

Outreach for historically underserved communities



2022 annual report pursuant to Sec. 129(94) of the [2021-2023 biennial operating budget](#) and Sec. 128(87) of the [2022 supplemental operating budget](#)

Acknowledgments

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Executive summary

Legislative mandate and amendments

The Legislature created the Outreach for Historically Underserved Communities grant program in the [2021 operating budget](#) (Sec. 129(94)) to contract with nonprofit organizations that deliver services targeted to historically disadvantaged populations to assist eligible people in accessing various state and federal social services:

\$7,500,000 of the general fund-state appropriation for fiscal year 2022 and \$2,500,000 of the general-fund state appropriation for fiscal year 2023 are provided solely for grants to community organizations that serve historically disadvantaged populations to conduct outreach and assist community members in applying for state and federal assistance programs, including but not limited to those administered by the departments of social and health services; commerce; and children, youth, and families.

The Legislature amended the proviso in the [2022 supplemental operating budget](#) (Sec. 128(94)) to shift funds and add reporting requirements. This report satisfies the reporting requirements:

(((\$7,500,000)) \$4,000,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2022 and (((\$2,500,000)) \$6,000,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2023 are provided solely for grants to community organizations that serve historically disadvantaged populations to conduct outreach and assist community members in applying for state and federal assistance programs, including but not limited to those administered by the departments of social and health services; commerce; and children, youth, and families. By June 31, 2023, the department must provide to the appropriate committees of the legislature a detailed report of the activities funded in this subsection. The report must include, but is not limited to:

(a) A list of grant recipients, their location, and the grant amount each received;

(b) Input from grantees on best practices for engagement with populations experiencing systemic inequities;

(c) Suggestions from the department and grant recipients on how to engage populations experiencing systemic inequities with future programming; and

(d) Other information and recommendations on need for this type of outreach work in future grant programs.

Note on changes in the 2022 supplemental budget: Text in double parentheses was removed from statute; underlined text was added.

Key findings

High demand for this type of funding

There is a substantial need for outreach funding for marginalized communities seeking social services:

- Commerce received 63 applications and \$36 million in requests for the \$10 million available.
- Commerce awarded \$10,026,868 to 25 organizations across the state.
- Combined, these organizations reached 51,373 individuals and assisted them in applying for state and federal assistance programs.
- Using a variety of languages and outreach methods, these organizations helped people apply for and enroll in state and federal service programs for poverty reduction.
- According to applications from these organizations, needs like housing, health care, employment and food assistance were the most common types of services needed.
- Partner organizations also used the funding to add or enhance services and increase training and coordination with other agencies and contractors.

Lessons learned to apply to future Commerce grant funding processes

Through listening sessions with individual grantees and monthly cohort meetings, Commerce identified five steps imperative to ensuring equitable outcomes and mitigating barriers experienced by marginalized communities. These steps to dismantle discriminatory barriers include:

- 1) Improve data collection and reduce contracting complexity.**
- 2) Establish ongoing communication with BIPOC and marginalized communities.**
- 3) Identify and recommend improvements to Commerce's application processes and data systems.**
- 4) Build capacity for training and technical assistance.**

By implementing these steps, outreach efforts can become more inclusive and help marginalized communities overcome barriers. Inclusive engagement involves enhancing relationships with underserved communities and increasing accessibility to services. By discovering the issues and barriers, such as language barriers, transportation issues, childcare needs, food incentives, location and time, we can increase the level of community input.

Offering multiple ways to contribute feedback provides opportunities to understand critical needs better. Through racially and culturally appropriate engagement, program staff become more well informed, services become more readily available and better outcomes are achieved.

Conclusion

The Outreach for Historically Underserved Communities program was very successful, helping 51,373 people connect to social services, enter employment programs, get medical care, housing placements and other vital services. Lessons learned are that policymakers and government programs can reduce barriers to accessing vital services to these communities, making transformational change in the lives of those with the greatest need. Commerce's Outreach for Historically Underserved Communities grant-funded providers were able to reach and support historically marginalized households, utilizing multiple languages to connect with them to strengthen their families and communities.

