Preparing Oregon's Communities of Color for Disasters

Where we are and where we need to go

United Way of the Columbia-Willamette

United Way

Acknowledgments

United Way

United Way of the Columbia-Willamette

Riley Smith Photos

Table of Contents

> 66
>
> I feel like our lives have been split into before and after September 8 [the 2020 wildfires]. ... I know people who had really terrible experiences, and I don't want to see it happen again.

Unete

Introduction

This report combines ten months of data collection, analysis, and sense-making to understand Oregon's inclusive messaging landscape. Our findings and recommendations reflect the insights and perspectives of community leaders from across the state.

This Report

In response to the 2020 wildfires, United Way of the Columbia-Willamette (UWCW) invested in disaster relief and recovery for the first time. Through its grant making process, UWCW heard again and again that Oregon's communities of color[1] do not have the support they need during a crisis. Community-based organization (CBO)[2] leaders identified profound gaps in culturally and linguistically appropriate communications, evacuation, shelter, and other systems intended to alert and protect our state's most marginalized communities.

Through continued conversations with CBOs, public sector representatives,[3] and philanthropic partners, UWCW determined an evaluation of inclusive disaster preparedness messaging, materials, and resources for communities of color would clarify current gaps and urgent needs in Oregon.

UWCW invited disaster preparedness leaders from California to share their experiences and co-lead this inclusive messaging evaluation project: El Sol Neighborhood Educational Center and Tahan Consulting. Leaders from both organizations were integral to the Listos Campaign's success.

This report summarizes our project team's findings and recommendations. Throughout the data collection, analysis, and sense-making processes, we applied our project values.

Project Values

Empowerment
Every individual involved in the process feels supported by their interaction with our team, and each participant is viewed as an expert.

Representation
Our research processes and findings center the feedback and experiences of communities, organizations, and individuals represented in this report.

Collaboration
At every step, stakeholders from across sectors and communities were invited to provide insight into the direction of the work.

Accuracy
Our methods and findings are rooted in qualitative practices, supported by research, and thoroughly analyzed.

---

[1] For the purposes of this report, we define communities of color as communities that have been historically underserved and marginalized. Please visit the UWCW website to learn more about our approach to leading with equity.

[2] Community-based organizations (CBOs) are nonprofit organizations embedded in communities, working directly with community members to identify their needs and elevate their solutions.

[3] Public sector representatives are employees of government offices or agencies working in disaster or preparedness departments.

Why This is Important

Every person should have an equal opportunity to survive a disaster. Every family should have access to resources and information that will prepare them for the next emergency. Every community should be heard and represented between crises, so that they may continue to thrive after disasters strike.

Unfortunately, Oregon's communities of color, like most in the United States, are vulnerablized to disasters and emergencies. These communities deserve a more comprehensive approach and equitable access to linguistically and culturally relevant, life-saving disaster preparedness resources. We must understand what we are doing to support these communities, what we are missing, and how to ensure we are all prepared for the next disaster.

Inclusive Messaging in California

The State of California's Governor's Office of Emergency Services invested in the <u>Listos Campaign</u>, a statewide culturally responsive disaster preparedness campaign, reaching over 20 million people from 2019–2022. Developed with community members and community-based organization (CBO) guidance, the campaign was designed to reach people with low incomes, disabilities and language barriers as well as older adults and other highly underserved or marginalized groups.

This report does not specifically address underrepresented or underserved communities outside of communities of color. Although our project team is aware of the impact of intersectionality, we feel that the scope of resources and our project team's expertise are better suited for an in-depth examination into one area of inclusivity. We believe that all underrepresented and historically underserved communities deserve this level of investigation and encourage future projects focused on those populations.

This project does not explicitly focus on other aspects of the disaster field, outside of preparedness.[4] Again, our team believes that issues of inclusivity in response and recovery are also essential and look forward to exploring these areas moving forward.

---

[4] Disaster systems support communities before, during, and after a disaster. Disaster preparedness initiatives, materials, and messaging focus on supporting communities before a disaster. Disaster preparedness is part of the larger disaster response and recovery system.

Findings

Momentum is Building

Oregon is in a unique position to create opportunities and develop equitable, community-driven disaster preparedness initiatives. In particular, we find three foundational characteristics that demonstrate momentum for inclusive preparedness:

- Initiatives are already happening across sectors
- Organizations are increasing capacity
- Oregon is changing its emergency management structure

Barriers to Inclusivity

Across all sectors, individuals are ready and wanting to increase access and inclusivity. However, they also face significant challenges in this work. By uncovering these barriers, stakeholders will better understand what solutions and actions are necessary to move this work forward. Eight primary barriers to inclusivity include:

- Lack of statewide convenor
- Confusing communications
- Incomplete translations
- Low technology access and literacy
- Limited staff capacity
- Restricted funding
- Widespread distrust

Barriers to Inclusivity Special Focus
Outreach does not equal representation

Community voice, power, expertise, and collaboration are keys to successful and effective inclusive disaster preparedness initiatives for communities of color. Community engagement must be meaningful and must not stop at outreach. Our three sub-findings include:

- Integrate community members into decision-making processes
- Engage community leaders and public sector champions
- Hire and retain representative staff

93%

of participants want to increase community representation and participation in developing and administering disaster preparedness resources

Recommendations

While the findings of this report illustrate the successes, barriers, and needs within the State of Oregon's preparedness sector, the following recommendations present actionable steps stakeholders can take. This research uncovered three primary areas for opportunity, with eight actionable practices and strategies:

The Next Door

1

Work together differently

- Identify a primary statewide convenor(s)
- Support community-based organizations (CBOs)
- Expand cross-sector partnerships

Unete

2

Embrace meaningful community engagement

- Build trust with communities
- Identify and engage champions
- Hire representative staff

3

Invest in innovation

- Move beyond translation
- Develop new funding streams

By committing to these actions, Oregon can begin to build historic and first-of-its-kind inclusive disaster preparedness initiatives.

Our Definition of Inclusive Disaster Preparedness Materials and Messaging

Inclusive disaster preparedness materials and messages are linguistically and culturally accessible. This means documents, alerts, and outreach strategies are easy for community members to find, understand, and use. Culturally appropriate images, language, and references are woven throughout materials and messages.

Inclusive disaster preparedness materials and messaging require equitable and inclusive practices that incorporate an understanding of intersectionality. Community members know what their communities need. We need to elevate community members' expertise to develop, design, and disseminate meaningful products.

Our definition of inclusive disaster preparedness materials and messaging is rooted in the experiences of United Way of Columbia-Willamette (UWCW) grantees. Explore the UWCW Wildfire Response and Recovery Fund Report for more insights and reflections from the community.
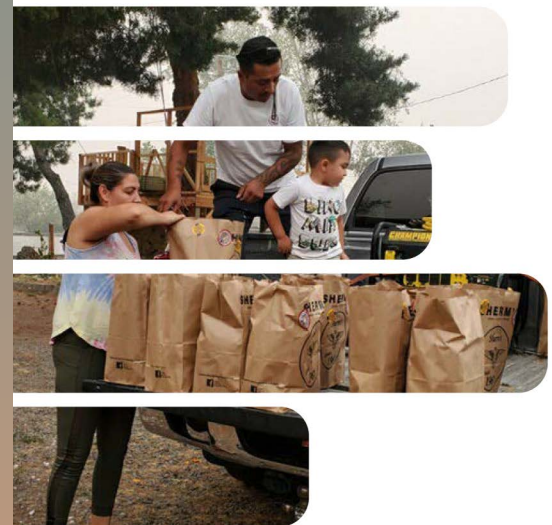
United Way of the Columbia-Willamette

WILDFIRE RESPONSE AND RECOVERY FUND
2020-2021 REPORT

Each methodological decision was made with the following values in mind: empowerment, representation, collaboration, and accuracy.

