

Memo



Metro

600 NE Grand Ave.
Portland, OR 97232-2736

Date: Tuesday, April 6, 2021
To: Metro Council
From: Suzanne Piluso, Investment and Innovation Program Manager
Matt Korot, Program Director, Waste Prevention and Environmental Services
Subject: Investment and Innovation grants evaluation | CORE meeting summary
(Reviewed by CORE)

Introduction

Suzanne Piluso and Matt Korot attended Metro's Committee on Racial Equity meeting via Zoom on March 18, 2021. Staff provided an overview of the three year pilot Investment and Innovation (I&I) grant program, and shared key findings related to racial equity from an evaluation of the pilot. The presentation included examples of individual grants to private companies and nonprofit organizations, and the ways and extent to which those grants incorporated actions to advance racial equity. CORE members were asked to engage in a discussion to consider how well the I&I program is meeting its goal of advancing racial equity.

Questions from CORE members illustrated members' interest in learning more about various aspects of the program related to racial equity, and members' comments provided valuable input for staff to use in shaping future iterations of I&I if the Metro Council decides to continue the program. The committee members' questions and staff responses are summarized below:

- **Overall good work:** Several members commented they think the partnership is on the right track, though more could be done to advance racial equity.
- **Sustaining the work:** How does Metro ensure that the benefits from the grants are sustained after grant funding ends?
 - Staff response: During the pilot, the grants were designed to fund up to 18 months of work, and not be an ongoing source of funding. The application process asked proposers to explain how they would sustain the outcomes after the I&I grant ends. Staff provided examples of how grantees have been able to sustain outcomes, and also acknowledged the challenges inherent (especially for nonprofit organizations) in one-off funding opportunities when ongoing operational funding is needed.
- **Impacts on gentrification:** The presentation highlighted a grant to build capacity for BIPOC-owned firms to compete in the region's deconstruction sector, which is growing due to a Portland ordinance requiring deconstruction (instead of demolition) of older buildings. A committee member noted that removal of older structures often happens in Black neighborhoods, related to gentrification. How does Metro make sure the clients served by those deconstruction companies are also equitable?
 - Staff response: The program did not consider larger issues of gentrification when considering deconstruction-related proposals, but instead focused on the benefits of salvaging building materials for reuse and job opportunities for people of color within the deconstruction sector.

- **Grant selection committee makeup:** The makeup of the grant review committees making funding recommendations is critical to the effectiveness of the program in advancing racial equity. Who was involved in awarding the grants? A committee member recommended Metro include a representative from CORE.
 - Staff response: The grant guidelines for the program requires that the committee include at least 2-3 people from the community. The two cycles of awarding capital grants included review committee members representing National Association of Minority Contractors, Latino Network, and other BIPOC organizations and individuals. However, for the second year of the program Metro used an internal grant review team to select the smaller program grants, due to the rapid doubling of the budget and limits on program staff capacity to facilitate multiple committees. To bring at least some community perspective into the process for program grants, Metro solicited community member input on the grant criteria. A finding in the evaluation recommends that all review committees include community members as an equity best practice, and that Metro build in adequate staff capacity to support those committees. Another evaluation finding recommends that Metro consider committee membership by application, to expand the voices involved in Metro's garbage and recycling policy and funding work.

- **Funding for education:** A committee member asked how many education-focused projects were funded, and noted education is sometimes one of the biggest barriers when it comes to getting BIPOC-communities involved in work related to the environment.
 - Staff response: Education was not a significant aspect of the grant program given its priority focus areas of demonstrable waste reduction. However, a grant was awarded to EcoSchool Network to work with trained parent leaders in 20 schools (including some Title 1 schools) to reduce waste through parent and student-led projects. In addition to reducing waste, students learned about the need for resource conservation and waste prevention skills.

- **Funding amount for communities of color:** A committee member noted the amount awarded to organizations serving communities of color was small compared to the larger amounts that went to capital investments at private companies. How were those decisions made? Was it based on differences in the scope of projects?
 - Staff response: Yes, the larger grants were due to scopes of work being focused on large construction or equipment investments for capital grants. With the exception of City of Roses, those capital investments did not go to BIPOC-owned companies. This reflects an inherent system limitation: very few of the companies that are major players in the garbage and recycling system are BIPOC-owned.

- **Plan for equity and community involvement:** A community member asked (in the Zoom presentation chat) why there was not an established plan for equity and community involvement.
 - Staff response in Zoom chat: "Regarding the equity and community involvement question, it was a function of a couple of factors. The first was that we developed the program at the same time as we were putting together the Regional Waste Plan, which involved partnerships and co-creation with 8 community-based

organizations. On the positive side, that enabled us to apply those learnings on the grant side. On the negative side, it stretched our partners' resources to an extent that we couldn't call on them for additional work. We also, to be honest, struggled with the short time between Council approval and the implementation deadline."

Follow-up: Staff will send the full list of grants that include amounts awarded and project descriptions, and roster of committee members.

cc: Committee on Racial Equity
Metro Councilor Christine Lewis
Metro Councilor Mary Nolan