Introduction

The need for outreach to marginalized communities

According to Governor Inslee’s Poverty Reduction Work Group (PRWG), created via Directive in November 2017, [10-Year Plan to Dismantle Poverty in Washington](#), 1.75 million Washingtonians – one in four (25%) – live below the official poverty measure of 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). However, the experience of poverty is not equally shared across communities. Indigenous people, Black and Brown Washingtonians, women, families with young children, youth, rural residents, immigrants and refugees, seniors, LGBTQIA+, and people with disabilities have poverty rates above the state average.

Meanwhile, programs serving people experiencing poverty are spread across agencies and sectors that partner to deliver cash, food and housing assistance; health care and services; early care and child education; and education, training, and employment opportunities. It can feel like a full-time job to navigate these programs, and targeted outreach and assistance are necessary to ensure families and individuals who need access to programs the most have the help they need to apply for and retain benefits.

How the program reached marginalized communities

The Outreach for Historically Underserved Communities grant provided major service themes: health care and food access, housing, and employment. State and federal programs most frequently identified for referral by grantees included Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Coordinated Entry (homeless housing placement) and Women, Infants and Children (WIC). Partner agencies provided services utilizing Community Health Workers who speak native languages used by those served and provided marketing outreach in their native languages.

Table 1: Languages used to market to and communicate with clients

Amharic	Arabic	Cambodian	Cantonese	Chinese Cantonese
Chinese Mandarin	Chuukese	English	Farsi	Japanese
Korean	Mam	Mixteco	Mixteco Alto	Mixteco Bajo
Marshallese	Nahuatl	Purepecha	Russian	Somali
Spanish	Tigringa	Triqui	Ukrainian	Vietnamese
Zapoteco				

Funding and challenges

In 2021, the Legislature provided the program with \$7.5 million for state fiscal year 2022 and \$2.5 million for state fiscal year 2023. Commerce requested to shift most funds to the second fiscal year to allow grantees time to staff their programs. Unfortunately, the startup delay and a lower-than-desired budget in 2023 resulted in amendments to all budgets and reductions for some 2023 grantees. In some cases, those changes resulted in lower 2023 staffing levels for grantees, which reduced program activities and created challenges for smaller organizations.

Program activities

Commerce funded 25 organizations around the state after a competitive request for proposals. Seven awarded contractors had never previously contracted with the State of Washington. Most contractors identified as members of the BIPOC or LGBTQIA+ community with lived experience or acted as fiscal sponsors for organizations.

Table 1: Recipients, locations and grants received

County	Organization name, website and subcontractors (if any)	Purpose of grant	Grant award
Yakima	Rod's House	Youth/young adult services, behavioral health housing, outreach	\$683,870
Snohomish, King, Pierce, Clark	Lutheran Community Services Subs: Korean Women's Association	Coordinated navigation for access to health services	\$630,000
Clark	Columbia River Mental Health	Behavioral health, outreach	\$600,000
Grant	Opportunities Industrialization Center	Health services, food security	\$600,000
King	Voices of Tomorrow	Connect immigrant/refugee families to TANF and support services, outreach	\$650,000
Pacific	Pacific County Subs: Pacific County Voices Uniting, Peninsula Poverty Response, Pacific County Immigrant Support	Quality, affordable health care, outreach services, immigrant support services	\$600,000
Spokane, Ferry, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Lincoln, Adams	Better Health Together Subs: American Indian Community Center; Carl Maxey Center/Black Business and Professional Alliance; Health and Justice Recovery Alliance; Hispanic Business and Professional Assoc.; Latinos in Spokane; MLK Center; Peer Spokane and Rural Resources	Behavioral health substance abuse treatment for BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities, outreach for support services	\$600,000
Yakima	Yakima Neighborhood Service Center	Outreach and application for social services	\$600,000
King, Pierce, Snohomish	Trac Associates	Vocational assistance, outreach	\$590,917
Benton	Benton Franklin Workforce Development Council	Workforce Development/ Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)	\$530,000

