



## Regional Refresh Fund grant program

*Low-barrier, flexible funding to support community-led cleanup efforts that advance garbage and recycling service equity in underserved communities of the Metro region.*

Regional Refresh Fund was launched as a pilot program in the fall of 2021 to increase access to low-barrier funding for community-led cleanup projects in greater Portland in a way that centers equity. Regional Refresh Fund completed a successful pilot period at the end of 2022 and became a permanent WPES program late spring of 2023. Originally launched as a sponsorship program, after adoption, the program was reclassified as a mini-grant to increase accountability as the program continues to grow and gain popularity in the community.

Over the life of this program, Regional Refresh Fund has provided over \$837,000 in funding across the 6 Metro Council districts, collectively removing or diverting more than 1.3k tons of trash and dumped garbage from underserved communities and environmentally sensitive areas like parks and rivers.

This report provides a lookback of the program's evolutions and achievements in the last year along with what's ahead for the program. It also highlights the accomplishments of several grantee projects completed in the 2023 calendar year to illustrate the diverse range of funded projects.

### Program objectives

- Grants advance cleanup efforts in greater Portland through community-powered events
- Grants advance garbage and recycling service equity in the Metro region
- Grants enhance Metro's relationship with the community

# Program developments in 2023

## **Improved Data Management Model**

In 2023, the program underwent a data management upgrade. During the program's pilot period, data was collected in multiple unrelated databases. For example, applications were hosted in Wufoo and collected a specific dataset, portions of which were recorded into a separate Excel tracking sheet. The post-project surveys (Grant reports) were collected through another digital platform in ArcGIS. Having these data sets in multiple systems meant some work was redundant, and increased the risk of human error, decreasing the accuracy and reliability of the data. It also made it difficult to create data dashboards for meaningful reporting and story-telling.

In partnership with the Data Resource Center, all data sets were migrated into a single, integrated online platform through ArcGIS. All relevant datasets are now integrated into the same system which allows it to pull relevant data points from all the data sets into two impressive dashboards. This has been a significant undertaking for the program, but it has contributed to significantly cleaner data and improved reporting models. It has also reduced some of the redundant administrative tasks that were regularly being performed by the program coordinator.

## **Committee Charter**

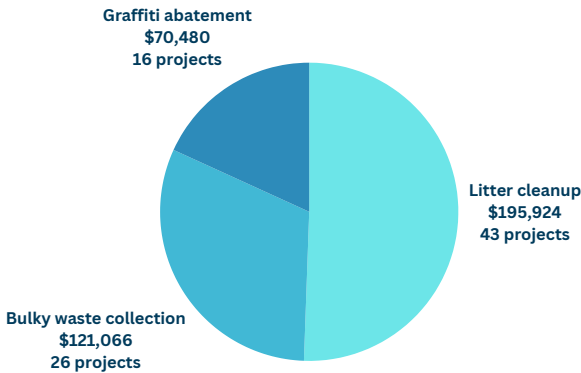
During the program's pilot period, the program assembled an ad-hoc review team made up of staff with experience in both grant-making and solid waste services to review applications and advise on programmatic matters. When the program was made permanent, an official committee charter was developed, formalizing the roles, responsibilities and terms of the internal review team.

In 2023, the review team consisted of seven members within Community Services & Education. As of January 2024, the team graduated one person and welcomed two new staff for a total of 8 members, including the chair.

## **Grant Handbook**

Upon adoption of Regional Refresh Fund as a permanent program, an official handbook was developed that is now provided to each grant recipient when their project proposals are approved. The handbook outlines the terms and reporting requirements of the mini-grant program. It also provides general guidance for the three primary categories of cleanups this program funds: litter cleanup, bulky waste collection events, and graffiti abatement efforts.

# Total grants awarded



- 44%** of grantees are BIPOC or women-led organizations.
- 89%** of applicants were successful.
- 89%** of projects served an equity focus area or another underserved community.
- 11%** of projects were focused on environmentally sensitive areas.

# Funding requests and grants awarded

In 2023, Regional Refresh Fund received 94 proposals totaling \$433,470 in requests. Of those 94 applications, 89% (or 85 applications) were successful bringing the total of approved cleanup grants to \$387,420.

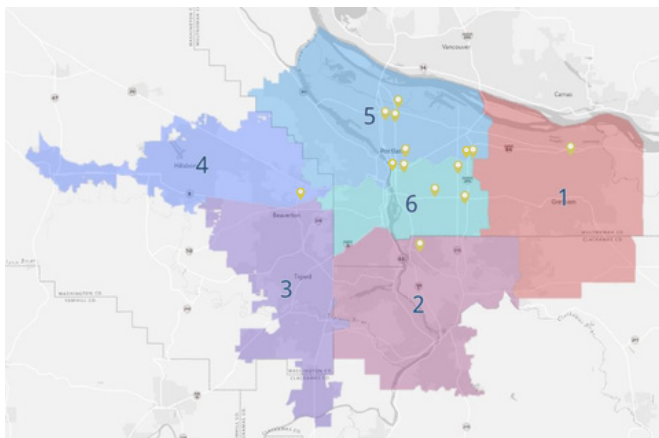
Similar to 2022, projects that focused on cleaning up litter or dumped and abandoned trash made up about half of all sponsored projects. Graffiti abatement project requests, however, more than doubled in 2023, up from 8% in 2022, to over 20% in 2023. Bulky waste collection events made up a smaller portion than prior years at 32%, down from 43% in 2022.

# Project funding and completion status

As of December 2023, 84% of all approved projects in 2023 had been completed. 10 projects were active at the time of this report. The pins on the map below represent active projects.

