recovery Group Committees, the county in the Metro region most impacted by the 2020 fires.

Source: Oregon Governor's Wildfire Economic Recovery Council. (Jan. 4, 2021). [Recovering & Rebuilding from Oregon's 2020 Wildfires: Key Findings & Recommendations](#).

In response to the 2020 Oregon wildfires,

United Way of the Columbia-Willamette (UWCW) launched the Wildfire Response and Recovery Fund, **raising more than \$700,000 to support 30 organizations** serving communities of color, low-income communities, and undocumented individuals.

AntFarm Youth Services*	LoveOne
BB Camp (B'nai B'rith Camp)	Micronesian Islander Community
Bridging Cultures	Native American Rehabilitation Association of the Northwest, Inc. (NARA)
Cascade Relief Team*	Oregon Food Bank
Catholic Charities	Pacific University - Sabiduría Program
Centro Cultural*	Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN)
Clackamas Long-Term Recovery Group*	Raíces de Bienestar*
Clackamas Service Center	Rural Organizing Project (ROP)*
Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians	The Hearth— De La Raíz Program
DevNW*	The Peacekeeper Society*
Estacada Area Food Bank*	The Stronghold*
Fires Igniting the Spirit	Todos Juntos
Hacienda CDC*	Unete Center for Farmworker Advocacy
Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice	Unite Oregon
Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO)	
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)*	



3 rounds of support



30 CBOs



18,600 households



97,600 community members

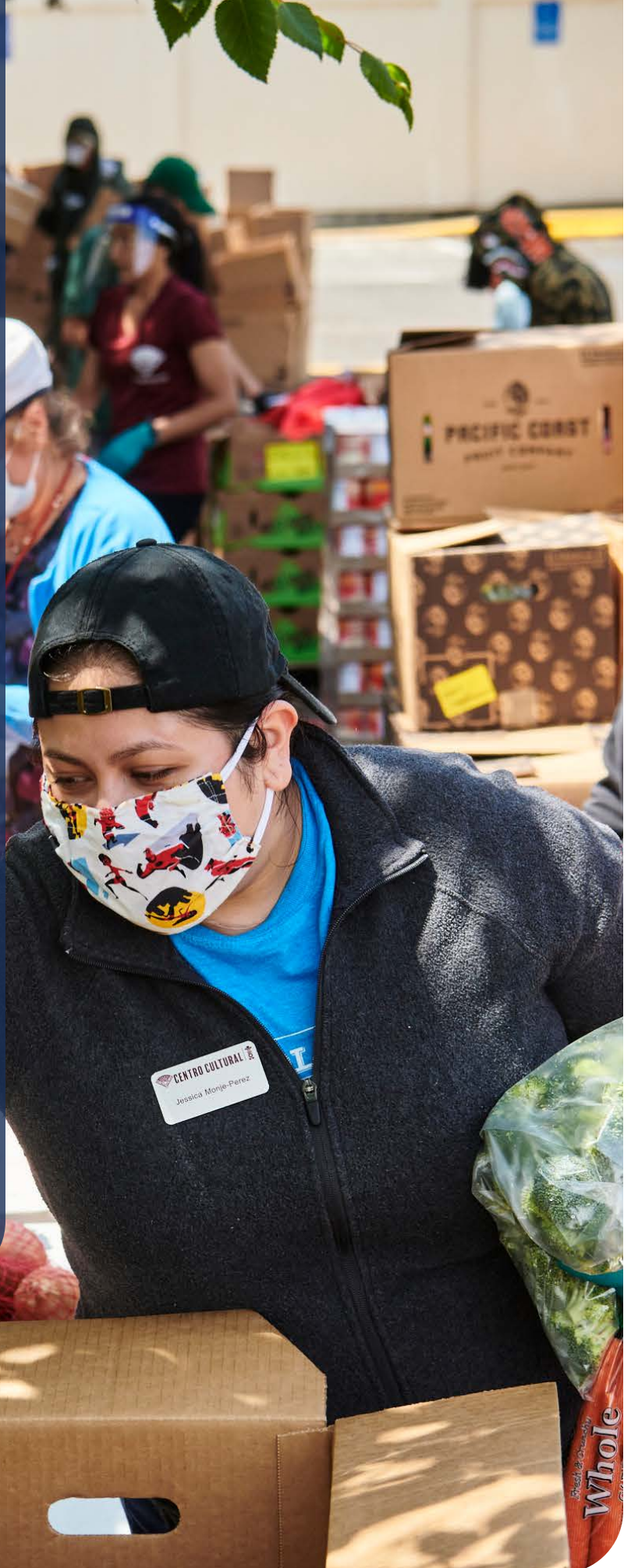
**Our most recent grantees have not submitted full reports*