County	Organization name, website and subcontractors (if any)	Purpose of grant	Grant award
King	Chinese Information and Service Center (CISC)	Advocacy, social and support services	\$445,724
Clark, Cowlitz	The Noble Foundation	BIPOC advocacy, support services	\$600,450
Pierce	Rainbow Center	LGBTQ2SA advocacy, support resources	\$388,087
Spokane	SNAP	Homeless outreach, support services	\$358,277
Pierce	Multicultural Child and Family Hope Center	Homeless prevention, social services	\$349,000
Snohomish	Citrine Health	Social and health care, food assistance	\$286,297
Grant	Hopesource	Education, employment, vital services assistance	\$224,999
King	FW Black Collective	Social justice, preventing evictions, mental health support	\$223,200
Spokane	Catholic Charities Eastern WA	Counseling, therapy, case management, food assistance	\$197,151
King	Launch and Live Stories (Community Day School) Subs: LiveStories' Washington FORWARD Platform	Supporting families, targeted data-based outreach for underserved communities	\$150,000
Whatcom	Empower Next Generations Subs: Geocko, Inc. dba LiveStories	Immigrant services, support, outreach	\$213,654
Skagit	Skagit Legal Aid Subs: IRS Acceptance Agent, Silvia Guzman	Access to the civil justice system for marginalized people	\$112,500
Kitsap	Gather Grow/Gather Together Grow Together (G2)	Low-income services, food services, job readiness, mentorship, outreach	\$102,450
Clark	Bridgeview Housing Services	Connecting and serving historically underserved populations, Ukrainian refugee support, move-in assistance	\$211,722
Thurston	Northwest Coop Development Center Subs: ROC Property Management Contractors	Coordination and access to state and federal assistance benefits	\$78,570

Demographics

Data reporting from all 25 outreach grantees reflected the following number of people served during the grant period.

Table 2: Clients served by demographic

Demographic	People served
American Indian/Alaska Native	1,119
Asian	9,581
Black/African American	3,454
Hispanic or Latino	12,150
Immigrant/Refugee	4,052
Homeless	4,537
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	564
Middle Eastern/Arab	258
White	12,266
Multi-racial	1,680
Race unknown	1,000
LGBTQIA+	712
Total number served	51,373

Source: Department of Commerce May 2023 Outreach Quarterly Report Data

Monthly outreach cohort meetings

Commerce convened virtual meetings, on the third Thursday of each month, for the outreach cohort throughout the duration of the grant. We held these meetings to discuss invoicing, data reporting, budget updates and answer any questions from the cohort. Guest speakers were invited to discuss topics of interest to the grantees, such as the Public Charge Rule and the Working Families Tax Credit. Other state agencies and programs were included in the meetings to discuss their services and answer questions. There were also opportunities for grantees to collaborate and share what was going well with their work and what challenges they faced. Grantees shared feedback that these cohort meetings were valuable to them, and they were able to share ideas and gain knowledge from each other.

Guests included representatives from the following entities:

- Washington State Department of Labor & Industries (L&I)
- Washington State Broadband Office
- Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS)
- Social Security Administration
- Washington State Department of Health (DOH)
- Washington State Employment Security Department (ESD)
- Commerce outreach team regarding the 2022 Capital Equity Report

There was also a special meeting on 2023-25 state funding opportunities for marginalized communities.

Issues for awareness

Building trust within communities is critical for outreach programs designed to reach BIPOC and other marginalized communities, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The isolation experienced by these communities was increased by language barriers, which made the services provided by the outreach grant and the trust-building even more valuable. Trust between communities, organizations and public systems creates linkages to important resources for marginalized community members. Lessons learned are to proactively invest in community capacity and to increase transparency and collaboration with communities experiencing barriers to access.

