



OREGON WORKER RELIEF

2022 Impact Report



March 2023
Updated April 2023



INTRODUCTION

In 2022, Oregon Worker Relief proved again that it is possible to craft durable, effective solutions to the inhumane conditions created by a racialized immigration system designed to exploit people. Community organizers in Oregon envisioned and created the dynamic fund in the early days of the pandemic, and it has expanded to support immigrant and migrant Oregonians facing a range of threats: lost work and wages, deadly climate disasters, barriers to small business growth, a deeply unfair legal system, and the housing crisis. The success of Oregon Worker Relief shows that community-led solutions work, and that when the community leads we set off a cascade of positive outcomes leading to stronger, healthier communities.

Here are the highlights of what we have accomplished together:

- Between its launch and the end of 2022, Oregon Worker Relief has distributed more than \$148 million in aid to over 77,000 Oregonians in need.
- Over 42,000 immigrant Oregonians who lost work have received \$72 million through the Relief Fund, allowing families to stay in their homes, put food on the table, and make ends meet.
- In its first year, the Climate Change Fund distributed more than \$3 million to agricultural workers in Oregon who lost work due to extreme heat or smoke.
- Nearly 100 immigrant-owned Oregon small businesses have received nearly \$12 million through the Small Enterprise Fund.
- The Quarantine Fund distributed over \$14.5M to 11,000+ Oregonians exposed to COVID-19 who self-quarantined.
- We laid the groundwork to launch Universal Representation for Oregonians facing deportation, and the Home Fund to provide cash assistance for families at risk of eviction and homelessness.

Immigrants have always been part of the core fabric of our state, but anti-immigrant policies and practices have intentionally excluded them from safety net programs, state institutions, and many parts of civic life. Our groundbreaking survey of Relief Fund beneficiaries provides new information about the financial lives of immigrant Oregonians. Our findings reveal the devastating impact of immigrant exclusion: urgent, widespread, and persistent financial insecurity in immigrant communities statewide. Only one in eight immigrant Oregonians indicated

feeling secure in their financial future, and less than half indicated they can afford their basic needs over the next six months.

As Oregon Worker Relief begins its fourth year, we are determined to realize our vision: community care that is comprehensive and sustainable, a state where immigrants are included equitably, and an economy where everyone has a pathway to prosperity. In the future, we envision expanding on this sustainable infrastructure to support immigrant and migrant communities and foster immigrant equity and inclusion. This means continuing to invest in community-led solutions. It means strengthening the systems of mutual care that sustain Oregonians through crises. And it means ensuring the conditions that allow our communities to create prosperity and grow in their resilience.

As we continue to reimagine what is possible and what healthy, resilient communities look like, we have identified four key areas to continue our work:

1. Working for climate justice because climate disasters disproportionately harm immigrants and BIPOC people.
2. Addressing the housing crisis that is worsening inequality and forcing families into poverty.
3. Building a statewide infrastructure to make sure immigrants can access legal services when they navigate an unfair immigration system.
4. Finally, building on the successes of Oregon Worker Relief to address the impacts of a racialized immigration system designed to exploit people and divide communities.

Strengthening relationships and connecting communities

More than 100 organizations across the state have participated in outreach and screening with Oregon Worker Relief. OWR provides a pathway for community based organizations to build on their trusted ties and efficiently reach community members who are excluded from other relief. Through their work, the navigating groups have expanded their capacity, deepened their relationships, and fostered community connectedness. Both in times of crisis and in times of prosperity, Oregonians benefit from strong bonds between neighbors.

Designed and implemented by the community and for the community, Oregon Worker Relief meets urgent needs statewide while strengthening community resilience for the future. The keys to the success of Oregon Worker Relief are fostering deep coalition partnerships, utilizing community-led design, and building and sharing powerful in-house technology expertise. Together, these factors allow us to shift power, address the effects of immigration laws that keep people in a state of perpetual legal precarity, and reimagine financial systems that prevent people from accumulating wealth.

RELIEF BY THE NUMBERS

\$148 million+

Total Fund Distribution between May 2020 and the end of 2022

\$114.6 million

distributed through the Relief Fund

\$7.1 million

distributed through the Climate Fund

\$12 million

distributed through the Small Enterprise Fund

\$14.5 million

distributed through the Quarantine Fund

77,465

Oregonians received financial relief through one or more of Oregon Worker Relief's programs.

36 counties


The Oregon Worker Relief Fund has provided financial relief in every county in Oregon.

RELIEF FUND

The Relief Fund is Oregon Worker Relief's inaugural fund and it began an innovative new model of support—direct financial relief to immigrant Oregonians. In 2022, the Oregon Legislature awarded \$65 million in new funding to help Oregonians excluded from Unemployment Insurance and stimulus relief make ends meet when they were impacted by COVID-19.

