



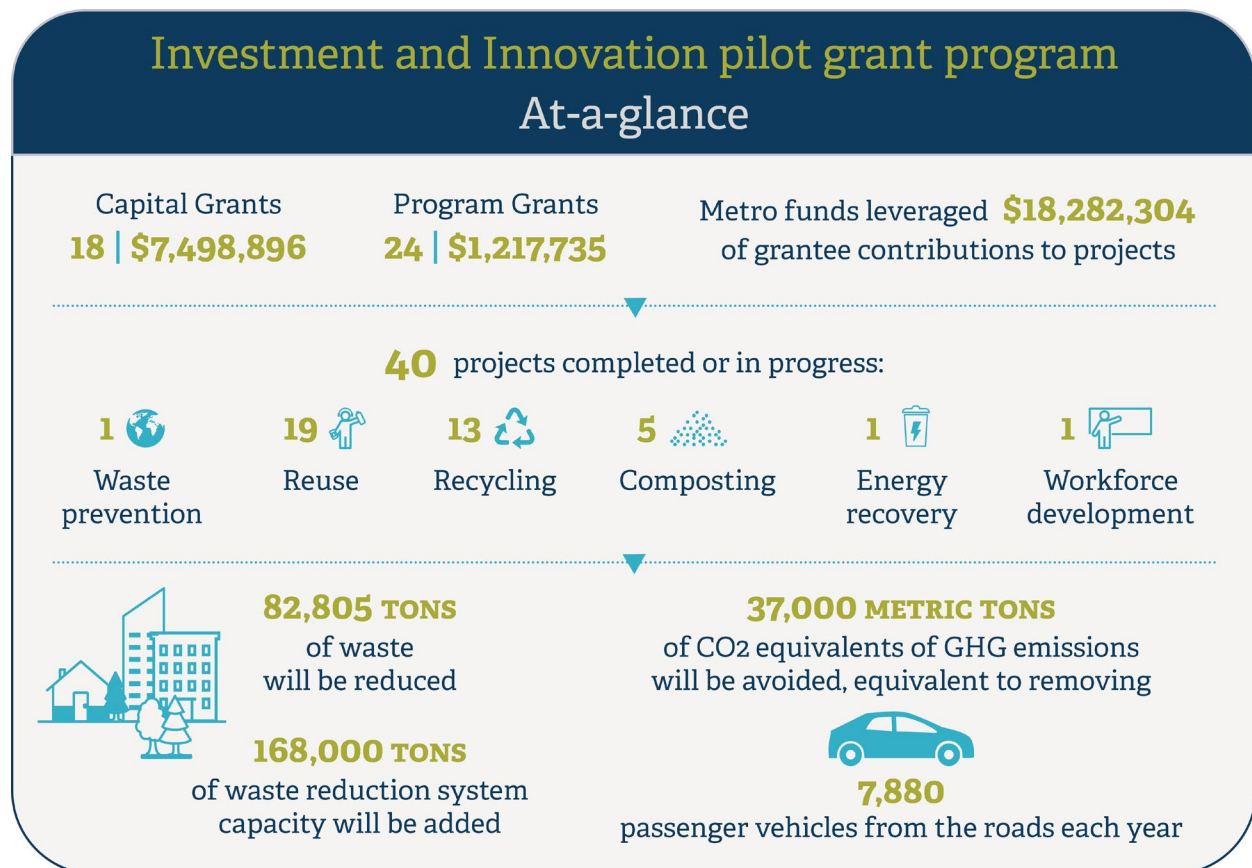
Investment and Innovation grant program pilot

Impact summary report

OVERVIEW

The Metro Council initiated the Investment and Innovation (I&I) program in 2018 as a three-year pilot to invest in efforts of private companies and nonprofit organizations to create, expand, preserve and broaden efforts that advance waste prevention, reuse, recycling and energy recovery in the greater Portland area, and to help foster economic opportunities and other benefits for communities of color and other historically marginalized communities. The I&I program helps Metro achieve the overarching objectives of the 2030 Regional Waste Plan by reducing the environmental impacts of materials throughout their life cycle and advancing racial equity.

This Impact Summary provides a high-level overview of the environmental, human health and racial equity impacts of the I&I pilot.¹ It is a companion piece to the full evaluation report completed in spring 2021.



¹ The grants awarded during the pilot are not all fully implemented. This summary describes *actual impacts* of completed grants awarded in 2018, and *anticipated impacts* from grants awarded in 2019 and 2020.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND HUMAN HEALTH IMPACTS

The I&I grant program seeks to preserve and expand the greater Portland area's capacity to reduce the environmental and human health impacts of products at any stage of the product life cycle, with particular emphasis on the end-of-life stage through waste prevention, reuse, recycling, composting and producing energy from waste. The I&I grants are advancing progress on Regional Waste Plan goals by:

Improving systems for recovering recyclables, food scraps and yard debris to make them more responsive to changing markets and evolving community needs.