Some grassroots nonprofit organizations lack the staff and grant management experience to manage applications and tracking required for state and federal grants. Commerce is listening to clients and responding in ways that will help to reduce staff hours in managing grants. We are working with grantees on innovative ways to make it less difficult for organizations to receive assistance and reduce their administrative load while balancing the potential for waste, fraud and abuse.

Grantee recommendations

Grantees were encouraged to collaborate with Commerce to provide feedback utilizing multiple mechanisms such as confidential surveys, virtual one-on-one meetings with grantees, quarterly data reporting and monthly cohort meetings. Commerce collected the following feedback, per the Outreach for Historically Underserved Communities Proviso requirement of a detailed report of the funded activities from grantees.

The following comments are unedited/verbatim from the 25 grantees submitted through quarterly data reporting.

- The best way to engage populations experiencing systemic inequities is to have someone who reflects and can relate to that community. Allow communities facing that issue to have a platform to express what they are experiencing and listen to their needs. Building trust and relationships is very important when serving a community.
- We have found that Community-based strategies can bridge access gaps and deliver equitable services by accounting for community assets such as established partnerships, community events, and local gathering spaces. Often, these strategies extend services beyond our doors. Actively including community-based leaders in decision-making and cross-sector partnerships with local service agencies has also been helpful.
- We need to start showing up for families in person, and we, as organizations, need to make the space to have families come in and feel welcomed. That includes having materials in their target language or at least the resources to communicate. I think this is the #1 issue, being able to communicate with the people.
- Our partners are finding success by hosting low-barrier events and then doing individual outreach at those events. They are finding that providing food and some incentive tends to make participants more comfortable and building rapport easier.
- Having staff with lived cultural experience helps in our program, specifically to connect with Pacific Islander populations.
- Hire a Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) trainer. The JEDI trainer provides a 2-3 day training curriculum for administrators, managers, supervisors, and front-line staff to be given on site or virtually. Training on trauma-informed care, motivational interviewing, ACES, and other evidence-based practices which assist in providing equitable, inclusive care and reducing health disparities are of particular importance.
- Meet them where they are at. It's important to be trauma-informed. This includes having an understanding of the current systemic issues that are affecting clients. It's also important to be person-centered and an active listener when working with clients because the outcomes/solutions may be the same for some, but their overall experiences are different.
- Citrine Health has found success in engaging populations experiencing systemic inequalities by connecting with agencies within those areas and creating lasting partnerships: These connections led to event and workshop invitations and created both trust within the community and a community presence.

- Supporting our clients through linguistically and culturally appropriate approaches
- Engagement has been initiated via other in-house giving programs such as diaper distribution, food pantry or personal care pantry.
- Best practice is street level and handing out cards, flyers, and outreach materials in migrant camps and homeless camps as well as agencies and community resources these populations may have regular contact with, including other migrant services.
- Being able to provide immediate assistance with a bus pass or help purchasing identification, birth certificates, a state ID, or a social security card is an effective way to build trust quickly with clients that have very few resources at their disposal. Transportation costs and fees for obtaining IDs are two of the more prolific barriers that low-income communities face. By eliminating these barriers, we are able to level the playing field a little more for our clients and get them heading down the path to financial stability.
- Relationship building is a must. Being able to hear out our clients and point them to the appropriate resource is crucial within this work. Clients are often overwhelmed by the impact of Covid-19. Having someone who can assist in finding resources assists in alleviating some of those pressures.
- Many residents do not have the necessary skills to use technology. The resource coordinator will usually provide additional assistance in setting up emails, zoom accounts or technical assistance with phones.
- Attend events where low-income families seek other services.
- Culturally specific, 'by and for' are hands down the best practice in engagement.