Methodology

Our methodology relied primarily on qualitative research methods, including interviews and focus groups. The qualitative methods were supplemented with survey data. Throughout the data collection process, we applied our project values.
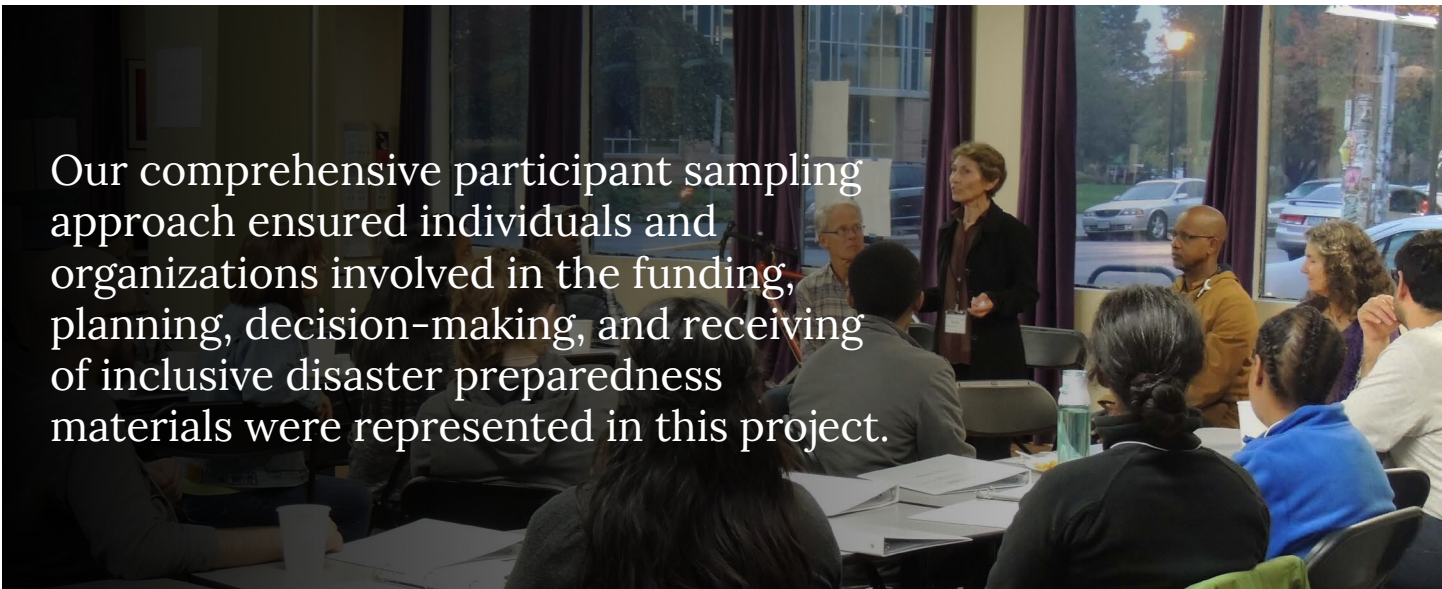
Participant Sampling

This project aimed to investigate the available resources, current gaps, and urgent needs related to inclusive disaster preparedness materials and messaging for Oregon's communities of color. We employed a targeted and intentional participant sampling to best match our desired outcomes and project values.

Specifically, our investigation and findings are rooted in the voices, understandings, and experiences of diverse individuals throughout the state of Oregon. This includes different sectors and level of positions, with participants from:

- Communities of color

- Community-based organizations (CBOs) who provide services to communities of color

- Disaster-focused public sector organizations or departments from the national, state, and local levels

- Philanthropic groups and large-scale CBOs, with a disaster focus and/or disaster funding

To deepen collaboration with communities of color and align with our project values and aims, we engaged community members, CBO staffers, and CBO executives. We applied this same rigor to recruiting participants from the public sector; our sampling population included county, state, regional, and federal emergency and health organization representatives. These individuals held positions that ranged from heads of communication, to emergency managers, to public information officers, to sheriffs. Finally, we partnered with non-governmental funders and grant makers, as they are often working alongside both CBOs and the public sector to provide resources in the disaster field.

Our comprehensive participant sampling approach ensured individuals and organizations involved in the funding, planning, decision-making, and receiving of inclusive disaster preparedness materials were represented in this project.

Unite Oregon

Connecting to Participants

After determining which populations to engage, we identified specific representatives.[5]

Community-based Organizations and Community Members

We invited community-based organizations (CBOs) working with different communities throughout Oregon to attend an introductory webinar, leaning on UWCW's already strong connections with community of color-serving CBOs and requesting recommendations from leaders within the community.

UWCW partnered with The Next Door, Unete, and Unite Oregon to strengthen our outreach methods. Engaging CBOs to recruit participants led to greater trust and collaboration between the project team and participants—and ensured our outreach methods aligned with our project values.

The Public Sector and Grantors

We engaged the public sector and grantor communities through UWCW's established relationships, disaster preparedness networks, and recommendations from trusted partners. We connected with vital leaders within disaster preparedness and inclusive messaging work, such as, but not limited to:

- Members of the Regional Disaster Preparedness Organization (RDPO)
- Oregon Office of Emergency Management (OEM)
- Oregon Health Authority (OHA)
- Emergency Support Function 8 Public Information Officers (ESF8 PIOS)
- County Emergency Managers.

With guidance from our CBO partners and public sector representatives, we engaged:

Community members and CBO representatives	**51**
Public sector representatives	**69**

[5] UWCW team members facilitated introductions between project consultants and key stakeholders. El Sol Neighborhood Educational Center and Tahan Consulting led all focus groups and interviews.

Community-based Organization Project Partners

By partnering with trusted community-based organizations (CBOs), we were able to engage with community members and CBO staff members. Our partner organizations serve communities of color across Oregon, often stepping into the role of disaster responders.

The Next Door

The Next Door changes lives and builds communities in the Columbia Gorge. The organization's mission statement: Opening doors to new possibilities by strengthening children and families and improving communities.

Unete

Unete, Center for Farm Worker Advocacy, is a movement of farm workers and immigrants that strives to empower and enrich the lives of both groups through education, cultural presentations, advocacy, representation in issues that affect their lives and organizing to defend immigrant rights.

Unite Oregon

Unite Oregon is led by people of color, immigrants and refugees, rural communities, and people experiencing poverty. The organization works to build a unified intercultural movement for justice.

Additional CBO leaders and community members were recruited through the Disaster Resilience Learning Network. During the 2021 Disaster Resilience Learning Collaborative pilot, UWCW, Oregon Health Authority, and Trauma Informed Oregon convened 28 leaders from 15 CBOs serving communities of color across Oregon. Explore Building Trusting Relationships and Collective Healing in a Time of Disaster to learn more.

Research and Evaluation Methods

We used a primarily qualitative research approach, supplementing our analysis with additional assessments. Specifically, the project team facilitated focus groups, conducted 1:1 interviews, created and distributed surveys, and completed a searchability assessment of already existing disaster preparedness materials.

Qualitative Methods

The project team designed a semi-structured interview and focus group protocol. The team conducted in-depth interviews with 26 individuals and facilitated 12 focus groups with 89 participants. To align with the values and goals of the project, two focus groups and two interviews were conducted in Spanish.

Each interview and focus group was delivered via Zoom and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Data were collected by notetaking and transcribed recordings through Otter.ai.[6] Data were coded, themed, and analyzed for insights and findings.

Interview Guide

Focus group and interview guides were developed to explore the current inclusive disaster preparedness messaging context and identify needs and opportunities for future work. Interviews explored the following topic areas, and questions in each category were tailored for CBO and public sector representatives:

- Introductions
- Current Initiatives
- Elements for Effectiveness
- Barriers, Gaps, or Opportunities
- Engagement and Partnerships
- Increasing Access and Equity

Please see Appendix A to review the complete guide.

120 participants

94 people in 13 focus groups
26 individual interviews

---

[6] Otter.ai is a transcribing software: https://otter.ai/.

Quantitative Methods

To supplement our qualitative data, we created and disseminated a survey in both Spanish and English. In total, we collected 78 survey responses. The data were analyzed through basic statistical analysis. Survey results are woven into the findings and themes of our qualitative research.

Survey

CBO and public sector representatives were invited to share experiences and recommendations through a survey. The survey instrument included the following questions; participants completed agreement scales and open-ended questions. Please see Appendix B to review the complete survey.

1. How inclusive and accessible do you believe Oregon disaster preparedness materials are to communities of color?
2. How inclusive and accessible do you believe Oregon disaster alerts are to communities of color?
3. What does inclusive and accessible mean to you?
4. Have you seen or do you have access to inclusive messaging and resources? If yes, what kind of materials and who provides it?
5. Are you a part of any initiatives around inclusive and accessible messaging, resources, and or alerts? If yes, what kind of initiatives and which organizations are involved?
6. What resources and conditions do you believe are necessary to creating and delivering inclusive disaster and emergency messaging/resources to Oregon's communities of color?
7. Who needs to be a part of the process to create statewide inclusive and accessible disaster preparedness materials and messaging?
8. What do you hope disaster preparedness looks like in five years?

Limitations

This project team appreciates and understands that many communities deserve this depth of investigation. However, our work is centered on communities of color and our sampling mirrors this focus. We also acknowledge that intersectionality plays a role in individual and community identity. Although we focused our report on a target population, these findings will have implications for other traditionally underrepresented and disaster-vulnerable communities.

" There is no real standard or common goal across the entire state of Oregon when it comes to BIPOC-targeted disaster preparedness. Because of this, our communities are really hurting.

Unite Oregon

Findings

Our research uncovered two primary types of findings for Oregon's inclusive disaster preparedness messaging and materials: momentum to increase comprehensive, coordinated, and accessible initiatives–and barriers to this emerging inclusivity.

Momentum is Building

"

I saw a messaging campaign that was disability specific. ... There were mostly young [people taking] a minute or two to talk about why they were getting vaccinated. It was just a really engaging approach–that I see as effective [for disaster messaging], especially with people of different cultures and races."

We found evidence of emerging inclusive disaster preparedness messaging, with signs of strong momentum and increasing commitment to this work. Our findings are organized into three sections:

Collaboration
Initiatives are already happening across sectors.

— Translating materials

— Creating inclusive messaging and alerts

— Gathering and sharing resources

— Leveraging complementary expertise

Capacity
Organizations are increasing capacity.