Example: Two I&I grants enabled Pioneer Recycling Services to invest in rapidly evolving technology at its material recovery facility in Clackamas. Pioneer purchased and installed two sorting robots, and the following year installed optical sorters. Both projects were for new technologies or applications of technology that had not been previously tried in the greater Portland area. The grants enabled Pioneer to test the effectiveness in improving sort processes and delivering products more likely to be recycled. Pioneer volunteered to share results and key learnings from both of these proof-of-concept projects with direct competitors to encourage innovation, benefitting both recyclers and the region as a whole.



Photo courtesy of Pioneer Recycling

Supporting efforts to recover and distribute surplus edible food.



Photo courtesy of Urban Gleaners

Example: In 2019, grant funds provided Urban Gleaners with a refrigerated van and additional staffing, enabling this nonprofit organization to rescue more than 1 million additional pounds of nutritious, edible surplus food from local businesses and deliver it to food pantries and meal sites – a 19 percent increase over the prior year. The grant funded an experimental partnership with Door Dash to test a “closed loop” pilot, through which food would be rescued more efficiently through partnership with drivers already on the road. Urban Gleaners was awarded a second I&I grant to hire additional staff for a second shift to scale up its food rescue and redistribution operation.

Investing in neighborhood-scale reuse and repair services and infrastructure.

Example: Free Geek, one of the few organizations focused on finding the best uses for discarded electronics, used its grant awarded in 2018 to hire new staff and purchase equipment to implement process improvements developed with Lean PDX. This enabled Free Geek to collect more donated electronic items and process them more quickly for reuse. This added capacity was especially necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic, when Free Geek experienced a surge in demand for low or no-cost computers for remote learning and work. Free Geek was awarded a 2020 I&I grant to host additional community collection events, focused on underserved communities, to bring in more items for reuse and recycling.



Photo courtesy of Angela Holm and Free Geek

Implementing strategies to increase the salvage of building materials for reuse.

Example: City Repair was awarded a grant in 2020 to develop a process and five demonstration projects to divert usable construction waste (mock-ups of building projects that are normally destined for landfill) in order to provide homes for people without them. The work was done in partnership with community housing organizations. The lessons learned from the project will be incorporated into a training module for architects, contractors, builders, developers and reuse advocates to expand the network of people diverting additional mock-ups on an ongoing basis.

Increasing knowledge among community members about garbage, recycling and reuse services.

Example: Eco-School Network was awarded a grant in 2018 to train and support a cohort of parent leaders in 20 schools to assess current practices of managing cafeteria waste, and implement unique parent and student-led waste reduction initiatives. The cumulative impact of the projects resulted in more than 120 tons of avoided waste through prevention, reuse and recycling. Even more significantly, the projects built awareness and excitement for waste reduction among students, parents and teachers, which will have ongoing benefits beyond the grant.

RACIAL EQUITY IMPACTS

Goal 2 of the Regional Waste Plan directs Metro to “Utilize grant programs to invest in businesses and nonprofit organizations to strengthen regional efforts around reducing waste, making better use of the waste that is produced and helping foster economic opportunities for communities of color and others who have historically been left out of the garbage and recycling system.” I&I grants are furthering implementation of Goal 2 by:

Creating new opportunities to participate in the garbage and recycling system, including workforce development and career pathways.

Example: City of Roses Disposal & Recycling (COR), one of the few Black-owned businesses in the greater Portland area’s waste management sector, was awarded two I&I grants to expand and update its facility in Northeast Portland that handles primarily construction and demolition debris. Infrastructure improvements included the addition of designated areas for additional processing, as well as storage, machinery and specialty processing areas. COR’s business expansion associated with the first I&I grant resulted in job growth as well, yielding 13 new living wage jobs with benefits that primarily went to under-represented individuals.

Supporting new partnerships to expand service delivery to historically marginalized communities.

Example: Repair PDX is developing new community partnerships with local public schools and nonprofit organizations such as ReBuilding Center to focus repair skills trainings and apprenticeships on underserved communities, including teaching sewing and technology repair to resilient youth experiencing homelessness.



Photo courtesy of Jesus and Jesse Fonseca and Repair PDX

Funding organizational efforts to advance equity, including new diversity/inclusion policies and equity trainings.

Example: GreenWay Recycling and Urban Gypsum were awarded grants in 2019 that include working with Constructing Hope on an equity assessment of organizational practices. Urban Gleaners is undergoing a process in collaboration with Resolutions NW to be more culturally responsive to the diverse population experiencing food insecurity that it serves, and has added an Ambassador Board to apply an equity lens to operations and outreach, with three of the founding members being people of color.

FOR MORE...

For much more detail, see the full evaluation report. It includes information on how the program was implemented, the status of each of the grants and their specific environmental and racial equity outcomes, and options for the future of the I&I program.