Webinar Series
Webinar #3: Creating a Water Justice Framework for Oregon
August 19, 2020
Today’s Objectives

- Review the purpose of developing an Oregon Water Justice Framework
- Review priorities identified and potential policy pathways
- Hear feedback from community
Oregon Water Futures Project

A collaboration between water and environmental justice interests to elevate the priorities of Indigenous peoples and communities of color across the state to shape the future of Oregon’s water resources.
Water Justice
Equitable Policy Development
OVERARCHING EQUITABLE WATER INVESTMENT PRINCIPLES

• Set aside a percentage of any new water infrastructure investments to benefit equity efforts that guarantee Indigenous communities and people of color actively participate in water infrastructure development, from planning to workforce development and contracting.
• Fund staff and programming for data gathering and water infrastructure investment planning led by Indigenous communities and people of color.
• Apply equitable recovery principles, an equity lens, and community accountability practices to any water infrastructure investment to actively engage Indigenous communities and people of color in the design and implementation of projects.
• Implement concrete outreach to hire individuals or contracting firms that train and employ Indigenous communities and people of color.
• Fund outreach positions for water infrastructure investments that count with the expertise, experience, and/or appropriate cultural competency and connections to effectively engage Indigenous communities and people of color in decision making and increase trust in public water services.
• Focus on high minority enterprises and specific communities hit the hardest by water impacts.
Prevent water shutoffs and improve affordability

• Federal or state action to issue a **moratorium on water shutoffs**, interest accrual and late fees for nonpayment starting immediately and continuing for 180 days after the emergency declaration ends, and to ensure all occupied households previously disconnected for nonpayment are proactively reconnected to water service without fees.

• Explore innovative ways to **fund critical operations of Oregon water and wastewater utilities** so that customers aren’t expected to fill budget gaps with increased rates, e.g. federal reserve buying local water utility bonds with provisions that allow for investments in staff, maintenance and community engagement.

• **Federal and state funding to augment low-income assistance programs** offered by Oregon water and wastewater utilities to A) forgive debt accrued by low income households, and B) expand capacity to help pay water bills for low-income customers.

• **Authorizations to allow differentiated rates**, based on an income-related threshold, that can provide relief for utility-burdened, residential ratepayers.
Set aside dedicated funding for Oregon tribes to engage in water planning, monitoring and infrastructure projects

• Federal funding to tribes (e.g., via BIA, EDA, or USDA) to assess tribal water needs, obtain technical assistance, and construct water infrastructure and river restoration projects. Invest those funds in the people and ways that honor tribes as the stewards of water in the state and honors their ancestral knowledge of water as guardians of this land.

• Federal funding or state match as needed to complete critical upgrades to drinking water infrastructure on the Warm Springs Reservation.

• Maintain capacity in state agency program budgets to monitor and enforce treaty rights and water quality standards, issue timely health advisories, participate in regional collaborative water planning with tribes, and other tribal priorities.

• Fund tribes to collect and analyze data to achieve state, tribal and federal agency goals.
Everyone at work and at home needs access to clean water--to drink, and to wash hands

• Initiate coordination between federal and state emergency management, farm operators and farmworker unions to deploy water and sanitation stations at work sites.

• Federal or state funding to OSHA to assist employers with water, sanitation, and multi-cultural resources and outreach.

• Federal or state funding (e.g., via USDA RD, HUD, or BIA) to improve water quality and access in farmworker and tribal housing.
Groundwater, wells, and septic systems

- **Federal and state funding for increased groundwater well testing** via state health departments and the Safe Drinking Water ACT.

- Create a new **Safe Well Water Fund at Oregon Health Authority** to help local health authorities and other educators provide well water education and testing of wells, and to provide grants and loans to low-income property owners and landlords for repair of drinking water wells or installation of water quality treatment systems.

- Require **landlords to test drinking water wells** for E. coli, arsenic and nitrates, and inform tenants of the testing results.

- Direct **Oregon Health Authority to analyze well test data** and provide public education in areas where contaminants are present.

- Expand Clean Water Revolving Fund and other infrastructure funding eligibility to **include improvements for distributed infrastructure** (e.g., for septic system repairs, upgrading community drinking water systems, and hooking up to municipal sewers).

- **Fund Oregon’s Affordable Septic System Replacement Loan Program** to increase availability of ‘deferred payment’ loan products for low-income families.
Build community capacity to shape our water future

- **Federal and state funding for visioning and value planning** (via EDA, USDA RD, and EPA) as an opportunity to engage and lift community needs, priorities, and hopes for the future—a way to tie infrastructure to a multi-generational, future-facing view for what it takes for people to prosper in place and identify additive potential community benefits, which in turn can open the door to new sources of funding to enable projects and minimize costs to ratepayers.

- Provisions in infrastructure **funding that count inclusive models for community engagement** (e.g., culturally-specific outreach, hiring of community organizers, stipends for community participation, timelines that allow for community-developed solutions) as eligible expenses and not overhead, and that prioritize funds for projects that were shaped and selected by impacted communities.

- Provisions in infrastructure **funding that require and fund** utilities and municipalities to develop more inclusive approaches to communicating with parts of the community (e.g., Spanish language outreach and use of media; and culturally-specific plans for disseminating emergency information during public health and other disasters).

- **Provisions in federal and state infrastructure funding to allow for staff positions and programming** that enable culturally-specific organizations to A) educate people around water infrastructure investments and jobs, and B) participate actively in community accountability efforts around the design and implementation of water infrastructure investments.

- **Provide federal and state funding** (e.g., through USGS or EPA) that enables culturally-specific organizations to research and collect data about the water needs of communities they represent so that they can advocate for those in the design and implementation of water infrastructure investments.
Secure Community Benefits

- Include a provision in federal water infrastructure bills to allow for 2-10% of all capital improvement costs to be invested in community benefit—defined as actions that improve health, economic mobility, and the stability of impacted communities.

- Require investments in brownfield cleanups and redevelopment to recapture some of the value for community benefit.
Invest in the water and green workforce and representative leadership

- Fund workforce programs that provide job and safety training for disadvantaged and underrepresented members of communities of color and low-income communities to secure jobs in environmental restoration, construction, handling hazardous materials and waste, and emergency response. Community college and apprentice programs are especially important, as is investing in the job pathways that allow for economic mobility.

- Include provisions in infrastructure funding that allow for and encourage priority procurement from Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprises (MBE/WBE), and do not require accepting the least-cost bids.

- Provide funding for training for MBE and WBE to move from being subcontractors to acting as prime contractors, for including apprentice and trainees as part of design and construction bids, and including community members as advisors to teams.

- Provide funding to expand the RARE, VISTA, and other service programs that combine work experience with technical training and certificate programs in water.
Reducing public health hazard by lead in households, schools, and child care centers

• Fully fund a national lead abatement program (e.g., in EPA’s clean water revolving funds) that will eliminate lead in water pipes by 2040.

• Allow for infrastructure funding to be used for lead line replacements and lead filters in homes, schools and child care locations that test positive for any levels of lead (not just above 15 ppb).
Reduce chronic flooding and move community assets from harm’s way

- **Expand eligibility in the Clean Water State Revolving fund** to cover costs of chronic flooding that pose a health risk to vulnerable populations.

- **Allocate** [Water Resources Development Act Funds for “community resilience”](#) projects that allow communities to relocate community assets, and invest in projects that allow people to prosper in place.

- **Clarify the Community Rating System for the National Flood Insurance Program** should provide additional points for actions local governments take to use natural infrastructure, and community-designed processes to reduce flood risk (i.e., not just raising levees or other built infrastructure).
Reflections, Questions???