— Developing new teams

— Establishing funding

Structure
Oregon is changing its emergency management structure.

Collaboration
Initiatives are already happening across sectors

The qualitative and quantitative analyses show many community-based organizations (CBOs), public, and philanthropic partners are already working together. These cross-sector projects are centered on four primary themes: a) translating materials, b) creating inclusive messages and alerts, c) gathering and sharing resources, and d) leveraging complementary expertise.

Translating Materials

"I know that all of our social media goes out in English and in Spanish. And now other groups want it translated into other languages. We're starting to build that capacity and being able to provide those translations."

Participants shared that the translation of preparedness materials, programs, and related outreach efforts has been a primary focus for them and their organizations. Many expressed that language is one of the most powerful tools for connection, and therefore one of the biggest areas of disconnection when not properly addressed.

Projects that focus on translation are not only being created in the public sector at the national level by the Federal Emergency Management Agenda (FEMA), but are also being created at state, county, and local levels.

"Translation of alert systems is happening in Multnomah County, with utility service providers coming to ask the county to support them with translated messages as well."

Community-based organizations (CBOs) have invested a sizable amount of time, money, and staffing into translations for community members, too. CBOs also highlight areas for translation to be improved, specifically that messages must be available at accessible literacy levels and be culturally responsive.

One staff member explained:

"We've translated in Spanish and English—because a lot of information is in English, but it's really not in simple language. So even if [community members] can read in English, they sometimes don't understand it. So we try to make it very simple."

While another developed this further by adding:

"Translation needs to be culturally competent, too. Language is more than literally translating words."

Translation initiatives have begun to move beyond direct translation to be culturally responsive and linguistically accessible. Although momentum is building and some CBOs, along with stakeholders from other sectors, have included cultural and educational literacy in their translation process, it is important to note that not all organizations have incorporated these elements.

Creating Inclusive Messages and Alerts

One way inclusive messaging and alerts are progressing is through the development of statewide stock alerts.[7] Local jurisdictions will have stock alerts and messages they know are translated and culturally relevant–and are ready to go. An interviewee also explained that these types of stock alerts and warnings will be easier to disseminate, as Oregon has agreed to use a single communications platform called Everbridge.[8]

Prior to adopting Everbridge, each county decided what system to use for alerts and warnings. By moving to a single platform for all counties, Oregon now has the opportunity to improve messaging across the state.

Although Oregon is creating more inclusive disaster alerts, many interviewees and focus groups participants expressed the need for more messaging and alert resources. Inclusive messages and alerts is an area that many felt was, and to some extent still is, lacking in terms of community of color inclusivity. Many community members are not aware of the alert

"Now with alerts and warnings, we are using the same technology called Everbridge. This way we can set up systems to make sure that the alerts are available in different languages. We can also begin to set consistent standards on how many times alerts should be sent out."

systems. As one participant expressed: *"We have developed a community workshop around alert and warning systems. We are starting off with a pilot and then will move forward from there."*

Even with education and the translation of alerts and warnings, community members and CBOs believe that relying on the Everbridge style of alerts system is just not enough, particularly as it requires a higher level of technology literacy and internet or computer access. As one promotora expressed: *"In my experience as a promotora, I send a lot of text messages. I send mass messages."*

---

[7] Stock alerts are messages prepared in advance of disasters with commonly used directions or information for community members.

[8] Everbridge is the underlying technology for Oregon's OR-Alert system.

Gathering and Sharing Resources

Community-based organizations (CBOs), philanthropic groups, public sector departments and offices, and other organizations are developing and disseminating a variety of inclusive disaster preparedness resources. Participants shared that having a multi-pronged approach for the method of distribution is important. The messenger, how, and where you outreach matters.

Many CBOs also spoke about their utilization of community events, as well as connections to the school and their established relationships to community members. Some CBOs highlighted that integrating emergency and disaster response training or education opportunities with Community Health Workers or promotora teams increases community access.

"The [CBO] already has strong connections to the community. So when it comes to passing out materials I usually contact community members directly or go to church services or school programs."

Public sector partners, however, emphasized using county fairs and cultural events as primary distribution methods. These outreach strategies can be successful for general awareness raising and often include interactive components but are not integrated into existing programming to facilitate deeper relationship building with community.

"We attend a lot of the local fairs in order to engage communities of color. Actually, we are planning to pilot a new hashtag alert system at the fair to see how it works before trying to utilize it during times of disaster."

Our findings show that while CBOs have established trust with the community, some public sector and large-scale philanthropic organizations need to build relationships and find new avenues for connection.

Leveraging Complementary Expertise

"The approach isn't creating something for every community but rather creating networks so that people can learn from each other and collaborate in each other's efforts."

Cross-sector entities, such as the Regional Disaster Preparedness Organization (RDPO), Portland Bureau of Emergency Management (PBEM), and the Emergency Preparedness Advisory Council (EPAC), were not created with the sole purpose of engaging communities of color. But each entity develops disaster resilience with communities of color through collaboration—and by leveraging complementary skills, experiences, or expertise of partners and community members.

The data also show that collaboration is happening to strengthen specific resources. For example, as a result of a partnership, an agency was able to provide Spanish-speaking communities with a more relevant resource: *"One county took messages to a culturally specific CBO to check their translations and the CBO said, 'This is childish and doesn't culturally translate at all.'"*

In addition to the Spanish-speaking community, these cross-sector partnerships are supporting inclusive messaging for other communities of color and engaging community members in the development or dstribution processes. For example, a coalition engaged parents to identify ways to meet Native American youth disaster preparedness needs.

Capacity
Organizations are increasing capacity

> " We realized that to save lives we needed to invest in disaster preparedness. Especially if we wanted to engage Black and Brown communities. It's been pretty incredible to have staff devoted to inclusive initiatives, without them we wouldn't be able to get this work done.

Unete

While many entities need more resources for inclusive disaster preparedness, some sectors and groups have already started to increase their capacity.

Developing New Teams

Although many participants shared that they do not have staff devoted to inclusive disaster preparedness, larger-scale nonprofits—such as United Way affiliates, the Red Cross, and philanthropic foundations—have devoted funding to build new teams.

Some organizations have intentionally hired staff from communities of color in order to have more meaningful and trustworthy engagement. Data show that these hiring practices go a long way with community members. Indeed, many participants expressed how much more connected they felt to emergency preparedness initiatives when someone from their community was represented within the organization serving the community or providing resources.

Establishing Funding

Capacity is being built through the creation of additional funding streams. Although our findings show that there needs to be significant increases in funding and funding types, we also discovered that some organizations have started this evolution. For instance, philanthropic groups and the public sector are funding studies, such as this one, and are researching barriers to inclusion as well as solutions to these barriers. Within the CBO sector, we see some groups already investing in the community when it comes to inclusive disaster preparedness.

"[One CBO] is giving financial support to all the different communities in its area. It's a great help to all of these communities."

Structure
Oregon is changing its emergency management structure

One of the most significant changes in Oregon's disaster field is where the Office of Emergency Management (OEM), which has historically operated within Oregon's Military Department, will be situated. In July 2022, the Oregon Department of Emergency Management will become an independent state agency and some believe that this change will open up a path for more inclusive and community-centered disaster preparedness initiatives.

