

# Oregon Community Summer Grant Report: Executive Summary



In early April 2022, the Oregon Legislature allocated \$50 million for community-based organizations to provide summer learning opportunities, administered through the Oregon Community Summer Grants (OCSG) Initiative by Oregon Association of Education Service Districts (OAESD). As part of the initiative, Region 16 Comprehensive Center on behalf of Oregon Department of Education and in partnership with OAESD hired OregonASK to support reporting on the OCSG Initiative.

This report explores the impact of OCSG funds, seeking to highlight the lived experiences from the initiative, summarize the impact of grant dollars, discuss challenges and barriers in the OCSG process, and present recommendations for the future. All findings contained in this report are drawn directly from the required grant reporting form and through feedback from grantees.

Impacts from the OCSG Initiative were meaningful and widespread. Grant funds enabled community-based organizations to offer 6,133 individual summer program opportunities, reaching into every county and serving nearly 240,000 youth. These programs gave youth access to enrichment activities and new experiences, helped them build skills in career development and social emotional learning, reduced food insecurity, and supported academic learning. These impacts echo proven outcomes from research on summer learning programs, demonstrating that OCSG funds enabled community-based organizations to provide evidence-based summer learning programs that help equip youth for their journey to becoming thriving adults. OCSG funds also created tangible benefits for the families of youth who attended summer programs. Grant funds made summer programs more accessible to families by removing barriers like transportation, cost, and language, and some programs also provided resources directly, such as family classes or enrichment activities.

For the community-based organizations that received OCSG funds, the impact was often transformational. Grantees were able to hire more staff, provide job opportunities and internships to young people, increase wages and benefits, recruit new youth and families to participate in programming (often expanding to previously unserved populations), develop and offer new types of programming, open new program locations, provide transportation, purchase supplies, and invest in capacity building that will benefit future years. OCSG funds also helped community-based organizations serve more members of priority populations, and to develop more effective practices to reach and engage priority populations, and to ultimately better serve their communities.

Successes did not come without challenges, and OCSG grantees mentioned three consistent obstacles with nearly identical frequency: outreach and recruitment of participants, finding and hiring staff, and the grant process itself. Although grantees reported overall positive experiences with the OCSG process, the insurance requirements caused confusion and stress for grantees, and ultimately created equity and accessibility barriers. The short timeline on which grants were opened, approved, and funded created unintended consequences that ultimately undermined critical aspects of the OCSG Initiative by creating hardships for grantees, families, and communities. Grantees rose above and created extensive, meaningful opportunities for youth despite the challenges; nevertheless, such an abbreviated timeline is untenable long-term.

Based on the findings of this report, recommendations for the future include:

- Provide consistent, sustainable funding for similar initiatives in future years, and ensure that any future grant funds are available earlier in the year
- Create formalized grant processes that include streamlined systems for applications, communications, and reporting
- Ease the burden of insurance requirements for community-based organizations
- Provide support and resources to build capacity and quality in community-based organizations