Climate disasters disproportionately impact working-class communities of color by exacerbating existing racial, socioeconomic, and health disparities.

Traditional service delivery models do not address the unique barriers that these populations face, such as social isolation, dependence on public transit, limited English proficiency, reliance on medical equipment, and insecure housing.

RESILIENCE BEFORE DISASTER

*The Need to Build Equitable,
Community-Driven Social Infrastructure*



WHAT WE LEARNED

In response to the 2020 wildfires, United Way of the Columbia-Willamette (UWCW) invested in disaster relief and recovery for the first time. We listened to the experiences of community-based organizations (CBOs) activated by the wildfires. These initial conversations—and our long-standing commitment to racial equity—led to the launch of our trust-based grant making process. We prioritized unrestricted grants to: 1) culturally specific and culturally responsive CBOs and 2) CBOs serving low-income, houseless, and rural communities.

Through our grant making process, we heard again and again that Oregon's communities of color do not have the support they need during a crisis. CBO leaders identified profound gaps in culturally-appropriate communications, evacuation, shelter, and other systems intended to alert and protect the state's residents.

As we look toward healing, we must center racial equity in our disaster response and recovery systems. From meeting basic needs to ensuring multilingual and multicultural services are available, kids and families across Oregon must have access to lifesaving resources during a crisis. With partners across sectors, we hope to build our preparedness capacity and community resilience by engaging those most impacted by disaster to create the solutions we need.

We know that with the threat of climate change, disasters, like wildfires, are increasing. We need to meet the urgency of this moment—and listen to our state's vulnerable communities.

DISASTER RESPONSE & RECOVERY

CREATE CULTURALLY SPECIFIC AND RESPONSIVE SITES

PROVIDE ACCESSIBLE DISASTER PREPAREDNESS EDUCATION

ENGAGE CULTURALLY SPECIFIC & RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATIONS

OFFER ACCESSIBLE LOCATIONS FOR DONATIONS

RESPECT THE EXPERIENCES OF SURVIVORS

WORKING DIRECTLY WITH CBOs

GRANT UNRESTRICTED FUNDS

OFFER VIRTUAL REPORTING OPTIONS

LIMIT DATA REQUIREMENTS

EXPLORE DISASTER AGREEMENTS



GRANTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Our grantees offered a series of recommendations for disaster response and recovery

CREATE CULTURALLY SPECIFIC AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SITES

Traditional rapid response services are often coordinated through militarized entities (e.g., wearing badges, uniforms, carrying weapons, conducting ID checks) and lack culturally specific outreach, communication, and spaces. CBOs are often required to set up alternative sites to meet the needs of their community members.

PROVIDE ACCESSIBLE DISASTER PREPAREDNESS EDUCATION

CBOs expressed a need for accessible, family-friendly disaster preparedness outreach and education. Materials statewide must meet communities' needs, reflect their cultures, and be linguistically appropriate.

ENGAGE CULTURALLY SPECIFIC AND RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATIONS

Culturally specific and culturally responsive organizations are interested in developing long-term partnerships and building trust with their county's emergency disaster teams. CBOs hope to engage in preparedness and response coordination planning early on, not after a disaster occurs, and to be compensated for their time and expertise.

OFFER ACCESSIBLE LOCATIONS FOR DONATIONS

CBOs in the Portland metro region stated it was challenging to find a location that had easy access for community members to drop off donations.

RESPECT THE EXPERIENCES OF SURVIVORS

CBOs expressed concern with the number of requests they received to interview wildfire survivors, knowing that clients may be re-traumatized sharing their stories. CBOs do not normally take photos at relief sites and request marketing and media consider the dignity of disaster survivors.



GRANTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Our grantees offered a series of recommendations when partnering with community-based organizations

GRANT UNRESTRICTED FUNDS

Flexible funds allowed CBOs to help families in ways that would meet client needs.

OFFER VIRTUAL REPORTING OPTIONS

Eight of the 18 CBOs preferred to conduct their reporting via a one-time, one-hour Zoom meeting, indicating a strong desire for flexible reporting processes and relationship building.

LIMIT DATA REQUIREMENTS

CBOs noted that requests for specific headcount data in their grant reporting were unfeasible. During a disaster, CBO staff barely have time to meet the basic needs of their clients, let alone collect demographic information.

EXPLORE DISASTER AGREEMENTS

CBOs expressed interest in establishing disaster agreements prior to the onset of disasters, allowing faster grant processing times when future disasters occur.

OUR IMMEDIATE IMPACT



Communities needed essential services during the wildfires. The flexible nature of our unrestricted grants allowed CBOs to expand their staff capacity and support families where they live.

Wildfire grant funds were used in a variety of ways to help those impacted by the wildfires, including basic needs for health and safety, household stability, and CBO capacity.

Wildfire Fund Relief and Recovery grants were awarded to 30 CBOs working with communities of color and low-income communities across the state. UWCW grantees estimate serving over 97,600 kids and families.

Our Immediate Impact

BASIC NEEDS FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY

The gift cards have been a point of surprise and gratitude for many who receive them, and many of the families are speechless or have cried upon receiving them.

IMMIGRANT MUTUAL AID COALITION

Free laundry, showers, diapers, and personal hygiene items.

Food assistance, including gift cards, meal delivery, and culturally responsive options.

Energy support, including portable generators, utility payment assistance, and gas cards.

Temporary lodging and short-term rent assistance, as well as mortgage aid.

Clothing and temporary shelter (e.g., tents, tarps) for those who were displaced but not wanting lodging.

Distribution of personal protection equipment, including face masks, purifiers, inhalers, goggles, and more.



Our Immediate Impact

HOUSEHOLD STABILITY

A family of six and a family of three lost their homes to the fires. We assisted with the first mortgage payment to alleviate some of the stress and helped navigate resources for food and clothing for the clients and their children.

SAVE FIRST, CATHOLIC CHARITIES

Storage containers, including suitcases and plastic tubs for those who had been displaced, many of whom were transporting their belongings in garbage bags.

Direct financial assistance for adults who had suffered layoffs or reduced work hours due to the wildfires and COVID-19.

Transportation assistance for those who were displaced and Oregonians with disabilities.

Help for businesses and individuals to apply for loans, grants, and FEMA assistance to become financially secure.

Paperwork recovery support to replace important documents and forms of identification.

Rebuild homes with partners from across sectors, for families in Clackamas County.