Most participants shared uncertainty about what this new structure will mean or what changes are in store, but many believe that avenues for new, less traditional, and more meaningful work will be available.
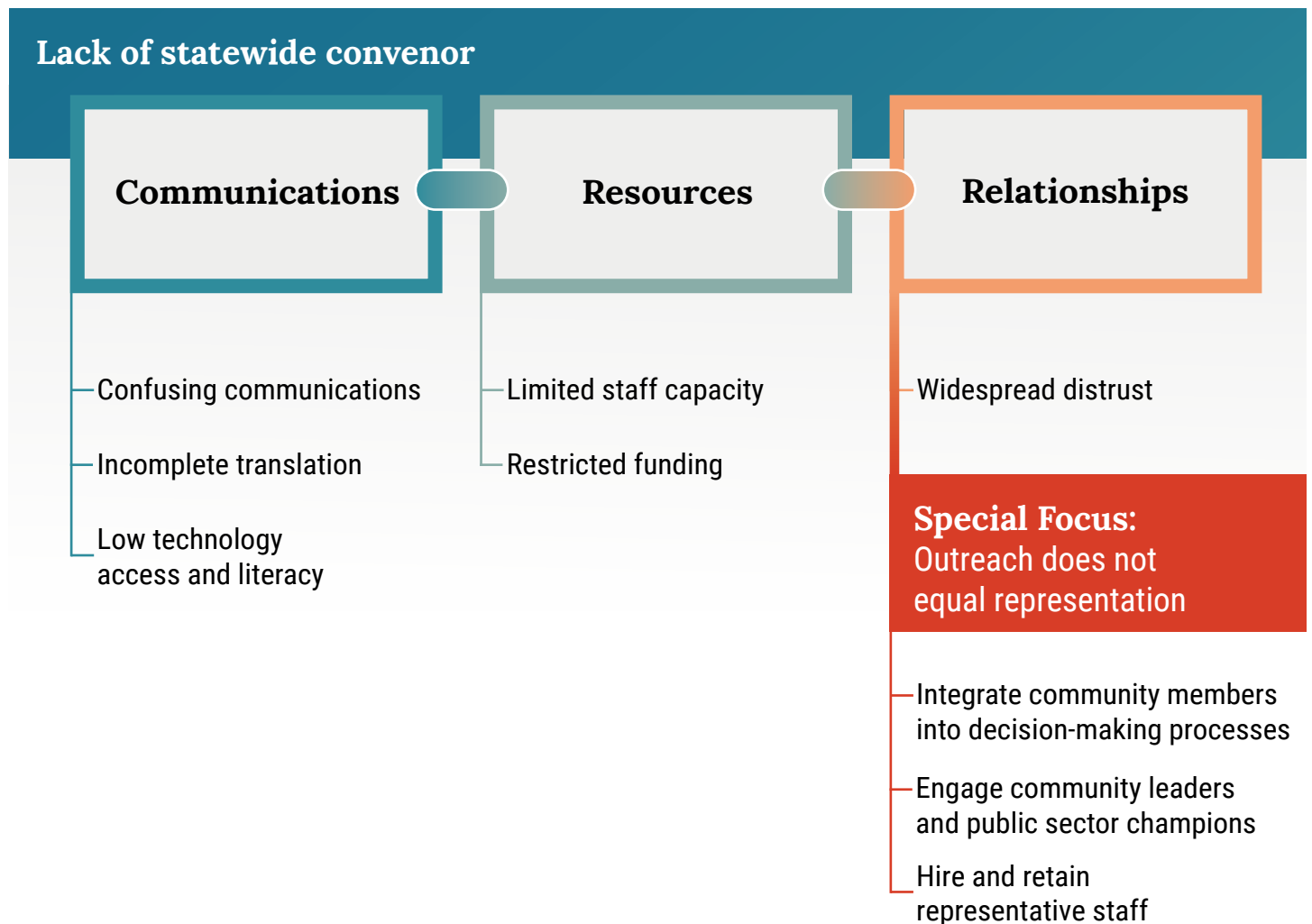
"

The disaster world is really traditional and people are set in their ways. I hope that with this [OEM] change there will also be room to make other changes and to bring new initiatives to the table. I think the time to act on targeted BIPOC preparedness is now, when people are already getting used to new things. We need to use this moment to progress this kind of preparedness forward.

Barriers to Inclusivity

Although there is significant progress and momentum across all sectors to create more equitable and inclusive disaster preparedness messaging, challenges remain, particularly when we consider message development and distribution in the context of broader initiatives.

We identified eight barriers to inclusive messaging initiatives. Our findings are organized into three themes: communications, resources, and relationships. Our special focus section includes three additional subthemes.

Lack of statewide convenor

Communications	Resources	Relationships

Communications
- Confusing communications
- Incomplete translation
- Low technology access and literacy

Resources
- Limited staff capacity
- Restricted funding

Relationships
- Widespread distrust

Special Focus: Outreach does not equal representation
- Integrate community members into decision-making processes
- Engage community leaders and public sector champions
- Hire and retain representative staff

Lack of Statewide Convenor

Our most resounding challenge: the lack of a statewide convenor.

Nearly 98% of our interviews, focus groups, and surveys identified this barrier.

Without a statewide convenor, participants identified difficulties creating standards across Oregon and understanding the current landscape of program and initiatives; some efforts are duplicated while other work falls through the cracks. Participants also expressed experiencing a general lack of support. These struggles and frustrations are in stark contrast to participants' sentiments towards traditional planning and preparedness, response, and recovery. In these areas, individuals felt confident in their work and knew where to look for statewide networking and leadership.

The lack of a statewide convenor impacts inclusive initiatives more acutely, with participants feeling frustration, burnout, and uncertainty. Stakeholders cannot meet the needs of the communities they strive to serve—and cannot support their peers and colleagues effectively.

"*Honestly, some days I just feel exhausted and hopeless. People's lives are at stake because of systemic racial oppression, and I don't see any state leadership stepping up and just owning it. I feel bad because [our organization] has other services that we have to provide and without resources and support I know that equitable preparedness is going to fall to the bottom of the pile.*"

"
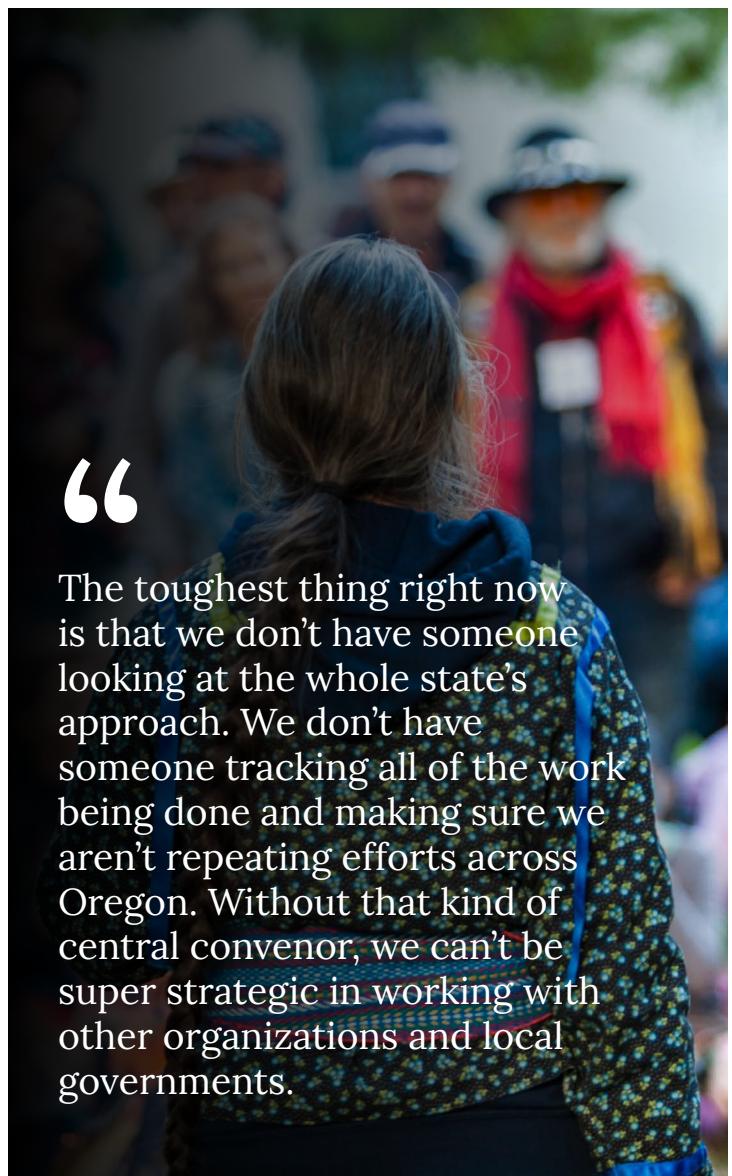
The toughest thing right now is that we don't have someone looking at the whole state's approach. We don't have someone tracking all of the work being done and making sure we aren't repeating efforts across Oregon. Without that kind of central convenor, we can't be super strategic in working with other organizations and local governments.

Communications

Confusing Communications

Inclusive disaster preparedness messaging relies on language and communication. However, stakeholders across sectors identified challenges related to shared terminology and finding the right pace for communications.

Lack of Agreement on Terms

Equity was identified as needing to be better defined and universally understood. A clear, shared definition was missing, with a disconnect between the use of the term and its implementation. One person of color and a public sector focus group participant shared:

"*All of a sudden, everybody's saying equity, equity, equity, and I don't think we knew what definition we were working off, or what equity really meant or that it meant different things to different people or to different groups.*"

Vulnerable surfaced as another term without a clear definition. Participants explained that there are two understandings of vulnerability in the context of disasters.

A significant number of participants expressed that before much more work could be done, we need to reach agreement on what words they use and what they mean.

Speed: Getting it Just Right

Participants identified pacing as another challenge. Some felt like processes and decisions were moving too fast—and others felt initiatives were not moving fast enough.

We heard this perspective from community members and CBOs that found communities of color voices were not thoroughly and meaningfully included in pivotal conversations; the appropriate amount of time was not taken to integrate their voices and decisions.

"*We moved into conversation so fast that we didn't even have time to catch up to ourselves as to what this work really means. What is it that we are even doing? Why are we doing it? Did we get the correct buy-in?*"

On the other hand, many focus group members and interviewees found some communication moved too slowly. Organizations are trying to get their messaging just right—and through bureaucratic systems—while people's lives continue to be in danger.

" When I talk about vulnerability I don't mean communities have some kind of weakness. I mean the system, as a racist institution, has created an environment and society where Black and Brown and Native people are more likely to die in disasters. The BIPOC community has been forced into a state of vulnerability.