The pandemic highlighted and worsened existing economic disparities. One in eight workers in Oregon is an immigrant, making up an essential share of the state's labor force across all industries. Immigrant Oregonians without legal status pay approximately \$81 million in taxes each year. Yet many immigrant Oregonians are excluded from public safety net programs, leading to increased housing insecurity, hunger, and hardship. The Relief Fund fought back against the inequities that prevent Oregonians from putting food on the table and paying rent when they face lost work or wages.

One mom of four in Forest Grove lost work harvesting blueberries due to COVID, and she and her kids were facing eviction. The financial relief provided by the Relief Fund helped her pay rent and keep her family in their home.



“My family was able to receive support from several OWR funds. Thanks to the OWR funds I was able to pay my late bills and support my home and family. **These funds had a great impact in my life, thank you.**”

- Ramona, Oregon Worker Relief recipient

*original Spanish language quote below

As one community navigator put it:

“The pandemic underscored the fact that our communities cannot be healthy and well unless we make sure everyone can meet their basic needs. I’m glad to help people who have lost jobs or wages access worker relief so they can support their families and get back on their feet.”

- Elba Alegría, community navigator with Pueblo Unido PDX

Climate Fund

Agricultural workers are increasingly impacted by climate change through deadly heat waves, wildfires, and unhealthy air quality. Many agricultural workers in Oregon worked through dangerous smoke and heat, until Oregon Worker Relief launched the first-ever Climate Change Fund for agricultural workers. The Climate Change Fund compensated workers when unsafe heat or

smoke pollution prevented them from being in the fields. One such worker is Leo, who has worked in the cherry and pear orchards of Hood River for twenty years. He lost wages during the 2020 heatwave, but the Climate Change Fund restored income he should not have been forced to lose.

“**Low wages for agricultural workers in Oregon force many people to risk their lives rather than miss a paycheck.** In 2021 one worker lost his life, and I know others who are suffering long-term consequences from exposure to smoke. In southern Oregon we saw 43 days over 90 degrees in 2022 and 20 of those days were over 100 degrees. Workers are struggling to make ends meet, but the Climate Change Fund is helping relieve some of the hardship caused by climate change.”

- Kathy Keese, Program Coordinator at Unete Center for Farm Worker Advocacy in Medford

Original quote displayed above in English: “Mi familia pudo recibir varios de los fondos del Alivio Laboral. Gracias a estos fondos yo pude pagar mis recibos del hogar y apoyar a mi familia. Estos fondos tuvieron un gran impacto en mi vida, gracias.” - beneficiaria de OWR, Ramona



Universal Representation

The immigration system is racialized, unfair, and difficult to navigate by design. Universal legal representation helps keep families and communities whole by providing access to immigration legal services. For people facing deportation, whether or not they have legal representation often determines the success of their case. Without representation, a person in removal proceedings is 5.5 times more likely to lose their case and be ordered removed from the United States, regardless of the merits of their case. Many people in removal proceedings have valid legal claims to remain here and continue to contribute to their community, but they have no way to articulate these claims without legal assistance.

When immigrant Oregonians are deported, our entire state suffers. If a family's breadwinner is deported, family members face housing and food insecurity. Children must cope with the incredible trauma of family

separation, with long-lasting psychological impacts. Children's school attendance and performance are also negatively affected, increasing their likelihood of dropping out and earning significantly less as adults.

In 2022, after years of grassroots advocacy by the immigrant community and immigrant justice organizations, the Oregon Legislature passed a law to bring us closer to achieving universal legal representation. Modeled after a successful pilot program called Equity Corps of Oregon, Oregonians at risk of deportation are connected with no-cost legal aid to navigate the complex immigration system.

Universal Representation continues the work of a pilot program, Equity Corps of Oregon, which has provided attorney access to immigrant Oregonians facing deportation since October 2018. Under the program:

- **2,700+** individual Oregonians have enrolled in the program and have received services
- **600+** of total enrollees were added since March, 2022, when SB1543 was enacted
- **750+** Oregonians who faced violence or persecution were empowered to request asylum
- **350+** Oregonians have applied for work authorization

“Thanks to the OWR I was able to keep my business open. This award allowed me to pay my employees and fees. This award helps not only my business, but also my well being, and my family. The OWR gave me a little peace during this COVID chaos.”

- Small Enterprise Fund recipient, business owner

*original Spanish language quote below

Small Enterprise Fund

Small businesses are the backbone of Oregon’s economy, and immigrant-owned businesses create jobs and contribute significantly to local economies. COVID-19 restrictions and the sudden economic shifts were very hard for small businesses to navigate, and the relief programs that helped other businesses survive often left behind immigrant businesses.

The Small Enterprise Fund made a significant difference by distributing \$11.7 million to 993 immigrant businesses across the state before wrapping up in September 2022.

