

## A PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP FOR AN ACCURATE CENSUS COUNT

*As a part of our Democracy Lens tools, for each state in our region, we report a data snapshot and case studies (called Bright Spots) about philanthropy's role in democracy. You can access all these data and Bright Spots on the [Democracy Northwest webpage](#).*

The census is a constitutionally required once-per-decade survey of everyone in the United States. Its data is used for legislative redistricting and for distributing federal funding across more than 300 programs<sup>1</sup> - over \$1.5 trillion in Fiscal Year 2017,<sup>2</sup> including \$19 billion toward Oregon.<sup>3</sup> With the state's population growing by more than 9% since the 2010 Census,<sup>4</sup> Oregon would qualify for more funding and potentially another congressional seat.<sup>5</sup> However, an undercount could reduce funding. Oregon's population includes 1.3 million people from hard-to-count (HTC) groups,<sup>6</sup> including people in remote areas, young children, people of color, tribal communities, immigrants, renters and those with limited internet access, among others. Reductions in Census Bureau funding can contribute to an undercount, as well as reluctance by people to complete the survey due to suspicion of the government and data security concerns.<sup>7</sup>

### Largest Census-Guided Programs for Oregon in Fiscal Year 2016 (in Millions \$)\*<sup>8</sup>

Medicaid	\$6,686	Lower Income Housing Loans	\$376
Student Loans	\$1,298	Pell Grants	\$319
Nutrition Assistance (SNAP)	\$1,073	Housing Vouchers	\$246
Highway Funding	\$507	State Children's Health Insurance	\$211
Medicare Part B	\$490	Temporary Assistance to Needy Families	\$184

\*Based on a sample of 55 programs

## Creating a Partnership to Prepare for the 2020 Census

Philanthropies in Oregon noticed that with so much funding at stake along with a congressional seat, the government seemed ill-prepared and underfunded for the 2020 Census. Adding to that, the state's 2010 Census participation rate only hovered around the national average of 67%.<sup>9</sup> Jesse Beason, president and CEO of the [Northwest Health Foundation](#), and Lauren Gottfredson, community collaborations senior manager at the [United Way of the Columbia-Willamette](#), believe these reasons spurred funders to create the [Census Equity Funders Committee of Oregon](#) (CEFCO) in January 2018 to collectively address these challenges as funders.<sup>10</sup>

Managed by the United Way of the Columbia-Willamette, the 17 private funders of CEFCO leveraged its initial funds of \$1 million to result in \$8.1 million in public funding toward their census work.<sup>11</sup> The group ultimately raised \$1.4 million in private funding, leading to a total of over \$9.5 million under CEFCO's management.<sup>12</sup> Gottfredson noted that funders' proactivity helped philanthropy plan further ahead than the government and build public-private partnerships, especially as the need for resources to support a complete count became more apparent.<sup>13</sup> In collaboration with public partners, including the State of Oregon and City of Portland, CEFCO developed an aligned outreach strategy with the pooled fund.<sup>14</sup>

### The Census Campaign

In November 2018, CEFCO launched a Request for Proposals (RFP) to find a coordinator for their census campaign, [WeCountOregon](#). It chose Dancing Hearts Consulting, LLC, which helped CEFCO contract out elements of the census work, ranging from building infrastructure to field outreach.<sup>15</sup> Many of the campaign staff at Dancing Hearts Consulting and their 12 partner organizations who led field operations were women of color, who used community-driven messaging to help expand census awareness in HTC populations.<sup>16</sup>

At the end of 2019, the next RFP released \$2 million in grants for nonprofits, tribes and government agencies to set up census assistance centers that primarily serve HTC populations.<sup>17</sup> This was the most widely distributed funding in the campaign, with 48 grantees ranging from large social services organizations to small community groups.<sup>18</sup>

### CEFCO Membership

- Cambia Health Foundation
- Comcast
- Grantmakers of Oregon and Southwest Washington
- Gray Family Foundation
- Lamb Foundation
- Lora L. and Martin M. Kelley Family Foundation Trust
- Meyer Memorial Trust
- North Star Civic Foundation
- Northwest Area Foundation
- Northwest Health Foundation
- Oregon Community Foundation
- PacificSource Foundation for Health Improvement
- Pride Foundation
- Spirit Mountain Community Fund
- The Collins Foundation
- The Ford Family Foundation
- United Way of the Columbia-Willamette

## Switching Gears in a Pandemic

The campaign has engaged many people throughout the 2020 Census timeline. An April 1, 2020 livestream that aimed to reach 250 participants reached 550, with another 2,500 seeing a recorded version. Digital events like this became preeminent due to COVID-19 reducing the safety of in-person contact during the 2020 Census. Fortunately, the campaign had



numerous remote communication methods built in already, including texting, video conferencing and social media efforts with prizes, and field teams transitioned to do more remote outreach.<sup>19</sup> CEFCO's relationship with the governor's office also made coordination around the pandemic smoother. Despite the challenges of COVID-19 and the lingering lack of trust in government surveys, the response rate surpassed that of the previous census.<sup>20</sup>