Engaging populations in future programming

- Work collaboratively with other organizations to provide trainings or workshops on how to serve community members. It would be very effective, especially if the collaboration is with organizations that work with specific communities and already have relationships. We would all bring our networks to the table and be able to introduce each other to new resources.
- We have started holding monthly BBQs in communities to bring people out to meet each other and engage, helps to break down those walls. In some communities where we have done this, we have seen them continue the conversations even after we have gone.
- Continuing to meet them where they're at, hosting centralized events and targeted individualized outreach to local congregate areas
- Lived cultural experience is helpful; however, lived experiences of those being served are overall helpful; homelessness, and child welfare, these experiences are very helpful in engaging clients.
- Connect with local partners who are experts in the field of engaging eligible underserved BIPOC populations.

- Continue to use a peer and CHW service delivery model is crucial to create safe spaces for individuals to access services. Having representatives from the populations they're serving helps provide culturally adept and relevant services for clients. A barrier and inequity that one organization has observed among people experiencing homelessness are not having access to reliable devices or internet connections. This piece is crucial for clients to access other resources such as group meetings, online applications, and communication for employment. Having technology access incorporated with future programming is necessary for the clients these organizations work with.
- The initial contact needs to be as hassle-free as possible and avoid too much internal referrals by using updated demographic information of the clients and the families. A single yet comprehensive data-collecting system is recommended.
- Have a regular and consistent presence to gain trust and rapport with target populations who typically shy away from service providers due to varying reasons, including fear of deportation/being detained.
- Transportation-related needs in the community. Provide transportation for children to get to school when their parents don't live within the bus service area and providing transportation for people to job interviews and for the first few weeks of work until they receive their first paycheck. There is a great need in our community.
- Providing flexible funding opportunities for 'by and for' organizations that are deeply rooted in and trusted by the communities they serve is crucial.
- Visit migrant seasonal farm workers at their campsites; since they cannot access resources outside of work, we must bring resources to them onsite, including food, clothing, diapers, and toiletries, and help them connect with state and local resources onsite in their native languages.

Commerce's next steps

Commerce will implement five actionable steps to better manage and streamline the contracting process, lower the burden incurred by smaller, primarily BIPOC-led nonprofits, and encourage a diverse applicant pool. These steps reflect feedback received from grantees.

1) Dismantle discriminatory barriers.

- Following guidance from Commerce's [Equity in Funding: Final Review of Commerce Capital Programs Report](#).

2) Improve data collection and reduce contracting complexity.

- Based on grantee feedback, Commerce relaxed data reporting from monthly to quarterly. Commerce also observed challenges related to invoicing and submitted requests to improve the electronic invoicing system (Contract Management System or CMS).

3) Establish ongoing communication with BIPOC and marginalized communities.

- Commerce has regular check-ins with grantees to inform them of additional funding opportunities and holds listening sessions to learn more about community needs and to build trust.

4) Identify and recommend improvements to Commerce's application processes and data systems.

- Commerce can reduce inefficiencies and simplify data collection for grantees by improving CMS and other technical systems. Commerce collaborates with statewide groups like the Subcabinet on Intergenerational Poverty Reduction to improve systems like Work First.

5) Build capacity for grantees through training and technical assistance.

- Commerce is committed to assisting and strengthening the most vulnerable communities with capacity building through additional technical assistance and training.

The challenges for smaller BIPOC and marginalized communities to find, apply and acquire critical grants are real, and win-win solutions are possible. By implementing these five steps, Commerce will ensure that small, grassroots organizations can apply for grants as easily as established, larger organizations. Through these efforts, Commerce intends to mitigate barriers to contracting with potential grantees that disproportionately affect nonprofits focusing on BIPOC, rural and other marginalized communities to ensure equitable distribution of funds. If unnecessary complexity can be eliminated, more funding, time, and energy can go toward addressing the needs of marginalized groups and improving the lives of historically underserved populations.