Our Immediate Impact

COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION CAPACITY

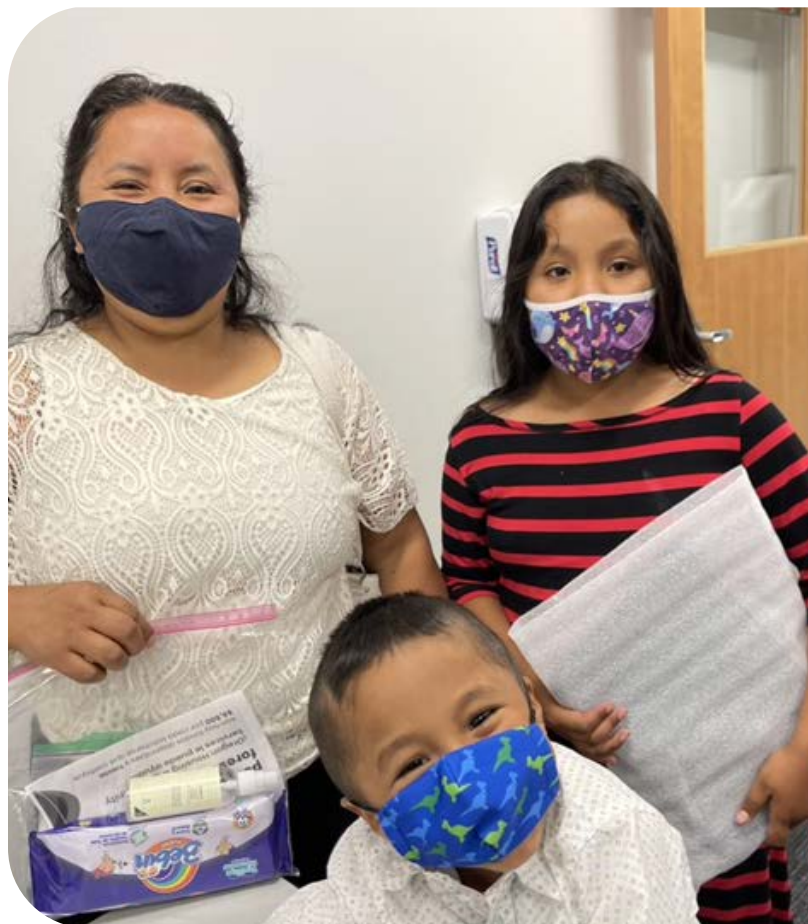
Wildfires are one of the most traumatic and devastating experiences a community can experience. Unfortunately, little is done to address the mental health effects of disasters on communities of color that already lack access to recovery resources. We need to consider the unique and diverse experiences of our communities and the power of community healing.

RAÍCES DE BIENESTAR

Training on disaster resiliency and preparedness, including resiliency and trauma-informed care.

Increased intake support capacity, including additional phone lines.

Temporary staff to handle increased community demand for services.



MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

CBOs consistently requested mental health and emotional wellness support for clients and their teams. During UWCW's second round of wildfire grants, we directed funds to Pacific University-Sabiduria and The Hearth-De La Raiz, programs specifically designed to address trauma and provide culturally grounded wellness to youth and adults directly impacted by the fires.

CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

We learned about the challenges CBOs faced and how they worked to meet clients' needs.

Wildfires during the COVID-19 pandemic made service provision more difficult.

Social distancing requirements at Clackamas Service Center made it challenging to provide on-site shelter and relief.

Grant restrictions can slow service delivery and prevent people from getting the help they need.

LoveOne reported that the rapid response funds from UWCW made it possible to provide services without running out of supplies.

Increased demand for services and resources made it difficult to meet the needs of community members.

Dividing limited funds, Todos Juntos gave direct assistance to as many people as possible.

Staff members made space to hear clients' stories while serving their communities.

Grantees, such as Unite Oregon and Unete, worked weekends and long hours to ensure clients felt supported.



What's Next

DISASTER RESILIENCE COLLABORATIVE PILOT

As the frequency and severity of natural disasters increase, culturally specific and culturally responsive CBOs will continue to play a critical role in supporting effected communities, particularly the Latinx and American Indian communities who were disproportionately impacted by the 2020-2021 natural disasters.

In partnership with the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and Trauma Informed Oregon, UWCW is piloting a Disaster Resilience Learning Collaborative program. The purpose of the project is to advance equitable disaster resilience through healing centered, culturally grounded collaborations and actions. We know that building resilience requires more than strengthening infrastructure and protecting natural resources. The learning collaborative is a space for statewide community of color leaders to build relationships, center cultural ways of healing, and reimagine how disaster response strategies can better serve their communities.

Healing-centered programs have the capacity to restore identity and those working with communities experiencing trauma need to support their own healing as well. Our first cohort will explore personal and collective power, with the goal of creating impactful systemic shifts rooted in wholeness and relationships.

We are proud to announce that all facilitators are community of color leaders dedicated to addressing wellness, healing, and resilience. All cohort members will be paid for their attendance and the grants will be unrestricted. We are looking forward to starting the Disaster Resilience Collaborative program in fall 2021—and to learning how we can move toward resilience together.

DISASTER COLLABORATIVE PARTICIPANTS

Bridging Cultures
Catholic Charities of Oregon
Centro Cultural
Centro de Servicios Para Campesinos
Familias en Accion
The Hearth
Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
Native American Rehabilitation Association NW, Inc.
The Next Door
Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN)
Rogue Climate
The Stronghold
Unete Oregon