## The Value of Funders Leveraging Public-Private Resources

A large takeaway for the philanthropies involved, according to Beason, was the power of coalescing private and public dollars. It gave the campaign the support needed to lead and, along with consulting expertise, identify leadership across many community organizations to increase the effectiveness of census outreach.<sup>21</sup> Gottfredson also believes that a large part of the innovation was pooling funds to better serve the community. It gave funders the opportunity to show they could use public funding responsibly, which can open the door for future public-private collaborations.<sup>22</sup>

### Key Takeaways

- Close collaboration between funders on a public problem can lead to an organized response on a statewide level that catalyzes more funding than solo efforts.
- Coalescing public and private dollars can open the door to future public-private partnerships when a campaign is effectively aligned.

## Endnotes

1. "Census Equity Fund of Oregon: Funding an Equitable 2020 Census Count," United Way of the Columbia-Willamette, accessed April 28, 2020, <https://www.unitedway-pdx.org/census-equity-fund-oregon-funding-equitable-2020-census-count>.
2. Andrew Reamer, *Brief 7: Comprehensive Accounting of Census-Guided Federal Spending (FY2017)* (Washington, D.C.: The George Washington University, 2020), 1, [https://gwipp.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2181/f/downloads/Counting%20for%20Dollars%202020%20-%20Comprehensive%20Accounting\\_Report%207B%20Feb%202020%20rev.pdf](https://gwipp.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2181/f/downloads/Counting%20for%20Dollars%202020%20-%20Comprehensive%20Accounting_Report%207B%20Feb%202020%20rev.pdf).

3. Ibid. 3.
4. “QuickFacts Oregon,” United States Census Bureau, accessed April 28, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/OR>.
5. “Census Equity Fund of Oregon: Funding an Equitable 2020 Census Count,” United Way of the Columbia-Willamette, accessed April 28, 2020, <https://www.unitedway-pdx.org/census-equity-fund-oregon-funding-equitable-2020-census-count>.
6. *Oregon Hard to Count Campaign Plan* (Ashland, OR: Dancing Hearts Consulting, LLC, 2019), 2, [https://www.unitedway-pdx.org/sites/default/files/wecountoregon\\_campaign\\_plan.pdf](https://www.unitedway-pdx.org/sites/default/files/wecountoregon_campaign_plan.pdf).
7. United Way of the Columbia-Willamette, “Census Equity Fund of Oregon.”
8. Andrew Reamer, *Counting for Dollars 2020 The Role of the Decennial Census in the Geographic Distribution of Federal Funds: Oregon* (Washington, D.C.: The George Washington University, 2019), 2, [https://gwipp.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2181/f/downloads/IPP-1819-3%20CountingforDollars\\_OR.pdf](https://gwipp.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2181/f/downloads/IPP-1819-3%20CountingforDollars_OR.pdf).
9. “2020 Census Hard to Count Map,” City University of New York Mapping Service, accessed August 24, 2020, <https://www.censushardtocountmaps2020.us/> and <https://www.censushardtocountmaps2020.us/?latlng=40.00000%2C-98.09000&z=4&query=coordinates%3A%3A43.51669%2C-121.46484&promotedfeaturetype=states&arp=arpRaceEthnicity&baselayerstate=3&rtrYear=sR2020latest&infotab=info-rtrselfresponse&filterQuery=false>.
10. Jesse Beason, online video interview with author, April 9, 2020; Lauren Gottfredson, online video interview with author, April 9, 2020.
11. *Oregon Hard to Count Campaign Plan* (Ashland, OR: Dancing Hearts Consulting, LLC, 2019), 2, [https://www.unitedway-pdx.org/sites/default/files/wecountoregon\\_campaign\\_plan.pdf](https://www.unitedway-pdx.org/sites/default/files/wecountoregon_campaign_plan.pdf); Gottfredson, interview.
12. Ibid.
13. Gottfredson, interview.
14. “What is the role of the Office of Community & Civic Life?” City of Portland Office of Community and Civic Life, accessed July 7, 2020, <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/civic/article/736266>; “Hard-to-Count Populations,” Oregon Counts 2020 (Office of Governor Kate Brown), accessed July 7, 2020, <https://www.oregon2020census.gov/hard-to-count-populations>. Gottfredson, interview; Beason, interview.
15. *Oregon Hard to Count Campaign Plan*, 5.
16. Gottfredson, interview.
17. Lauren Gottfredson, *Census Equity Fund Request for Proposals* (Portland, OR: United Way of the Columbia-Willamette, 2019), 1-2, [https://www.unitedway-pdx.org/sites/default/files/rfp\\_for\\_census\\_2020\\_grantmaking\\_fillable\\_final.pdf](https://www.unitedway-pdx.org/sites/default/files/rfp_for_census_2020_grantmaking_fillable_final.pdf).
18. Gottfredson, interview.
19. Ibid.
20. “2020 Census Hard to Count Map.”
21. Beason, interview.
22. Gottfredson, interview.