Stacy Wegley

Incomplete Translation
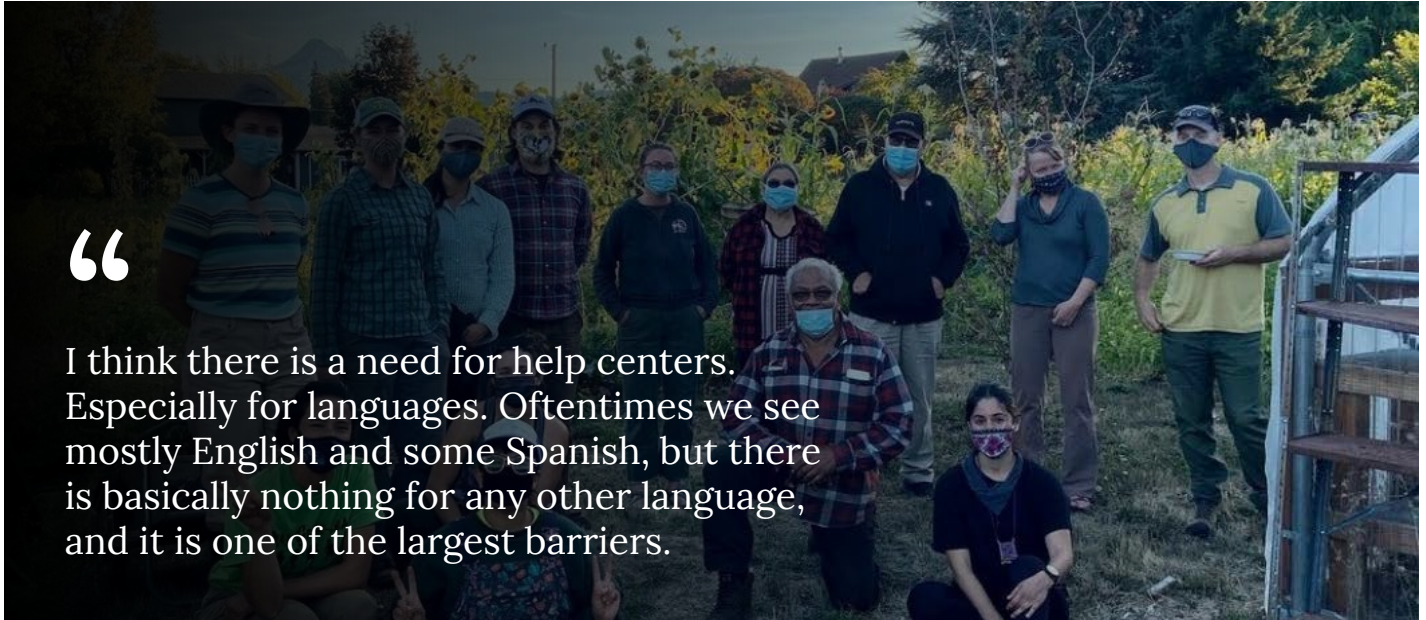
> **"**
> I think there is a need for help centers. Especially for languages. Oftentimes we see mostly English and some Spanish, but there is basically nothing for any other language, and it is one of the largest barriers.

The Next Door

Oregon is home to community members who speak many languages.[9] Participants noted the importance of translation and interpretation beyond English and Spanish—and the need for infrastructure to support these additional translations.

Direct translation is not complete translation. Inclusive messaging and meaningful translation must reflect the needs, experiences, and strengths of our communities in relevant and accessible language. While some organizations and agencies are moving to expand the languages available and to incorporate culturally responsive outreach strategies, many participants acknowledged that their work still centers on direct translation.

"In Clackamas County, we are missing culturally relevant resources. The only ones that I know of are for Covid, but there isn't anything for [emergency preparedness]."

Accessing Public Services

Equitable and inclusive disaster preparedness initiatives include service delivery. Messaging and alerts are not effective if community members experience barriers when connecting to public services. Community members seeking services did not always feel welcomed or encouraged to use the resources they needed. Cultural relevance, connection, and sensitivity at service sites—in the programs and spaces designed for community members—are essential elements of inclusive initiatives.

---

[9] The Regional Disaster Preparedness Organization (RDPO) is currently working to identify additional barriers to emergency services and programs, including language and literacy: https://rdpo.net/social-vulnerability-tools-project.
.

Low Technology Access and Literacy

> " One barrier we have in the Latino community is we don't know a lot about technology. A lot of us aren't really familiar with the internet or know how to set up an email.

Stacy Wegley

Lack of community access to technology was one of the largest barriers expressed across all sectors. Some community members do not own cell phones or smartphones, others do not have access to computers, and even more do not have access to stable WiFi or internet.

Latino and Native American community members have reported not being aware of alert systems, part of the barriers are due to not having knowledge on how to navigate technology or having limited to no access to the internet. These alert processes have been barriers to communities, especially since these systems often require registering online via an email address, which not all community members have.

One participant expressed, "*I know a lot of people that don't have access to things that I think the government takes for granted. Like all of these alerts, you have to have a phone…. You also have to have the internet, and*

*a lot of rural folk don't have that. Some urban people don't have it either because it can be expensiv*e."

Our data also indicate that technology barriers are not removed by access alone. Communities must have tools that match their needs and capacities, making it possible to find information through familiar and known pathways.

"*We've noticed all the families I've interacted with, they have a really hard time connecting because they also don't understand the technology, they don't understand how to log into zoom, they don't have the time.*"

As noted in previous sections, county representatives have also identified gaps between traditional preparedness alert systems and technology literacy, as systems often require having an email address or some familiarity with technology.

Online Searchability

Our project team investigated how easy it was to find online disaster preparedness materials. Resources were identified through a simple Google search. Fourteen websites and one handbook were evaluated for accessibility. The vast majority of resources were only available in English—often buried beneath many links—and required high literacy levels to understand.

Resources

Limited Staff Capacity

Although some organizations and offices have expanded their disaster preparedness teams, most participants expressed that one of the biggest issues they face is staffing. Nearly every community-based organization (CBO) we spoke to indicated that they were understaffed. The interviewees from the philanthropic sector echoed this sentiment: "We, like many of the other sectors, are also understaffed. Right now, I only have one person devoted to all of the disaster work."
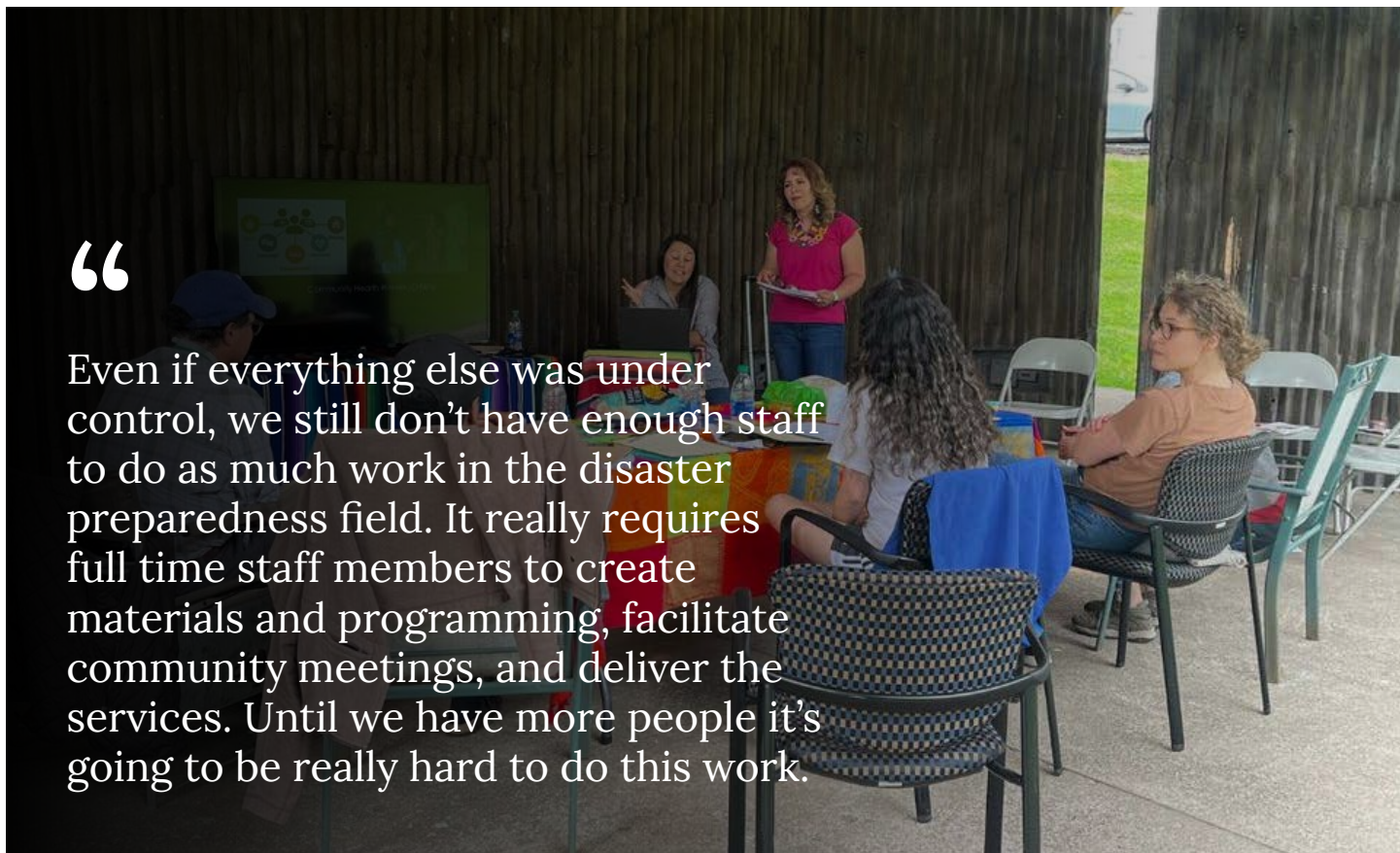
Not only are entities understaffed, but team members are also tasked with managing all disaster areas,

including targeted communities of color inclusive disaster preparedness initiatives. Many public sector participants shared that low staff numbers create barriers to equitable and inclusive initiatives—and seasoned staff members are experiencing high levels of burnout.