*Original quote above in Spanish: “Gracias al Alivio Laboral de Oregon pude mantener mi negocio abierto. Esta ayuda me dejó poder pagarle a mis empleados y mis recibos. Esto no solo me ayudó con mi negocio sino también con mi salud y familia. El Alivio Laboral de Oregon me dio un poco de paz dentro de todo el caos.”



New in 2023: The Home Fund

Every Oregonian needs a safe place to call home. But right now, Oregon is experiencing a severe housing crisis, due in part to stagnant wages and rising costs. Immigrant Oregonians are among the most vulnerable community members to eviction, and one in 10 children in Oregon live with a family member who is undocumented. Yet, many safety net programs that assist families facing eviction exclude immigrants without legal immigration status.

In 2023, Oregon Worker Relief is launching the Home Fund to provide short-term finan-

cial assistance to immigrant Oregonians at risk of eviction and housing instability. The Home Fund will cover up to two months of rent for eligible applicants and connect applicants with support services such as financial counseling, job training, food assistance and legal services, to help them stay housed in the long-term.

In Oregon, we believe in looking out for our neighbors. When we protect the housing rights of immigrants in Oregon, our communities are more stable, safe, and resilient.



Oregon Worker Relief Impact & Need: A Survey of Relief Fund Beneficiaries

The trusted community relationships of Oregon Worker Relief and its partners provide us a unique opportunity to learn more about the financial realities facing immigrant Oregonians and the impacts of Oregon Worker Relief. We conducted 51 in-depth interviews and a text survey of beneficiaries of the namesake fund, the Relief Fund, gathering 929 responses. All of the respondents experienced financial hardship during the pandemic and received aid from the Relief Fund.

While financial assistance from OWR provided beneficiaries a brief reprieve during a time of crisis, our findings reveal immigrant Oregonians experience urgent, widespread, and persistent financial insecurity. In fact, only about 15% of respondents indicated feeling secure in their financial future, and less than half of respondents indicated they can afford their basic needs over the next six months.

Furthermore, in times of need, we found that immigrant Oregonians rely in large part on their friends and family for financial support. This likely means that even those who are optimistic about their financial stability may struggle to care for their friends and family who are excluded from safety net programs and have nowhere else to turn.



Without action, the wealth gap in Oregon will continue to deepen along racial and ethnic lines. By continuing to invest in our communities, we can strengthen our community resilience in emergencies and make forward progress toward a more thriving and equitable Oregon. Through its community-centered model of identifying and addressing needs, Oregon Worker Relief is well-positioned to continue to provide critical support for immigrant Oregonians.

Key Survey Findings

Financial insecurity is ongoing, widespread, and persistent among immigrant Oregonians.

- Only about 15% of respondents indicated feeling secure in their financial future.
- A little less than half of respondents indicated they can cover their basic needs and other expenditures over the next six months.
- A majority of respondents indicated they do not feel confident in being able to find a good job to support their family.
- A large majority of respondents indicated they are concerned about losing their home, and only a few respondents believed they could buy a home.

The financial assistance from OWR helped, but more was needed.

- Most respondents indicated the financial assistance from OWR only somewhat covered their hardship.
 - For those that were not able to fully cover their hardship with OWR funds, most asked friends and family to borrow money.
 - A small percentage indicated obtaining a loan or using credit cards.
 - A few reported they simply were not able to cover their hardship.

OWR gave immigrant Oregonians hope for their future financial stability in emergencies.

- Only 30% of respondents believed they will be able to save and plan for emergencies in the short term.
- However, a majority of respondents indicated that they would be able to keep up with their basic needs and expenses during an emergency if OWR provided another financial assistance opportunity.

Oregon Worker Relief conducted two surveys. You can view the full results data of our qualitative survey at <https://chju4ez4wwu.typeform.com/report/uNBN3xYB/GvY-tAFjUrdLJyUbA>

The full results of the second survey are compiled below:

On a scale of 1 to 5, was the Worker Relief financial assistance enough to cover your financial needs?

Total responses = 930

- 5, Yes, it was enough = 379, 40.7%
- 4 = 85, 9.1%
- 3, It was somewhat enough = 272, 29.2%
- 2 = 31, 3.33%
- 1, No, it was not enough = 111, 11.9%

On a scale of 1 to 5, how easy was it to apply for Worker Relief?

Total responses = 870

- 5, It was very easy to apply = 337, 38.7%
- 4 = 87, 10%
- 3, It was somewhat easy to apply = 287, 32.9%
- 2 = 36, 4.1%
- 1, It was not easy to apply = 123, 14.1%

On a scale of 1 to 5, would you be interested in applying if another financial assistance program was made available?

Total responses = 876

- 5, very interested = 797, 90.9%
- 4 = 27, 30.8%
- 3, somewhat interested = 36, 4.1%
- 2 = 3, 0.3%
- 1, not interested = 13, 1.4%

Contact

For additional information about Oregon Worker Relief, please visit workerrelief.org or reach out to Isa Peña at isa@innovationlawlab.org.

* illustrations by Doug Brown



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