71 completed

14 in progress



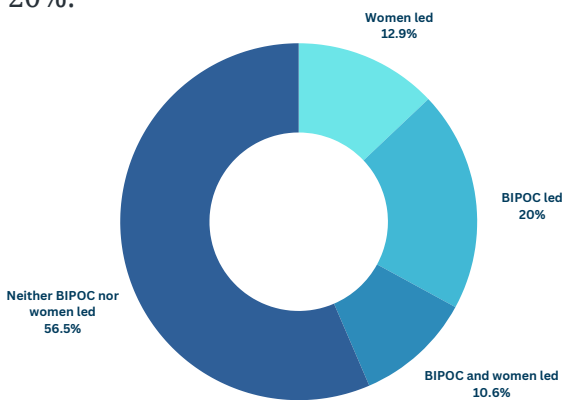
### Types of cleanup projects

- 43 litter/dumped trash
- 26 bulky waste collection
- 16 graffiti abatement

# Equity benefits

## By organization funded

In the last year, the program saw a substantial rise in applications from organizations led by BIPOC communities and women. Part of this uptick can be explained by improved data collection methods which dramatically improved self-disclosure from applicants during the reporting process. But even aside from increased self-disclosure, it is noteworthy that over 44% of funding recipients were organizations either led by communities of color, women, or both. In 2022 the combined total was just 20%.



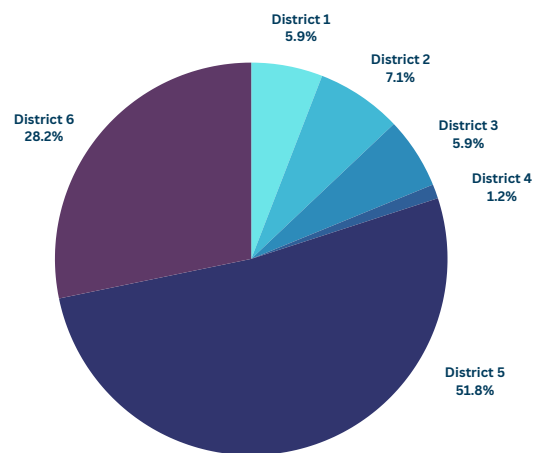
## By audience served

In terms of the audience served by funded projects, 89% of projects served either a designated equity focus area or another underserved community such as people living outside or those living in low-income, multi-family housing. The remaining 11% were directly focused on an environmentally sensitive area like parks and rivers.



## By district

Similar to prior years, Districts 5 and 6 have continued to apply for cleanup projects at the highest rates. Only one proposal was submitted from District 4 in 2023. The district with the highest submission rate was District 5 with 44 approved proposals. The program hopes to partner with Councilors in 2024 to help promote the program in districts that historically submit fewer applications.



## Project impacts

In total, 875 tons of material were cleaned up around the region in 2023.



820 tons of waste were cleaned up and disposed of.



55 tons of waste were diverted (recycled) from the waste stream.

# Grant project highlights

## Litter & abandoned trash cleanups

### Cultivate Initiatives



In 2023, in multiple cleanup efforts funded in part by Regional Refresh Fund, Cultivate Initiatives cleaned up over 250 tons of trash off the streets of East Portland.

### Columbia Slough Watershed Council



Columbia Slough Watershed Council removed 59 cubic yards of trash from seven Columbia Slough events hosted between July and September 2023.

### Free & Complete



Free & Complete compensated folks living outside to assist in trash cleanup in NE and SE Portland. Together they removed over 1,000 lbs. of trash from the streets.

### Better Chances



Better Chances, a small BIPOC run organization enlisted volunteers to cleanup 3 heavily trashed areas in NE Portland, disposing of more than 1,000 lbs. of trash.

# Grant project highlights

## Bulky waste collection events

### City of Happy Valley



City of Happy Valley hosted a popular bulky waste collection event over the summer collecting 29 tons of bulky waste and another 10 tons of recyclable material.

### Creston-Kenilworth N.A.



Creston-Kenilworth Neighborhood Association hosted a bulky waste collection event disposing of 6.8 tons of trash and recycling another 1,000 lbs. of material.

### The Rosewood Initiative



The Rosewood Initiative hosted a bulky waste collection event in East Portland collecting 1.43 tons of bulky waste and recycling another 1,000 lbs. of reusable material.

### Rebuilding Together Portland



Rebuilding Together PDX provided bulky waste cleanup for 24 low-income homeowners disposing of 150 tons of bulky waste and recycling 1,000 lbs. of material.

# Grant project highlights

## Graffiti abatement

### Portland Street Art Alliance



Portland Street Art Alliance brought in local and regional artists to combat graffiti with murals, transforming Rose's Equipment Supply into a thing of beauty. They also disposed of 500 lbs. of trash.

### Seth Lewelling PTO



Seth Lewelling PTO transformed a commonly tagged wall into a beautiful mural for the children. They also cleaned up trash and invasive species around their property disposing of 2,000 lbs. of material.

### Lloyd Eco District



Lloyd Eco District brought volunteers together to paint over graffiti in Peace Memorial Park and covered 59 blocks removing 740 lbs. of litter from the streets in NE Portland.

### NE Broadway Business Association



Northeast Broadway Business Association commissioned a powerful mural project communicating the big impact a simple act of kindness can have on others.

If you picnic at Blue Lake or take your kids to the Oregon Zoo, enjoy symphonies at the Schnitz or auto shows at the convention center, put out your trash or drive your car - we've already crossed paths.

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*Photo courtesy of City of Happy Valley*

## What's next for the Regional Refresh Fund program?

In 2024, the program will seek to expand its reach to Council districts that submit fewer applications. The team will continue to evaluate long-term effectiveness as the program continues to grow and gain a larger community audience.

### **Contact information**

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