"*Some people have been working hard for years to create more inclusive disaster preparedness initiatives. We are burnt out and tired but we also know that we need to keep fighting to save lives, and to get more people working on this in our agencies.*"
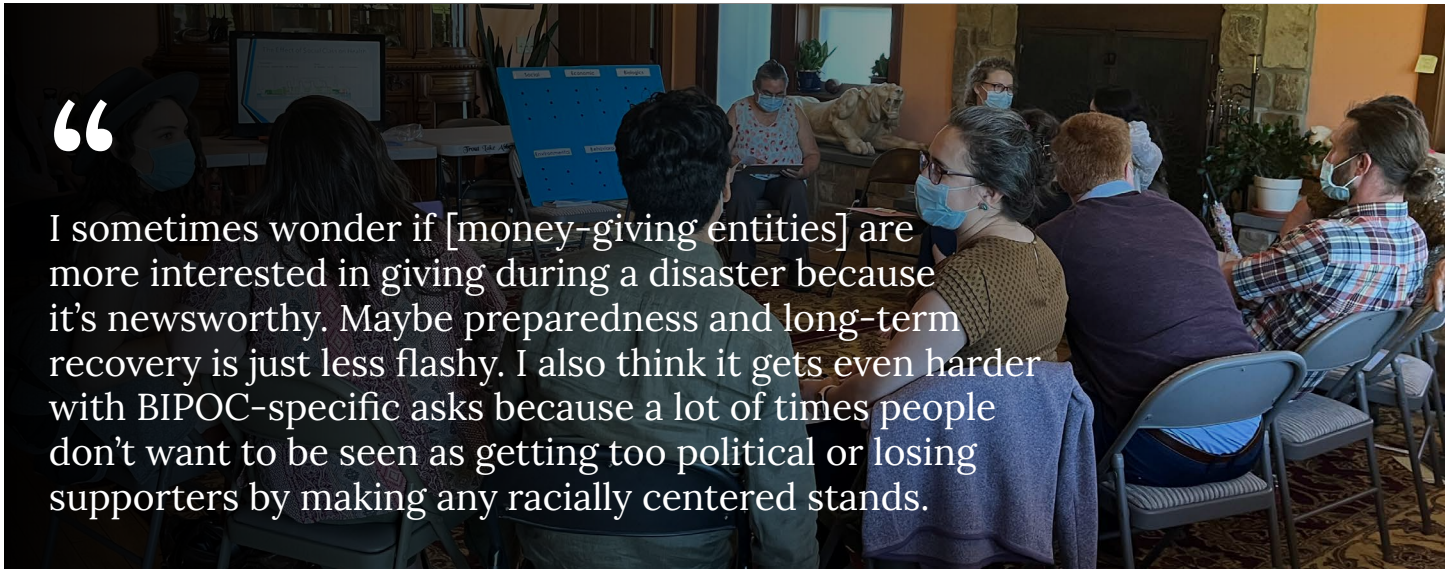

"

Even if everything else was under control, we still don't have enough staff to do as much work in the disaster preparedness field. It really requires full time staff members to create materials and programming, facilitate community meetings, and deliver the services. Until we have more people it's going to be really hard to do this work.

The Next Door

Restricted Funding

" I sometimes wonder if [money-giving entities] are more interested in giving during a disaster because it's newsworthy. Maybe preparedness and long-term recovery is just less flashy. I also think it gets even harder with BIPOC-specific asks because a lot of times people don't want to be seen as getting too political or losing supporters by making any racially centered stands.

The Next Door

Accessible funding is another barrier to inclusivity. Participants identified challenges related to the ways funders award grants and the limitations community-based organizations (CBOs) experience seeking funds they need.

Philanthropy

From some CBO and community member perspectives, philanthropy grants are mostly made during gray skies—in the aftermath of a disaster—rather than providing support during blue skies.

"*Philanthropy has to look at the communities and organizations that don't traditionally get picked or are underrepresented… Actually a native researcher coined this term of decolonizing philanthropy, and I think that's what we need for this kind of preparedness to succeed.*"

Concerns that funders may be hesitant to support community of color led organizations or initiatives were echoed throughout our data sources. Our interviewees from the philanthropic sector offered another perspective: The challenge is not a lack of desire or wanting to give only in response to disaster but rather that they are still "looking for [their] in." Funders felt they have to better understand the needs before investing.

Accessing Funds: CBO Limitations

CBOs cannot always reach communities of color with life-saving disaster preparedness materials because many do not have the funding needed to do the work and do not have the means to access those funds. Data show that CBOs experience roadblock after roadblock during the grant making process, including the grant application itself, limited access to multi-year funds, and restricted funds.

In addition to short-term or non-renewable funding, it is difficult to find funds for program expansion. Many focus group members explained that if a program is doing well—and requires an increase in funding to meet the growth of service—expansion funding is nearly impossible to find. Some participants shared that successful programs tend to lose funding rather than grow to meet its demands.

"*Without repeat funding, it's hard to invest time into initiatives that we know aren't sustainable. It could mean sitting around with boxes of new materials that we can't pass out, or new programs developed that we can't actually deliver, or staff that have to be let go.*"

Relationships

Widespread Distrust

> " Our people are scared and untrusting of government programs and the police. I have to say it—they're very racist. They're dominated by white people, and our people are scared of them because we don't speak the language and the police/sheriffs don't speak Spanish. When something happens in their community, they won't reach out.

Communities Don't Trust the Government

Community members do not trust local, state, or federal government agencies, citing experiences of racism, violence, and inadequate support from first responders. Distrust is exacerbated in communities where preparedness efforts are run out of the sheriff's office.

Public sector representatives want to repair relationships between government agencies and communities; state or local government initiatives will not be effective until more meaningful connections are developed. Public sector participants, however, shared that they are overwhelmed with daily tasks, making it difficult to prioritize trust-building activities and strategies:

"*Me and my colleagues want nothing more than to connect and build trust with the BIPOC community. We just want to do it well and to put the right effort in and the time that it deserves. And sometimes it's hard to find the resources and the time but we have to do it, and we can't keep making excuses.*"

Organizations Don't Trust Each Other

The data show that there is also mistrust within the community-based organization (CBO) community. National organizations are not as deeply connected to communities as their grassroots counterparts—and previous decisions and investments of these larger organizations have harmed communities of color.

"*We have found that even in the nonprofit sector, choices have been made that have really divided the community and made BIPOC folks weary of interacting with larger, more well-known organizations. This is tough since they have the funding that we need or even the resources that the community needs.*"

Barrier to Inclusivity Special Focus:
Outreach does not equal representation

"

We need to have more connection with the spiritual community, artists, and musicians. We need to connect with the culture of BIPOC communities on levels that are felt and that are authentic.

Data show that intentional and meaningful community representation within all aspects of inclusive disaster preparedness messaging is key to effective and successful initiatives. From funding to planning to development to dissemination, communities must be engaged.

When asked how public sector agencies, offices, and departments engaged with communities or encouraged community representation, they often referred to tabling at cultural events or county fairs. As one public sector interviewee explained: "A lot of our engagement with the community is by going to cultural events and passing out information and talking to people about preparedness."

Community-based organizations (CBOs) and community members, however, did not discuss tabling activities. Rather representation and engagement to CBOs and community members meant being invited as community experts to decision-making tables, engaged as community leader liaisons, or hired as staff members.

Unite Oregon

Integrate Community Members into Decision-Making Processes
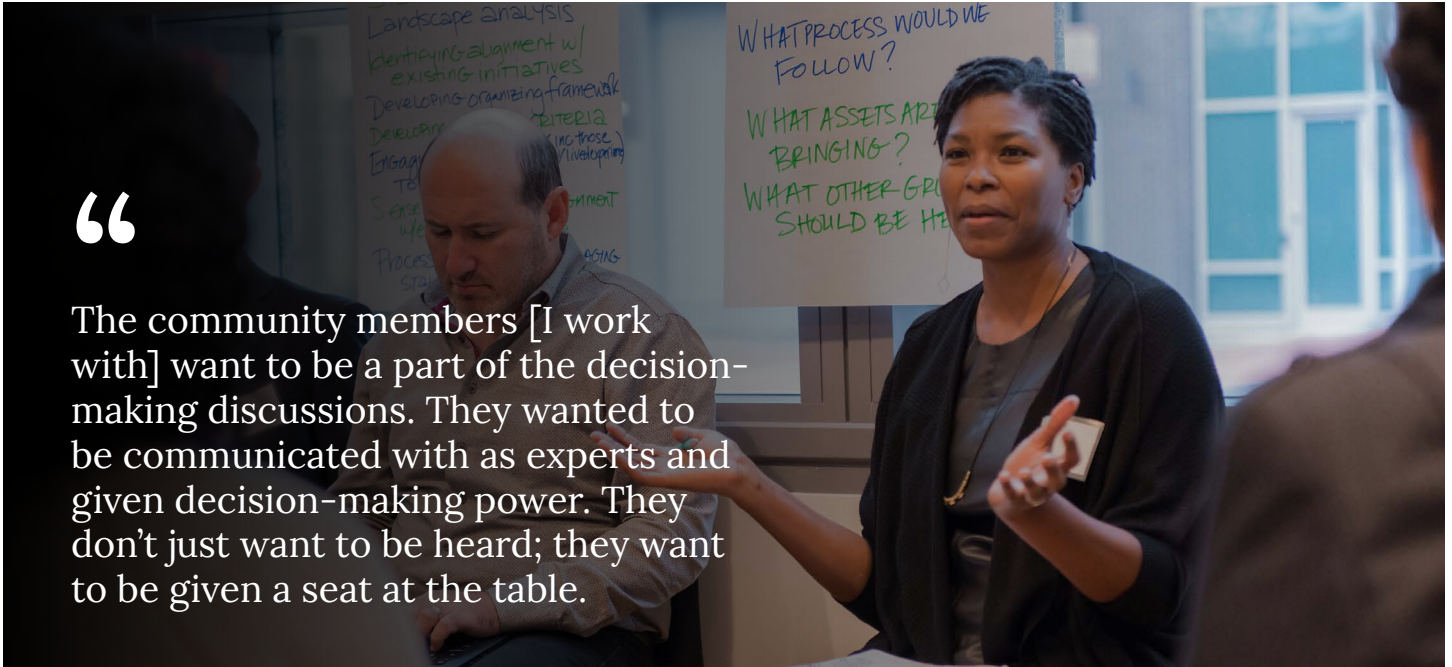
> " The community members [I work with] want to be a part of the decision-making discussions. They wanted to be communicated with as experts and given decision-making power. They don't just want to be heard; they want to be given a seat at the table.

Stacy Wegley

We learned from many community members that it is difficult to know how to get involved and to get a seat at the decision-making table. It is particularly challenging to participate in the disaster field, as it is well established and, as one interviewee said, "thrives on tradition and doing things the way they have always been done."

This sentiment was echoed by community-based organizations (CBOs), community members, and public sector representatives. When stakeholders are able to overcome barriers to deeper engagement, initiatives are stronger. As one county-level staffer expressed:

"When we have fully engaged the community at every level of an initiative, the work has been more successful and fulfilling. It takes extra effort on the front end and requires a lot of open and honest communication but nothing compares to a truly representative project. It really feels different."

While some groups have been able to create space for more meaningful engagement, this is still not the case in every instance. A CBO executive explained that this kind of representation is not only needed within government but also within CBOs:

"And we're also going back to the community to get them involved and get their voices, to help support the work or to say 'no, this is not gonna work, it's gonna work for you who has your home, you have a phone, you have a car, you don't have to worry about this kind of stuff'...really getting diverse community voices to the table, because we can't speak for all of them."

Engaging Community Leaders and Public Sector Champions

While some community-based organizations (CBOs) and community members express challenges connecting to government initiatives, some public sector entities also find it difficult to engage community members and CBOs. Participants with successful community engagement practices developed relationships with community leaders and public sector champions.

One CBO executive highlighted this point when commenting:

"The Tribal Emergency Coordinator out of the Office of Resilience and Emergency Management with the Oregon Department of Human Services has definitely helped to support [us] by bringing up some of the conversations our neighbor coalition has advocated for."

A FEMA staff member illuminated the importance of having a connection to community leaders:

"When we have been able to find respected leaders in communities of color or CBOs that are viewed as leaders, it really makes it easier to connect with more community members and to develop richer community representation."

Outside of being representatives themselves, community leaders are able to be the conduit of trust-building in order to bring in more community members.
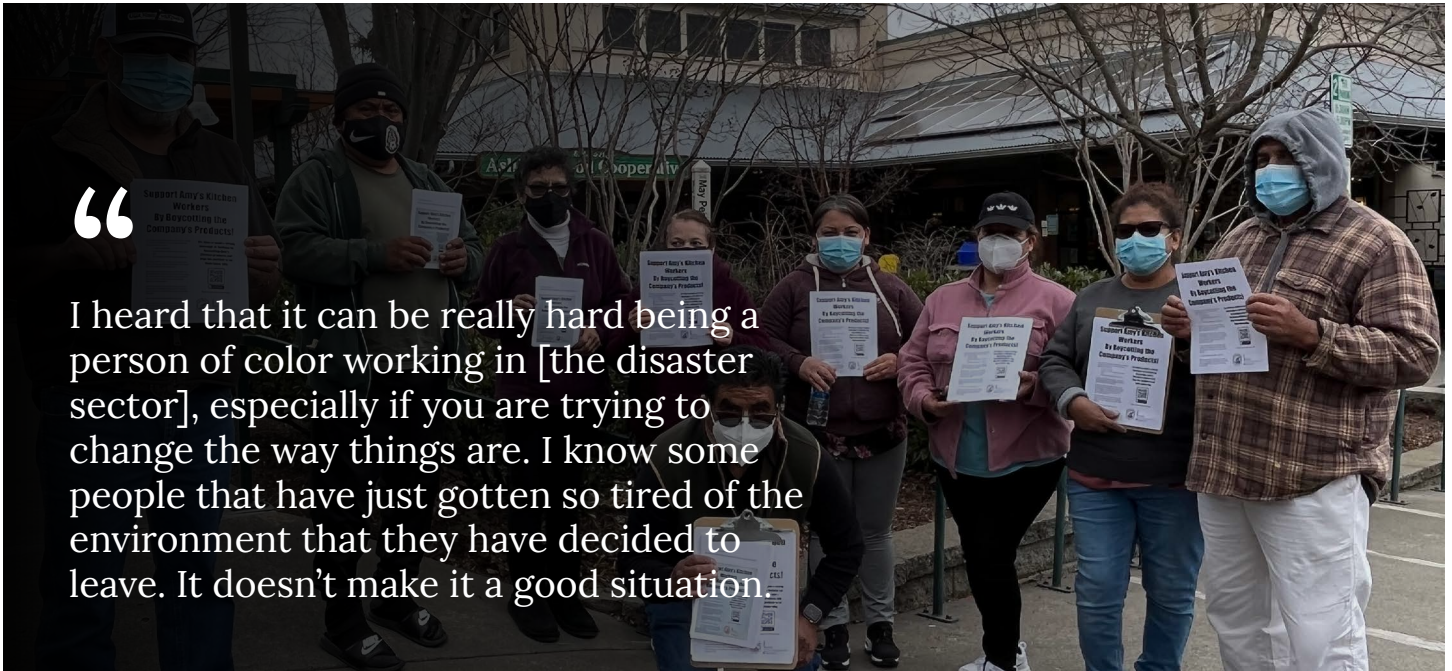

" When we have been able to find respected leaders in communities of color or CBOs that are viewed as leaders, it really makes it easier to connect with more community members and to develop richer community representation.
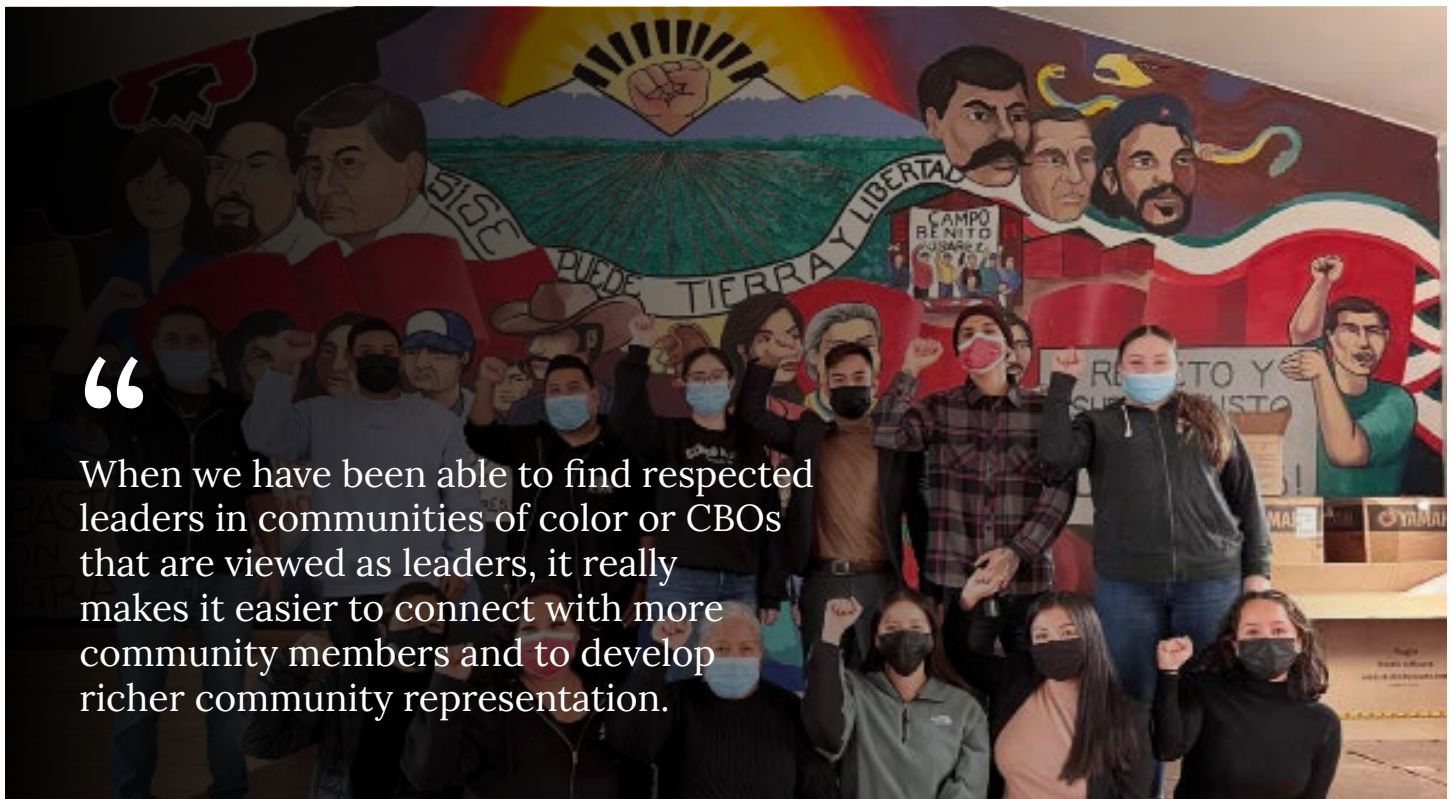
PCUN

Hiring and Retaining Representative Staff

"

I heard that it can be really hard being a person of color working in [the disaster sector], especially if you are trying to change the way things are. I know some people that have just gotten so tired of the environment that they have decided to leave. It doesn't make it a good situation.

Unete

Finally, across all sectors we found it is very important and meaningful to have community representation as full-time hired staff in the public sector as well as in large-scale, community-based organization (CBO) and philanthropic groups. Participants noted that having staff who represent the community leads to more successful outreach efforts.

A community member explained that a reason she would like to see more staff of color is to have greater linguistic connection:

"*I think that the whole community would have liked to see more people who speak Spanish. Many of us don't understand [English]. I think that would be something amazing that we would have loved to see as during the moment of the fires.*"

The data also uncovered that hiring representative staff is just the start, the second piece is retention. Creating systems that facilitate onboarding, engagement, and support ensure staff members feel connected to the work—and like they belong in the organization.

Although community members and public sector staff agree that having people of color represented on staff is important, if they are not retained this can then make community engagement even more challenging.

> "
>
> With what happened here in Rogue Valley with the fires, various towns burned down. We need to see culturally and ethnically representative materials that are in our language in ways that our communities can really receive and understand.

Recommendations

Our final section responds to project findings, offering recommendations designed to leverage momentum as we address barriers. All stakeholders committed to equitable and inclusive disaster preparedness materials and messaging can adapt these actionable practices to their programs, organizations, initiatives, and partnerships.

Work Together Differently

We need to situate inclusive disaster preparedness messaging and materials in comprehensive, equitable initiatives to meet community-identified needs. This means working together differently: sharing information and coordinating efforts to ensure cross-sector projects are complementary, not duplicative.

Taking Action

Community-based organizations, public sector agencies, and philanthropic partners can work together differently by:

1

Identifying a primary statewide convenor(s)

Statewide work requires statewide leadership and the necessary infrastructure to support collaborative learning and action, including common language, asset maps, and project directories. Identifying statewide convenors will ensure stakeholders know where to turn for information, ideas, and guidance.

2

Supporting community-based organizations

Community-based organizations need consistent funding that fully covers their costs and breaks the cycle of chronic under-investment. They also have varying levels of disaster preparedness experiences and resources—and need spaces for peer learning, coaching, and connections.

3

Expanding cross-sector partnerships

Expanding cross-sector partnerships is a powerful way to accelerate current momentum. Hosting a cross-sector disaster preparedness conference will bring stakeholders together, increasing opportunities to deepen coordination and spark innovation.

Embrace Meaningful Community Engagement

Our community members are context experts, with deep wisdom and lived experience. Meaningful engagement means listening to and learning from communities, ensuring processes are open and accessible, and centering the needs of people most impacted by disasters.

Taking Action

Community-based organizations, public sector agencies, and philanthropic partners can embrace meaningful community engagement by:

1

Building trust

Create trust through relationship building by showing up, slowing down, asking questions, and engaging in dialogue.

2

Identifying and engaging champions

Champions are leaders who bridge experiences, find common ground, and create connections. Identifying and engaging champions ensures information and feedback flow across sectors, communities, or organizations.

3

Hiring representative staff

Hiring representative staff means community voices are woven across organization operations, not limited to outreach efforts. Bringing community members into staff and leadership positions demonstrates how organizations value the lived experiences, relationships, and expertise of communities.

Invest in Innovation

Disaster preparedness leaders have designed important and essential systems. By building on what we know works and changing what doesn't, we can experiment, learn, and innovate together. We need to ensure inclusive disaster preparedness messaging and materials meet the needs of all Oregon communities—and we need the funding to do it.

Taking Action

Community-based organizations, public sector agencies, and philanthropic partners can invest in innovation by:

1

Moving beyond translation

Translation is not enough. Communities need culturally relevant materials in media and formats that reflect their values and identities. These materials must be disseminated in ways that are easy to access, understand, and share.

2

Developing new funding streams

Stakeholders committed to equitable and inclusive initiatives need flexible, responsive funding. These funding streams must support preparedness between crises, building capacity now to respond to and recover from for the next disaster.

Appendix A
Interview Guide

Introductions

1. Where are you in Oregon? Tell us more about your agency and your role.

2. How would you describe the populations you serve?

Current Initiatives

3. What culturally specific disaster preparedness initiatives are happening in your area?

4. What are examples or "bright lights" of inclusive preparedness in Oregon?

Elements for Effectiveness

5. What are you (or your team) doing in disaster preparedness that is working well?

6. What elements or characteristics make these approaches most effective?

Barriers, Gaps, or Opportunities

7. What gaps in preparedness (and alerts) need to be addressed in order for communities to be safest in your local area or region?

8. What do you or others in your region need in order to make progress in this area?

9. What solutions do you recommend for creating disaster preparedness materials for your communities/communities of color?

Engagement and Partnerships

10. Does your work engage with community members and CBOs?

11. In what ways are you seeing the philanthropic sector engaged? The private sector?

Increasing Access and Equity

12. What are the ways in which your resources, or resources you know, speak to issues of intersectionality?

Appendix B
Survey

Oregon Disaster Preparedness: Inclusivity for Communities of Color

1. What organization or agency do you work with?

2. What is your role at this organization or agency?

3. Does your organization or agency currently do disaster work? If so, how and or what type?

4. Does your work focus on serving specific communities of color? If so, which?:
   - African
   - Asian
   - Black/African American
   - Hispanic/Latino
   - Indigenous
   - Native American
   - Middle Eastern
   - Native American/ Pacific Islander
   - North African
   - Slavic
   - Multi-Racial
   - Other (please specify)

5. How inclusive and accessible do you believe Oregon disaster preparedness materials are to communities of color?
   - Not at all
   - Somewhat
   - Very
   - Extremely

6. How inclusive and accessible do you believe Oregon disaster alerts are to communities of color?
   - Not at all
   - Somewhat
   - Very
   - Extremely

7. What does inclusive and accessible mean to you?

8. Have you seen or do you have access to inclusive messaging and resources?
   - Yes
   - No

9. If yes, what kind of materials and who provides it?
   - Example 1
   - Example 2
   - Example 3

10. Are you a part of any initiatives around inclusive and accessible messaging, resources, and or alerts?
    - Yes
    - No

11. If yes, what kind of initiatives and which organizations are involved?
    - Example 1
    - Example 2
    - Example 3

12. What resources and conditions do you believe are necessary to creating and delivering inclusive disaster and emergency messaging/resources to Oregon's communities of color?

13. Who needs to be a part of the process to create statewide inclusive and accessible disaster preparedness materials and messaging?

14. What do you hope disaster preparedness looks like in 5 years?

Thank you

to the community members, organizations, and partners who contributed to this report.

United Way of the Columbia-Willamette

United Way